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Conflict And Displacement: Interrogating The Human Rights Situation Of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) In Benue State, Nigeria, 2014 – 2024

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Abstract
Violent conflict has engulfed the entire landscape of Nigeria, ranging from terrorism, insurgencies, separatist agitations, farmer-herder conflict, banditry, and communal crisis. In all situations, there were reported cases of the destruction of lives and property and the displacement of a multitude of other residents. Benue State in North Central Nigeria was one of the most affected by violent conflict, with an overwhelming incidence of internally displaced peoples (IDPs) camps scattered in Agatu, Guma, Gwer-West, Kwande, Logo and Makurdi Local Government Areas (LGAs) of the State. The major objective of this study was to establish an understanding that conflict causes displacement. Again, the study determined the incidence of displacement occasioned by conflict in Benue State. It also examined the human rights situation of selected IDP camps in Benue State. The study adopted a mixed methods approach to generate relevant data, which was analysed contextually using descriptive statistics. It relied on the Human Needs Theory as a framework of analysis to locate the needs of the IDPs as captured in the human rights framework. The study established that forced displacement violated the rights, freedoms, and liberties of the IDPs in Benue State. Again, internal displacement affected the civic, political, economic and social-cultural rights of the IDPs. The study called on governments to demonstrate commitment and political will to ensure that the IDPs' rights are guaranteed and protected. The study also recommended, among others, that civil society organisations intensify advocacies and actions for an amplified humanitarian intervention to ease the challenges faced by the IDPs in Benue State.

Keywords: Conflict, Displacement, IDP Camps, Human Rights, Farmer-Herder Conflict, Banditry.

Introduction

There are 68.3 million internally displaced people, globally, and are the majority of the world's forcibly displaced population (58 per cent). Again, the number of people living in internal displacement because of armed conflict and violence reached 48 million globally at the end of 2020 (United Nations, 2021). This is the highest number ever recorded and reflects the evolving nature of conflicts and resulting displacement. Emerging dimensions of violent conflicts have held sway in Nigeria for close to two decades and Benue State, in North-Central, has had its fair share of the

conflict. In his study, Ojewale (2021) established that in the last decade, there were 1,412 incidents of conflict reported in the North Central region and 7,399 deaths across the states of Benue, Plateau, Kogi, Nasarawa, Niger, Kwara and the Federal Capital Territory. The escalating violence has deeply unsettled the local economy, where agriculture, the mainstay of the region's economy, has been badly hit. Many farmers in the affected areas have abandoned their farms for fear of attack. As a result of the herder-farmer conflict, the Nigerian government loses an estimated $13.7 billion in revenue annually (Ojewale, 2021).

Thus, the escalating farmer-herder conflict, coupled with herders' militia attacks, and rural banditry have created fear and tension in different parts of Benue State. The scourge of violent conflict in the State has precipitated widespread forced displacement, profoundly affecting the lives of millions. Many displaced persons have sought refuge with relatives in neighbouring communities and internally displaced persons (IDPs) camps. The United Nations submits that there are 2.1 million internally displaced people in Benue State alone (Achem, 2023). Communities that once thrived in the vast expanse of the State are now in turmoil, with families torn apart and their way of life disrupted. The conflict has driven millions from their homes, creating a surge in internal displacement. These individuals often flee with minimal belongings, abandoning farms, businesses, and community networks. The sudden and unplanned nature of their displacement leads to acute humanitarian needs, including shelter, food, water, and healthcare. Internally displaced populations frequently seek refuge in urban centres or IDP camps, where they face overcrowded conditions, inadequate sanitation, and limited access to essential services (Dasylva & Mbouet, 2024). This displacement places a heavy burden on already strained resources, exacerbating a humanitarian crisis.

IDPs are among the most vulnerable people in the world, and many are trapped in protracted displacement for years or even decades. Uprooted from their homes and livelihoods, they often face dangerous conditions and continue to face risks even after fleeing for safety. National governments have the primary responsibility to protect and assist their displaced citizens and residents, but they may be unable or unwilling to do so. When IDPs do settle, places of refuge may lack adequate shelter, food, clean water or health care. Even where such services exist, the sudden influx of people can overwhelm them. It can be difficult for displaced people to find work, leaving them without an income to support themselves and their families.

An avalanche of studies dedicated to different aspects of conflict and displacement. For instance, Iorbo et al (2024), investigated "Social Inclusion and Justice for the Internally Displaced by the Herdsmen-Farmers Conflict in Benue State, Nigeria"; Ogbole et al (2023) interrogated the "Challenges of Internally Displaced Persons in Benue State, Nigeria: An Approach to Peace and Conflict Resolution". Again, Omoraka et al (2022) did "An Appraisal of the Management of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Benue State, North-Central Nigeria, 2015-2022". Despite the existence of copious literature on conflict and displacement, there is scarce literature on interrogating the human rights situation of internally displaced persons in Benue State. This study, therefore, sets out to fill this gap.

