

# CHALLENGES OF UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSION FOR REFUGEE (UNHCR) IN THE ASSISTANCE OF INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS (IDPS) IN NORTHEASTERN NIGERIA, 2009-2023

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## **Abstract**

*The United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) has been involved in protecting the North-East with other humanitarian bodies at domestic and international levels. Despite the concerted efforts of UNHCR, internal displacement persists in the Northeastern Nigeria. This study, therefore, examined the challenges of United Nations High Commission for Refugee (UNHCR) in the assistance of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in northeastern Nigeria, 2009-2023. In doing this, Human Needs theory was adopted for the purpose of this paper. Questionnaire, interview and secondary sources such as books and journals were used. The study revealed that the IDPs have not been adequately assisted because of certain challenges faced by the UNHCR, including lack of reliable data, unclear policies and institutions, corruption by government officials, inadequate funding and security challenge among others. Thus, the paper recommended among others that stiffer penalties, including long term imprisonment, should be meted out to any responder caught diverting relief materials meant for the IDPs by the concerned authorities to serve as deterrence to others. Likewise, all the tiers of governments in the affected states and other stakeholders, including private sectors, international organizations, and civil society organizations should be more committed to alleviating the plight of the IDPs through improved funding.*

**Keywords:** *United Nations, High Commission for Refugee (UNHCR), Internally Displaced Persons (IDPS), Northeastern.*

## **Introduction**

The United Nations High Commission for Refugee (UNHCR) has been involving in Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) situations in the world to provide a succor to them. During the 1990s, the UNHCR has considerably increased its involvements in IDP situations. By 1999, the agency was offering assistance and protection to about 5 million IDPs. These operations have covered IDPs in places like former Yugoslavia, Colombia, Caucasus and Azerbaijan (UNHCR, 2020). Furthermore, the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement (GPID) was established in 2008. It is a normative framework for the protection of the IDPs. Although, the GPID are non-binding or soft law instrument created for the protection and assistance of the IDPs. It is based on these principles that the protection responsibility of the IDPs lay with the state concerned, but when it failed to do so, the responsibility shifts to the international community. This gives room for the international institutions (such as UNHCR) to begin involving in IDPs situations.

The UNHCR's Global Forced Displacement Trends in 2019 reports that, approximately 79.5 million people were forcibly displaced as a result of violent conflict, persecution or human rights violations across the globe (UNHCR, 2020). There were 26.0 million refugees out of the total number of displaced people, while 45.7 million were IDPs, 4.2 million asylum seekers and 3.6 million Venezuelans displaced abroad (UNHCR, 2020). Again, the Global Report on Internal compiled by the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) finds that, in 2017, at least 80,000 people were displaced in their own countries on a daily basis. Accordingly, 30.6 million people were displaced internally in 2017 as a result of conflicts and disasters across 143 nations (IDMC, 2018).

In Africa, intra-state violence, armed conflicts, and ethno-religious conflicts are significant causes of internal displacements with a record of about 15 million Internally Displaced People (IDPs), which makes the continent an epicentre of insurgency and human displacement (Akanle, 2018). Conflict and insecurity remain a symbolic attribution of Africa because of the trend and pattern of violence engulfing the continent. Several African countries have experienced violence during the pre and post-colonial era, as they struggle for national independence and economic strength. The Nigerian case is particularly worrisome given the

persistence of complications, weak state apparatuses and large-scale humanitarian crises and the consequences of these.

The most populous country in Africa with over 200 million people, Nigeria has been severely affected by Boko-Haram insurgency, banditry, ethno-religious conflicts and political violence. The attendant effects of these are millions of displaced persons and loss of lives, livelihoods and properties. These crises persist, generating situations of multi-dimensional need in humanitarian contexts marked by the absence of reliable and valid data (Danlami and Idowu, 2019). Nigeria is one of the African countries entwined in a serious internal displacement dilemma. It is reported among the countries with highest number of IDPs in 2022. The Displacement Tracking Matrix reports that a total of 2,388,703 people are internally displaced in Nigeria at the end of February 2023 (IDMC, 2023; UNHCR, 2023). While there are global guiding principles on internal displacement, Nigeria has not performed well in domesticating and implementing these principles. The effect is that the numbers of displaced persons continue to rise steadily (IOM, 2021).

