



# Integrating Social Work into Nigeria's Whole-of-Society Approach to National Security: A Framework for Community Resilience and Sustainable Peace

Adams Adah Otakwu, Ph.D., mni

Centre for Civil-Military Cooperation (CIMICO), Abuja – Nigeria

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## ABSTRACT

Nigeria's persistent and evolving security challenges have exposed the limitations of conventional state-centric approaches that rely primarily on military and law enforcement responses. Despite sustained investments in counterterrorism, intelligence, policing, and regional security cooperation, threats such as terrorism, banditry, kidnapping, communal conflicts, violent extremism, and organized crime continue to undermine human security and sustainable development. These challenges have displaced millions, disrupted livelihoods, weakened community institutions, and intensified psychosocial vulnerabilities, underscoring the need for multidimensional and preventive security interventions. This paper examines the strategic role of professional social work within Nigeria's emerging Whole-of-Society approach to national security. Guided by Human Security Theory, Ecological Systems Theory, and Security Governance Theory, the study adopts a qualitative conceptual methodology based on a critical review of scholarly literature, policy documents, and international best practices published between 2021 and 2026. The paper argues that professional social workers possess unique competencies in community mobilization, conflict prevention, psychosocial support, family strengthening, rehabilitation, reintegration, and peacebuilding that remain largely underutilized within Nigeria's security architecture. To address this gap, the study proposes the Social Work–Security Integration Framework (SWSIF) as a conceptual model for integrating social work into national security governance. It concludes that institutionalizing social work within Nigeria's Whole-of-Society security framework would strengthen preventive security, enhance community resilience and social cohesion, and contribute significantly to sustainable peace and national development.

**Keywords:** Social Work; National Security; Human Security; Community Resilience; Whole-of-Society Approach; Peacebuilding; Nigeria.

## INTRODUCTION

### Background to the Study

The nature of national security has undergone a profound transformation over the past three decades. Traditionally, security was conceptualized as the protection of territorial integrity, political sovereignty, and state institutions against external aggression and internal rebellion through military power, policing, intelligence operations, and criminal justice mechanisms. This state-centric perspective assumed that the security of the state automatically translated into the security of its citizens. However, the changing character of contemporary security threats has challenged this assumption and stimulated a paradigm shift towards more people-centred approaches to security. Increasingly, scholars and policymakers recognize that sustainable peace depends not only on military capability but also on the capacity of societies to address the structural social, economic, environmental, and governance factors that generate insecurity (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2022).



Contemporary security threats—including terrorism, violent extremism, transnational organized crime, cybercrime, forced displacement, climate-induced conflicts, food insecurity, and social exclusion—are multidimensional and interconnected, requiring collaborative responses beyond conventional security institutions. Consequently, the concept of national security has evolved from a narrow state-centric approach to the broader framework of **human security**, which emphasizes the protection of individuals, communities, livelihoods, dignity, and opportunities alongside the protection of state sovereignty (UNDP, 2022).

Nigeria exemplifies these complex security realities. Despite significant investments in defence, intelligence, policing, and regional security cooperation, the country continues to experience terrorism, armed banditry, kidnapping, farmer-herder conflicts, separatist violence, piracy, and organized crime, all of which threaten national stability and socioeconomic development (Human Rights Watch, 2025). According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, 2025), approximately 3.7 million Nigerians remain internally displaced due to conflict and violence, while the International Organization for Migration (IOM, 2024) reports that displacement has severely disrupted livelihoods, education, healthcare, and community cohesion. Similarly, the National Bureau of Statistics (2022) estimates that 133 million Nigerians are multidimensionally poor, highlighting the close relationship between socioeconomic deprivation and insecurity. These realities demonstrate that contemporary security challenges require preventive and multidimensional interventions that complement military responses with community resilience, social protection, and human development initiatives.

The growing acceptance of the Whole-of-Society Approach reflects this changing understanding of security. This approach recognizes that sustainable security depends on collaboration among government institutions, security agencies, civil society organizations, traditional and religious institutions, professional bodies, the private sector, and local communities. Within this collaborative framework, professional social work possesses considerable potential to contribute to conflict prevention, psychosocial support, rehabilitation, community engagement, and post-conflict recovery.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Despite sustained military operations and increased investments in national security, Nigeria continues to face persistent and evolving security challenges. While security agencies have recorded notable operational successes against insurgent and criminal groups, insecurity remains widespread, suggesting that conventional responses have been largely reactive and insufficient in addressing the underlying social determinants of violence.

