



**IPCR**

**Conflict Research Network West Africa**

# **2023 Research Conference on Social Protection and Economic Uncertainties in Fragile and Conflict-Affected Settings**

Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution (IPCR)  
Abuja, Nigeria

**8–9 November 2023**



## **Introduction**

This Conference on Social Protection and Economic Uncertainties in Fragile and Conflict-Affected Settings was organised by the Conflict Research Network West Africa (CORN West Africa) in partnership with the Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution (IPCR) from 8–9 November 2023, in Abuja, Nigeria. Research papers presented at the Conference covered themes such as the theory and practice of social protection, the political economy of social protection, gender dynamics in social protection, social protection and peacebuilding, outcomes of social protection programmes, victim-centred social protection, data management and communication in the implementation of social protection programmes, religion, civil society and social protection, and historical reflections on social protection. A separate discussion, ‘Unpacking Nigeria’s Social Register Politics: Implications for Poverty Alleviation and Conflict’, took place at the Conference involving researchers and officials from the National Social Safety Nets Coordinating Office.

## **Opening Remarks**

Welcome remarks were made by Dr Joseph Ochogwu, Director General of the IPCR. He highlighted the importance of the Conference theme and the urgent need for appropriate social protection policies and their implementation, to address fragility and build resilience in Nigeria. Dr Chris Pycroft, Development Director, British High Commission, Nigeria identified the need for improved social protection programming and the importance of evidence-based policymaking in the field of social protection. Nkatha Ntoburi, a Social Protection Specialist at the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), emphasised the role of international partners and donors in improving social protection in Nigeria. This report summarises the discussions and policy recommendations emerging from the Conference.

The keynote address was titled “Social Protection in Times of Crises” and was delivered by Professor Emmanuel Remi Aiyede, Professor of Political Institutions, Governance and Public Policy at the University of Ibadan and Research and Policy Uptake Lead at the Partnership for African Social and Governance Research (PASGR), Nairobi. Professor Aiyede discussed how social protection could address vulnerabilities, build resilience, expand opportunity, and increase equity, and the elements and types of social protection needed to achieve these objectives. He asked whether existing practices were achieving these goals and if not, what could be done and what was being done. He argued that, although African countries had produced many social protection policy documents at national and regional levels, Africa still had the lowest social protection coverage of any continent. Professor Aiyede explained that because of ongoing fiscal policy challenges, African leaders must recognise the importance of dialogue and identify with citizens who bore the hardships of austerity measures. They must show their commitment to social protection by working with stakeholders to manage social protection improvements in a sensitive and empathetic manner.



## **Panel Discussions on Political Economy of Social Protection**

Concerns about neopatrimonialism, distributive politics, electoral clientelism and the politics of internally displaced people were discussed. They were linked to Nigeria's rentier economy, which is conducive to good relations between national and local non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and governments, particularly in conflict-affected regions such as north-east Nigeria. It was stressed that NGOs and governments should work together to tackle hardships created by economic and social precarity.

NGOs were said to be complicit in the patronage politics orchestrated by governments, often under the guise of dispensing social protection programmes. Scarcity of funds prompted NGOs to seek economic gain in this way and enhance their social capital. Consequently, NGOs had become de facto providers of social protection on behalf of the government. Such ties between NGOs and governments are most obvious during election cycles. Heightened political activities increase collaboration between NGOs and governments in the implementation of social protection programmes. Political interests often take precedence over sustainable social protection provision at the expense of electorates, who are ostensibly the primary beneficiaries of social protection policies.

## **Social Protection: From Theory to Practice in Nigeria**

Debate focused on the theory and practice of social protection in Nigeria's neoliberal democracy, and the politics of indigeneity and inclusive social protection. It examined gaps in the distribution of social welfare and whether distribution was selective. Researchers explained neoliberal conceptions of social protection, which, according to their study, do not adequately provide for many of the people in need. These vulnerable groups often live in urban slums or rural communities, where the state has limited presence. Other papers explained how social protection in Nigeria is tied to identity politics and how provisions such as small loans, economic empowerment, cash transfers, and food supplies are often reliant on place of origin. Mostly they are distributed through political and patronage networks, leaving vulnerable non-indigenes excluded.