Since 2009, North-eastern Nigeria, which consists of six states that include Borno, Adamawa, Yobe, Bauchi, Gombe, and Taraba has largely been challenged by the internal displacement crisis. Mba (2017) finds that 13.33% of the IDPs in the area were displaced by communal clashes, 0.99% by natural disasters and 85.68% of the displacement was caused by the Boko Haram insurgency. The above statistics confirm that insurgency has largely been responsible for the mass internal displacement of persons, especially in Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe states, which have remained the epicenter of insurgent activities in North-eastern Nigeria since 2009. The crisis, which is linked to poor governance and religious extremism, is characterized by bombing, kidnapping, and destruction of lives and property. It is on record that the Boko Haram insurgency had killed over 30,000 people between 2009 and 2018, driven over 1.8 million out of their homes, and destroyed property worth #16 billion (International Review of the Red Cross, 2018). It is against this background that this study examines the challenges of United Nations High Commission for Refugee (UNHCR) in the assistance of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPS) in Northeastern Nigeria (2009-2023).

### **Statement of the problem**

Despite the serious academic questions provoked by the plights of the IDPs and obvious need to demystify their socio-economic and political implications, extant studies had paid fleeting attention to the challenges of United Nations High Commission for Refugee (UNHCR) in the assistance of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPS) in Northeastern Nigeria from 2009-2023 which is an important aspect of knowledge. This lacuna poses challenges of policy and analysis to government as there is little or no research informed explanations to guide its policy formulation and implementation on the matter. It is this void that this study strives to fill.

The crisis of existence and challenges of survival confronting internally displaced persons in North-eastern Nigeria have assumed a disturbing phenomenon with protracted implications for the displaced. As reported by the International Review of Red Cross (2018), there are more than 2,000,000 displaced persons across the Northeast along 120,000 Nigerian displaced refugees from the area to the neighboring countries of Cameroon, Chad, and Niger in 2018. The DTM (2020) Round 33 Report put the number of internally displaced persons in the Northeast states of Borno, Yobe, Adamawa, Gombe, Bauchi, and Taraba at 2,118,550 cutting across 436,058 households as of August 2020. Aside from sudden displacement, which is enough physical torture for most displaced persons from their communities in North-eastern Nigeria, the displaced are more vulnerable in the camp to further threats of shortages of essential items, insecurity, psychological depression, and low self-esteem, among others.

The original mandate of the UNHCR is to protect refugees, not the IDPs. However, the vulnerability of the IDPs has necessitated the agency to expand its role to cover IDPs. Consequently, the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) has involved in protecting the north east together with other humanitarian bodies at domestic and international levels. The federal and state governments have also made concerted efforts to address the plights of the IDPs within the available resources through several measures, including the provision of food and non-food items (DTM, 2020). Despite their concerted efforts, internal displacement still persists.

### Research Questions

The study is guided by the following questions:

- i. What are the mechanisms adopted by UNHCR in its assistance to IDPs in the North Eastern Nigeria?
- ii. What are the challenges faced by the UNHCR in its assistance to the IDPs in North Eastern Nigeria.

### Objectives of the Study

The general objective of the study is to examine the challenges of United Nations High Commission for Refugee (UNHCR) in the assistance of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPS) in Northeastern Nigeria (2009-2023). However, the specific objectives are:

- i. To assess the mechanisms adopted by UNHCR in its assistance to IDPs in the North Eastern Nigeria.
- ii. To investigate the challenges faced by the UNHCR in its assistance to the IDPs in North Eastern Nigeria.

### Research Propositions

- i. Developing a confidential dialogue with both civilian and military authorities is the mechanism adopted by UNHCR in its assistance to IDPs in the North Eastern Nigeria.
- ii. Corrupt by government officials, insecurity and inadequate social amenities are the challenges faced by the UNHCR in its assistance to the IDPs in North Eastern Nigeria.

### Conceptual Framework

#### Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)

The Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, which is the most recognized and widely accepted document for IDPs protection, defines internally displaced persons 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 in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized border (Hampton, 2014).

This definitional conception offers above underpins two central components of IDP- the coercive or involuntary movement which occurs within national borders, some of which are instigated by armed conflicts, violence, human right violation and disaster. Clearly, this factor had deprived people of the most essential protection mechanism, especially access to quality health services and sustainable livelihood. The second component of the IDPs is the movement within national borders. Considering that IDPs remain under the control of national authorities, the expectation is that they are expected to have improved conditions much like the un-displaced people, yet the absence of a coordinated health care service has contributed to the growing rate of traumatic stress of IDP resulting in lack of access to medical and health care facilities.

