

## **Internally Displaced Persons in Nigeria: Durable Solution, Assessment and Reviews**

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**ABSTRACT:** *The protracted internal displacement crisis in Nigeria has led to significant challenges for the affected population and has strained the country's resources and infrastructure. This paper focuses on the issue of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Nigeria, exploring the concept of durable solutions, the importance of comprehensive assessments, and the necessity of regular reviews in addressing their plight. The concept of durable solutions forms the cornerstone of addressing displacement crises, aiming to provide sustainable outcomes for IDPs. This study examines the three recognized durable solutions: voluntary return, local integration, and resettlement, and analyzes their applicability in the Nigerian context. It emphasizes the need for a holistic approach that considers socio-economic factors, security conditions, and the protection of IDPs' rights. Comprehensive assessments play a vital role in understanding the needs and vulnerabilities of IDPs, facilitating informed decision-making and resource allocation. This study highlights the importance of conducting thorough assessments, including demographic data, living conditions, access to basic services, and psychosocial support. It emphasizes the role of government agencies, humanitarian organizations, and research institutions in undertaking these assessments to guide effective interventions. Regular reviews of displacement situations are crucial to monitor progress, identify gaps, and adapt strategies accordingly. This study emphasizes the significance of periodic evaluations of policies, programs, and interventions aimed at addressing internal displacement in Nigeria. It underscores the importance of stakeholder involvement, including IDPs themselves, in these review processes to ensure their perspectives are considered and their voices heard. Furthermore, the work acknowledges the challenges inherent in addressing the plight of IDPs in Nigeria, including limited resources, security concerns, and the complexity of the underlying causes of displacement. It emphasizes the need for a coordinated and multi-stakeholder approach, involving the government, humanitarian actors, civil society, and the international community, to achieve durable solutions for IDPs.*

**KEYWORDS:** displacement, IDPS, nigeria, durable solutions, humanitarian disaster

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Internally displaced persons have peculiar and generic needs and potential vulnerabilities beyond the conflict or disaster that displaced them. Solutions to internal displacement are

termed and considered to be “durable” if a number of conditions are met. These conditions include: enjoying the protection of the State of nationality or residence; the voluntariness of the decision to return or settle elsewhere; the prevalence of safety and security in areas of settlement or return; real prospects for restitution of or compensation for lost property; no discrimination in the enjoyment of their rights, and equal access to public services and economic opportunities (Global Protection, 2007:323). The Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) Framework on Durable Solutions for Internally Displaced Persons has maintained that achieving durable solutions is a gradual process and durable solutions can be deemed to have been achieved when IDPs “no longer have any specific assistance and protection needs that are linked to their displacement and can enjoy their human rights without discrimination on account of their displacement” (ISSA, 2015:12).

National authorities are primarily responsible for supporting IDPs in their search for a durable solution. As such, they strive to ensure that IDPs are: in a position to make an informed and voluntary decision about the settlement option they would like to pursue; able to participate in the planning and management of their durable solution; able to access equitable and relevant assistance and support services; involved in peace processes and peace-building efforts where relevant (IDMC, 2013:80). There are three means through which durable solutions may be obtained by internally displaced persons. Each of the three means indicates return or resettlement and is equally capable of ending displacement process when combined with other essential factors. In essence, the choice of any of the options is a pointer to the end of displacement. Durable solutions can be achieved through:

- i. Voluntary Return: sustainable and voluntary return to the area of origin;
- ii. Integration: sustainable local integration in areas where IDPs take refuge;
- iii. Relocation: sustainable integration in another part of the country (Adeleye, 2022:147).

The term “integration” refers to sustainable local integration in the areas where IDPs have taken refuge and is defined in line with the IASC Framework on Durable Solutions for Internally Displaced Persons. Since there exist a “common but flawed assumption” that the need to create a future or durable solution for IDPs is satisfied by returning them to their former lives, integration becomes preferable where security is not guaranteed in such places of origin or when their places of origin is associated with psychological trauma or other physical, social, political or economic problems by the IDPs. (Fagen, 2011). As far as IDPs are concerned and in the local context, their settlement is largely associated with ownership of personal accommodation, which is one important factor in integration (ISSA, 2015:12). Return, local integration, or settlement elsewhere are equally valid options for IDPs. Human rights law gives them the right to choose freely between the three options as part of the rights to freedom of movement and choice of residence.

