

Cultivating Social Cohesion

Urban Gardens and Social Capital among Internally Displaced Populations in Maiduguri

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ABSTRACT

The protracted insurgency in North-East Nigeria has resulted in large-scale internal displacement, with many individuals residing in protracted urban displacement settings in Maiduguri. These conditions often erode traditional social structures, necessitating interventions that foster social cohesion and rebuild community networks. This study investigates the role of urban community gardening programmes as a mechanism for generating social capital—specifically bonding, bridging, and linking capital—among internally displaced populations in an African urban crisis context. A cross-sectional survey was administered to a stratified random sample of 312 participants engaged in urban gardening projects across three displacement-affected wards. The survey instrument measured multiple dimensions of social capital using validated scales, and data were analysed using descriptive statistics and linear regression models. Participation in community gardens was significantly associated with increased levels of bonding and bridging social capital. A strong majority (78%) of respondents reported forming new, trusted relationships with individuals from different ethnic or village backgrounds since joining a garden project. Regression analysis indicated that the frequency of garden participation was a positive predictor of perceived community solidarity. Urban community gardens serve as a potent platform for social capital formation in displacement contexts, facilitating critical social connections beyond immediate kin groups. They function as integrative spaces that can mitigate the social fragmentation caused by displacement. Policy frameworks for durable solutions in urban displacement should explicitly integrate and fund communal agricultural spaces as social infrastructure. Programme design must ensure equitable access to garden plots and incorporate structured opportunities for collective decision-making to maximise social cohesion outcomes. social capital, urban agriculture, internal displacement, social cohesion, Nigeria, humanitarian intervention This paper provides novel empirical evidence on the specific pathways through which urban gardening cultivates bridging social capital across ethnic lines in a conflict-induced displacement setting, a mechanism underexplored in the African urban studies literature.

Keywords: *Social capital, Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), Urban agriculture, Boko Haram insurgency, Protracted displacement, Nigeria, Community resilience*

Article Highlights

- Urban gardens significantly increased bonding and bridging social capital among IDPs.
- Frequency of garden participation predicted stronger perceived community solidarity.
- Gardens facilitated critical social connections beyond immediate kin groups.
- Programme design must ensure equitable access and collective decision-making.

Policy Imperative

Durable solutions for urban displacement should fund communal agricultural spaces as essential social infrastructure.

This study offers novel empirical evidence on gardening as a mechanism for building bridging social capital in African urban crisis contexts.

ABSTRACT-ONLY PUBLICATION

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