



CLIMATE-INDUCED CONFLICT AND THE ETHICAL DEFICIT IN PEACEBUILDING: A CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF PLATEAU STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

Climate-induced conflicts pose a significant security and development challenge in Nigeria's Middle Belt, particularly in Plateau State, where environmental degradation, shifting rainfall patterns, and land scarcity intensify communal violence. While the climate-conflict nexus has attracted considerable scholarly attention, the ethical dimensions of peacebuilding, including faith-based and indigenous frameworks, remain underexplored. This study examines the intersection of climate-induced conflict and ethical deficits in peacebuilding in Plateau State, using Environmental Security Theory and Christian Virtue Ethics as analytical lenses. Employing a qualitative documentary research design, the study systematically analyzes the literature, policy documents, and conflict reports through thematic content analysis. The findings indicate that climate variability functions as a threat multiplier, exacerbating socioeconomic disparities, governance failures, and resource-based grievances. For instance, recent reports document more than 200 deaths in Plateau State in late 2023 resulting from communal violence linked to competition for land and water (AP News, 2023; WANEP, 2024). Peacebuilding efforts in Plateau State remain predominantly reactive and often neglect ethical principles such as stewardship, distributive justice, and inclusion, as well as the potential contributions of indigenous ecological knowledge and interfaith ethical frameworks. The study concludes that sustainable peacebuilding requires integrating environmental security, ethical transformation, governance reform, and collaboration with local knowledge systems. This article advances the climate justice discourse by demonstrating that climate-induced conflict in Plateau State constitutes an environmental, security, and ethical governance challenge that requires holistic, context-sensitive peacebuilding strategies.

Keywords: Climate-Induced Conflict, Peacebuilding, Climate Justice, Governance, Plateau State.



Introduction

Persistent conflicts in Nigeria's Middle Belt, especially in Plateau State, have been extensively analyzed and are often attributed to ethnic or religious differences. However, ecological stressors, including drought, irregular rainfall, land degradation, and water scarcity, are critical underlying drivers (Blench, 2004; Okpara et al., 2015; Busby, 2021). This study contends that these environmental pressures fundamentally shape the region's ongoing instability. The link between climate change and violent conflict has attracted significant global scrutiny, with the IPCC identifying sub-Saharan Africa, including Plateau State, as highly vulnerable to climate-driven instability due to rising temperatures and changing rainfall patterns (IPCC, 2023; Busby, 2021).

Local political tensions further complicate these dynamics, underscoring the importance of ecological stressors in Plateau State's conflict and peacebuilding landscape (International Crisis Group, 2017). Escalating resource competition in Plateau State, fueled by shrinking Lake Chad, loss of arable land, and demographic pressures, has intensified migration and conflict, especially between farmers and herders (Okpara et al., 2015; Adams et al., 2018). Weak governance and inadequate dispute resolution mechanisms further exacerbate tensions (Swatuk & Özerol, 2018). Despite significant peacebuilding efforts, sustainable peace remains elusive, as many interventions neglect ecological and ethical dimensions, undermining community trust and long-term stability (Mercy Corps, 2015).

A significant limitation of peacebuilding in Plateau State is its predominant focus on short-term conflict resolution, which often neglects ecological causes and raises ethical concerns related to justice and sustainability (Ishola & Luginaah, 2025). Climate stressors, including drought and erratic rainfall, influence conflict dynamics, and the frequent omission of these factors in peacebuilding initiatives perpetuates ethical gaps that impede durable solutions (Busby, 2021). Therefore, integrating climate and ethical considerations is essential to enhancing the effectiveness of interventions in Plateau State.

Statement of the Problem

Despite numerous peacebuilding initiatives, Plateau State continues to experience persistent violence, resulting in significant loss of life, property damage, displacement, and erosion of social cohesion (International Crisis Group, 2017; Krause, 2011; Mercy Corps, 2015). While ethnic and religious tensions are frequently cited, ecological stressors such as land degradation, water scarcity, and reduced arable land are critical yet often overlooked drivers of conflict (Blench, 2004; Okpara et al., 2015; Busby, 2021; Raleigh & Urdal, 2007). Ignoring these threat multipliers perpetuates violence by intensifying competition between farming and pastoral communities and exacerbating grievances. Most current peacebuilding efforts prioritize short-term dispute resolution and intergroup dialogue, while neglecting ecological context and ethical imperatives such as justice, stewardship, and sustainability (Swatuk & Özerol, 2018; Adams et al., 2018). As a result, transformative change remains elusive, with recurring conflicts and diminished trust among stakeholders. There is an urgent need for research that critically examines the climate-conflict nexus in Plateau State, evaluates the limitations of existing peacebuilding efforts, and proposes frameworks that integrate ecological and ethical principles (Busby, 2021; Ide, 2015). Without such integration, efforts toward lasting peace will remain inadequate amid escalating environmental and social challenges.

