

Institutionalising Community Policing as a People-Centred Public Safety Framework in Benue State

Lawyers Alert | Guma & Katsina-Ala LGAs, Benue State | 2022 to Present

"Sustainable security cannot be imposed from above — it must be built from within, through trust, inclusion, and shared responsibility between citizens and state actors."

Executive Summary

Lawyers Alert, with support from the Open Society Foundations, has spent the past three years piloting and institutionalising a People-Centred Public Safety (PCPS) framework in Benue State, Nigeria, one of Nigeria's most conflict-affected states. Driven by chronic farmer-herder violence, land and resource disputes, and widespread displacement, Benue State presented a compelling case for rethinking how public safety is governed.

The initiative operationalised the community policing provisions of the Nigeria Police Act 2020 through the establishment of Community Policing Committees (CPCs) in Guma and Katsina-Ala Local Government Areas (LGAs) in Benue State. These committees, comprising traditional leaders, security agencies, women, youth, religious leaders, and persons with disabilities, have become functioning platforms for early warning, conflict mediation, and community-security collaboration.

The two-year pilot phase (2022 to 2025) delivered measurable results: improved community-police trust, reduced petty crime, early conflict prevention, and growing state ownership, culminating in the formal adoption of the PCPS framework by the Benue State Government, under the stewardship of the Benue State Bureau of Homeland Security, at a state-wide launch event on 24 February 2026.

The initiative is now in its third year, expanding to Agatu LGA while deepening implementation in Guma and Katsina-Ala. A comprehensive situational analysis and baseline study are currently underway to establish measurable indicators against which progress will be tracked. A renewed capacity-building programme for CPC members is also ongoing. The state-level adoption marks a pivotal shift: from a civil society-piloted initiative to a government-owned public safety governance model with potential for scale across all 23 LGAs of Benue State.



KEY MILESTONE

On 24 February 2026, His Excellency, Rev. Fr. Hyacinth Iormem Alia, Governor of Benue State, represented by the Deputy Governor, formally launched the People-Centred Public Safety framework, signalling high-level political commitment. The Benue State Bureau of Homeland Security, led by Air Commodore Jacob Ayange Akaa Gbamwuan (Rtd.), has been designated as the lead agency for implementation.

3 Years of Implementation	2 to 3 LGAs: Piloted in 2, Expanding to 3	48+ CPC Members Trained & Operational
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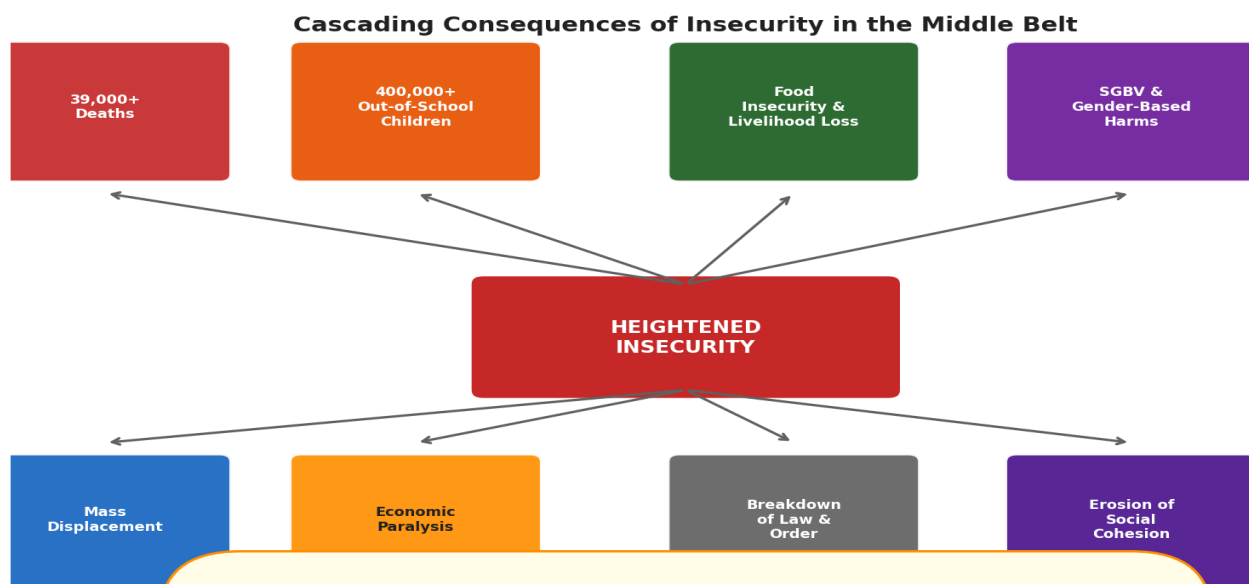
2 Pilot LGAs with Active CPCs	15+ Women & Youth in Community Policing Committees	24 Feb 2026 State-Level Government Adoption
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1. The Problem: Insecurity in Benue State