This does not mean that a government cannot promote a particular option, as long as it leaves room for IDPs to choose one of the others. They should never be coerced into returning or into any other settlement option. IDPs cannot be said to have achieved a durable solution merely as a result of returning. Their sustainable (re)integration is required, any specific assistance or

protection needs linked to their previous displacement must be resolved, and they must be able to exercise their rights without discrimination on account of their displacement. The right to freedom of movement and to choose one's place of residence means IDPs can choose to return to their places of origin or to live elsewhere in the country. Restricting the choice of settlement options is possible but in really exceptional circumstances prescribed by law, in which it is absolutely necessary to protect the life, safety, health and integrity of those affected, or there is a similarly important and legitimate justification (IDMC, 2013:71).

The search for any of these durable solutions for internally displaced persons is a gradual, often long-term process of reducing displacement-specific needs and ensuring the enjoyment of human rights without discrimination. The IASC Framework provides the following criteria to determine whether a durable solution is achieved:

- i. safety and security, adequate standard of living;
- ii. access to livelihoods;
- iii. restoration of housing, land, and property;
- iv. access to documentation;
- v. family reunification;
- vi. participation in public affairs;
- vii. and access to effective remedies and justice (ISSA, 2015:49).

The following also determine IDPs' progress towards durable solutions:

- a. long-term safety, security and freedom of movement;
- b. enjoyment of an adequate standard of living without discrimination;
- c. access to livelihoods and employment;
- d. effective and accessible mechanisms to restore housing, land and property.

In many displacement contexts, the following criteria may also be relevant:

- i. access to personal and other documentation without discrimination;
- ii. family reunification and the establishment of the fate and whereabouts of missing relatives;
- iii. participation in public affairs without discrimination;
- iv. access to effective remedies and justice (IDMC, 2013:80)

In essence, voluntary return, integration and relocation may each indicate the end of displacement as it provides returnees the sense of ownership of their accommodation. This is not sufficient because it is not in itself an end to displacement nor a durable solution. since it does not solve all the problems inherent in displacement. The earlier mentioned criteria determine to what extent a durable solution has been achieved. Government Ministries, Departments, Agencies and other stakeholders with the responsibility for protecting and assisting internally displaced persons still have to put in place measures to ensure that all internally displaced persons achieve durable solutions without discrimination and continue to provide humanitarian assistance until durable solution has been achieved.

## **DISCUSSION**

A trip to impacted regions was conducted by OCHA in June 2004, and the organisation issued a number of recommendations to the United Nations system in general and OCHA specifically to enhance overall responsiveness to the needs of internally displaced persons (IDP) in Nigeria. In a report to the IASC on a recent mission to Nigeria, OCHA reported that the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Children's Fund, and the World Health Organization have formed a task force to address immediate short-term needs in the health, education, water and sanitation, and HIV/AIDS sectors. The task force will focus on the current affected states and will complement Federal/State level interventions. It will be linked to the existing UN/NGO Emergency Preparedness & Response group. Once a rapid needs-assessment in the affected area has been carried out, project proposals will be developed for submission. Some donors, e.g. Canada, EU/ECHO and UK/Dfid have already indicated their willingness to offer support (Adeleye and Osadola, 2022).

The task force will enhance existing training and institution building efforts at both national (NEMA) and state (SEMA) levels. The UNCT and task force should be encouraged to seek technical support and assistance for training and to develop universal needs assessment tool, camp management - including registration/verification, stock control etc. Support efforts to NEMA and SEMA should improve coordination and leadership. In discussions with NEMA, it is clear that they are unwilling to adopt an approach that focuses on certain states, either currently affected or with potential, as this has budgetary implications. Altering the focus from anything less than 36 states would bring about budget cuts from the Federal government to NEMA. However, it is important that the UN and international community select potential 'flashpoints' to focus early warning and early action activities and support.

The UNCT and international community can support government efforts through improving services in the community and promote the return of IDPs. There is the need to increase community development activities and better distribution of existing resources and access to services for all parts of the community. The UN should only initiate reconstruction projects once the reconciliation process has started and should avoid any perception that is 'rewarding'. The establishment of physical barriers between ethnic and religious groups should be avoided at all costs. Improved governance, as well as greater involvement by all ethnic groups, must be encouraged and supported. In this respect, public awareness initiatives – utilising local languages, such as the BBC Hausa service – should be investigated in order to capitalise on the similarities rather than the differences across ethnic groups. Development programmes should have an inter-ethnic emphasis, including collaborative community initiatives as part of their implementation. Young people who are unemployed or disenfranchised should be among the primary target groups. Micro-credit programmes should be promoted in disaster-affected communities to assist them in transitioning from the emergency relief phase to the rebuilding and rehabilitation phase of their lives.

The following were their recommendations:

(a) In collaboration with the United Nations system, the Task Force will strengthen current training and institution-building activities at the national (NEMA) and state (SEMA) levels, respectively. The UNCT will contact the OCHA and other organisations in order to get technical help and aid for training.

