ATROCITY PREVENTION LAB

2024 Case Study Report: Interfaith Mediation Centre (Nigeria)

Executive Summary

In 2024, the Signal Program on Human Security and Technology collaborated with the Interfaith Mediation Centre (IMC) to enhance early warning and early action (EW/EA) decision-making workflows through geospatial analytic methodologies. This case study highlights the integration of spatial analysis into IMC's systems, focusing on five Nigerian states (Kaduna, Plateau, Benue, Katsina, and Kano) between 2020 and 2023. Key findings reveal that armed criminals are the predominant initiators of conflict events, although spatial variation exists and highlight significant contributions from other groups, such as farmers, herders, and youths. The project's deliverables included static maps and graphs that provided new insights into spatio-temporal conflict dynamics.

The analysis demonstrated the potential of spatial methodologies to simplify complex datasets and offer actionable insights into conflict trends. For instance, visualizations revealed regional variations in conflict initiators, highlighting the need for tailored responses based on local dynamics. Armed criminals were the leading contributors to conflict events across the states analyzed, but unique patterns emerged in specific areas, such as the dominance of community-level disputes in Benue and youth-led conflicts in Kano.

IMC's application of these insights in advocacy and decision-making processes was noted. The visualizations provided a compelling narrative for engaging stakeholders and emphasizing the importance of early-warning interventions. However, challenges such as limited funding, technical capacity gaps, and the inability to directly tie specific actions to data insights hindered broader impact. Feedback from IMC emphasized the need for enhanced GIS training, better tools for data collection, and sustainable funding mechanisms to ensure continuity of the early-warning system.

Looking ahead, the report recommends several key actions to maximize impact. These include capacity-building initiatives focused on geospatial analysis, redesigning data collection frameworks to better capture conflict dynamics, and developing tools to improve data management efficiency. Additionally, securing consistent funding will be critical to sustaining and expanding the capabilities of IMC's EW/EA system. Future collaborations should prioritize these areas to strengthen the organization's ability to mitigate conflict and promote peace in Nigeria effectively.

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Project Collaborators

The Interfaith Mediation Centre (IMC) is a Nigerian non-governmental, non-partisan, not for profit making, faith-based organization dedicated to promoting peace and good governance through capacity building, conflict resolution and mediation—using a faith-based approach. IMC provides tools and resources that support an effective and responsive government including consultation, facilitation, mediation and training. IMC helps public entities, including state agencies and development partners, with integrated conflict management systems, in order to improve their ability to deal with conflict.

The Signal Program on Human Security and Technology at the Harvard Humanitarian Initiative has been working since 2012 to advance the safe, ethical, and effective use of information technologies by communities of practice during humanitarian and human rights emergencies. Our objective is to strengthen the efficacy and efficiency of early warning/early response (EW/EA) work through a strategic evidence-based, and ethical integration of spatial methods, field methods, and novel analytic tools into existing atrocity and conflict prevention decision-support mechanisms and workflows.

Background: IMC's Early-Warning System

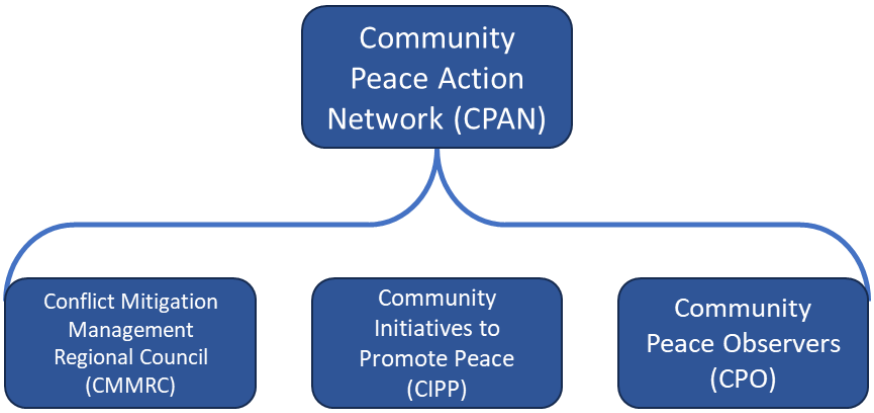


Figure 1. Summary table of the early-warning infrastructure at the Interfaith Mediation Centre.