Objectives of the Study

The broad objective of this study was to establish a nexus between conflict and displacement in Nigeria. The specific objectives were to:

- Determine the incidence of displacement occasioned by conflict in Benue State.
- Examine the human rights situation of selected IDP camps in Benue State.

Conceptual Overview

Conflict

Conflict is a relationship between two or more parties (individuals or groups) who have or think they have incompatible goals. According to Miller (2005), conflicts are a fact of life, inevitable and often creative. It occurs when people pursue goals that clash or seem so. Disagreements and conflicts are usually resolved without violence and lead to an improved situation for most or all of those involved. Similarly, Akpuru-Aja (2009, p. 12), sees conflict "as involving two or more parties that have or perceive incompatibility in their interests and values or in the strategy of achieving the ends desired". He further maintained that conflict is a frustration-based attitude of protest against a lack of opportunities for development and a lack of recognition and identity.

According to Epelle and Uranta (2014), violence is a physical form of conflict intended to hurt or kill somebody. Conflict can exist between or among individuals, ethnic or other social groups without resorting to physical force; but when physical force is applied, it becomes violent. In a similar, Epelle and Uranta (2014, p. 529), aver that:

> Conflicts assume a violent character when physical force is exerted for purposes of violating, damaging or abusing. Most conflicts and violence are social as human beings pursue their survival and security needs with other human beings particularly when these needs are not or cannot be met simultaneously for all concerned.

Consequently, violent conflict occurs when parties seek to attain their goals by violent means and try to dominate or destroy the opposing parties' ability to pursue their interests. In this work, violent conflict can be defined as the manifestation of a hostile attitude in the face of conflicting interests between individuals, groups or states. This conflicting interest can be over resources, identity, power, status or values, as witnessed in Nigeria, generally and Benue State to be specific.

Displacement and Internally Displaced Persons

The term "internally displaced persons" (IDPs) is drawn from the United Nations Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement (Guiding Principles) which define IDPs as:

> persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalised violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized State border (United Nations, 1998, principle 5).

Similarly, the African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa also known as the Kampala Convention (2009) defines internal displacement as "the involuntary or forced movement, evacuation or relocation of persons or groups of persons within internationally recognised state borders" (Iorbo et al., 2024). In the same vein, the Kampala Convention (2009) defines Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) as:

> persons or groups of persons who have been forced to flee their homes or places of habitual residence suddenly or unexpectedly as a result of armed conflict, internal strife, systematic violations of human rights or natural or man-made disasters, who have not crossed an internationally recognized state border.

Stated differently, IDPs are persons who have been displaced by natural disasters or violent conflicts from their homes and traditional support structures and have not crossed the borders of their countries. They are victims of various kinds of injustices, and violent attacks orchestrated by their government or others against them. Omoraka et al (2022) argue that there are two major components of IDPs. These are the coercive or otherwise involuntary character of movement and the fact that such movement takes place within national borders. Some of the most common causes of involuntary movements are armed conflicts, violence, human rights violations and disaster, among others. This gives no choice to people but to leave their homes depriving them of the most essential protection mechanisms, such as community networks, access to services and livelihoods. The second component of the IDPs, according to them, is the movement within national borders. Since IDPs remain legally under the protection of national authorities of their habitual residence, unlike refugees who have been deprived of the protection of their state (country) of origin; they are expected to enjoy the same rights as the rest of the population. When families are displaced, they only run for the survival of their children and themselves. It is a situation where the victims face untold economic hardship, psychological trauma and social dislocation. Consequently, the IDPs have a special need for the assistance of the government and other humanitarian groups that could intervene to cushion the impact of hardship to bring succour to them.

It is apt to maintain that the quantitative and time qualifiers in this definition make it unduly narrow. Restricting the internally displaced to those forced to leave 'suddenly or unexpectedly in large numbers' would exclude serious cases of internal displacement. Even in Nigeria, IDPs escape in drips and drabs to places considered safe and not necessary in droves. In this case, the United Nations Guiding Principles affords a working definition which has tried to cure this deficiency. Considering these observations, the internally displaced should be understood as persons or groups of persons who have been forced to flee, or leave, their homes or places of habitual residence as a result of armed conflict, internal strife and systematic violations of human rights, as well as natural or man-made disasters involving one or more of these elements, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized State border. What should make internally displaced persons of concern should be the coercion that compels their movement, their subjection to human rights abuse as a result of this evacuation, and the lack of protection available to them. It is noteworthy, therefore, that internal displacement occurs characteristically in reaction to armed conflict, oppression, situations of widespread violence, natural and human-made tragedies, etc. The scale of internal displacement and the inevitable problem and nature of the response have become far more momentous in contemporary times (Alobo & Obaji, 2016).