The UN should use the Task Force as a mechanism to address new ‘flashpoints’ in an early warning and early action capacity, in support of NEMA and SEMAs. A more comprehensive strategy and support for the Nigerian government would be required if the country is to address the structural reasons of conflict that are at the core of the war. The UNCT should implement community development projects that will have a multiplier effect on reconciliation efforts. Accordingly, the UN should only initiate reconstruction projects once the reconciliation process has started and should avoid any perception that is ‘rewarding’ communities. At all costs any physical separation between ethnic and religious communities should be avoided. Better governance and increased participation by all ethnic groups must be promoted. In this regard, the UN should develop public awareness campaigns – using local language e.g. BBC Hausa service – to build on commonalities rather than difference between ethnic groups.

Development programmes should have an inter-ethnic emphasis, including collaborative community initiatives as part of their implementation. Young people who are unemployed or disenfranchised should be among the primary target groups. Micro-credit programmes should be promoted in disaster-affected communities to assist them in transitioning from the emergency relief phase to the rebuilding and rehabilitation phase of their lives.

(b) OCHA: Upon identifying short-term initiatives targeted at resettlement and repatriation of internally displaced persons, as well as problems related to reconciliation, OCHA should provide assistance in approaching the international donor community.

The UNCT and other relevant government organisations should be provided with support training in the areas of coordination, assessments, and aid delivery, according to OCHA. An emotionally oriented treatment module that has been slightly changed may be created.

The UNCT and the government should be assisted in completing IDP policy and law by the OCHA’s IDP unit. However, it is essential that there is full collaboration with Norwegian Refugee Council who was singled out by both the National Committee for Refugees and by UN for previous training and support on IDP issues.

### **Assessment and Review**

The distribution of non-food items (NFIs) has been ongoing in the Borno, Yobe and Adamawa States. UNHCR and the Nigerian Red Cross Society (NRCS) are targeting 3,000 IDP in each of the three States (UNHCR, 2015:1). It is believed that a significant number of internally displaced persons (IDP) have returned to their places of origin (Personal Communication). In addition, it is claimed that a significant number of refugees have returned to Nigeria (UNHCR, 2016:2). According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the fact that they have been forced or coerced to leave their homes is a feature shared by all internally displaced

persons, regardless of the cause for their displacement. As a consequence, they are unable to find adequate shelter or lodging. Despite the fact that housing is a fundamental component of helping refugees, there is no UN or other organisation that addresses this requirement in the case of internally displaced persons (IDP) in humanitarian crises (Mooney, 2005:16). The absence of shelter is inextricably linked to the exact form and meaning of relocation, making it all the more astonishing that such an apparent need has gone unnoticed for so long.

The absence of an institution, along with a global scarcity of resources for humanitarian crises, seems to be a dangerous mix that is detrimental to the safety and well-being of internally displaced persons worldwide. For people who have been internally displaced by war, all of the United Nations agencies are required to work together, with coordination provided by the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator at headquarters and Resident/Humanitarian Coordinators in the field, to meet their requirements. So far, the collaborative system has not been particularly effective in helping internally displaced persons since no one is really in control (Jörnrud, 2012:58)

In November 2017, 800 internally displaced persons (IDP) graduated from a livelihood programme administered by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the American University of Nigeria. Its beneficiaries gain knowledge and abilities in a variety of fields, including tailoring, agriculture, fishing, blacksmithing, and information technology. More than 12,000 people have graduated from the programme, which is now in existence in the Nigerian states of Adamawa, Borno, Gombe, and Yobe, to date. Beneficiaries are also supplied with business start-up kits to assist them in maintaining their operations. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has built four Skills Acquisition Centers in Borno State to ensure that the programme reaches as many individuals as possible. UNHCR also supplied equipment and resources to 426 internally displaced people, refugees returning home, and host community members across 40 cooperative business groups in Yobe in order to help them in becoming self-sufficient and self-reliant (Personal Communication). Birth certificate distribution in Borno State came to an end in November after a five-month operation that ran from January to November. More than 102,000 persons have been registered and issued with certificates in the LGAs of Bama, Banki, Damasak, Gamboru Ngala, and Mungono, bringing the total number of people registered and issued with certificates to more than 112,000 (UNHCR, 2017:2).