Benue State sits at the heart of Nigeria's most protracted farmer-herder conflict. Driven by northward desertification pushing Fulani pastoralists southward, competition for land and water resources has fuelled decades of violent clashes, displacement, and the breakdown of social cohesion. The consequences are as follows:

- Over 39,000 people killed in related conflicts across the region in the past decade.
- More than 400,000 children aged 2 to 18 are out of school in Benue State alone, due to displacement and insecurity.
- Widespread internal displacement, with communities in Guma and Katsina-Ala LGAs particularly hard-hit.
- Economic paralysis, especially for women and youth, who face heightened vulnerability and loss of livelihoods.
- Collapse of formal law and order in hinterland areas, enabling criminal gangs to fill governance vacuums.
- Decline in food production as farmers are being murdered at the farms and farming communities are displaced. Thereby reducing food production in the State.

Traditional government responses, including anti-grazing laws, state security deployments, and motorcycle seizures, have been largely reactive and heavy-handed, often deepening community grievances rather than resolving them. A critical structural gap has been the near-total exclusion of communities from security decision-making, resulting in weak trust, poor intelligence flows, and security interventions disconnected from local realities.



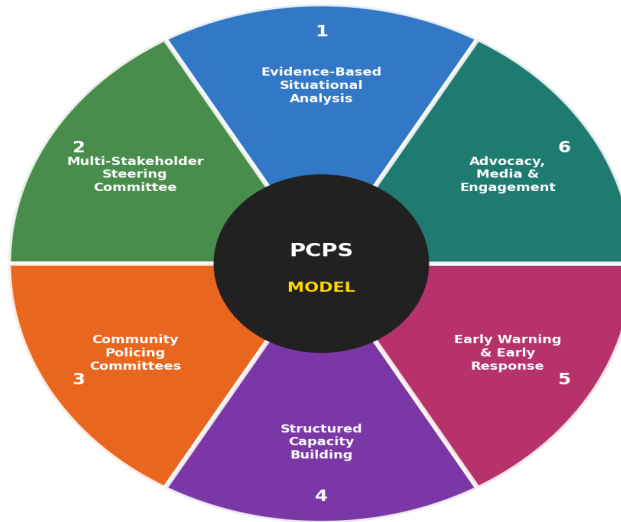
2. About the Initiative

2.1 What is People-Centred Public Safety?

People-Centred Public Safety (PCPS) is a governance approach that repositions communities as active partners, rather than passive subjects, in achieving and sustaining safety. It is grounded in the principle that sustainable security cannot be imposed from above; it must be built from within, through trust, inclusion, and shared responsibility between citizens and state actors.

The PCPS framework operationalises the community policing provisions of Part XIV (Sections 113 to 117) of the Nigeria Police Act 2020, which mandates the establishment of Community Policing Committees at state, local, and ward levels. Through Lawyers Alert's implementation, this legal provision, long dormant, has been practically activated for the first time in Benue State.

The Six Pillars of People-Centred Public Safety



2.2 Legal Foundation

The initiative is anchored in Section 113 of the Nigeria Police Act 2020, which mandates Community Policing Committees with the following objectives:

- Promote partnership and cooperation between the police and community members.
- Encourage community participation in crime prevention and public safety.
- Enhance effective policing through community engagement and shared problem-solving.
- Improve transparency, accountability, and public confidence in the police.