Olukolajo, Ajayi & Ogungbenro (2014) refer IDPs to persons who have been displaced by natural disaster or violent conflicts from their homes and traditional support structure and have not crossed the borders of their countries. They are victims of various kinds of injustices, violent attacks orchestrated by their own government or others against them. Arguably, there are two essential characteristics of internally displaced persons, including coercion (force or involuntary displacement) and internal movement (displacement within national borders).

According to UNHCR (2013), displacement is the forced relocation, movement or evacuation of people or group of individuals within an internationally recognised state border. The concept displacement has no legal status as refugee. The term is just a description of individual's factual circumstance. IDP applies to any individual who is forced to flee his place of residence, in spite of cause, but remains under the jurisdiction of his state. In Akuto's (2017) view, IDPs as people who were displaced by conflict or natural disaster from their habitual residence and have not gone beyond the national borders of a country. They happen to be victims of various kinds of violent confrontations carried out by their own governments, in form of injustices against them.

### **Insurgency**

Scholars and theorists have given different definitions of insurgency. While some of these definitions are closely related, others are not so related though contain common elements and this still makes the subject technically difficult. Perhaps insurgency is best understood by first considering what it is not. Insurgency is not terrorism or conventional war for example, though it shares with them some similarities such as the use of force or guerrilla tactics to achieve an end which is often political. Basically, the difference between insurgency and terrorism lies in the scope and magnitude of violence. While for instance, terrorism rarely brings about political change on its own, insurgency attempts to bring about change through force of arms. Similarly, terrorists often apply a wide range of damages when compared to insurgents. On the other hand, while conventional war involves adversaries more or less symmetric in equipment or training, insurgency involves adversaries that are asymmetric, weak, and almost always a sub-state group (Samson, 2013). Traditionally however, insurgencies seek to overthrow an existing order with one that is commensurate with their political, economic, ideological or religious goals.

Insurgency according to the United State Department of Defence (2007) has been conceived as an organised movement that has the aim of overthrowing a constituted government through subversive means and armed conflicts (Hellesen, 2008:14). This definitional conception offered above suggests that insurgents are not only very deadly because of their attempt to undermine the sovereignty of a state and sharing their resources, they also employ unlawful means which transcend socio-political and religious strategies for advancing their course. As warfare, insurgency is characterised by protracted, asymmetric violence, use of complex terrains (mountains, forest jungle), psychological warfare and political mobilisation to alter the balance of power in favour of insurgents. These tactics being used by insurgents has been responsible for the failure of the federal government of Nigeria to tame the dreaded Boko Haram and Niger Delta insurgents.

For our purpose, insurgency could be defined as a econo-political and ethno-military organization that aims to de-legitimize a recognized political entity by the international community as a result of their control of a given geographic territory by means of guerrilla warfare, terrorism, organized crime and various propaganda machineries for political mobilization. Boko Haram activities fit this definition. This is because before March 2015, they were taking Nigerian territory and establishing caliphates by attacking both military and civilian institutions. They funded their activities by taking people hostage and trading them for ransoms, bank robberies and kidnapping, cyber crimes, human, drug, and wildlife trafficking and herds taking and propagate their ideology, terrorist deeds and crimes using YouTube, the international media and leaflets.

### **Challenges faced by United Nations High Commission for Refugee in its Assistance to Internally Displaced Persons in North East Nigeria**

Oluwole, Eme & Aloho (2017) examined the challenges facing the rehabilitation of internal displaced persons in North East region of Nigeria. In doing this, communication theory was adopted while documentary method like the use of books and journals was used to gathered data; the findings were analyzed through content analysis which indicates that the funds and materials that are donated to internally displaced persons by the Nigerian government, United Nations, international organizations, philanthropist, and individuals were not properly utilized for internally displaced persons but for camp officials, National Emergency Management Board (NEMA). The study found out among others that the frequency of Boko Haram attacks has undermined the rehabilitation of internally displaced persons and the government agency, National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) who is charged with the responsibility of



overseeing the activities of IDPs Camps has also contributed worrisomely to the rehabilitation of displaced persons in the region by not utilizing the donated relieved materials given by Nigerian government, Non-governmental organizations, philanthropist etc for internally displaced persons but for the camp officials interest. Thus, the paper recommended among others that the Nigerian government should explore new strategies and mechanism in rehabilitating the internally displaced persons by ensuring that the funds and materials donated to them are properly monitored and utilized for the purpose of their rehabilitation. The study did not address the challenges faced by the UNHCR in its work with the IDPs in Northeastern Nigeria.