Although international evidence demonstrates that professional social workers contribute significantly to violence prevention, family strengthening, rehabilitation, psychosocial support, peacebuilding, and community resilience, these competencies remain largely underutilized within Nigeria's national security architecture. Existing security policies continue to place greater emphasis on kinetic and law enforcement responses, with limited attention to preventive social interventions that address poverty, trauma, social exclusion, youth vulnerability, family instability, and weakened community institutions.

Furthermore, there is limited scholarly literature examining how professional social work can be systematically integrated into Nigeria's Whole-of-Society approach to national security. This policy and knowledge gap necessitates the development of a conceptual framework capable of repositioning social work as a strategic partner in strengthening preventive security, community resilience, and sustainable peace.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The broad objective of this study is to examine the strategic role of professional social work within Nigeria's Whole-of-Society approach to national security.

The specific objectives are to:



1. examine the relationship between social work and contemporary national security;
2. analyse the relevance of Human Security, Ecological Systems, and Security Governance theories to national security;
3. assess the potential contributions of professional social work to conflict prevention, community resilience, rehabilitation, and peacebuilding in Nigeria;
4. identify existing policy and institutional gaps limiting the integration of social work into Nigeria's security architecture; and
5. develop a **Social Work–Security Integration Framework (SWSIF)** for strengthening collaborative security governance in Nigeria.

## Research Questions

This study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the relationship between professional social work and contemporary national security?
2. How can social work contribute to Nigeria's Whole-of-Society approach to national security?
3. What institutional and policy gaps hinder the integration of professional social work into Nigeria's security architecture?
4. How can the proposed Social Work–Security Integration Framework (SWSIF) strengthen community resilience and sustainable peace?

## Significance of the Study

This study contributes to the growing discourse on human security and collaborative security governance by demonstrating the strategic relevance of professional social work to national security. It extends existing scholarship by proposing the Social Work–Security Integration Framework (SWSIF) as a conceptual model for integrating social work into Nigeria's Whole-of-Society security architecture.

The study is significant to policymakers by providing evidence-based recommendations for strengthening preventive security through multidisciplinary collaboration. It also offers practical guidance to security agencies, humanitarian organizations, social work practitioners, and development partners on leveraging social work competencies in conflict prevention, rehabilitation, psychosocial support, and community resilience.

Academically, the study enriches the literature on social work, security governance, and peacebuilding while providing a foundation for future empirical research on the role of social work in national security. Ultimately, the findings support ongoing efforts to promote sustainable peace, strengthen social cohesion, and advance inclusive national development in Nigeria.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Relevant Theories

#### Human Security Theory

Human Security Theory provides the principal theoretical foundation for understanding the relationship between social work and national security. Popularised by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in its 1994 Human Development Report, the theory challenged the traditional state-centric conception of security by arguing that genuine security extends beyond territorial defence to include the protection of individuals from chronic threats such as poverty, hunger, disease, unemployment, environmental degradation, violence, and social exclusion. Contemporary scholarship has further expanded the concept, emphasizing that human security encompasses freedom from fear, freedom from want, and freedom to live in dignity (UNDP, 2022).



Recent literature demonstrates that contemporary security threats increasingly arise from multidimensional social vulnerabilities rather than purely military aggression. Tadjbakhsh (2021) argues that violent conflicts are often sustained by persistent inequalities, governance failures, weak institutions, and socioeconomic exclusion. Similarly, the United Nations (2022) observes that the interdependence of economic instability, climate change, displacement, food insecurity, and public health emergencies has blurred the boundaries between development and security, making multidisciplinary responses essential.