The consequence of internal displacement on IDPs themselves, as well as on the local authorities and communities that host them, can be shocking. While the act of displacement itself often may violate the human rights of those affected, the subsequent loss of access to homes, lands, livelihoods, personal documentation, family members, and social networks can deleteriously affect the ability of IDPs to assert and relish an entire range of fundamental rights. Most apparent, IDPs instantaneously become reliant on others for basic needs such as shelter, food and water. At the same time, their susceptibility may be amplified by barriers to accessing health care, education, employment, economic activities, and electoral politics in their areas of displacement. Moreover, the longer displacement continues, the greater the risk that traditional family and social structures break down, leaving IDPs dependent on outside aid

and vulnerable to economic and sexual exploitation. Such dependency, in turn, reduces the chances of durable solutions and sustainable reintegration into society once political and security conditions have changed to enable such solutions to take place.

Suffice it to add that displacement of any kind in Nigeria has led to a breakdown in family structure, loss of lives, and infrastructure and destruction of property. The security conditions left people with no choice but to migrate from their residences (Norwegian Refugee Council, 2017). In this regard, Obaji and Alobo (2016) asserted that displaced persons are exposed to security challenges; that range from gender and child-based hostility, separation from family, exploitation, and detention with no consideration of the rule of law. According to Akuto (2017), the challenges facing the IDPs are insecurity, trauma, bitterness, malnutrition, hunger and starvation, deprivation of human rights and sexually transmitted diseases among others.

Internally Displaced Persons have gained currency in the last decade due to civil conflicts, war, human rights abuses or natural disasters. Internally Displaced Persons in Benue State refers to all those persons who have been forced to leave their homeland or places of residence as a result of incessant attacks and killing by herdsmen. In their condition of forceful relocation, the IDPS have lost control of their social economic and political life and have become refugees in their land; but unlike refugees, IDPS are found within the boundary of their country.

Human Rights

Human rights are freedoms, liberties and privileges that members of the human enjoy simply for being human. They are not granted by any state. The United Nations (2022) maintains that human rights are universal, inherent and inalienable in all humans, regardless of nationality, sex, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, language, or any other status. Human rights range from the most fundamental – the right to life – to those that make life worth living, such as the rights to food, education, work, health, and liberty (UN, 2022). Similarly, Human Rights Watch (2024) submits that human rights are the basic rights and freedoms based on common humanity. They include civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights.

It is noteworthy that human rights are drawn from various cultures, religions and philosophies from around the world over many centuries. They are in force at all times and in all places. They protect everyone equally without discrimination according to race, sex, religion, political opinion or other status. Similarly, human rights are standards that recognize and protect the dignity of all human beings. Human rights govern how individual human beings live in society and with each other, as well as their relationship with the State and the obligations that the State have towards them. Human rights law obliges governments to do some things and prevents them from doing others. Individuals also have responsibilities: in using their human rights, they must respect the rights of others. No government, group or person has the right to do anything that violates another's rights (United Nations, 2022). To this end, therefore, Shaibu and Olu-Adeyemi (2020) posit that human rights are expected to serve man with his social, political and economic needs and are perhaps desirable.

Since human rights are inherent and inalienable, internally displaced people retain a broad range of economic, social, cultural, civil and political rights, including the right to basic humanitarian assistance (such as food, medicine, shelter), the right to be protected from physical violence, the right to education, freedom of movement and residence, political rights such as the right to participate in public

affairs and the right to participate in economic activities (United Nations Guiding Principles, 10-23).

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts and applies the Human Needs Theory as the most suitable theoretical framework. The Theory was developed in the 1970s and 1980s as a generic or holistic theory of human behaviour. It is based on the hypothesis that humans have basic needs to be met to maintain stable societies (Burton, 1990). Human needs theory stresses the satisfaction of needs essential for human beings, required for survival, which when compromised act as a major source of conflict. As Burton (1979) avers, we believe that human participants in conflict situations are compulsively struggling in their respective institutional environments at all social levels to satisfy primordial and universal needs – such as security, identity, recognition, and development. This struggle cannot be curbed; it is primordial (Burton, 1979). This struggle for primordial needs is theoretically related to the Frustration-Aggression theory which is based on the stimulus-response hypothesis (Dollard et al., 1939). The frustration of not satisfying these needs leads to aggression and subsequently, conflict. What distinguishes the Human Needs theory from the Frustration-Aggression theory is that the former is concerned only with absolute requirements (needs) while the latter is also concerned with wants and desires. Thus, unless identity needs are met in multi-ethnic societies unless in every social system, there is distributive justice, a sense of control, and prospects for the pursuit of all other human societal developmental needs, instability and conflict are inevitable (Burton, 1990). There are bold assumptions in this theory.