**Research Objective**

To analyze how climate stressors and ecological threats drive violent conflict in Plateau State, and to identify ethical and governance approaches that can inform the development of effective, sustainable peacebuilding strategies. (Okpara et al., 2015; Busby, 2021)

Research Question

How do climate stressors and ecological changes drive violent conflict in Plateau State, and what ethical and governance strategies are needed for effective, sustainable peacebuilding? (Okpara et al., 2015; Busby, 2021)

Theoretical Framework

This study applies Environmental Security Theory (EST) and Christian Virtue Ethics to examine climate-induced conflict and peacebuilding in Plateau State. EST examines how environmental degradation and resource scarcity interact with social and political vulnerabilities to fuel conflict, positioning climate change as a threat multiplier rather than a direct cause (Ullman, 1983; Mathews, 1989; Busby, 2021; Buhaug & von Uexkull, 2021). In Plateau State, EST explains how competition for land and water intensifies violence, especially where governance is weak and historical tensions persist (Higazi, 2016; International Crisis Group, 2017). However, EST does not address the ethical dimensions of peacebuilding. Thus, this study integrates Christian Virtue Ethics, which emphasizes cultivating virtues such as justice, stewardship, reconciliation, and responsibility, essential for individual and communal well-being (Gardiner, 2011; Lederach, 1997). Christian ethics interprets ecological crises as moral failures and advocates ethical transformation alongside institutional reforms. This framework highlights ethical deficits in current peacebuilding, particularly the neglect of justice, accountability, and environmental stewardship in intervention strategies for Plateau State. By combining EST and Christian Virtue Ethics, the study provides a comprehensive perspective on climate-induced conflict as both an ecological security and a moral challenge. This integrated lens underscores the necessity of ethical transformation, effective governance, and the pluralistic inclusion of indigenous and Islamic ethical contributions to build sustainable peace in Plateau State (Oguche et al., 2025; Busby, 2021).

Conceptual Clarification

This study examines climate-induced conflict, climate justice, ethical deficits, and peacebuilding in Plateau State, Nigeria, drawing on scholarship in environmental security and ethics (Busby, 2021; Gardiner, 2011). Climate-induced conflict arises when climate change intensifies vulnerabilities and resource competition, thereby escalating violence and grievances in Plateau State (Okpara et al., 2015; Busby, 2021). Climate justice demands equitable responses, as marginalized groups disproportionately suffer from climate impacts (Schlosberg, 2007; Gardiner, 2011). Ethical deficit denotes the absence of moral principles in governance and peacebuilding, leading to ineffective responses to the root causes of conflict (Gardiner, 2011; Schlosberg, 2007). This study evaluates how ethical values are integrated into current peace initiatives to advance sustainable peace and environmental justice. Peacebuilding aims to prevent and resolve conflict by addressing underlying causes through reconciliation, improved governance, and community engagement, particularly in the context of climate-induced conflicts (Lederach, 1997; Galtung, 1996). These interconnected concepts underpin the research, highlighting how ethical standards, environmental governance, local knowledge, and interfaith collaboration can foster sustainable peace in Plateau State (Mercy Corps, 2015; Oguche et al., 2025).

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative documentary research design, well suited to analyzing complex social, environmental, and ethical issues in Plateau State, Nigeria (Bowen, 2009; Adams et al., 2018). Secondary data were drawn from peer-reviewed journals, academic books, government documents, and NGO reports, with a focus on climate variability, resource governance, and conflict dynamics (Ide & Scheffran, 2014). A structured literature search was conducted across major academic databases, emphasizing sources relevant to climate issues in Nigeria and similar regions. Thematic content analysis identified key patterns, including climate variability, conflict dynamics, ethical deficits, and indigenous knowledge, and these were contextualized using Environmental Security Theory and Christian Virtue Ethics (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Source triangulation and a focus on reputable publications ensured reliability and analytical rigor. The study used only publicly available materials, making formal ethical approval unnecessary, while adhering to academic integrity and sensitivity in reporting. Limitations include reliance on secondary data, which restricts primary insights into local experiences; however, diverse sources provide a robust basis for exploring the climate-conflict relationship and ethical considerations in peacebuilding. Future research should expand through direct fieldwork and community engagement (Busby, 2021; Mercy Corps, 2015).