IMC has established an early warning system in Nigeria that leverages a large network for reporting, monitoring, and resolving disputes, known as the Community Peace Action Network (CPAN). CPAN serves as the early-warning hub of IMC and comprises all peace structures created by IMC.

The Conflict Mitigation Management Regional Council (CMMRC) provides local early-warning infrastructure within each state that IMC operates within. The CMMRC oversees anything having to do with early warning/early action, mediation, mitigation, dialogue, and other forms of intervention. The council is made up of different agencies including, but not limited to, news/media outlets, elected officials, road transport agencies, police, and civil defense. The regional branches know how to link up with the relevant authorities to attenuate violence.

Community Initiatives to Promote Peace (CIPP) is a collection of projects that support IMC towards early warning/early action. One example is Peace Journalism, an initiative to bring journalists together to combat misinformation and incendiary rhetoric which divides communities and can

lead to violence. IMC noted that while Kaduna state was the strongest in Peace Journalism, many other states have copied this structure.

The Community Peace Observers (CPO) network is a community-based structure with members acting as watchdogs in communities. CPO's are there to submit reports but also to respond. For example, there are many instances of CPO's directly resolving a conflict between community members of different ethnicities or religions through dialogue and mediation. CPO's serve the community in other ways too, such as organizing sensitivity trainings, interventions, and verifying occurrences of incidences.

Objective

The objective of the project was to apply spatial methods on IMC's early warning data to provide evidence that they can use to inform and engage in policy issues, identify and engage with the right stakeholders, and provide internal, updated, situational awareness on conflict events, current assets, and any emerging trends.

IMC's early warning data was maintained an excel spreadsheet containing thousands of verified conflict and cooperative events. Due to limited spatial literacy and technical or resource capacity, this spreadsheet had undergone limited data analysis but had immense potential for offering insight into conflict and intervention dynamics in the region.

IMC was interested in an analysis of the states of Kaduna, Plateau, Benue, Katsina, and Kano from 2020-2023 to better understand how conflict emerges in such locations and the dynamics around the conflict over time.

Thematic Focus

IMC collects reports of violence and interventions through its Community Peace Action Network. Reports submitted through KoboToolbox provide information on who did what to whom, when and where the conflict event took place, how many persons were injured or killed, and more. IMC also collects reports on cooperative, peacebuilding events, such as mediations, trainings, and upstream prevention efforts. While this is important information to collect, our analysis focused on violence incidents and therefore these interventions were not included.

The research questions were, ***1. How do violent incidents vary spatio-temporally over the area of interest? And 2. How do each of the types of violent incidents vary across the areas of interest and across time?***

Methodology

Data Cleaning and Filtering:

The original dataset consisted of over 4,100 records, including conflict incidents, interventions, and unrelated events such as natural disasters. Records outside the geographic focus (Kaduna, Plateau, Benue, Katsina, Kano) and the time period (2020-2023) were filtered out. The dataset was further refined to focus exclusively on conflict-related events, resulting in 1,314 records for analysis.

Categorization of Events:

Each record was categorized based on the type of conflict (e.g., armed robbery, herder-farmer clashes, youth unrest). This categorization enabled the identification of dominant conflict types and their geographic distribution.

Spatial Analysis:
Geographic coordinates provided in the dataset were used to map the locations of conflict events. Using ArcGIS Pro, the team generated choropleth maps and used graduated symbology to visualize conflict intensity and spatial distribution across Local Government Areas (LGAs).

Temporal Analysis:
Conflict trends over time were analyzed using line graphs. This analysis highlighted temporal peaks in violence, correlating with key events such as elections and agricultural cycles.