The relevance of Human Security Theory to Nigeria is evident in the country's persistent security challenges. Despite improvements in military operations against insurgent groups, terrorism, banditry, kidnapping, communal conflicts, and violent extremism continue to flourish in environments characterised by poverty, unemployment, weak governance, social fragmentation, and inadequate public services (World Bank, 2024). According to the National Bureau of Statistics (2022), approximately 133 million Nigerians experience multidimensional poverty, while the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (2025) estimates that conflict and violence have displaced about 3.7 million people. These indicators suggest that insecurity in Nigeria is deeply rooted in structural social conditions that cannot be effectively addressed through military interventions alone.

Human Security Theory therefore provides a compelling justification for integrating professional social work into national security governance. As a profession committed to promoting social justice, strengthening resilience, protecting vulnerable populations, and enhancing community well-being, social work addresses many of the underlying drivers of insecurity identified by the theory. Through psychosocial support, community mobilisation, family strengthening, conflict mediation, livelihood support, and social protection interventions, social workers contribute to creating the social conditions necessary for sustainable peace and security.

While Human Security Theory broadens the understanding of *what* should be protected, it provides limited explanation of *how* social and institutional environments interact to shape security outcomes. This limitation is addressed by Ecological Systems Theory, which offers a more comprehensive understanding of the interaction between individuals, communities, and broader social systems.

### **Ecological Systems Theory**

Ecological Systems Theory, developed by Bronfenbrenner (1979), explains human behaviour as the product of continuous interaction between individuals and multiple environmental systems. These include the immediate family, schools, peer groups, workplaces, communities, cultural norms, political institutions, and broader socioeconomic conditions. Rather than attributing social problems solely to individual behaviour, the theory emphasizes that human development and social outcomes are influenced by the dynamic relationships between people and their environments.

The ecological perspective has become one of the most influential theoretical foundations of contemporary social work because it promotes holistic assessment and intervention across multiple levels of society (Kirst-Ashman & Hull, 2023). Recent scholarship has reaffirmed its relevance in addressing complex social problems such as violence, displacement, substance abuse, family instability, and community disintegration, all of which arise from interactions among social, economic, institutional, and environmental factors rather than isolated individual characteristics (Gray & Amadasun, 2024).

Within the context of national security, Ecological Systems Theory provides a useful framework for understanding the multifaceted causes of insecurity in Nigeria. Terrorism, banditry, kidnapping, youth violence, and communal conflicts are rarely the consequence of a single factor. Instead, they emerge through the interaction of poverty, unemployment, family dysfunction, weak educational systems, social exclusion, governance deficits, misinformation, and declining community cohesion. These interconnected conditions create environments in which criminal networks and violent extremist groups can recruit vulnerable individuals and sustain cycles of violence.



The ecological perspective also highlights the importance of preventive interventions that strengthen protective factors within families and communities. Professional social workers operate across multiple ecological levels by providing counselling to individuals, strengthening family functioning, mobilising communities, advocating for vulnerable populations, and influencing public policy. Such interventions enhance resilience, reduce social vulnerabilities, and support peaceful coexistence before insecurity escalates into armed conflict or organised crime.

Although Ecological Systems Theory explains *how* insecurity develops through interactions among social systems, it does not sufficiently address the institutional arrangements required to coordinate multiple actors in responding to these challenges. This limitation is addressed by Security Governance Theory, which emphasizes collaborative approaches to managing complex security environments.

### **Security Governance Theory**

Security Governance Theory emerged in response to the growing recognition that contemporary security challenges can no longer be effectively managed by the state acting alone. The theory argues that security has evolved into a shared responsibility requiring coordinated action among governments, security agencies, civil society organisations, international organisations, private sector actors, professional bodies, traditional institutions, and local communities (Krahmann, 2022). This perspective departs from traditional hierarchical models of security by emphasizing collaboration, shared accountability, and networked governance.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2022) similarly argues that fragile and conflict-affected societies require integrated governance systems capable of addressing the political, economic, social, and humanitarian dimensions of insecurity simultaneously. Collaborative governance strengthens institutional legitimacy, enhances public trust, improves early warning mechanisms, and promotes community ownership of peacebuilding initiatives. Contemporary security policy increasingly reflects this approach through concepts such as community policing, whole-of-government, whole-of-society, and comprehensive security.