Olanrewaju & Adekunle (2019) examined insurgency and the invisible displaced population in Nigeria. The study addressed the gap of the effects of the invisibility of internally displaced persons living in host communities to the Government as less attention has been given to the discriminatory treatment of IDPs in host communities arising from the neglect of the government towards providing humanitarian aids to IDPs in host communities against the Government presence in formal camps. The study deployed Vulnerability Theory as its theoretical compass and employed interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) as its research instruments. The study found that the destinations of IDPs settlements were very vulnerable in terms of their access to quality education, shelter, food, health care, and potable water as they were often cut off from the government's humanitarian interventions and only visible to Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and individual philanthropists who have limited resources to allocate. The study recommended among others that, there should be a holistic intervention mechanism in managing the displacement crisis in Nigeria irrespective of their resettlement destination. What were not captured in the analysis are the challenges faced by the UNHCR in its work with the IDPs in Northeastern Nigeria.

Onoja, Ogedengbe, Sanni, Abiodun, Ayorinde & Okeme (2020) interrogated the challenges facing the IDPs with a view to evaluating the effects of humanitarian response projects in alleviating these challenges. The study deployed mixed methods approach in data collection and analysis with quantitative dominance. The study found hunger, lack of clothing regular sickness and lack of drugs as the major challenges confronting IDPs. The study equally found that humanitarian services positively impacted the IDPs, yet there is need for government and the humanitarian services providers to put more efforts to alleviate the suffering of the IDPs in Nigeria. In another study, Oghuvbu & Okolie (2020) disclosed that the challenges facing displaced people in Nigeria as a result of Boko Haram, natural and man-made disasters, as well as the Hausa-Fulani Mayhem are peculiar to all the IDPs irrespective of demographic disparities. The study employed qualitative and quantitative research methods drawing data from primary and secondary sources. The study found starvation, inadequate potable water supply; hunger, lack of electricity, accommodation shortages and lack of sustainable occupation foretell serious human security threats for the country. The study recommended relevant policies for government and other related agencies working with the IDPs; while, concluding that government should collaborate with individuals and organizations in providing vocational skills, that will help alleviate their plights. However, no acknowledgement is made to the challenges faced by the UNHCR in its work with the IDPs in Northeastern Nigeria which is a gap in literature.

The empirical literature review shows that studies conducted in Nigeria on internally displacement covered among others issues such: causes and factors which induce internal displacement, internal intervention for IDPs, Psychosocial challenges of IDPs, provision of education for IDPs, inclusive electoral process for IDPs in Nigeria. However, little or no study has been conducted to analyze the challenges of UNHCR in the assistance of IDPs in Northeastern Nigeria. This unexplored impact may have important implications for the welfare of receiving locations given the large magnitude of displacement experienced in some parts of Nigeria.

## **Theoretical Framework: Human Needs Theory (HNT)**

### **History of the Theory**

The Human Needs Theory (HNT) was proposed by Abraham Maslow in his paper "A Theory of Human Motivation" in psychological review in 1943. According to this theory human needs are universal and are not negotiable. It asserts that some needs are more significant for the well being of human survival

(Olanrewaju, Omotoso, Alabi, 2018). In the views of Maslow and Burton, these needs are not just water, food and shelter. They also involve non physical and physical essentials and other needs human beings are passionate to achieve.

### **Perspectives within the Theory**

HNT posit that the reason for conflict is as a result of underlying needs of persons to meet their needs as individual, as a society and at group level (Osagioduwa & Oluwakorede, 2016). Burton (1990 cited in Danielsen, 2005), is of the view that global human needs are repeatedly ignored, resulting to groups using violence to get their rights and satisfy their needs. The study of HNT by Max Neef (1991), Burton (1990), and Maslow (1943) focus on the correlation between human needs and conflict at different levels of society ranging from intra/inter personal conflicts to conflicts within the international setting and inter-group conflict (Danielsen, 2005). The relationship between conflict and human needs rest on the premise that conflict occurs when individuals and groups needs are not met (Olanrewaju, Omotoso & Alabi, 2018). Hence, conflict resolution would be more effective when human needs are met and conflict interest addressed.