Lawyers Alert's activation of this provision in Guma and Katsina-Ala LGAs represents the first deliberate, structured implementation of Section 113 in Nigeria, establishing a replicable model for national adoption.

3. The Benue Community Policing Model

The PCPS model is built on six interconnected pillars, each designed to address a specific structural gap in Benue State's safety and security governance architecture.

Three Core Strengths of the PCPS Model

1. THE LAW	2. PROVEN RESULTS	3. COMMUNITY & GOVT OWNERSHIP
Nigeria Police Act 2020 Section 113	3 Years of Evidence	Built from Within
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ First deliberate activation of S.113 in Nigeria ▶ CPCs mandated at state, local & ward levels ▶ Legally replicable across all 36 states ▶ Creates right of communities to participate in security 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Conflict averted via EWER system in Guma LGA ▶ Reduced petty crime & improved safety ▶ Women returning to markets & trade ▶ Formally adopted by Benue State Govt (Feb 2026) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ LGA Chairmen provide office space & fuel ▶ Youth & women lead CPC committees ▶ Bureau of Homeland Security designated lead ▶ Communities self-resource without external prompting

Pillar 1: Evidence-Based Situational Analysis

The initiative began with a rigorous situational analysis of Guma and Katsina-Ala LGAs, generating the first context-specific, rights-framed security assessment of these areas. Findings identified land and water disputes, weak boundary demarcation, poor policy enforcement, and climate-driven resource pressures as the primary conflict drivers. This evidence base informed all subsequent programming and has been shared publicly as a resource for policymakers and practitioners.

A new comprehensive situational analysis is currently being conducted across three LGAs, namely Guma, Katsina-Ala, and the newly added Agatu, to establish baseline measurements for the ongoing impact evaluation framework.



Pillar 2: Multi-Stakeholder Steering Committee

To ensure security sector ownership and prevent community policing from being perceived solely as a civil society project, an inclusive *Steering Committee* was established as the primary

coordination and oversight body. Its composition reflects the full ecosystem of security governance in Benue State:

- Lawyers Alert (coordinating secretariat)
- Nigeria Police Force
- Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC)
- Benue State Peace and Reconciliation Committee
- Benue State Bureau of Homeland Security
- Civil Society Organisations (CSOs)
- Benue State Civil Protection Guard (formerly Volunteer Guard)

This multi-agency structure has been critical to navigating institutional hierarchies, securing government endorsement, and embedding the initiative within formal governance processes rather than running parallel to them.



Pillar 3: Community Policing Committees (CPCs) and Action Planning

CPCs are the operational heart of the model. Two CPCs were established, one each in Guma and Katsina-Ala LGAs, comprising 22 members per committee, democratically nominated by their communities. Membership is deliberately inclusive:

- Traditional leaders and community elders
- Nigeria Police Force representatives
- NSCDC and Livestock Guard representatives
- Religious leaders
- Women's representatives
- Youth representatives
- Vigilante group representatives
- Persons with Disabilities (PWDs)

Each CPC was formally inaugurated, provided with Terms of Reference, and sworn into office. A core feature of the CPC model is the development of community-owned action plans, which are designed collaboratively with input from community members and updated to reflect evolving security realities. These action plans serve as the operational guide through which CPCs translate community safety priorities into concrete activity. CPCs implement their action plans through a range of sustained community engagement mechanisms, including radio programmes that broadcast safety messages and community rights education, town hall meetings and dialogues with security agencies, advocacy visits to local government officials and traditional rulers, publications and information materials targeting key community audiences, and real-time early warning communication with security sector actors. This model of locally owned, action-plan-driven engagement has given CPCs genuine traction and visibility within their communities. CPCs have also secured dedicated office space within the Local Government Secretariat in Guma, giving them a formal institutional presence. Action plans in Guma and Katsina-Ala are currently being reviewed and updated as part of ongoing implementation, and a new CPC will be inaugurated in Agatu LGA.