Furthermore, Maslow (1970) identified physiological needs, safety needs, belongingness and love needs, esteem needs, and self-actualization needs; and classified them hierarchically into five stages in a definite order of priority. According to him, the more basic needs or wants which have the greatest potency must have to be gratified in an individual before he would strive to meet the higher needs. Similarly, Burton (1979) lists response, stimulation, security, recognition, distributive justice, meaning, the need to appear rational and develop rationality, the need for a sense of control and the need for role defence. He refers to some needs as basic and these include food, shelter, sex, reproduction, etc. (Burton, 1979). More so, some basic needs like security, distinctive justice, social recognition of identity and effective participation in the process that shape such identities. Again, basic human needs comprise physical, physiological, social and spiritual needs. According to him, to provide access to food and deny or hinder access to another freedom of worship will amount to denial and could make people resort to violence to protect these needs.

The strength of this theory is that it has wide applicability. While some see it merely as a tool to be applied in prevention or post-conflict peace building, practitioners like Rosenberg (2003) use Human Needs Theory in the mediation of violent conflicts. Another major strength of the theory is that it focuses on the source of conflict, looking at how best the parties can have their needs met, and those of others. Human Needs Theory also emphasizes common humanity (Maslow, 1970). In a world context where differences are accentuated, Human Needs Theory attempts to unify human beings from different regions and cultures, creating a common understanding of who we are and how others need and feel the same way we do. However, Human Needs Theory has some weaknesses that lead to its drawbacks. Firstly, there are several discrepancies between the various theorists, even between Burton (1979) and Rosenberg (2003), who agree that all needs are universal, non-hierarchical and complementary. Secondly, should we prioritise certain needs over others? Is Maslow right in

asserting that needs for food and shelter should be met before considering needs for self-esteem and self-fulfilment? Or is protection, rest and play equally important to secure human well-being? Thirdly, there seems to be an exaggerated belief in the importance of dialogue (Abiodun, 2012).

The relevance of this theory is that it recognizes and legitimizes bandits' needs in Nigeria. It posits that the needs of all individual citizens and groups must be met. This helps to move the conflict from zero-sum to win-win. The abstraction of 'human needs' helps to eliminate the sense of mutually exclusive goals. These needs are not satisfied at the expense of the other community but are realised along with the community's needs. These needs are not mutually exclusive or gained at the expense of another; they are universal. It must be emphasised that the Human Needs Theory is significant as it shows us how conflicts can be managed and resolved through the satisfaction of basic human needs. Again, the theory stresses the source or the origin of the dispute and looks towards resolution by satisfying the needs of the parties involved. Another reason why the Human Needs Theory is treated as an asset is that it works towards uniting human beings, makes us understand how the other party feels when their needs are deprived and provides us with a platform to aid in peacebuilding.

Thus, the key to human needs theory is the identification of the unmet needs which would lead to the conflict. The Human Needs model states that for resolution both the parties must sit together and acknowledge each other and their views, and opinions regarding the issue. This mode of acknowledging and stepping into the other party's shoes is called 'Empathy.' Empathy is essential in the process of conflict resolution and analysis. Human Needs Strategies aims at the integrative approach and tries to make the situation win-win for both parties, thus any solution which encompasses the issues relating to both nations shall be considered and eventually, the conflict would cool down and be resolved. If all the needs of the parties are satisfied, then it is probable to find a win-win solution.

Methodology

This study adopted a mixed-method approach to data. Thus, primary and secondary sources of data were utilised for this study. Secondary data was generated from published materials like journals, books and other releases by government and international bodies. On the other hand, there were oral interviews and focused group discussions were conducted among the IDPs and managers of the camps. All the data were analysed contextually.

Incidence of Displacement in Nigeria

In the decade dating back to 2012, Nigeria continued to witness a prevalent internal displacement crisis. From being home to an estimated 65,000 IDPs in 2011, Nigeria's internal displacement population grew in leaps by over 300% to over 3.2 million IDPs by the year 2022 (IDMC, 2022). Nigeria's most affected regions were the North-East, North-Central, and North-West. The displacement crisis in Nigeria has grown exponentially over the last decade and ranked amongst the top 10 countries with the most conflict-induced internal displacements worldwide and in Sub-Saharan Africa.