Human need theory provides explanation on human behavior and social interaction. These theorists argued that all individuals have needs they strive to satisfy, either by using the system 'acting on the fringes' or acting as a reformist or a revolutionary. The theory posits that the fundamental reason behind the unmanageable conflict is based on the fact people want to meet their needs on societal, group and individual bases.

According to this theory, human beings need certain essentials if they must live and attain well-being in any ramification of life. Such essentials are known as (basic) human needs. They further argued that human needs must serve as a primary element of individual survival. According to Christian Bay, 'Needs refer to any requirement for a person's survival, health, or basic liberties; this basically implies that when these needs are inadequately met, mental or physical health might be impaired'. This way, needs refer to necessities for not only biological survival but also for health and development (physical and mental growth) of persons as human beings.

Traditionally, it is the duty of government in every society to take decisions and make policies to solve social problems that will in turn affect the lives of the people positively. Every human being has some basic needs which according to Maslow and Burton are essential for survival (Marker, 2015). Government has the responsibility to make decisions and solve social problems, the evolution of globalization couple with other circumstances have distance government from the people, leading to frustration and dissatisfaction of human needs. This led to the establishment of institutions able to satisfy the needs of people (Olanrewaju, Omotoso & Alabi, 2018). The creation of institutions like NEMA/SEMA to cater for the needs of displaced persons has not yielded positive results as they still lack what Maslow calls pressing needs like water, food and shelter which necessitates interventions by international institutions like the UNCHR. Also, the relevance of Human needs theory to the work reveal the inability of Nigerian state in providing the basic needs of its citizens such as access to the necessities of basic needs approach that is healthcare, decent sanitation, inadequate facilities for accommodation or shelter.

### **Methodology**

The study adopted descriptive survey research design. The targeted population of the study is 4,952 which includes the United Nations High Commission for Refugee (UNHCR), Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs, National Commission for Refugees, Migrants and Internally Displaced Persons (NCFRMI), Adamawa State Emergency Management Agency, Borno State Emergency Management Agency, Yobe State Emergency Management Agency, Camp Management in Bakkasi IDP camp Maiduguri, Camp Management in Malkohi camp in Yola, Camp Management in Angwanlawal Camp, Yobe and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). The sample size of 354 was drawn based on Krejcie & Morgan (1970) method of determining sample size from a given population.

The sampling techniques for this study are purposive and stratified random techniques. These sampling techniques are chosen because they enable the researcher to purposely choose respondents at their locations. While respondents for interview were selected using purposive sampling technique, the respondents for the administration of questionnaire were determined using stratified random technique. The research drew upon both primary and secondary data. Questionnaire and in-depth interview method were used as the primary instruments of data collection. The data collected through questionnaire was analyzed using simple percentage and presented on tables while information from interview and secondary sources were analyzed using content analysis.

### Data Analysis and Interpretation of Results

Out of three hundred and fifty - four (354) copies of questionnaire administered, three hundred and thirty - six (336) copies were duly completed and retrieved. Eighteen (18) copies of questionnaire were not retrieved and all efforts to retrieve them proved abortive as some literate respondents insisted to fill the questionnaire themselves and were not easy to manage. Interviews were equally held with members of the above mentioned institutions. The interview results were supplemented with information from the extant literature, including reports and official documents.

**Table 1: Mechanisms adopted by UNHCR in its assistance to IDPs in North Eastern Nigeria**

Response	Frequency	%
1. Training on business and financial management	77	23
2. Deepening partnerships with development actors	81	24
3. Teaching children and safeguarding of women against rape, abduction, forced marriage, slavery, torture and murder	99	29
4. Joint programs and partnership with government and other non-governmental organizations	79	24
<b>5. Total</b>	<b>336</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Field Work, May (2024).

Table 1 shows the mechanisms adopted by UNHCR in the assistance of IDPs in the North East. As can be seen in the table above, majority of the respondents who are 99 and representing 29% indicated teaching children and safeguarding of women against rape, abduction, forced marriage, slavery, torture and murder, (24%) indicated deepening partnerships with development actors, 23% indicated training on business and financial management while 24% indicated joint programs and partnership with government and other non-governmental organizations. P1 submitted that:

Addressing both the immediate and the longer term needs of IDPs may require challenging existing practices and mindsets. Humanitarian actors traditionally focused on immediate, emergency needs have been increasingly required to address more protracted displacement and this comes with challenges. For example, humanitarian actors like UNHCR typically receive only short-term funding and presents risks. Indeed, when development action is not well executed by humanitarians, it may result in other adverse impacts, such as reduced funding and lower quality development overall, which arguably further perpetuates protracted displacement. Moreover, supporting IDPs is not traditionally perceived as a development issue and is therefore insufficiently included in development strategy and planning (May, 2024).