INCLUSION IN LEADERSHIP

In Katsina-Ala LGA, the Youth Representative was elected as CPC Chairperson, a powerful signal of the shift toward youth leadership in community security governance. Additionally, 25 women and youth are now actively participating in traditional council meetings, spaces from which they were previously excluded.

Pillar 4: Structured Capacity Building

Prior to any training, Lawyers Alert conducted a baseline needs assessment of CPC members, identifying significant knowledge gaps that informed a tailored capacity-building curriculum. Key findings included:

- Only 40% of CPC members were aware of a rights-based approach to security governance.
- Only 35% understood the formal roles of the police.

- Only 55% had training in conflict resolution.
- 45% were unaware of existing security reporting channels.

Capacity-building sessions were subsequently delivered, covering human rights principles in policing, community-driven security governance, early warning and early response (EWER) systems, conflict mediation and resolution, leadership and advocacy, and collaboration with law enforcement. A renewal capacity-building programme is currently ongoing, deepening CPC members' skills in rights-based policing, accountability mechanisms, and linkages with national oversight bodies including the Police Service Commission. CPC was linked to National security sector accountability bodies e.g Police Service Commission

Pillar 5: Early Warning and Early Response (EWER) Systems

CPCs have been equipped with early warning protocols and trained to monitor, document, and report security threats through established channels. The impact of this system has been demonstrated in practice: in Guma LGA, a potential violent conflict was averted when the community, through CPC channels, alerted security agencies to early warning signals before the situation escalated. This success validates the EWER model and underscores the life-saving potential of community-police intelligence collaboration.

Pillar 6: Advocacy, Media, and Community Engagement

CPCs implement their action plans through sustained outreach, including radio programmes that reach broad community audiences with public safety and rights messages, advocacy visits to LGA Chairmen and security agencies that have secured tangible resource commitments, community dialogues bringing together citizens and security actors, and publications reaching opinion leaders and policymakers. This outreach has generated concrete results: monthly donations of 50 litres of premium motor spirit (PMS) to Guma Divisional Police by community stakeholders, directly improving the police's capacity for rapid response to early warning signals, and the donation of office space within the LGA Secretariat.

4. Results and Achievements (2022 to 2025)

The following achievements have been recorded across the completed phases of the initiative:

4.1 State Government Adoption: A Historic Milestone

The most significant milestone of the initiative to date is the formal adoption of the People-Centred Public Safety framework by the Benue State Government. On 24 February 2026, His Excellency, Rev. Fr. Hyacinth Iormem Alia, Governor of Benue State, represented by the Deputy Governor, officially launched the PCPS framework as a state-wide public safety model. The Benue State Bureau of Homeland Security, headed by Air Commodore Jacob Ayange Akaa Gbamwuan (Rtd.), has been designated as the lead implementing ministry.

This adoption represents a fundamental shift from a pilot civil society initiative to an institutionalised, government-owned governance framework. Community policing is now embedded within the state's formal security architecture, not as an external project, but as a recognised and state-endorsed approach to public safety. The CPCs in Guma and Katsina-Ala now operate with explicit state backing, and the model is positioned for replication across additional LGAs.

WHAT STATE ADOPTION MEANS IN PRACTICE

The Benue State Government's adoption of the PCPS framework creates the conditions for: budget allocation for community policing structures; official directives from the Bureau of Homeland Security to LGA Chairmen to adopt and implement the framework; formalisation of CPCs within local governance structures; and the sustained institutionalisation of community participation in security governance across all 23 LGAs of Benue State.

4.2 Institutionalisation of Legal Framework

The project's establishment of functional CPCs in Benue State represents the first deliberate activation of Section 113 of the Nigeria Police Act 2020 in Nigeria. This legal milestone institutionalises the right of communities to participate in security governance and creates a precedent for replication in other states.