## **Gender Dynamics in Social Protection**

Presentations also addressed the exclusion of women from social protection, the effectiveness of women's empowerment programmes in unsettled regions and the impact of social protection schemes for women on Nigeria's economic development. A focus on women with disabilities would boost inclusion and acknowledge the multifaceted nature of disability, the Conference heard. Also discussed was the effectiveness, accessibility, and inclusivity of Lagos State policies aimed at supporting individuals with disabilities, particularly women. Speakers explained how insecurity in Kaduna State had affected social protection schemes for women and warned that this must be considered in shaping new initiatives; participants agreed that cash transfer programmes could significantly increase women's empowerment, especially where economies were fragile. Calls for the economic empowerment of women to be made a prominent social protection strategy won strong support, particularly if taking into account challenges such as limited literacy and technological advancements. Understanding how these factors impacted women with disabilities will be crucial for designing interventions that are inclusive and that tackle barriers. A pragmatic approach will also be essential to bridging gaps and empowering women economically.

## **Social Protection and Peacebuilding**

Peace, the reintegration of ex-Boko Haram combatants, and links between social protection and conflict reduction in Nigeria were discussed, together with the Presidential Amnesty Programme (PAP) for ex-militants in the Niger Delta and Operation Safe Corridors in north-east Nigeria. The effectiveness of that region's social protection programmes in relation to reintegration schemes was also assessed; research suggests that communities attacked by Boko Haram militants remain fragile and insecure, which undermines their capacity to absorb former fighters. Welfare provision for communities remains insufficient and many people still face economic hardship. Studies indicate some success in reducing conflict through social protection programmes, but conflict is still widespread. It may therefore be productive to align social protection programmes with peacebuilding where armed conflicts and political violence continue. The government and development community were urged to help facilitate this.

## **Victim-Centred Approaches to Social Protection**

The experiences of victims of farmer–herder and other disputes, the COVID-19 pandemic, and child trafficking were among other concerns discussed. Victim protection, especially of vulnerable groups such as women and children, is not a priority in social protection programmes. The Conference pressed for a greater focus on problems faced by widows and orphans in farmer–herder conflict areas, the inclusion of displaced people in those programmes, and the enforcement of the Child’s Right Act for children born in Boko Haram camps and in other conflict-affected areas.

## **Social Protection in the Margins**

Social protection in rural parts of the Niger Delta and the work of state and non-state organisations in providing it was debated. Access to social protection benefits is inadequate in this region but there is strong evidence that social protection increases the effectiveness of conflict management strategies, if properly distributed.

## **The role of Religious Institutions and Civil Society in Social Protection**

Research indicates that the Catholic church and other religious institutions in south-east Nigeria have provided effective social protection through cash, literacy, and vocational training. This was evident during Nigeria’s civil war between 1966 and 1969 and has been sustained since then. Other Christian denominations and religious bodies offer social protection services to their communities. More study is needed of the impact of social protection initiatives run by religious institutions on poverty reduction.





## Impacts of Social Protection Programmes

Delegates discussed the impact of youth empowerment schemes in Oyo State, the effect of social protection policies on poverty in Nigeria, and the impact of the National Home-Grown School Feeding Programme in north-west Nigeria. They assessed the effectiveness of youth empowerment strategies in boosting community security and the adverse impacts of current economic realities on these initiatives. Existing social welfare provision in relation to cash transfers and financial palliatives is currently not sufficient to reduce poverty in Nigeria. A sustainable economic policy is needed to tackle uncertainties faced by the poor and vulnerable. And a robust impact evaluation of social protection programmes in Nigeria is key to determining the effectiveness of poverty reduction schemes.

### Recommendations for the Nigerian Government:

- Nigeria's social protection programme is vulnerable to political influence and patronage politics. We recommend that the Federal and state governments design national- and state-level accountability mechanisms for all social protection programmes.

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- There are significant doubts about the integrity of Nigeria's social register. Debates at the conference revealed that while there has been considerable effort by the Nigerian government to expand the social register, it is still not clear to researchers and citizens how people can gain access or be included in the social register. We recommend that it be integrated into the National Identity Management Database held by the National Identity Management Commission. The National Identity Number (NIN) should serve as a social security number in Nigeria.

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- We propose that all cash transfers be delivered through the banking system. Where recipients have no bank account, cash transfers should be provided as vouchers that can be redeemed at designated financial institutions by vendors who provide goods and services to vulnerable populations.

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- Nigeria has several social protection policies and institutions with social protection mandates. This creates duplicity and a lack of coherence in the delivery of social protection services. We recommend that Federal and state governments review their social protection programmes and policies and create an overarching framework and central unit that coordinates and assesses the impacts of governments' interventions.