Report from USAID (2019) opined that the humanitarian response to women and children gained rapid attention in 2016. As of 2016, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) records 80 local and international organizations that collectively employed an estimated 4,000 aid workers. As at

the end of 2019, these included: 37 Nigerian local and national NGOs (L/NGOs); 34 international NGOs (INGOs), eight U.N. entities (including OCHA and the International Organization for Migration (IOM); and four Nigerian government entities).

In particular, the UNHCR is providing assistance to internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the form of food, essential household items, shelter, water, sanitation and health care, including nutritional as well as mental health and psychosocial programs. The UNHCR has also supported IDPs returning to their places of habitual residence through food, agricultural inputs, cash grants, support in rebuilding houses, and improving access to water, sanitation and hygiene conditions. The UNHCR is engaged in activities aimed at ensuring respect for international humanitarian law (IHL) and addressing the protection concerns of IDPs, by developing a confidential dialogue with both civilian and military authorities, and by carrying out activities aimed at restoring family links between IDPs who have been separated from their loved ones. In line with its obligations under the Kampala Convention, Federal, State and LGA authorities have been responding to the needs of IDPs through various interventions, with support from international, regional and local humanitarian actors, including the UNHCR.

**Table 2: Scope of assistance by UNHCR to IDPs in North East Nigeria**

Options	Frequency	%
1. To all population	129	38
2. Only victims of Boko Haram	82	24
3. Children only	67	20
4. Women only	58	18
<b>5. Total</b>	<b>336</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Field Work, May (2024).

Table 2 shows the scope of assistance of UNHCR to IDPs in Borno, Adamawa and Yobe States. According to the finding, a significant percentage of the respondents 38% said to all population, 24% said to only victims of Boko Haram, 20% indicated that they intervene to assist children only while 18% of them said women only. Therefore, the finding of this study on scope of assistance by UNHCR revealed that significant percentage of the assistance is to all population who are displaced.

P2 explained that from the children's angle, humanitarian organizations do not provide adequate learning opportunities for these kids. A child's early stages are the formative years of the child's life therefore, it is important to teach them the basic skills needed for survival in the society. Most humanitarian organizations have a school for kids in their camps but the contents being taught are repetitive. They are only taught how to speak better English language. A child needs more than just a language skill during his formative years. As stated earlier, these efforts exist but there is a growing need to improve the strategies used by humanitarian organizations to keep women and children safer in IDP camps in Northeast Nigeria (May, 2024).



**Table 3: Needs Assessments of Nigeria Population in North East**

SECTOR	PEOPLE IN NEED (in million)	BREAKDOWN OF PEOPLE TARGETED (in million)					BY SEX AND AGE		REQUIRED FUNDS US\$ (in million)
		TOTAL PEOPLE TARGETED	IDPs	RETURNEES	HOST COMMUNITY	INACCESSIBLE	% FEMALE, MALE	% CHILDREN, ADULT, ELDERLY	
Food Security	2.7	2.7	1.2	0.7	0.7	0.2	55% 45%	56% 37%	263.6
Nutrition	2.8	2.0	0.4	0.3	1.1	0.2	71% 29%	62% 38%	106.3
Health	5.3	5.0	1.4	1.3	1.5	0.8	55% 45%	74% 20%	73.7
WASH	3.6	3.2	1.1	0.9	0.4	0.8	53% 47%	58% 37%	68.8
Shelter and NFI	3.5	1.9	0.8	0.1	0.1	0.8	53% 47%	61% 35%	60.5
Early Recovery	5.6	4.6	1.0	1.6	1.9	-	53% 47%	57% 36%	53.7
Education	2.2	1.5	0.7	0.3	0.1	0.4	54% 46%	78% 2%	48.3
Protection	5.2	4.7	1.8	1.6	0.4	0.8	54% 46%	56% 37%	30.6
GBV	3.0	1.3	0.5	0.4	0.1	0.2	86% 14%	67% 38%	38.2
Child Protection	3.2	1.5	0.5	0.4	0.1	0.6	55% 45%	83% 17%	36.6
Logistics	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	28.0
DMS(CCCM)	1.3	0.3	0.8	0.1	-	0.5	54% 46%	60% 37%	19.5
Coordination	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	16.5
ETS	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3.4
<b>OVERALL</b>	<b>7.1</b>	<b>6.2</b>	<b>1.8</b>	<b>1.6</b>	<b>2.0</b>	<b>0.8</b>	<b>54% 46%</b>	<b>58% 37%</b>	<b>848</b>

Source: UNHCR (2023).