4.3 Restored Community-Police Trust

Through the CPC structure, a measurable improvement in community-police relations has been recorded in both Guma and Katsina-Ala. Communities that previously viewed security agencies with suspicion now have structured, regular, and formalised channels for engagement. The result is better intelligence sharing, more responsive policing, and a growing sense of co-responsibility for community safety. The early conflict aversion in Guma, where a CPC early warning prevented escalation, stands as a concrete demonstration of this transformation.

4.4 Inclusive Security Governance

The initiative has made measurable progress in broadening who participates in security decision-making:

- 15 women and youth are now actively participating in traditional council meetings.
- The Youth Leader in Katsina-Ala was elected CPC Chairperson, a first for the community.
- Women, youth, and PWDs hold formal representation in both CPCs.
- Women are leading peace dialogues in Katsina-Ala through the Sankara Mothers platform.

4.5 Safety Improvements and Community Resilience

Communities in Guma and Katsina-Ala have reported a noticeable reduction in petty theft, robberies, and other low-level crime. Community perception data and qualitative reporting from CPC members

consistently point to improved safety conditions. Beyond security, the initiative has invested in the resilience of women's groups and the broader community, supporting economic empowerment activities that address the socio-economic drivers of insecurity. Women who were displaced or economically sidelined by violence are being supported to rebuild livelihoods and re-engage in community life, reinforcing the connection between safety, economic recovery, and sustainable peace. Women are cautiously returning to marketplaces, with observable resumption of trade and economic activity, a direct indicator of improved community safety perceptions.

4.6 Local Government Resource Commitment

A key indicator of local ownership is the commitment of LGA resources without external prompting. Both the Guma and Katsina-Ala LGA Chairmen have provided:

- Dedicated office space for CPC operations within the LGA Secretariat.
- Regular donations of fuel (50 litres PMS monthly in Guma) to security sector actors, enabling faster response to early warning signals.

5. Ongoing Engagements

The initiative is currently active across several fronts, building on the gains of the pilot phase while expanding the reach and depth of the People-Centred Public Safety model.

Baseline Research and Impact Measurement

A comprehensive situational analysis and baseline study is currently being conducted across Guma, Katsina-Ala, and Agatu LGAs. This research will establish the quantitative foundation needed for rigorous impact evaluation. Indicators being measured include frequency of violent conflicts, community trust in security agencies through perception surveys, participation rates of women and youth in security governance, and economic recovery indicators such as market activity and agricultural return.

Expansion to Agatu LGA

The PCPS model is being replicated in Agatu LGA, applying lessons learned from Guma and Katsina-Ala to ensure a more informed and sustainable activation. Stakeholder mapping, community sensitisation, and CPC formation are currently underway, culminating in the inauguration of a new 20-member CPC that will be inclusive of women, youth, traditional leaders, and security sector actors.

CPC Action Plan Review and Renewal Capacity Building

CPC action plans in Guma and Katsina-Ala are being comprehensively reviewed and updated to reflect current security realities and align with the broadened PCPS approach. A structured renewal capacity-building programme is ongoing, equipping CPC members with advanced skills in rights-based policing, public safety governance, accountability, and relationship-building with security agencies and national oversight bodies.

Women's Resilience and Community Economic Empowerment

Alongside security governance activities, the initiative is actively supporting women's groups and community organisations to strengthen resilience. Local NGOs, CSOs, and women's groups are being enabled through capacity building to work alongside CPCs in identifying and addressing security challenges through a participatory and inclusive approach. This includes economic empowerment support for women to rebuild livelihoods disrupted by conflict, reinforcing the direct relationship between community safety, economic stability, and sustainable peace.