## Recommendations for International Partners and Donors

- There is limited data on the impact of social protection programmes in Nigeria. We recommend that international partners and donors work with researchers to assess the effect of these initiatives. International partners and donors should provide support to researchers to extend the knowledge base of social protection in Nigeria.
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- The Conference calls on international partners and donors to support the Nigerian Government in developing policies and strengthening institutions with social protection mandates.
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- Some international partners and donors support social protection initiatives implemented by international organisations and NGOs. The Conference recommends that these interventions prioritise long term support to local organisations and communities. This long-term support should focus on strengthening local organisations and communities to ensure effective delivery of social protection services by state institutions.

## Closing Remarks

Nigeria is facing serious economic challenges. This is increasing the precarity of vulnerable people. The government has made concerted efforts to address these challenges and provide social protection for at-risk citizens, but these efforts are being undermined by inefficiency, corruption, and weak institutions. Since the Conference took place the Minister for Humanitarian Affairs and Poverty Reduction has been suspended following allegations of corruption and abuse of office. This highlights the importance of concerns voiced and evidence shared at the Conference. There must be a rethink of social protection policy and practice in Nigeria. CORN West Africa and partners will provide evidence that supports improved policymaking and effective programming in social protection. We will do this through the community of practice inaugurated at the Conference. We call on Conference participants to continue their social protection research and ensure that their findings are disseminated widely. We urge policymakers to accept and implement their recommendations.





## Press Coverage of Conference Outcomes

**Social Protection Policy in Nigeria at Risk of Political Hijack, Tinubu Told - THISDAYLIVE** - <https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2023/11/13/social-protection-policy-in-nigeria-at-risk-of-political-hijack-tinubu-told>

**Social Protection Policy At Risk Of Political Hijack, CORN Director Tells Tinubu:** <https://independent.ng/social-protection-policy-at-risk-of-political-hijack-corn-director-tells-tinubu/>

**Tinubu urged to safeguard social protection policy from political interference:** <https://sunnewsonline.com/tinubu-urged-to-safeguard-social-protection-policy-from-political-interference/>

**Nigeria at risk of social protection policy's political hijack, CORN Director tells Tinubu:** <https://thenewsbearer.com/nigeria-at-risk-of-social-protection-policys-political-hijack-corn-director-tells-tinubu/>

**Social Protection Policy in Nigeria at Risk of Political Hijack, CORN Director Tells Tinubu:** <https://spectatorsng.com/social-protection-policy-in-nigeria-at-risk-of-political-hijack-corn-director-tells-tinubu/>

**Overhaul Social Intervention programmes Architecture: CORN tells Tinubu:** <https://spectatorsng.com/overhaul-social-intervention-programmes-architecture-corn-tells-tinubu/>

**Overhaul Social Intervention Programmes Architecture - CORN tells Tinubu** <https://penangle.com/overhaul-social-intervention-programmes-architecture-corn-tells-tinubu/>

**Go beyond Edu's suspension, overhaul social intervention programmes - CORN to Tinubu:** <https://dailypost.ng/2024/01/10/go-beyond-edus-suspension-overhaul-social-intervention-programmes-corn-to-tinubu/>

**Overhaul Social Intervention Programmes Architecture, CORN Tells Tinubu:** <https://independent.ng/overhaul-social-intervention-programmes-architecture-corn-tells-tinubu/>

**Overhaul Social Intervention Programmes architecture, CORN tells Tinubu:** <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2024/01/overhaul-social-intervention-programmes-architecture-corn-tells-tinubu/>

**Beyond Suspending Edu, Overhaul Social Intervention programmes, CORN tells Tinubu - THISDAYLIVE** - <https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2024/01/11/beyond-suspending-edu-overhaul-social-intervention-programmes-corn-tells-tinubu>

**CORN To Tinubu: Overhaul Nigeria's Social Protection Architecture** <https://newnigeriannewspaper.com/corn-to-tinubu-overhaul-nigerias-social-protection-architecture/>

**Overhaul social intervention programmes – Group to Tinubu:** <https://businessday.ng/news/article/overhaul-social-intervention-programmes-group-to-tinubu/?amp=1>

**Tinubu Establishes Special Panel On Overhaul Of National Social Investment Programmes:** <https://newspointnigeria.com/just-in-tinubu-establishes-special-panel-on-overhaul-of-national-social-investment-programmes/>

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