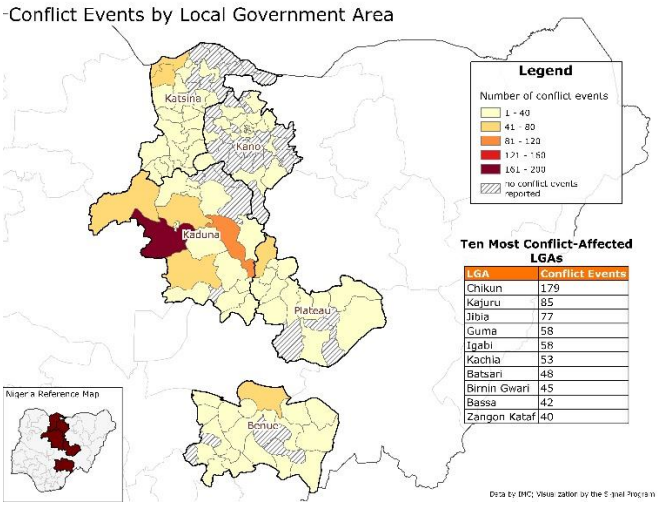
Initiator Analysis:
The dataset included information on conflict initiators (e.g., armed criminals, herders, farmers, youths). Charts were created to compare the proportion of incidents attributed to each group, both regionally and overall.

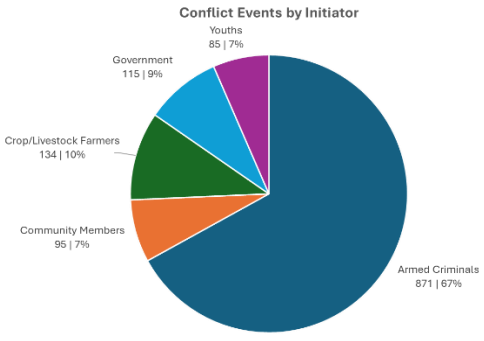
Integration of Community Feedback:
Insights were supplemented with qualitative data from IMC's Community Peace Observers and stakeholders. This helped contextualize quantitative findings and identify potential causal factors for observed trends.

Outcomes

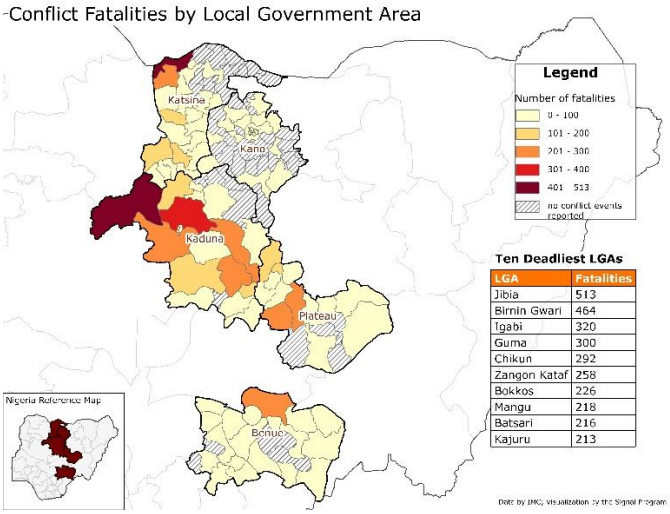
This project's outcomes were the generation of static maps and graphs to convey conflict trends across time and space.