Strengthening Accountability Architecture

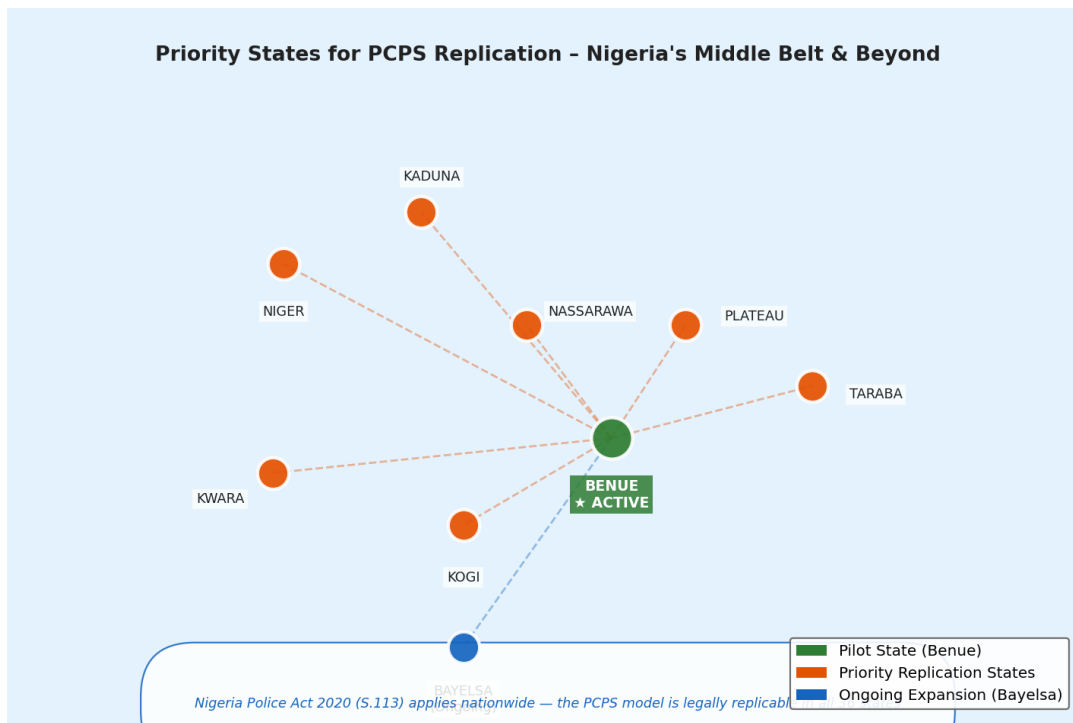
Ongoing work is establishing confidential reporting channels linking CPCs with the Police Service Commission for misconduct reporting, structured monitoring and evaluation systems with regular reflection meetings, and feedback loops between community-level data and state security decision-making processes.

National Replication

Alongside the Benue State expansion, Lawyers Alert is supporting the replication of the CPC model in Bayelsa State through a partnership with Spaces for Change. This signals the initiative's potential for national scaling beyond its Benue State origins and contributes to a growing movement toward community-centred security governance across Nigeria.

The Need for Replication: Beyond Benue State

The insecurity crisis is not confined to Benue State. The same structural conditions, farmer-herder conflict, resource competition, weak community-security interfaces, food insecurity, SGBV, and displacement pervade the entire Middle Belt and beyond. The PCPS model is legally replicable in all 36 states under the Nigeria Police Act 2020 and operationally validated for rapid replication.



Priority States for Replication

The following states share Benue's conflict profile and present immediate opportunities for PCPS adoption:

STATE	WHY REPLICATION IS URGENT
Niger	Persistent farmer-herder clashes in southern LGAs; significant SGBV and displacement; food insecurity among IDPs in Shiroro, Munya, and Rafi LGAs.
Nassarawa	Shared border with Benue; direct overspill of farmer-herder violence; SGBV rates elevated in conflict zones; agricultural disruption threatening food security.
Plateau	Decades-long communal violence in Jos, Barkin Ladi, and Riyom; chronic displacement; SGBV under-reported; high need for community-security trust infrastructure.
Kogi	Growing banditry and kidnapping crisis; collapse of community policing structures; women and youth economically marginalised by insecurity.
Kwara	Rising herder-farmer tensions along northern corridors; early-stage conflict escalation requiring EWER infrastructure before violence deepens.
Kaduna	Worst conflict fatalities in the North-West; SGBV and food insecurity at crisis levels in Southern Kaduna; urgent need for community-centred governance.
Taraba	Persistent inter-communal violence; high IDP population; women disproportionately affected; governance vacuum enabling criminal networks.