A report by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, 2022), indicated that of Nigeria's estimated 3.2 million IDPs, 2.2 million were victims of the Boko Haram insurgency in the North-East, over 474,744 were victims of banditry, Fulani-Hausa ethnic conflicts in the North-West. Furthermore, over 495,013 of Nigeria's displacement figures were victims of armed herders and militia conflicts, communal conflicts, and banditry in the North-Central region.

This is presented in Table 1 below:

Table 1: Incidence of Displacement in Northern Nigeria

Region	Causes of Displacement	Number of IDPs
North-East	Boko Haram Insurgency	2,200,000
North-West	Banditry, Hausa-Fulani ethnic conflict	474,744
North-Central	Herders' militia, Banditry and communal conflicts	495,013

Source: UNCHR, 2022.

As of December 2023, the International Organization for Migration (IOM)'s Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) identified a total of 1,092,196 internally displaced persons (IDPs) in 183,437 households, in the eight states of North-Central and North-West Nigeria; viz: Benue, Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Nasarawa, Plateau, Sokoto, and Zamfara states. The IDP population included IDPs in camps and camp-like settings (196,502 individuals or 18%) and IDPs residing in host communities (895,694 individuals or 82%). It is noteworthy that eighteen per cent of IDPs in North-Central and North-West Nigeria were living in camps or camp-like settings while 82 per cent of IDPs were dispersed in host communities. Table 2 below, displays the estimated number of IDPs in the North-Central and North-West regions indicating that Benue hosted the largest number of IDPs with about 394,567 individuals, constituting 36% of IDPs in the region (IOM, 2024a).

Table 2: Estimated Number of IDPs by State

State	Number of IDPs	Percentage
Benue	394,567	36%
Katsina	231,937	21%
Kaduna	119,787	11%
Sokoto	94,729	9%
Plateau	54,457	5%
Nasarawa	20,613	2%
Kano	15,608	1%

Source: IOM, 2024a.

The demographic outlook showed that the majority or 54 per cent of the IDPs in North-Central and North-West Nigeria were male, while 46 per cent were female. Fifty-four per cent of the IDPs were minors or under 18 years old, while 21 per cent of the total IDP population were under six years old. Seventeen per cent of the IDPs were elderly (60 years or more). On average, internally displaced households were estimated to have six members (IOM, 2024a).

Furthermore, as part of the commitment to provide verified figures of IDPs in Benue State in line with the government's plans, the International Organization for Migration's DTM, in partnership with UNHCR, Benue State Emergency Management Agency (BSEMA) and other organisations launched the biometric registration in Benue State on 22 August 2023. Six LGAs were mapped as locations with IDPs in Benue State. The biometrically registered IDPs covered Makurdi LGA (16 camps and three host community sites), Guma LGA (eight camps and four host community sites), Logo LGA (two camps and host community sites), Kwande (one camp and host community site) Agatu LGA (three camps) and in Gwer-West (four camps). The registration showed that Guma LGA had the highest number of IDPs, with 105,154 individuals (17,636 households), followed by Gwer-West with 63,083 from 3,435 households. Agatu LGA had 46,135 IDPs (from 5,641 households), while Makurdi with 36,062 individuals (9,415 households). Logo LGA had 32,530 IDPs (from 3,311 households, while Kwande LGA had 15,909 individuals (3,225 households). Table 3 below shows the top LGAs with the incidence of IDPs in Benue State (IOM, 2024b).

Table 3: Top LGAs hosting IDPs in Benue State

LGA	NO. of IDPs	NO. of Camps	NO. of Households
Guma	105,154	8	17,636
Gwer-West	63,083	4	3,435
Makurdi	47,990	16	12,314
Agatu	46,135	3	5,641
Logo	32,530	2	3,311
Kwande	15,909	1	3,225
Total	**310,801**	**34**	**45,592**

Source: Compiled by the author, 2024.

The majority of the IDPs have been displaced for over ten years, whilst millions of them have suffered multiple displacements in their places of refuge (IDP camps) thus making it increasingly difficult to recover from displacement-induced impoverishment and disadvantage. Additionally, in the displacement camps where the majority of the IDPs reside, there was hardly any provision of social amenities like healthcare services, educational access, and decent shelters (Olanrewaju et al., 2019). This further escalated humanitarian and livelihood challenges as well as heightened the vulnerability of the displaced population and the majority of them were susceptible to increased disadvantage, exploitation and abuse.

Anzenge and Iorbo (2022) posited that the prevalent displacement crisis in Nigeria thus points to an imminent factor of Nigeria's unwillingness to fulfil its primary responsibility to prevent arbitrary displacement, address root causes and rehabilitate IDPs for livelihoods recovery, and access to social services. According to them, the unwillingness to assist victims of internal displacement was established in a study by Olanrewaju et al., (2019) who observed that Nigeria's humanitarian agencies declined to provide humanitarian assistance to IDPs who were residents in unofficial resettlement camps. Additionally, Mirth (2014) found that IDPs who were residents in areas not recognised by Government policies were deprived of protection and assistance. Despite these deprivations, there was abounding evidence that the IDPs' residency in unofficial camps was due to the failure of the Government to provide official camps and meet IDPs' shelter and safety needs (Titilope et al., 2021; Shehu & Abba, 2020).