Literature Review

Context and Background

Nigeria's Middle Belt, with Plateau State at its center, serves as a cultural and economic bridge between the Muslim north and Christian south, and is home to over 40 ethno-linguistic groups (Blench, 2004; International Crisis Group, 2017; Higazi, 2011). Rapid population growth strains limited resources, while colonial administrative policies have left legacies of demographic shifts and land tenure disputes (National Population Commission, 2006; Nwan et al., 2024). Plateau State, once "the food basket of Nigeria," now faces desertification, land degradation, and erratic rainfall, disrupting agriculture and rural livelihoods (Okpara et al., 2015; Mercy Corps, 2015; Busby, 2021). Intensified competition for land—especially between farmers and southward-migrating Fulani herders—has escalated since the 1980s, fueled by climate changes and the breakdown of traditional resource-sharing systems (Raleigh & Urdal, 2007; Blench, 2004).

Socio-economic challenges, including widespread poverty, unemployment, and weak governance, compound these pressures, lowering agricultural productivity and food security (Mercy Corps, 2015; Adams et al., 2018; International Crisis Group, 2017). Women and children are particularly affected by these disruptions, with gender exclusion from land access and peacebuilding worsening vulnerabilities (Ishola & Luginaah, 2025; Hellestveit & McConnachie, 2024). Gender inclusion is thus vital for sustainable peace.

Plateau State's repeated violence, including the Jos crises of 2001, 2008, and 2010, stems not just from ethnic or religious tensions but from competition over land, water, and political representation (Krause, 2011; Blench, 2004; Okpara et al., 2015). Effective interventions must address the complex interplay of environmental, demographic, and socio-political grievances to resolve persistent conflict.



Ethical Principles and Local Knowledge

Effective ecological peacebuilding in Plateau State must be grounded in ethical principles and incorporate local knowledge systems. Environmental justice requires the inclusion of impacted communities, especially smallholder farmers and pastoralists, in decision-making (Mercy Corps, 2015; Swatuk & Özerol, 2018). Intergenerational equity emphasizes protecting land for future generations. Traditional land stewardship and communal resource-sharing remain underutilized within formal peacebuilding.

Religious traditions also offer valuable ethical frameworks. Christian and Islamic teachings stress stewardship, while indigenous cosmologies highlight the sacred connection to land (Oguche et al., 2025). Excluding these perspectives undermines the legitimacy and sustainability of peacebuilding efforts. Thus, integrating ethical and local knowledge systems is essential for justice and effectiveness in Plateau State.

Indigenous Ecological Knowledge and Sustainable Peacebuilding in Plateau State

Indigenous Ecological Knowledge (IEK), also known as Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK), encompasses the environmental wisdom developed by indigenous communities through their enduring relationship with nature. In Africa, these communities leverage such knowledge to manage vital resources such as land, water, and forests, thereby promoting conservation and mitigating resource-related conflicts (Berkes, 2018).

In Plateau State, indigenous groups such as the Berom, Mwaghavul, and Tarok have established sustainable resource management practices based on cultural and traditional laws. These practices historically fostered responsible resource utilization and alleviated competition for limited ecological assets. Significant practices among the Tarok Communities include the conservation of sacred groves and community forests, which serve as spiritual sites governed by customary access rules to prevent overexploitation. Research indicates that these sacred areas have effectively preserved local ecosystems. (Pam, G. 2017).

Community-led Forest conservation is another crucial approach, whereby local customs regulate the extraction of wood and medicinal plants, ensuring ecological sustainability. Historical evidence suggests that the Berom communities relied extensively on forest resources while adhering to these cultural customs. Traditional watershed protection has also played a key role among the Mwaghavul by restricting farming and development near riverbanks and wetlands, thereby maintaining water quality and reducing soil erosion. This highlights the relevance of indigenous conservation strategies amid ongoing environmental challenges in the region. Additionally, traditional grazing management has minimized resource conflicts by facilitating negotiations between pastoralists and farmers over access to grazing lands and water, thereby promoting coexistence (Pam, G. 2017). It was also abundantly understood that in most Plateau state communities, indigenous agricultural practices, including crop rotation, bush fallowing and organic fertilization, have contributed to sustainability by improving soil health and mitigating environmental impact. Communities historically combined these techniques with adaptive strategies to enhance agricultural resilience in changing environmental conditions. Biodiversity conservation, as evidenced by research among the Mushere people, underscores the importance of traditional insights into wildlife and ecosystem preservation. Despite modernization posing threats



to these knowledge systems, they continue to provide essential guidance for community-based conservation efforts (Ikehi, M., Paradang, S., & Ayeh, L. 2015).