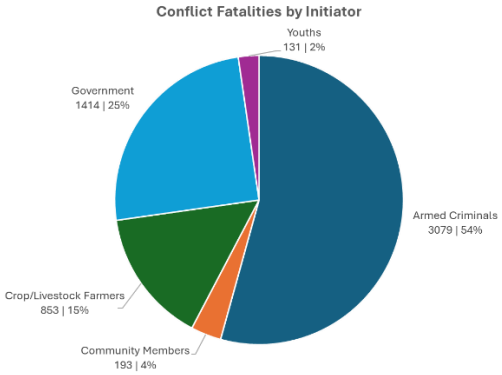
Analysis of Events



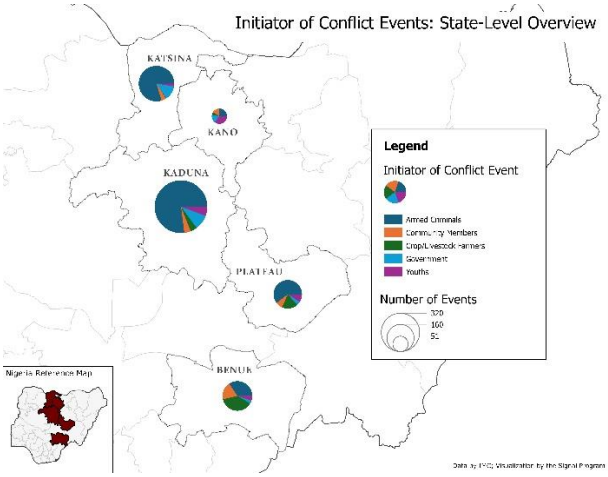


Analysis of Fatalities

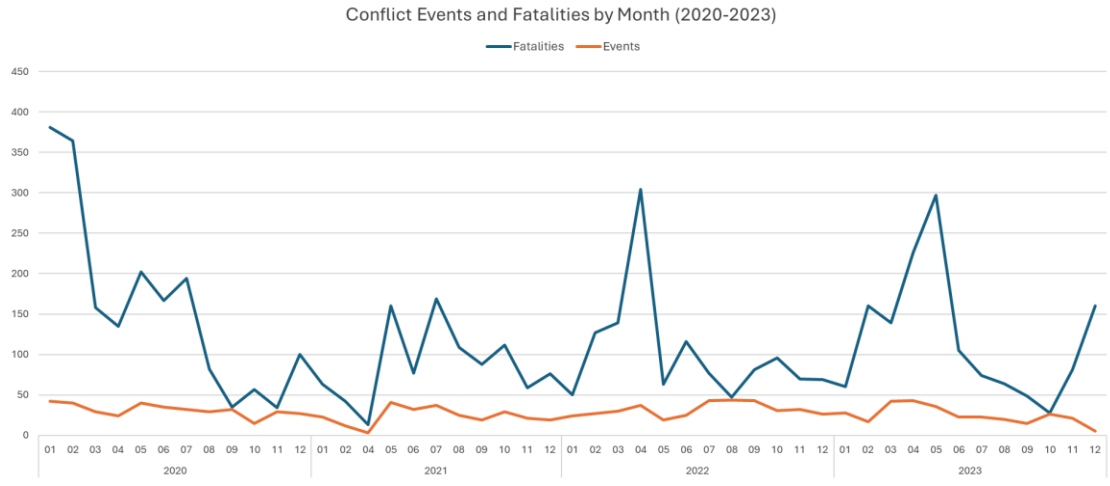




Analysis of Initiators



Temporal Analysis



Key Findings

1. Spatial Distribution of Conflict Events: Analysis revealed significant spatial variation in conflict incidents across the states studied. Kaduna and Benue experienced the highest concentration of violent events, largely driven by disputes between herders and farmers. In contrast, Kano recorded fewer incidents but had a higher proportion of youth-initiated conflicts, indicating a distinct socio-political dynamic in the region.

2. Temporal Trends: Conflict incidents were not evenly distributed over time. Peaks in violence were observed during election periods and agricultural harvest seasons, correlating with heightened tensions among political groups and resource-based disputes. These temporal patterns underscore the importance of time-sensitive interventions.

3. Key Conflict Initiators: Armed criminals were identified as the primary initiators of violence, responsible for 67% of recorded events. However, localized dynamics highlighted other contributors: herder-farmer conflicts dominated in Benue, while youth-related disputes were prominent in Kano. These findings emphasize the need for tailored interventions that consider the unique triggers in each region.

4. Challenges in Data Utilization: Despite the wealth of data collected, gaps in technical capacity and limited funding hindered IMC's ability to fully leverage insights for proactive interventions. Enhanced GIS training and improved data collection frameworks were identified as critical needs to address these challenges effectively.