More so, it has been contended that Nigeria's protection and assistance of IDPs based on where they were located or on policy parameters were inconsistent with Nigeria's commitment under the African Union Convention on Internally Displaced Persons (also known as the Kampala Convention). Article 5(1) of the Kampala Convention submits that governments bear primary responsibility for protecting IDPs providing them humanitarian assistance without any bias, or discrimination, and ensuring the safety and dignity of IDPs wherever they are found within the affected country. Furthermore, affected Governments shall provide lasting solutions by addressing the root causes of displacement, and creating necessary conditions for voluntary, dignified, and safe return, integration, or resettlement of IDPs. Nigeria reiterated its position in its national policy on internal displacement and commits to the equal protection and assistance of IDPs irrespective of the root cause of the displacement and wherever IDPs may be located (Farouq, 2021).

But besides the protection of IDPs based on where they are located (official or unofficial IDP settlement), the Nigerian Government had also prioritised protection and rehabilitation assistance of IDPs in the country based on the cause of displacement rather than the fact of displacement. Whilst Nigeria's national policy recognises that the Government owes its citizens the right to not be displaced by preventing internal displacement and rehabilitating displacement-affected persons and communities, this commitment is far from implementation (Anzenge & Iorbo, 2022).

In practice, Nigeria's frameworks that guide the socio-economic rehabilitation of IDPs and displacement-affected communities were limited in coverage to the displacement crisis in North-East Nigeria which was induced by the Boko Haram insurgency and excluded victims of all other displacements triggered by other causes. These biases were found in the Buhari Plan for the social rehabilitation, reconstruction and humanitarian intervention in the North-East (Presidential Committee on North-East Initiative (PCNI, 2016); and the North East

Development Commission for strengthening humanitarian interventions, rehabilitation of IDPs and social reconstruction of displacement-affected communities, (NEDC, 2017). These frameworks focused on the rehabilitation of displacement-affected communities and persons in the North-East to the exclusion of other regions. Similarly, the Nigeria Humanitarian Response Strategies, jointly implemented by the Nigerian Government, and international humanitarian agencies, was limited to humanitarian aid and rehabilitation needs of IDPs and communities affected by the Boko Haram insurgency (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance (OCHA, 2016-2022). Furthermore, despite these strategic frameworks being named "The Nigeria Plan", they were limited to only Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe in North-East Nigeria, which was impacted by the Boko Haram insurgency. Commendable socio-economic rehabilitation of victims, critical infrastructure in communities and restoration of social services were achieved with a focus on ending humanitarian aid dependency by the year 2026, especially in Borno State (OCHA, 2022). Despite these noble and commendable efforts, the North-West and North-Central regions which were also burdened with mass internal displacement population and attending socio-economic losses, had been excluded from Nigeria's humanitarian response plans and rehabilitation interventions for seven years (OCHA, 2016-2022). These regions jointly had an estimated one million IDPs whose displacement was a direct failure of the Government to have prevented arbitrary displacement, and whose victims were Nigerian citizens, for whom the Government bears the primary responsibility for their protection and assistance.

The Challenges and Human Rights Situation of the IDPS in Benue State

The United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons emphasised that people forced to flee or leave their homes - particularly in situations of armed conflict - were generally subjected to heightened vulnerability in several areas (United Nations, 2022). He maintained that displaced persons suffered significantly higher rates of mortality than the general population. They also remained at high risk of physical attack, sexual assault and abduction, and frequently were deprived of adequate shelter, food and health services. More so. the overwhelming majority of internally displaced persons were women and children who were especially at risk of abuse of their basic and sexual rights (Betancur, 2024).

The IOM (2024a) affirms that displaced people generally encounter more vulnerabilities such as insecurity, lack of livelihood opportunities and access to services. Rights violated by displacement include:

Right to security
Right to basic humanitarian assistance (such as food, medicine, shelter)
Right to be protected from physical violence
Right to education
Right to health
Right to liberty
Right to adequate housing
Right to freely choose a spouse (cases of child marriage)
Freedom of movement and residence
Political rights, etc.