The relevance of indigenous ecological knowledge is paramount in addressing climate-induced conflicts by reinforcing communal responsibility and collaborative resource governance. Many current conflicts in Plateau State arise from competition for land and water, issues historically mitigated by traditional governance through community participation and conflict resolution. The decline of these systems has led to unsustainable practices and increased vulnerability to climate-related challenges. Integrating indigenous ecological knowledge into contemporary peacebuilding initiatives can enhance culturally relevant environmental governance, improve community engagement, and promote sustainable resource management. This integration addresses ethical gaps in modern efforts and bolsters local resilience against climate-induced conflicts. To foster sustainable peace in Plateau State, it is crucial to blend contemporary environmental policies with revitalized indigenous ecological knowledge within climate adaptation and conflict prevention strategies. Such an approach would significantly enhance local resilience and promote a harmonious relationship with the environment.

The Climate-Induced Conflict Nexus: Literature Synthesis

While most scholars agree that climate variability acts as a threat multiplier, there is, however, significant disagreement regarding the extent to which environmental factors independently cause violent conflict. A significant body of scholarship highlights the impact of climate variability and environmental degradation on conflict dynamics in sub-Saharan Africa (Adams et al., 2018; Ide, 2015; Raleigh & Urdal, 2007). In Nigeria's Middle Belt and Plateau State, the interaction between climatic change and social tensions is particularly pronounced. Research indicates that prolonged droughts, temperature extremes, desertification, and the reduction of water bodies intensify competition for land and water resources (Blench, 2004; Okpara et al., 2015; Busby, 2021). Belli et al. (2025) further illustrate that climate-induced malnutrition mediates the relationship between environmental stress and violent conflict, emphasizing the multifaceted nature of this nexus and the necessity for integrated humanitarian and security strategies.

Okpara et al. (2015) note that receding water sources, such as Lake Chad, compel herders to migrate southward, leading to confrontations with agricultural communities. This migration, along with the loss of grazing corridors and inadequate adaptation measures, has resulted in frequent, sometimes lethal, clashes in Plateau State (Mercy Corps, 2015; Busby, 2021). Empirical evidence indicates that these ecological stressors are threat multipliers, exacerbating existing ethnic and religious divisions by increasing competition for scarce resources (Ide, 2015; Raleigh & Urdal, 2007). Adams et al. (2018) assert that climate shocks, such as droughts and floods, not only provoke immediate conflicts but also jeopardize long-term livelihoods, rendering communities vulnerable to political or militant exploitation. The political economy of resource conflict complicates this relationship; colonial land tenure systems and post-independence governance have entrenched inequalities in access to resources (Nwan et al., 2024). Local elites often exploit these tensions to bolster political power and distract from governance failures (International Crisis Group, 2017). Consequently, even when ecological pressures diminish, political incentives for sustaining intergroup conflict may persist. A comprehensive analysis of the climate-conflict nexus in Plateau State must therefore address these political dynamics, recognizing the interplay between



ecological stress and political manipulation as reinforcing factors of violence (Blench, 2004; Raleigh & Urdal, 2007).

Table 1: Empirical Evidence of Climate-Induced Conflict and Peacebuilding Challenges in Plateau State, Nigeria

Year	Location/ LGA	Climate/Resource- Related Trigger	Conflict Outcome	Evidence of Ethical Deficit/Peacebuilding Challenge	Source
2010– 2020	Various LGAs in Plateau State	Increasing competition over land, water, and grazing resources linked to environmental pressures	Plateau recorded among the highest fatalities from farmer-herder and ethno- communal conflicts in Nigeria	Weak security response and inadequate conflict prevention mechanisms	EASO (2021)
2017	Riyom, Barkin Ladi, Bassa	Resource competition between farmers and herders aggravated by environmental scarcity	Recurring violent attacks, displacement, and destruction of livelihoods	Failure of governance institutions to address underlying grievances and resource disputes	International Crisis Group (2017)
2023	Mangu LGA	Dispute over destruction of crops by grazing cattle amid increasing resource pressure	Escalation into widespread communal violence, deaths, destruction of homes, churches, farms, and displacement of thousands	Breakdown of local conflict-resolution mechanisms and inadequate preventive peacebuilding structures	Dickson & Matakhitswen (2024)
May 2023	Mangu LGA	Competition over access to agricultural and grazing resources	More than 80– 130 people reportedly killed; numerous villages attacked and burned	Delayed security intervention and inability of institutions to prevent escalation	AP News (2023); Africanews (2023)
Decem- ber 2023	Bokkos, Barkin Ladi, and	Long-standing disputes over land ownership,	Over 200 deaths across more than 20	Weak early-warning systems, poor protection of	WANEP (2024); AP News (2023)