Reporting and Dissemination

The analysis was presented to IMC in a Zoom meeting and the maps and figures were delivered to them via email. Subsequently, IMC shared these data products widely through their networking and advocacy workstreams, including to the following entities:

- Kaduna State Peace Commission
- Search for Common Ground
- Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution in Abuja
- Security Coordination within the State
    - Department of Security Services
    - Local police
- Environment Climate Change Forum (IMC platform)
- Network of Peace Journalism (IMC platform)
- Bureau of Interfaith

Assessing Impact

Immediate Impact

Directly following the delivery of the analysis, the Signal Program requested that IMC complete an impact survey. Of the two respondents from IMC who completed the impact survey, both reported that the results and insights were very clear, very relevant, and they anticipated a very significant influence on their organization's decision-making processes. While they responded that they felt very prepared to apply the results to future projects or decisions, they also stated that capacity

building is necessary. They cited the need for GIS tools, technical training in GIS, and funding as necessary to support data collection structures and adopt spatial analysis for regular use.

Three-Month Impact

Three months following the delivery of the data analysis, the Signal Program met again with IMC over Zoom to gather qualitative feedback on the project's impact. In the meeting, IMC reported that the data analysis was very useful for them, as it allowed for many years of collected data to be summarized in a visual format that takes only 5-10 minutes to read through. They were pleased with the simplification of the information into something clear and interpretable.

The largest impact of the project can was broadly defined as increased advocacy, as it gave IMC legible evidence to share with their partners. IMC reported these data products help show the community how important early-warning intervention is to prevent conflict from happening. Additionally, they were confident that, due to their own reputation for credibility, along with the institutional recognition of Harvard, the information is met by their network of stakeholders with trust and confidence.

Challenges and Lessons Learned

The collaboration between the Signal Program and the Interfaith Mediation Centre (IMC) highlighted several challenges that influenced the project's outcomes and provided valuable lessons for future initiatives. These insights are essential for refining methodologies and ensuring greater impact in subsequent efforts.

Challenges

1. **Funding Constraints**
    a. Many components of IMC's early warning system, including data collection and reporting infrastructure, are at risk due to limited funding. This jeopardizes the continuity and comprehensiveness of data collection, directly affecting the quality and utility of spatial analysis.
    b. Lack of funding for technical training and GIS tool acquisition limited IMC's ability to fully leverage the insights provided.
2. **Technical Capacity**
    a. IMC's limited technical capacity in geospatial analysis posed challenges for integrating spatial methodologies into their workflows.
    b. The organization expressed a strong need for technical training to enhance their ability to independently manage and analyze spatial data.
3. **Impact Attribution Gap**
    a. IMC faced difficulties in identifying specific instances where the spatial data analysis directly informed decisions or interventions. This gap hindered the ability to demonstrate the tangible impact of the project's insights on conflict prevention.
4. **Data Quality and Structure**
    a. The original dataset required significant cleaning and reorganization, indicating a need for improved data management practices.

   b. Inconsistent categorization and lack of detailed disaggregation (e.g., by conflict type) limited the depth of analysis that could be performed.
5. **Stakeholder Engagement**
   a. While IMC disseminated the results widely, the lack of systematic follow-up with stakeholders made it challenging to track how the insights were utilized in decision-making processes.

Lessons Learned

1. **Importance of Sustainable Funding**
   a. Ensuring continuous funding for data collection and infrastructure is critical for the success of early warning systems. Advocacy for dedicated resources should be prioritized in collaboration with development partners.
2. **Capacity Building as a Key Enabler**
   a. Investing in GIS training and providing user-friendly tools can empower organizations like IMC to adopt spatial analysis as a routine part of their operations.
3. **Integration of Action-Tracking Mechanisms**
   a. Embedding mechanisms to document the use of insights and their outcomes can enhance accountability and demonstrate the value of data-driven approaches.
   b. Structured feedback loops with stakeholders can provide clarity on the impact of shared data products.
4. **Streamlining Data Management**
   a. Designing data collection tools with better categorization and linkage capabilities (e.g., associating interventions with conflicts) can improve the quality and relevance of analyses.
5. **Building Stronger Advocacy Narratives**
   a. The credibility of IMC and the institutional reputation of Harvard played a significant role in stakeholder trust. Coupling data insights with compelling advocacy narratives can amplify their influence.
6. **Collaborative Approach to Impact Assessment**
   a. Working with external evaluators and partners can help capture and validate the practical applications of data insights, bridging the gap between analysis and action.