Like all human beings, internally displaced persons enjoy human rights articulated by international human rights instruments and customary laws. The Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement (1998), noted that arbitrary displacement in the first instance is prohibited (Principles 5-7). However, once persons have been displaced, they retain a broad range of economic, social, cultural, civil and political rights, including the right to basic humanitarian assistance (such as food, medicine, shelter), the right to be protected from physical violence, the right to education,

freedom of movement and residence, political rights such as the right to participate in public affairs and the right to participate in economic activities (Principles 10-23). Again, the displaced persons have the right to assistance from competent authorities in voluntary, dignified and safe return, resettlement or local integration, including help in recovering lost property and possessions. When restitution is not possible, the Guiding Principles call for compensation or just reparation (Principles 28-30). There is no gainsaying the obvious that displacement forces people from their homes, depriving them of shelter, land, possessions and livelihoods.

In Benue State, the struggle for new income sources was exacerbated by unemployment, limited skills, loss of social networks and discrimination. As a result, IDPs endure more severe and persistent poverty and higher food insecurity than others in society. IDPs' living conditions, often precarious and overcrowded, expose them to health risks. Access to health care, education and other services was difficult as their documentation was frequently lost or destroyed during displacement (Betancur, 2024). More so, numerous challenges confronted the Internally Displaced Persons in their various camps. Bassey and Nta (2022) aver that forced from their homes, IDPs experienced specific forms of deprivation, such as loss of shelter and faced heightened tension or particular protection risks. These risks included armed attacks and abuse while fleeing in search of safety; family separation, including an increase in the number of separated and unaccompanied children; heightened risk of sexual and gender-based violence, particularly affecting women and children; arbitrary deprivation of land, homes and other properties; and displacement into harsh and unwelcoming environments, where they suffer stigma and marginalisation, discrimination or harassment. Expectedly, accommodation and shelter appear to be the most commonly faced challenge by all IDPs in Benue state because every IDP has been displaced from his or her place of habitation. A study by Ukase and Jato (2022) further showed that 100 per cent of the people interviewed in IDP camps across Benue said accommodation is their number one challenge.

The IDPs in all the camps in Benue indicated that the forceful ejection of the people from their homes rendered them homeless and helpless. They also decried the poor housing in the camps. They also maintained that the changes in their living situations have considerably eroded their level of housing satisfaction. The situation in the camps indicated a major violation of the rights to life, the right to own a house, the right to private life and the right to own a family. For instance, an IDP in the Abagena Camp reiterated that:

> We are very crowded in small tents and often lack toilets, clean water and electricity…. I planned to marry last year, but due to displacement, I cannot marry because I do not have a house of my own. I don't have what it takes to marry and enjoy a marital life. The house's conditions are not the same as those of our previous home where we had sufficient water. The water in this house has dried up. There is no electricity and no toilet (Displaced Respondent, 2024).

Another human rights challenge confronting IDPs in Benue State is food scarcity. Ukase and Jato (2022) submit that beside rationing of food in the camps, the quality of the food provided was poor. For instance, the quality of food lacked basic ingredients and nutrients, thereby leading to malnutrition, illness and in some cases death of babies and nursing mothers (UNICEF, 2015). Evidence abounds that the right to food is grossly violated. In an in-depth interview with some IDPs in Anyiin IDPs Camp, in Logo Local Government Area, an IDP

averred that:

> Conflict and displacement have affected our well-being. We don't eat well. We are not living and eating like we used to because we don't have the resources, and it is affecting our health. The Benue State government is trying to feed us but sometimes one cannot eat what one wants. Sometimes we live on handouts from well-wishers who visit and donate food items (Displaced Respondent, 2024).

The exposure of the IDPs to inclement weather, and their lack of access to adequate food supply and proper clothing often combined to pose a greater challenge, which was a health challenge. The most common illnesses in the camps were malaria, typhoid, diarrhoea and skin infections. The hygiene and health care standards among the IDPs were low. The inadequacy of health knowledge and hygiene issues was compounded by the limited availability of healthcare facilities and the nonchalant attitude of healthcare providers. Children in IDP camps were most times not immunized and the women did not have access to toiletries during menstruation. As Ukase and Jato (2022) submit, this problem was further compounded by their inability to visit a gynaecologist for regular check-ups during pregnancy and childbirth. Again, medical facilities and supplies were inadequate, not matching the health needs of the IDPs. In the case of treatment of illness or injuries, there were health care units and clinics provided by some agencies and humanitarian organizations but were inadequate in terms of capacity, thus, the spate of referral cases to hospitals outside the camps at the expense of the IDPs was high. As a result, the majority of serious illnesses went untreated even when diagnosed. Faced with these difficulties, most IDPs resorted to herbal or traditional medication to treat themselves.