	Mangu LGAs	grazing rights, and environmental stress	communities; widespread destruction of property and displacement	vulnerable communities, and limited accountability for perpetrators	
January 2024	Mangu LGA	Continuing contestation over land and community boundaries	Approximately 30–50 additional fatalities reported	Recurrence of violence despite previous peace interventions demonstrates sustainability gap in peacebuilding efforts	AP News (2024)
2020–2024	Plateau State (General)	Climate variability, declining agricultural productivity, land degradation, and resource scarcity	Persistent cycles of attacks and reprisals among farming and pastoral communities	Ethical concerns regarding justice, inclusion, equitable resource governance, and environmental stewardship remain inadequately addressed	Koubi (2019); Busby (2021); Babatunde&Ibnouf (2024)
2024	Middle Belt/Plateau Context	Scarcity of land and water resources affecting livelihoods	Increased displacement, food insecurity, economic losses, and deterioration of social relationships	Existing peacebuilding interventions remain largely reactive rather than preventive	Mercy Corps (2024)

Evidence Interpretation

Empirical evidence shows that climate variability and environmental stressors do not directly cause violent conflict; rather, they intensify existing socio-economic inequalities, governance failures, identity politics, and weak peacebuilding institutions, leading to increased communal violence. In Plateau State, competition for land, water, and agricultural resources underpins many conflicts. Ethical deficiencies, such as poor environmental stewardship, lack of accountability, exclusion, and insufficient protection for vulnerable groups, persist, highlighting the intertwined nature of environmental, governance, and ethical challenges. Comprehensive peacebuilding must address all these factors to be effective.

Comparative studies from the Sahel and Horn of Africa further demonstrate that environmental change, combined with weak governance and unresolved grievances, fosters prolonged conflict. In Plateau State, the absence of strong local resource-sharing and dispute-resolution mechanisms means ecological shocks are more likely to trigger violence than to prompt negotiation or adaptation.



It is important not to view climate as a deterministic cause of conflict. The relationship is mediated by social, political, and economic factors, including institutional strength, marginalization, and the presence of peacebuilding, which can either exacerbate or mitigate the impact of environmental stress. Neglecting these dimensions leads to incomplete conflict analysis and ineffective interventions that fail to address the root causes of instability.

Governance Failures and Climate Conflict in Plateau State

While climate change and resource scarcity contribute to conflict in Plateau State, ongoing violence is primarily rooted in governance failures and institutional weaknesses (Busby, 2021; Buhaug & von Uexkull, 2021). Inadequate land administration and ambiguous ownership regulations fuel disputes between farmers and pastoralists, with state institutions often lacking effective conflict-resolution mechanisms (Higazi, 2016; International Crisis Group, 2017). Poor implementation of climate adaptation policies and underfunded sustainable practices leave rural communities vulnerable to resource scarcity and escalating tensions (Federal Ministry of Environment, 2021; IPCC, 2023). Political manipulation of community identities further exacerbates conflict, as disputes over land and resources are reframed along ethnic and religious lines for political gain (Best, 2007; International Crisis Group, 2017). Weak security institutions and delayed interventions allow violence to persist, while limited community engagement in governance diminishes the effectiveness and legitimacy of peacebuilding.

A lack of accountability perpetuates impunity, erodes public trust, and reinforces cycles of violence (Schlosberg, 2007). Governance failures also contribute to unequal access to resources and opportunities, intensifying grievances among marginalized communities. Conflicts in Plateau State thus stem from the convergence of climate pressures and weak institutions, not environmental stress alone. Sustainable peace requires governance reforms: strengthening land tenure, improving policy implementation, promoting accountability, supporting inclusive participation, and embedding ethical principles in governance. Without these, climate-related conflicts will likely continue, underscoring the urgent need for holistic, justice-oriented interventions.