Nigeria's evolving security environment reinforces the relevance of Security Governance Theory. The multiplicity of actors involved in responding to terrorism, displacement, humanitarian emergencies, and communal conflicts demonstrates that sustainable security depends on effective coordination across sectors. However, collaboration has largely centred on government institutions and humanitarian organisations, with limited recognition of professional social workers as strategic actors within the national security architecture.

Security Governance Theory therefore provides a strong rationale for institutionalising social work within Nigeria's Whole-of-Society approach to national security. Social workers possess specialised competencies in prevention, mediation, psychosocial support, rehabilitation, reintegration, and community engagement that complement the operational mandates of military, police, intelligence, and emergency management institutions. Their integration would strengthen collaborative security governance by addressing the social dimensions of insecurity while improving trust between communities and state institutions.

### **Theoretical Synthesis**

The three theories collectively provide a robust analytical framework for this study. Human Security Theory broadens the understanding of security by emphasising the protection of individuals and communities alongside the defence of the state. Ecological Systems Theory explains how insecurity emerges through interactions among individuals, families, communities, institutions, and broader socioeconomic structures. Security Governance Theory complements these perspectives by demonstrating that addressing such complex challenges requires collaboration among multiple actors rather than reliance on conventional security institutions alone.



Together, these theories support the central argument of this study that professional social work should be recognised as a strategic component of Nigeria's Whole-of-Society approach to national security. They further provide the theoretical basis for the proposed Social Work–Security Integration Framework (SWSIF), which seeks to institutionalise social work within national security governance through preventive, developmental, rehabilitative, and community-based interventions.

## METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative conceptual research design, employing a doctrinal and integrative literature review methodology. The choice of this approach is informed by the exploratory nature of the study, which seeks to develop a conceptual framework for integrating professional social work into Nigeria's Whole-of-Society approach to national security rather than testing predetermined hypotheses.

Data for the study were obtained exclusively from secondary sources published between 2021 and 2026, including peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, policy documents, international reports, government publications, and institutional frameworks. Major sources consulted include publications from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW), Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), World Bank, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), International Organization for Migration (IOM), National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP), and other reputable scholarly databases.

A systematic document analysis technique was employed to synthesize evidence relating to social work practice, human security, collaborative security governance, community resilience, conflict prevention, and peacebuilding. Themes emerging from the reviewed literature were coded, categorized, and critically analysed to identify conceptual relationships, policy gaps, and opportunities for institutional integration.

The study adopts an interpretivist analytical orientation, emphasizing understanding rather than statistical generalization. Accordingly, findings are presented through thematic synthesis leading to the development of the proposed Social Work–Security Integration Framework (SWSIF). The conceptual nature of the study eliminates the need for human participants or primary data collection. Consequently, ethical concerns relating to informed consent, anonymity, and confidentiality were not applicable. Nevertheless, the study adhered strictly to principles of academic integrity through accurate citation, faithful interpretation of published works, and avoidance of plagiarism.

## DISCUSSION: INTEGRATING SOCIAL WORK INTO NIGERIA'S WHOLE-OF-SOCIETY APPROACH TO NATIONAL SECURITY

The review of extant literature demonstrates that while Nigeria has made considerable investments in strengthening its military capabilities, intelligence architecture, policing institutions, and regional security cooperation, insecurity has continued to evolve in complexity and geographical spread. This suggests that contemporary security threats are not merely operational or tactical challenges but manifestations of deeper structural deficits embedded within communities and institutions. The persistence of terrorism, armed banditry, farmer-herder conflicts, communal violence, kidnapping, cultism, and youth criminality indicates that conventional security interventions have been more successful in responding to the symptoms of insecurity than addressing its underlying causes (UNDP, 2022; World Bank, 2023).

This finding reinforces the argument advanced by Human Security Theory that sustainable national security extends beyond protecting territorial sovereignty to safeguarding the dignity, welfare, and resilience of citizens. Security should therefore be understood as a continuum encompassing prevention, protection, recovery, rehabilitation, and sustainable development. Military and law enforcement agencies remain indispensable to this continuum; however, they cannot independently resolve the socioeconomic, psychological, and institutional

conditions that generate insecurity. Rather, sustainable security requires multidisciplinary collaboration involving development professionals, educators, health practitioners, psychologists, community leaders, humanitarian actors, and professional social workers.