The figure above shows the needs assessment of the Nigerian population in the North East. The figure above shows that women and children are the majority. This data indicates that a large population is in dire need, while millions are still inaccessible. The importance of focusing on women and children cannot be over emphasized because most of them make up 79% of the IDPs population in the IDP camps. Despite being the majority group in the population of the IDP camps, the response to the needs of women and children has been relatively low. Women and children have been vulnerable to sexual violence, unwanted pregnancy, hunger, diseases, and death in most cases. These trials are majorly unique to them because they are seen as the vulnerable group in the population. For example, distribution of food can be challenging for women.

A large proportion of government-funded humanitarian aid is composed of contributions to UNHCR and other UN or regional bodies (e.g. the European Humanitarian Aid Office). Most government donors also provide financial support to their own national refugee supporting agencies, which address needs in the donor country and elsewhere. Within the UN system, UNHCR and UNRWA are the main bodies charged with providing direct assistance to refugees. OCHA (for IDPs) and UNHCR (for refugees) coordinate the work of other UN and NGO bodies, although there may be some overlap. Other UN bodies often in evidence in displacement situations include the World Food Programme (WFP), which provides food relief and the International Organization for Migration (IOM), which organises the movement of people (including refugees and IDPs) in need of international assistance. UNHCR, UNRWA and OCHA all work closely with specialized UN bodies such as UNICEF (on children's issues), UNDP (on development matters) and UNIFEM (for women) (Omoraka, 2021).

Kunle (2020) argued that some women can be bullied off their food if there is not enough supervision in the camp and if there are bullies around. Undoubtedly, these trials can also be experienced by the men in the camp but is less likely to happen to a man. Aisha in an interview recalled how "At night, a male camp official picked up young girls like Aisha who returned from the bush surrounding Bama and took them to tents occupied by soldiers and other security officials. This was usually at a roadblock in Tango. The

next morning, they were given N1500 and returned to the IDP camp. I did not hear about it; it was done to me and at least two others that I know,” she thought she had to emphasise. “There is no way to cater to yourself here without surrendering to the sexual assaults of officials” (Kunle, 2020). Women are also more prone to diseases and infections because of the lack of environmental hygiene as well as being sexual predators for men. The level of destruction undermining physical security and livelihoods instilled deep fears in the affected population, significantly reducing the possibilities of return. Women and children who are the majority in the IDP camps have been exposed to several human rights violations, which include sexual violence, transactional sex, and inadequate distribution of food in camps.

In Nigeria, the IDPs settled in a range of settings with host communities, families or in camp-like locations. Camp-like settings are categorised as planned, transit, dispersed and self-settled camps. Planned camps are officially authorized by the national authorities. Transit camps are created to serve as temporary shelters for displaced persons before they are moved to more stable locations. Dispersed settlements were residential areas under one camp management but scattered across wide distances. Self-settled locations are where IDPs settle of their own accord without official approval. Generally, most organized humanitarian support are provided for IDPs living in camp-like settlements. Hence, IDPs in self-settlements are a concern as they have no official status, which influences the support they receive and consequently their health status (interview with P3: May, 2024).

Today 1.8 million people are internally displaced, and new displacement continues due to insecurity. The crisis has impacted women, men, girls and boys, and people with special needs differently, and their vulnerabilities as well as coping mechanisms vary. Women and girls have been targeted with rape, abduction, to serve as “sex slaves”, and also conscripted into a broad spectrum of roles including serving as spies and human beings forced to carry person-borne improvised explosive devices (PBIED). Men and boys have been mainly targeted for recruitment and are at higher risk of being killed at battle fronts or being arbitrarily detained. While the humanitarian community provided life-saving assistance to over 5.5 million affected people (1.4 million women, 950,000 men, 1.8 million girls and 1.4 million boys) in 2018 and helped stabilise living conditions for millions of affected people, significant humanitarian needs remain as the conflict continues. At present, it is estimated that more than 800,000 people are still in areas that are inaccessible to international humanitarian actors.