Christian and Islamic Approaches to Climate Justice and Peacebuilding

Climate change has become a pressing ethical issue that extends beyond scientific and political discourse. Many religious traditions regard environmental stewardship as a fundamental moral imperative. In Plateau State, where Christianity and Islam are prominent, these ethical frameworks are essential for addressing climate justice and promoting conflict resolution, necessitating engagement with the values of both faiths.

Christian Views on Climate Justice

Christian ethics emphasizes stewardship, rooted in Genesis 2:15, which assigns humanity the responsibility to care for creation (Conradie, 2011; De Gruchy, 2007). This view positions humans as caretakers accountable to God, framing environmental degradation as a moral crisis that disproportionately affects vulnerable populations (Nche, 2022). Theologians argue that environmental care is integral to human well-being and addressing social inequalities (Conradie, 2011). Christian teachings advocate for equitable resource distribution and peaceful conflict resolution, particularly pertaining to land and water disputes (Nche, 2022). Additionally, principles of reconciliation serve as ethical guidelines for restoring relationships impacted by environmental conflicts (De Gruchy, 2007). Historically, churches in Plateau State have played crucial roles in



mediating disputes and fostering community unity, highlighting the practical relevance of Christian ethics in environmental and social challenges (Nche, 2022).

Islamic Perspectives on Climate Justice

Islamic ethics also provides a comprehensive framework for addressing environmental concerns. The concept of Khalifah teaches that humans are caretakers of God's creation, with the Qur'an framing nature as a divine trust that must not be exploited (Salifu et al., 2025). Consequently, environmental stewardship is a religious obligation. Central to Islamic ethics is the principle of *Adl*, which promotes equitable access to resources and safeguards for marginalized communities (Salifu et al., 2025). Islam condemns exploitation and advocates for fairness in resource management. Additionally, Sulh emphasizes dialogue and mediation for conflict resolution, relevant in Plateau State's diverse communities competing for resources (Salifu et al., 2025).

Common Ground Between Christian and Islamic Ethics

Despite their theological differences, Christianity and Islam share significant ethical principles pertinent to climate justice and peacebuilding (Nche, 2022; Salifu et al., 2025). Both traditions underscore the importance of stewardship, justice for marginalized groups, compassion, and communal responsibility. They advocate ethical responses to climate change that uphold human dignity and social protection, as well as reconciliation and the peaceful resolution of conflicts.

These converging values provide a robust basis for collaborative initiatives among churches, mosques, traditional leaders, and civil society in Plateau State, with a focus on environmental stewardship, resource governance, and community reconciliation.

Implications for Climate Justice and Peacebuilding in Plateau State

The diverse religious landscape of Plateau State poses both challenges and opportunities for fostering peace (Nche, 2022; Salifu et al., 2025). While religious differences can lead to conflict, faith communities can unite to drive positive change. Integrating Christian, Islamic, and even Indigenous Religious principles into climate justice initiatives can enhance local participation in peacebuilding efforts. A collaborative approach to climate justice underscores the universal impact of environmental issues and necessitates shared responsibility for climate adaptation and conservation. Faith leaders play a vital role in raising awareness, encouraging sustainable resource use, mediating conflicts, and promoting harmonious relationships. By merging Christian stewardship, Islamic notions of Khalifah, and indigenous knowledge, a robust framework emerges to address climate-related disputes in Plateau State. This strategy not only confronts environmental challenges but also bridges ethical divides that obstruct peacebuilding. Achieving climate justice will require cooperation among religious groups, governmental bodies, traditional leaders, and civil society to foster sustainability and lasting peace.

Critical Review of Current Peacebuilding Strategies

Current peacebuilding strategies in Plateau State focus mainly on reconciling ethnic and religious groups but often neglect ecological and resource-based drivers of conflict (Adams et al., 2018; Swatuk & Özerol, 2018). Government-led initiatives like peace summits and interfaith dialogues address immediate tensions but rarely tackle long-term issues such as land scarcity, climate adaptation, or sustainable resource management (International Crisis Group, 2017). The Plateau State Peace Building Agency prioritizes inter-communal reconciliation but largely omits



environmental governance and resource adjudication, which can exacerbate ecological pressures and fuel renewed violence. NGO interventions, such as Mercy Corps' livelihood projects and early warning systems, are constrained by short project cycles and limited alignment with local governance (Mercy Corps, 2015). Community peace committees mediate disputes but lack authority and resources to address structural drivers, especially those involving land and water (Krause, 2011). Ethical deficiencies persist, with many initiatives failing to address environmental justice or to include marginalized groups such as women and youth (Ide, 2015; Busby, 2021).