A major source of comfort is that national and international organisations have made significant efforts in recent years to ensure the protection and assistance of internally displaced persons. However, because of the absence of a legal and regulatory framework that clearly specifies duties and obligations, humanitarian and development efforts to mitigate the effects of displacement have been hindered and will continue to be hampered, and this is expected to continue. A framework of this kind is also necessary for a holistic and comprehensive approach to assisting internally displaced persons in their search for long-term solutions, as well as for preparing for and preventing future displacement (IDMC, 2014:17). In some camps, approximately 10 percent of displaced children have some access to elementary and secondary school, but the quality of instruction is far from satisfactory. The United Nations Children's

Fund reports that in 2015, 29,094 out of approximately 980,000 displaced school-age children in the northeast were able to attend school (Human Rights Watch, 2016:67). United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) reports that 46,453 school-age children who were displaced in the Nigerian states of Adamawa, Borno, Gombe, and Yobe have been registered in other areas of the nation. There are approximately 800,000 out-of-school children who have been displaced, and this represents less than 10% of them. In addition, the organisation stated that 22,436 internally displaced children received educational supplies, school bags, and eight school tents (Human Rights Watch, 2016:74).

Since its inception, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has played an increasingly important role with internally displaced persons (IDPs) worldwide. From the 1970s through the 1990s, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) made choices on whether or not to interact with internally displaced persons (IDPs) on a case-by-case basis based on criteria established by the General Assembly and at the discretion of UNHCR administration. There was also a wide range of areas in which the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) worked with internally displaced persons, including food, health, and education. However, with the establishment of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) cluster structure in 2005, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees' involvement with internally displaced persons has mainly followed this paradigm further articulated under the Transformative Agenda in 2011 (Personal Communication). Participating humanitarian organisations were given worldwide cluster coordination leadership duties under this framework by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC). UNHCR is in charge of the global protection cluster, and it also co-ordinates the clusters on camp coordination and camp management (CCCM), and emergency shelter and non-food items (NFI). Country-level clusters are activated based on the requirements of the country and a set of criteria agreed upon by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee. As a result of this, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees' choice to intervene in internally displaced persons' circumstances have grown more methodical (OIOS, 2016:14).

The majority of internally displaced persons (IDPs) believe that their present living circumstances are worse than they were prior to displacement (Personal Communication). This was mostly due to the worsening circumstances in terms of providing IDPs basic need, which would be facilitated with access to housing, land, and money, as well as job opportunities. The prioritisation of these long-term needs reflects a displacement that has been ongoing for some time. As a result of their prolonged relocation, IDPs have raised their vulnerabilities and increased their reliance on assistance from the government and humanitarian organisations to fulfil the majority of their basic needs, which they have identified as a negative feature of their displacement (Personal Communication). The implications of this include that resilience-building activities and long-term assistance in the areas of housing, land, and cash should be prioritised, both in terms of programmes in internally displaced persons' camps and in terms of possible support for individuals wanting to return or move. The reasons for departure cited by internally displaced persons (IDP) who plan to leave their present location may be used to infer IDPs assessments of their existing living circumstances. Other factors contributing to IDPs choice to leave their present area include scarcity of food and a lack of adequate housing

(REACH, 2017:26). Government agencies, humanitarian and faith-based organisations are making some efforts to meet the basic needs of internally displaced people (IDP), but they face obstacles in accessing health care, education, employment and economic opportunities as well as information that will enable them to participate in decisions that affect their lives. However, despite the previous and current needs and difficulties of internally displaced persons (IDP) in Nigeria, the involvement of the United Nations is evident and praiseworthy since the role it has played is a comprehensive one. It has no responsibility for internally displaced persons and owes no obligation to them, but it has granted them some rights (UNHCR, 2015:103).

1.3 million internally displaced persons (IDP) lived in Nigeria in 2015, with Borno state housing the biggest number; 81,693 IDPs who lived in four divisions of the far north area of Cameroon; and 18,882 IDPs lived in Chad, which included returnees from Nigeria and were distributed over four districts. These internally displaced persons (IDP) are housed in camps, informal settlements, host communities, with their families, in leased homes, in places of worship and public buildings, and as well as at border crossings. Thus, their ability to exercise their rights to education, food, health, housing, and water and sanitation has been significantly curtailed. A large number of displaced children are unable to attend school, and those who stay in their communities frequently get low quality education as a result of instability, the lack of instructors who have left, and the damage of school buildings and infrastructure (UNHCR, 2015:4). The Nigerian state has reacts to forced displacement in an ad hoc and inefficient way. There was no specific national policy in place to deal with the issue at the time. Aid of all kinds was given to internally displaced persons (IDPs) through the regular social welfare and disaster response systems. In general, the issue was assigned a very low priority and was given very little visibility inside the organisation.