The analysis equally demonstrates that many contemporary security threats emerge gradually through interconnected social processes. Family instability, prolonged unemployment, poor educational opportunities, substance abuse, social exclusion, weak governance, misinformation, and community fragmentation collectively create environments where criminality and violent extremism can flourish. By the time these vulnerabilities manifest as armed violence or organized criminality, security agencies are often compelled to respond through coercive measures. Such interventions may suppress immediate threats but seldom eliminate the structural conditions that produced them. Consequently, violence frequently re-emerges in different forms or locations.

Professional social work offers a preventive alternative capable of interrupting this progression. Unlike conventional security institutions that intervene primarily after violence has occurred, social workers engage communities at the earliest stages of vulnerability. Through family support services, youth development programmes, school social work, psychosocial counselling, community mediation, livelihood referrals, and social protection interventions, social workers strengthen protective factors while reducing exposure to the drivers of violence. These preventive functions align directly with Nigeria's aspirations to institutionalize a Whole-of-Society approach to national security.

International experience provides compelling evidence that integrating social services into security governance enhances both prevention and recovery. In several jurisdictions, including Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia, Rwanda, and South Africa, multidisciplinary partnerships involving social workers have contributed to preventing youth radicalisation, supporting victims of violence, facilitating offender rehabilitation, strengthening child protection systems, and rebuilding trust between communities and public institutions (IFSW, 2024; United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime [UNODC], 2023). Although institutional arrangements vary across countries, the common denominator is recognition that sustainable security cannot be achieved through enforcement alone but requires coordinated investments in human development, social inclusion, and community resilience.

The Nigerian context presents a particularly compelling case for such integration. Communities affected by insurgency, communal conflict, or banditry frequently experience displacement, family separation, psychological trauma, interrupted education, weakened livelihoods, and deteriorating trust in public institutions. These consequences persist long after military operations have restored territorial control. Without structured psychosocial support, family reunification, livelihood recovery, community reconciliation, and youth reintegration, affected communities remain vulnerable to renewed violence. Social workers possess professional competencies specifically designed to facilitate these recovery processes, yet their contribution remains largely peripheral within existing security institutions.

Another important observation emerging from this study relates to public trust. Effective security governance depends not only on the operational capabilities of security agencies but also on citizens' willingness to cooperate through information sharing, community surveillance, and collective problem-solving. Trust is strengthened where communities perceive state institutions as responsive, inclusive, and respectful of human dignity. Professional social workers, by virtue of their community-based orientation and ethical commitment to empowerment, can serve as credible intermediaries between security institutions and local populations. Their involvement may therefore improve intelligence gathering, reduce community resistance, strengthen early warning systems, and promote collaborative responses to emerging threats.

The foregoing analysis demonstrates that the relationship between social work and national security is neither incidental nor peripheral. Rather, social work constitutes an essential preventive and developmental dimension of comprehensive security governance. However, realizing this potential requires deliberate institutional reforms capable of embedding professional social work within Nigeria's national security architecture. To address this



gap, this paper proposes the Social Work–Security Integration Framework (SWSIF) as an original conceptual model for operationalising the contribution of social work to Nigeria's Whole-of-Society approach to national security.

### **The Social Work–Security Integration Framework (SWSIF): A Proposed Conceptual Model**

The Social Work–Security Integration Framework (SWSIF) is proposed as a multidisciplinary governance model that institutionalises professional social work across the security continuum. The framework is premised on the understanding that security is not merely the absence of violence but the presence of resilient individuals, cohesive families, empowered communities, responsive institutions, and inclusive governance. The framework comprises five interconnected pillars, each reinforcing the effectiveness of conventional security institutions while addressing the social determinants of insecurity.

#### **Pillar One: Prevention and Early Intervention**

This pillar focuses on identifying and addressing vulnerabilities before they escalate into security threats. Social workers collaborate with schools, families, community leaders, religious institutions, and local governments to identify at-risk populations, prevent school dropout, strengthen parenting, reduce substance abuse, address domestic violence, and facilitate youth engagement programmes. These interventions reduce the likelihood of recruitment into criminal and extremist networks.