Women's participation in resource governance strengthens peace agreements, yet their voices are often excluded in Plateau State (Hellestveit & McConnachie, 2024). Weak institutions, inconsistent government support, and colonial legacies further undermine the effectiveness of peacebuilding (Nwan et al., 2024). Overall, the critical neglect of ecological and ethical factors leaves the region vulnerable to recurring cycles of violence.

Establishing the Need for the Study

Despite repeated peacebuilding efforts in Plateau State, violence persists and intensifies, revealing critical gaps in analysis and intervention (International Crisis Group, 2017; Mercy Corps, 2015). Root causes are often misidentified as ethnic or religious, while ecological and ethical factors are overlooked (Blench, 2004; Okpara et al., 2015; Adams et al., 2018). Traditional mediation and peace summits rarely address environmental pressures or resource competition, resulting in fragile agreements (Busby, 2021). Exclusion of local knowledge and ethical principles further undermines the legitimacy of peace initiatives (Ide, 2015; Mercy Corps, 2015). Thus, there is a pressing need for research and frameworks that address climate as a conflict multiplier and integrate ecological and ethical considerations throughout peacebuilding. This study aims to fill these gaps and inform more effective, sustainable strategies for Plateau State.

Recommendations:

1. An Ecological-Ethical Peacebuilding Framework

Addressing the climate-conflict nexus in Plateau State necessitates a comprehensive framework that integrates ecological realities, ethical principles, and institutional reforms. The proposed framework includes several key components informed by evidence from Plateau State, similar regional contexts, and established tenets of environmental peacebuilding.

- 2. Environmental Peacebuilding:** This approach promotes sustainable natural resource management to prevent conflict and foster social cohesion (Swatuk & Özerol, 2018; Ide, 2015). In Plateau State, prioritizing collaborative resource management projects, such as joint water infrastructure, afforestation, and soil restoration—can rebuild trust between farming and pastoralist communities, fostering economic interdependence and reducing resource-related violence (Busby, 2021). Experience from the Sahel and East Africa shows that shared resource management can bridge ethnic and religious divides. Initiatives like Mercy Corps' Farmer-Herder Dialogue Platforms in neighboring states serve as models, illustrating how structured resource planning can diminish conflicts and enhance communal relationships.
- 3. Embedding Ethical Principles and Local Knowledge:** An effective framework must be grounded in ethical principles, including environmental justice and inclusive participation. Empowering marginalized groups, especially women, youth, and displaced persons, is



crucial for incorporating diverse perspectives in resource management (Hellestveit & McConnachie, 2024; Adams et al., 2018; Busby, 2021). Leveraging indigenous knowledge and traditional conflict resolution practices can enhance local legitimacy and ownership, while intergenerational equity is vital for long-term sustainability. Peacebuilding efforts must create lasting conditions for stability by implementing sustainable land-use policies and governance reforms that account for future ecological and social challenges.

4. **Leveraging Faith-Based Approaches:** In Plateau State, faith communities play a pivotal role in promoting peace and environmental responsibility (Oguche et al., 2025). Both Christian and Muslim leaders can draw upon teachings about justice and stewardship to facilitate reconciliation and responsible land use. Engaging faith-based organizations in peacebuilding efforts is essential for fostering interfaith dialogue that addresses ethical issues in resource management and climate adaptation.
5. **Policy and Institutional Reform:** Sustainable peace necessitates reforms in governance. It is crucial to strengthen land tenure systems, clarify resource rights, and enforce environmental regulations (Okoi & Nalule, 2023). The existing legal framework, particularly the Land Use Act of 1978, inadequately addresses climate adaptation and often marginalizes smallholder farmers and pastoralists lacking formal rights documentation. Reform is essential for ensuring equitable resource governance, alongside community-based management initiatives and early warning systems for climate shocks (Okpara et al., 2015; Busby, 2021). Sustained investment in education, climate-smart agriculture, and rural infrastructure is also critical for addressing structural inequalities.
6. **Multi-Stakeholder Collaboration and Monitoring:** Addressing the complex climate-conflict nexus requires collaboration among diverse stakeholders, including government officials, traditional leaders, civil society, women's groups, youth, and international partners. Establishing multi-stakeholder platforms will facilitate coordinated interventions and adaptive strategies to evolving conditions (International Crisis Group, 2017). In summary, this ecological-ethical peacebuilding framework for Plateau State should integrate environmental management, ethical commitments, local agency, faith-based values, and institutional reform. By addressing both root causes and moral dimensions of conflict, it offers a viable pathway toward sustainable peace and prosperity in Nigeria's Middle Belt.