Replication is also already under way: Lawyers Alert is supporting the CPC model in Bayelsa State through a partnership with Spaces for Change. This proof of portability demonstrates that the model travels beyond its Middle Belt origins.

6. Media and Publications

The People-Centred Public Safety initiative has attracted broad coverage across national and state-level media platforms. The following publications, documentaries, and news reports document key milestones of the project:

Documentaries and Video

- **Security Sector Accountability to Citizens in Benue State: A Documentary**
<https://youtu.be/3oOVLIUbBic>
- **Insecurity: Lawyers Alert Inaugurates Community Policing Committee in Benue**
<https://youtu.be/iFSUiBZSL7o>
- **CPC Inauguration Ceremony (Facebook Watch)** <https://fb.watch/yEd2SW183U/>

State Government Adoption and Programme Launch

- **Benue Launches People-Centred Security Model Amid Lingering Challenges**
(*Premium Times*) <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/more-news/859351-benue-launches-people-centred-security-model-amid-lingering-challenges.html>
- **Benue Govt Unveils People-Centred Public Safety Programme, Reaffirms Commitment to Peace and Security** (*City Post*) <https://www.citypost.ng/benue-govt-unveils-people-centred-public-safety-programme-reaffirms-commitment-to-peace-and-security/>
- **Benue Govt Launches People-Centered Public Safety Program, Pledges Commitment to Peace and Safety** (*TMS News*) <https://tmsnews.ng/benue-govt-launches-people-centered-public-safety-program-pledges-commitment-to-peace-safety/>
- **Benue Govt Launches People-Centered Public Safety Program in Pursuit of Peace and Security** (*The Sun*) <https://thesun.ng/benue-govt-launches-people-centered-public-safety-program-in-pursuit-of-peace-security/>
- **Benue Adopts Community Policing to Tackle Insecurity** (*Daily Trust*)
<https://dailytrust.com/benue-adopts-community-policing-to-tackle-insecurity/>

Community Policing in Practice

- **Residents Embrace Community Policing in Benue** (*The Nation*)
<https://thenationonline.ng/residents-embrace-community-policing-in-benue/>
- **Guma LG Donates Office Facility to Community Police Project** (*The Eagle Online*)
<https://theeagleonline.com.ng/guma-lg-donates-office-facility-to-community-police-project/>
- **Guma LG Donates Office Facility to Community Police Project in Benue** (*News Now Online*) <https://newsnowonline.com.ng/2024/04/29/guma-lg-donates-office-facility-to-community-police-project-in-benue/>

- **Guma LG Donates Office Facility to Community Police Project** (*News Express*)
https://newsexpressngr.com/api/news_detail.php?id=224641&title=guma-lg-donate-office-facility-to-community-police-project
- **Guma LG Donates Office Facility to Community Police Project in Benue** (*Prompt News Online*) <https://promptnewsng.com/guma-lg-donate-office-facility-to-community-police-project-in-benue/>

Research and Reports

- **Situational Analysis on Security Threats, Human Rights Violations, and Socio-Economic Disruptions in Benue State** (*Lawyers Alert*)
https://www.lawyersalertng.org/_files/ugd/644c10_c2544903efb14171a97bb5efb689885f.pdf

7. Conclusion

People-Centred Public Safety is not merely a project. It is an evolving governance framework anchored in law, driven by communities, and now formally backed by the Benue State Government. In three years, Lawyers Alert has moved this framework from concept to community practice to state policy, demonstrating that inclusive, rights-based security governance is achievable even in Nigeria's most challenging security environments.

The CPCs in Guma and Katsina-Ala are not waiting for the state to act. They are meeting, mediating, alerting, advocating, supporting women's economic recovery, and building peace. What they need, and what the framework's full potential requires, is the institutional infrastructure that only government can provide: sustained funding, formal policy anchoring, and the political will to scale.

The 24 February 2026 launch was a beginning, not an end. Lawyers Alert remains committed to working with the Benue State Government, security agencies, communities, and development partners to ensure this framework delivers lasting safety and dignity for the people of Benue State.

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