#### **Pillar Two: Community Resilience and Social Cohesion**

Community resilience constitutes the second pillar of the framework. Here, social workers mobilize communities to strengthen collective efficacy, promote dialogue, facilitate mediation, encourage civic participation, and build local capacities for peaceful conflict resolution. Through these interventions, communities become active contributors to security governance rather than passive recipients of state protection.

#### **Pillar Three: Crisis Response and Psychosocial Support**

Where violence occurs, professional social workers provide emergency psychosocial services, trauma counselling, family tracing, child protection, gender-based violence response, displacement support, and humanitarian coordination. These interventions complement military and humanitarian operations by addressing the human consequences of conflict.

#### **Pillar Four: Rehabilitation, Reintegration, and Recovery**

Long-term peace depends on successful rehabilitation and reintegration of affected populations. Social workers support former offenders, victims of violence, internally displaced persons, returnees, and conflict-affected families through counselling, livelihood support, vocational referrals, reconciliation initiatives, and social reintegration programmes. These activities reduce recidivism and strengthen post-conflict recovery.

#### **Pillar Five: Policy, Research, and Institutional Development**

The fifth pillar recognises social workers as contributors to evidence-based security policy. Through research, monitoring and evaluation, advocacy, and inter-agency collaboration, social workers generate evidence for improving community-based security interventions while strengthening institutional accountability and citizen participation in security governance.

### **Scholarly Contribution of the Framework**

The principal contribution of the SWSIF lies in repositioning social work from a predominantly welfare-oriented



profession to a strategic actor within national security governance. Unlike existing models that treat social work as an auxiliary humanitarian service, the framework conceptualises social work as a preventive, developmental, rehabilitative, and policy-oriented partner that complements military, police, intelligence, correctional, and emergency management institutions. Consequently, the framework provides a practical pathway for operationalising Nigeria's Whole-of-Society approach to national security while simultaneously strengthening human security, community resilience, and sustainable peace.

### **Policy Implications**

The findings of this study have significant implications for national security policy, social development planning, professional social work practice, and institutional reform in Nigeria. The central argument emerging from the analysis is that contemporary security challenges cannot be sustainably addressed through coercive responses alone. Rather, effective security governance requires integrated interventions that combine defence and law enforcement with preventive social policies capable of addressing the structural determinants of insecurity.

First, the study highlights the need for a paradigm shift in Nigeria's national security philosophy. Existing security strategies have understandably prioritized military operations, intelligence gathering, policing, and criminal justice responses because of the immediacy of violent threats. While these institutions remain indispensable, sustainable peace requires complementary investments in community resilience, psychosocial recovery, social protection, and preventive interventions. The proposed integration of professional social work into national security planning therefore represents a transition from reactive security management to proactive security governance. Such a shift aligns with contemporary human security thinking, which recognizes that safeguarding human dignity, social inclusion, and community well-being is fundamental to long-term national stability (UNDP, 2022).

Second, institutionalizing professional social work within Nigeria's Whole-of-Society security architecture would strengthen the preventive dimension of national security. Social workers possess specialized competencies in family support, child protection, community organization, conflict mediation, psychosocial counselling, youth empowerment, and rehabilitation. These competencies complement the operational capabilities of military, police, intelligence, correctional, and emergency management agencies by addressing the social vulnerabilities that frequently precede criminality, radicalization, and violent conflict. Their systematic deployment within conflict-prone communities would improve early warning mechanisms, enhance community engagement, and reduce the likelihood of violence through timely social interventions.

Third, the study underscores the importance of strengthening community resilience as a national security objective. Communities characterized by strong social cohesion, functional local institutions, active civic participation, and effective support networks are generally better positioned to resist recruitment by criminal organizations and violent extremist groups. Social workers can facilitate community resilience through participatory development, social capital formation, civic education, restorative dialogue, and capacity-building initiatives. Consequently, resilience should be recognized as a measurable component of Nigeria's broader national security strategy rather than merely a social development outcome.