Future Projects

Throughout discussions with IMC, additional organizational needs arose that could not be addressed in the context of this project. Those needs could be avenues for future projects and collaborations.

1. The first was the development of a search tool that provides the ability to search for events within the conflict early warning dataset efficiently and effectively.
2. The second was a desire to redesign the Kobo Toolbox data collection form to better disaggregate by conflict type and potentially set up a data management schema to allow for related records. This would make it easier to associate interventions with the corresponding conflict event to which the intervention was responding.

Recommendations for Future Tracking and Strategic Enhancements

To address gaps in linking spatial data insights to decision-making and ensure sustainable impact, the following recommendations outline actionable steps for tracking mechanisms, capacity building, and operational improvements:

1. Develop an Outcome-Tracking Framework

- Establish a standardized framework to record actions stemming from spatial data insights.
    - Include fields for:
        - Description of decisions or interventions.
        - Stakeholders involved.
        - Timeline and measurable outcomes (e.g., reduction in conflict incidents, increased cooperation events).
- Regularly update and review this framework to capture evolving needs and ensure relevance.

2. Integrate Feedback Loops

- Introduce a periodic feedback process involving stakeholders such as local government, NGOs, and community leaders.
    - Utilize surveys, interviews, and workshops to gather qualitative and quantitative data on the use and impact of insights.
- Document feedback to continuously improve data dissemination and application strategies.

3. Leverage Technology for Real-Time Monitoring

- Implement real-time monitoring tools (e.g., dashboards or mobile apps) to track data sharing and decision-making activities.
- Ensure these tools are user-friendly, accessible, and tailored to the technical capabilities of IMC's stakeholders.

4. Enhance Data Collection and Management

- Redesign tools like Kobo Toolbox to capture disaggregated conflict data, including:
    - Types of incidents.
    - Associated interventions and their outcomes.
- Create a robust data management system that links conflict reports with corresponding interventions for better analysis and insight generation.

5. Build Capacity for IMC Staff

- Conduct advanced GIS and spatial analysis training to empower IMC personnel with technical expertise.

- Host workshops focused on integrating spatial tools into decision-making workflows.
- Provide training on impact assessment, data storytelling, and evidence-based advocacy.

6. Expand Peace Journalism Initiatives

- Scale Peace Journalism programs to other states, building on the successes in Kaduna.
- Collaborate with media outlets to train journalists in conflict-sensitive reporting and misinformation mitigation.

7. Establish a Sustainability Plan

- Develop a comprehensive funding strategy to secure consistent resources for CPAN and related programs.
- Partner with international donors and local stakeholders to ensure long-term operational viability.

8. Strengthen Stakeholder Engagement

- Use insights and visualizations from spatial analysis to engage policymakers, security agencies, and community leaders.
- Advocate for increased investment in early-warning systems and conflict prevention mechanisms at state and national levels.

9. Implement a Monitoring and Evaluation Framework

- Design a system to track the effectiveness of interventions and early-warning responses over time.
    - Include metrics to evaluate both immediate and long-term outcomes.
- Incorporate community feedback mechanisms to ensure that initiatives remain responsive to local needs.

10. Promote Accountability and Success Stories

- Collaborate with external evaluators or research institutions to validate the link between spatial data insights and decision-making.
- Document and share case studies demonstrating the successful application of data insights in conflict prevention and resolution.
- Highlight these stories in advocacy materials to showcase the value of data analytics and inspire confidence among stakeholders.

Contact

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