The education of IDPs in Benue state had suffered serious setbacks because they were forced to flee from their original place of abode. Contrary to the United Nations Guiding Principle on Internal Displacement which is to the effect that the authorities concerned shall ensure that such persons, in particular children, receive education which shall be free and compulsory at the primary level, a considerable number of children in the IDP camps, especially unofficial camps had no school. Where schools were found at all, they were adult schools. Formal education and traditional learning cycles continued to be disrupted by the protracted conflict and the destruction of educational facilities and institutions. For IDPs, access to education has been further restricted by limited resources and inadequate facilities in IDP camps, which have led to poor quality or even no education at all for children. Schools in IDP camps were typically overcrowded with few or no qualified teaching staff. While school enrolment for displaced children improved, poor resources and material difficulties experienced by families continued to hinder progress in advancing access to universal primary education in Nigeria. The findings revealed an acute shortage of resources and a poor pupil-teacher ratio. Despite their commitment, the services of the teachers were seriously inadequate to cater for the educational needs of pupils. Moreover, the high cost of tuition is beyond the reach of most displaced families, resulting in the denial of access to education for thousands of displaced children across Benue State.

The dislocation of the IDPs from their homeland also meant their eventual removal from their means of livelihood. It should be noted that the majority of the IDPs were farmers who were forced to flee from their homes due to violent attacks by herders, leaving their farmsteads behind. In their 'new homes', they did not have access to land nor did they have other farm inputs to engage in productive farming. This inactivity rendered the IDPs

unemployed and worsened the poverty level among the IDPs. This particular problem was so acute because almost 100 per cent of the IDPs were unemployed.

As Achem and Aderinto (2023) posit, the vulnerability of the IDPs puts them at risk of sexual exploitation, abuse and sometimes violence. Internally displaced women living in insecure shelters were at higher risk of sexual violence. Some women and girls reported being attacked when they left camps to fetch water or firewood. There were cases of girls suffering cases of rape, child pregnancy, abortion, sex work or early marriage. In almost all the IDP camps, there were reported cases of sex-for-food. Thus, displaced women and girls in IDP camps remain particularly vulnerable and are continuously exposed to sexual and gender-based violence, including conflict-related sexual violence. Interviews with the IDPs in all the camps indicated that sexual violence, often in the form of rape, attempted rape, and sexual harassment, was common within and around IDP camps and farmlands. These were reported in Daudu, Anyiin, Abagena and other IDP Camps in Benue State. Similarly, the social condition of the IDPs following their dislocation from home and the subsequent alienation from their primary occupation – usually farming further worsened their economic woes. It is in the bid to provide for the needs of the family that the children in the IDP camps are forced to work. These children not only worked to feed themselves; they also worked to support the family's upkeep. Most of these children below the age of eighteen often moved outside the camps to engage in farming activities, petty trading and running errands for members of the host communities for meagre wages or sometimes exchange their labour for food. These posed both safety and security concerns as the children were further exposed to sexual abuse and molestation.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The internal displacement of people has become a significant concern in Nigeria. More than two million people have fled their homes in Benue State as a result of violent conflict. The rise in the problem has led to calls for concrete rights-based solutions to protect and assist internally displaced persons. The issue of internal displacement is serious enough to require amendments to Nigeria's constitution. The rising wave of violent conflict and resultant displacements has far-reaching implications for national political stability. Since the Nigerian constitution obliges the government to safeguard the citizens' welfare, it becomes imperative that there should be constitutional protection for displaced people.

It is therefore recommended that Nigeria reinforce national responsibility for the protection of IDPs. This includes supporting the development and implementation of laws that prohibit forced displacement, protect IDPs' rights, ensure access to justice for rights violations and establish conditions for the achievement of durable solutions. It also includes supporting UN Resident Coordinators /Humanitarian Coordinators with humanitarian diplomacy.

Again, there is a need to improve humanitarian assistance to IDPs, ensuring it is timely, adequate and responsive to their specific needs. Humanitarians must lay the groundwork for solutions to internal displacement as early as possible to avoid aid dependency and protracted displacement. This includes prioritising safe and dignified shelter, supporting livelihoods and education, documentation and housing, and land and property rights.

More so, the government and all stakeholders need to invest more in addressing the root causes of displacement through conflict resolution, climate change adaptation and mitigation and sustainable development.

Development and peace organisations need to arrive earlier, and national authorities and organisations need to work harder to keep the peace and maintain security. Otherwise, we risk further displacement, dispossession and social dislocation.

Lastly, there is a need to ensure that IDPs are at the centre of the response to internal displacement. It is time to work alongside them as rightsholders rather than treat them as mere beneficiaries of assistance. There is a need to better understand and address barriers to participation, offering conditions conducive to participation.

While the challenges faced by IDPs are significant, they are not insurmountable. With concerted effort, political will and the active participation of IDPs themselves, the human rights of IDPs can be upheld and they can look forward to a future of dignity, security and peace.

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