Fourth, the proposed Social Work–Security Integration Framework (SWSIF) offers practical guidance for improving inter-agency collaboration. Security institutions frequently operate within sectoral boundaries, limiting opportunities for multidisciplinary problem-solving. The framework encourages structured collaboration among security agencies, ministries responsible for humanitarian affairs and social development, educational institutions, healthcare providers, correctional services, traditional institutions, faith-based organizations, civil society organizations, and professional associations. Such coordination would improve information sharing, reduce duplication of interventions, and promote comprehensive responses to complex security challenges.



Finally, this study has important implications for social work education and professional regulation in Nigeria. Universities and professional bodies should incorporate modules on conflict transformation, humanitarian action, trauma-informed practice, disaster management, countering violent extremism, restorative justice, and security governance into social work curricula. Equipping future practitioners with these competencies would enhance their preparedness to contribute meaningfully to multidisciplinary security initiatives while preserving the profession's ethical commitment to human rights, social justice, and community empowerment.

## CONCLUSION

Nigeria's evolving security environment demonstrates that contemporary threats cannot be sustainably addressed through conventional military and law enforcement responses alone. While security agencies have recorded important operational successes in degrading armed groups and disrupting criminal networks, the persistence and recurrence of insecurity indicate that the structural drivers of violence remain insufficiently addressed. Sustainable peace therefore requires a broader conception of national security that integrates protection from violence with investments in human development, social inclusion, institutional trust, and community resilience.

This paper has argued that professional social work constitutes an indispensable but underutilized component of Nigeria's emerging Whole-of-Society approach to national security. Through a synthesis of Human Security Theory, Ecological Systems Theory, and Security Governance Theory, the study demonstrated that insecurity is fundamentally multidimensional, emerging from interactions among social, economic, institutional, and governance factors. Consequently, effective security governance requires multidisciplinary collaboration extending beyond conventional defence institutions.

The principal contribution of this study is the development of the Social Work–Security Integration Framework (SWSIF). The framework provides a conceptual pathway for institutionalizing social work within Nigeria's national security architecture through five interconnected pillars: prevention and early intervention; community resilience and social cohesion; crisis response and psychosocial support; rehabilitation, reintegration, and recovery; and policy, research, and institutional development. Unlike conventional security models that emphasize reactive responses, the proposed framework prioritizes preventive, developmental, and restorative interventions that complement existing security institutions while strengthening community ownership of peacebuilding.

The study therefore concludes that integrating professional social work into Nigeria's national security architecture is not simply a welfare initiative but a strategic investment in sustainable peace, human security, and national development. As Nigeria continues to confront increasingly complex and interconnected security challenges, the adoption of multidisciplinary approaches that combine security operations with evidence-based social interventions will become increasingly indispensable. Institutionalizing professional social work within the country's Whole-of-Society security framework offers a practical and innovative pathway for enhancing resilience, strengthening public trust, preventing violence, and promoting inclusive and sustainable national security.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. **Institutionalize Social Work in National Security:** The Federal Government should integrate professional social workers into national security institutions to support prevention, psychosocial services, rehabilitation, community engagement, and post-conflict recovery.
2. **Strengthen the Social Work Profession:** Government should expedite the implementation of the Social Work Regulatory Framework to enhance professional standards, accreditation, and workforce development.

3. **Mainstream Social Work in Security Policy:** Future reviews of Nigeria's National Security Strategy should recognize social work as a key component of the Whole-of-Society approach to national security.
4. **Establish Community Security Support Centres:** Federal, state, and local governments should establish community-based social work and security centres in conflict-prone areas to strengthen resilience, mediation, and psychosocial support.
5. **Promote Multidisciplinary Collaboration:** Security agencies and social workers should undertake regular joint training and collaborative programmes to improve coordination, civilian protection, and community engagement.
6. **Support Research and Evidence-Based Practice:** Universities, research institutions, and professional bodies should promote research on the role of social work in conflict prevention, peacebuilding, rehabilitation, and national security.
7. **Strengthen Community Participation:** Government should promote community-based security partnerships by actively engaging citizens, traditional institutions, women, youth, faith-based organizations, and civil society in security governance.
8. **Institutionalize Monitoring and Evaluation:** Community security and resilience programmes should incorporate monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to measure outcomes, inform policy, and improve programme effectiveness.

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