Contribution to Knowledge

This study advances the discourse on climate change, conflict, and peacebuilding by integrating Environmental Security Theory with Christian Virtue Ethics, thereby framing climate-related conflict as both a security and ethical concern. Unlike previous research that primarily addressed environmental scarcity and resource competition, the findings underscore that conflicts in Plateau State also stem from deficiencies in justice and inclusion. Additionally, this study introduces the concept of "ethical deficit" in the context of climate justice, highlighting indicators such as inadequate environmental stewardship and unequal resource distribution. Empirically, the research synthesizes data from Plateau State to demonstrate how environmental stress compounds governance challenges and social inequalities, thereby escalating violence. This contribution enriches the ongoing discourse on climate-induced conflicts in Nigeria's Middle Belt. The study further proposes a peacebuilding framework that integrates environmental governance, ethical transformation, and interfaith initiatives, offering actionable solutions to mitigate climate conflicts and promote justice and sustainable peace in Plateau State and similar regions in Africa.

Limitations of the Study

The study faces significant limitations. It is based solely on secondary data, primarily scholarly articles and policy documents, which may neglect specific local insights and experiences from affected communities. Furthermore, while the findings pertain to Plateau State, caution is warranted when extrapolating the results to other regions in Nigeria or Sub-Saharan Africa, given varying socio-political and environmental contexts. Additionally, the dynamic nature of climate change and governance could lead to evolving conflict patterns that this research does not address. Nevertheless, the study offers critical insights into the ethical and governance dimensions of climate-induced conflict and peacebuilding in Plateau State.

Areas for Future Research

Future inquiries should expand on these findings through fieldwork, including interviews and surveys with affected communities and stakeholders, to enrich understanding of local perspectives on climate justice and conflict dynamics. Comparative analyses of climate-induced conflicts across different states in Nigeria's Middle Belt could reveal both common trends and distinct dynamics.

Investigating the roles of women, youth, and traditional institutions in climate adaptation and peacebuilding is also vital. Further research should assess the effectiveness of interfaith environmental initiatives and community-led adaptation strategies in fostering sustainable peace. Lastly, longitudinal studies on the impact of climate policies and ethical frameworks are essential for advancing knowledge and informing policy development.

Conclusion

Climate-induced conflict in Plateau State is complex, rooted in environmental stress, governance deficiencies, and socioeconomic vulnerabilities. Climate change intensifies resource competition, while ongoing violence largely stems from institutional weaknesses and inequitable governance. This study posits that sustainable peace requires not only security measures but also ethical transformation, community engagement, and climate justice. By integrating indigenous knowledge and interfaith approaches into climate-sensitive strategies, stakeholders can develop more effective, sustainable solutions to Plateau State's challenges and address ethical gaps vital to achieving environmental sustainability and enduring peace in a changing climate.

This study outlines significant policy recommendations for climate governance and peacebuilding in Plateau State and Nigeria. It emphasizes that addressing climate-induced conflicts requires integrated approaches beyond security measures, focusing on environmental sustainability, social equity, and effective governance. Policymakers should advocate for climate-resilient agricultural practices, sustainable land-use planning, watershed protection, and equitable resource management to mitigate resource competition. Enhancing early-warning systems and ensuring fair access to land and water can promote accountability in managing climate-related disputes. Moreover, incorporating indigenous knowledge and community-driven peace initiatives can advance climate justice and foster long-term peace.

For peacebuilding and community development practitioners, the study recommends a transition from reactive conflict management to proactive strategies that address the underlying causes of climate-induced conflicts. Engaging faith leaders, traditional authorities, and civil society to foster



environmental stewardship and dialogue is critical. Development agencies should enhance community resilience through climate-smart agriculture and local peace efforts. Interfaith cooperation between Christians and Muslims can improve environmental protection and social cohesion in diverse communities like Plateau State, encouraging local ownership of peacebuilding initiatives and ensuring sustainable responses to climate challenges. This study enhances climate-conflict scholarship by merging Environmental Security Theory with ethical peacebuilding perspectives, highlighting that the climate-induced conflict in Plateau State is a crisis of environmental governance, moral responsibility, and social justice, rather than a mere competition over resources.

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