Armed wars and human rights violations are usually the underlying causes of both internally displaced persons and refugees, which have basic similarities. Likewise, the severe conditions experienced by internally displaced persons (IDP) and refugees are very comparable, resulting in their protection requirements being almost equal. (Lee, 1997:529). When it comes to debates regarding displacement, repatriation, and reintegration, human rights concerns are at the centre of the conversation. Therefore, when it comes to resolving the issue of internally displaced persons, human rights law is the most essential tool to be consulted (Geissler, 1999:457). Efforts by the federal and state governments to fulfil their needs are inconsistent, and because of restricted access to resources, support from international organisations and Nigerian civil society are also constrained in their capacity to assist them. People who live in or near camps get some assistance, but it is often inadequate to meet their basic needs for food and other essentials like clothing (Personal Communication). It is also common for them to live in cramped, filthy conditions. Children, the elderly, and those with disabilities are among the most vulnerable internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Nigeria (IDMC, 2014:1).

## **CONCLUSION**

Achieving sustainable solutions is a complex process that addresses human rights, humanitarian, development, reconstruction and peace-building challenges, requiring the



coordinated and timely engagement of different actors. In seeking durable solutions, intervening agencies must avoid creating dependence and facilitate return as soon as conditions permit, by providing aid that is adequate but not creating living conditions of a higher standard than those in the IDPs' areas of origin which could become an incentive for not seeking voluntary return or resettlement. In conclusion, addressing the issue of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Nigeria requires a comprehensive and multifaceted approach that encompasses durable solutions, thorough assessments, and regular reviews. The protracted nature of internal displacement in Nigeria calls for urgent action and sustained commitment from all stakeholders involved.

Durable solutions, including voluntary return, local integration, and resettlement, must be pursued in a manner that prioritizes the rights and well-being of IDPs. These solutions should be informed by a deep understanding of the socio-economic, security, and protection considerations relevant to each specific context. By focusing on long-term sustainability and empowering IDPs to rebuild their lives, durable solutions can help break the cycle of displacement and pave the way for lasting stability.

Comprehensive assessments are vital in understanding the complex needs and vulnerabilities of IDPs. By collecting and analyzing accurate data on demographic profiles, living conditions, access to basic services, and psychosocial support, decision-makers can develop evidence-based policies and allocate resources effectively. Collaborative efforts involving government agencies, humanitarian organizations, and research institutions are essential for conducting thorough assessments and generating actionable insights.

Regular reviews serve as a critical mechanism for monitoring progress, identifying gaps, and adapting strategies as needed. They provide an opportunity to evaluate the effectiveness and impact of policies, programs, and interventions aimed at addressing internal displacement. Inclusive review processes that actively involve IDPs and ensure their voices are heard are essential for promoting accountability and ensuring that responses remain relevant, responsive, and respectful of their rights and aspirations (Adeleye, 2023). The diverse progresses that has been achieved in recent years to protect and assist internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Nigeria is encouraging to see even though the majority of internally displaced persons (IDPs) believe that their present living circumstances are worse than they were prior to displacement. Among other things, the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) has been reasonably responsive to the needs of internally displaced persons (IDP) in terms of camp coordination and management, with reasonable safety and security measures, provision of food and nutrition, access to basic health services, including reproductive health and education, as well as water and sanitation services (Personal Communication). Following the relief phase of the displacement, the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) in collaboration with relevant stakeholders organised programmes for the rehabilitation of survivors, the reintegration of displaced persons, the reconstruction of infrastructure, and the remediation of the environment. The nation adopted the Kampala Convention on April 17, 2012, and in July 2012, it revised its draft policy on internally displaced persons (IDP) to include the requirements of the Convention. They are critical components of a comprehensive strategy to

assisting internally displaced persons in their quest for durable solutions, as well as in planning for and avoiding future displacement (UNHCR, 2015:184).

However, it is crucial to acknowledge the challenges that impede progress in addressing the internally displaced persons crisis in Nigeria. Limited resources, security concerns, and the complex underlying causes of displacement present significant obstacles. Overcoming these challenges requires a coordinated and collaborative approach, involving the government, humanitarian actors, civil society, and the international community. By working together, these stakeholders can pool their resources, expertise, and experiences to develop sustainable solutions and ensure the meaningful inclusion of IDPs in decision-making processes.

Ultimately, resolving the plight of internally displaced persons in Nigeria requires unwavering commitment and sustained efforts. By pursuing durable solutions, conducting comprehensive assessments, and engaging in regular reviews, Nigeria can strive towards ending displacement, rebuilding lives, and fostering inclusive and resilient communities. This collective endeavor will not only restore hope and dignity to those affected by internal displacement but also contribute to the overall peace, stability, and sustainable development of the nation.

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