**Table 4: Responses on the challenges faced by the UNHCR in its assistance to IDPs in Northeastern Nigeria**

Challenges	Frequency	%
1. Corruption by government officials.	54	16
2. Insecurity.	63	19
3. Lack of reliable data.	43	13
4. Unclear policies and institutions.	54	16
5. Inadequate funding	52	15
6. All of the above	70	21
<b>Total</b>	<b>336</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Field Work, May (2024).

Analysis of data in Table 4 shows that 54 respondents which represent 16% of the total respondents were of the opinion that corruption by government official is the major challenge faced by the UNHCR in its assistance to the IDPs in Northeastern Nigeria; 29 respondents representing 19% were of the view that the challenge is insecurity; 43 respondents which represent 13% of the total respondents were of the opinion that lack of reliable data is yet another challenge faced by the UNHCR in its assistance to the IDPs in Northeastern Nigeria, 15% of the total respondents indicated unclear policies and institutions while 70

respondents representing 21% are of the view that inadequate funding by the government is the challenge faced by the UNHCR in its assistance to the IDPs in Northeastern Nigeria;

The result emanating from the question relating to the challenges faced by the UNHCR in its assistance to IDPs in Northeastern Nigeria revealed that majority of the respondents' beliefs that all the options given are the challenges faced by the UNHCR in its assistance to IDPs in Northeastern Nigeria. The percentage of the options chosen shows close range differences which imply that all options are the challenges faced by the UNHCR in its assistance to IDPs in Northeastern Nigeria.

The actual number of person displaced by recurring internal conflicts need to be determined before any meaning planning and eventual intervention can be effectively undertaken. In Nigeria reliable data in this regard is lacking, and this constitutes one key constraint that undermines effective protection and assistance of IDPs in Nigeria. The capacity to gather relevant data is potentially inefficient due to poor communication and transportation networks. Most of the IDPs are uprooted away from their homes into areas that are virtually not easily accessible. The National Commission for Refugees, Migrants and Internally Displaced Persons and National Emergency Management Agency by virtue of their enabling statutes collate data on IDPs in Nigeria without any agreeable standards in terms of methodology. Data derived from these sources are therefore questionable, inaccurate and misleading (interview with P6: May, 2024).

For example, after many years, the National Refugee Commission publicly released an estimated figure of 1.5 million persons as internally displaced due to internal crises in Nigeria, this figure to say the least is doubtful given that they are not usually disaggregated by sex and age (Shedrack and Nuarrual, 2016). The cumulative effects of the above development leads to the continued distortion of the true pictures and understanding of the severity and dynamics of internal displacement in Nigeria even before national authorities and international communities for the purposes of any feasible and result oriented intervention.

Corruption is another essential challenge hindering effective management of IDPs in Nigeria. It is on record that management agencies and office holders in government who ought to care for the needs of displaced persons on various occasions have been found diverting relief materials and funds meant for displaced persons for their own benefits. A situation that reduces the efficiency in managing displaced persons in Nigeria (Akuto, 2017). Camp officials and leaders of IDPs have been seen as corrupt as they are also involved in selling items meant for IDPs thereby violating principle 24(2) of the United Nations 'Guiding Principles' on IDP

However, funding or budgetary constraints such as reporting and monitoring expenses, donor conditions, among others hinder UNHCR to intervene with other displaced people. For this reason, the response and involvement in IDP situations remain tentative and inadequate. At the sometimes cause selected involvement by the UNHCR. Internally displaced persons get funds through management agencies basically via donations, international aids, and revenue. The supports are most times not sufficient in meeting the needs of displaced persons in Nigeria. Insufficiency or lack of assistance brought about shortage of infrastructure, manpower, commodities, mobility and equipment (interview with P7: May, 2024).

To further bolster the capacity of the federal government to address the mounting humanitarian pressures in the North East, the Senate raised the amount proposed by the Executive in the budget for the IDPs from six billion naira (N6,000,000,000.00) to ten billion naira (N10,000,000,000). In addition to this funding, funds donated by non-governmental organizations and individuals towards alleviating the plight of the troubled people include: the sum of N6.3 billion donated by Dangote and other individuals; \$800 million donated by World Bank; \$248 million donated by UNDP for the rebuilding of the North East out of which \$24 million has been released so far; \$200 million donated by United States; \$750 million donated by Saudi

Arabia and N900 million donated by the donated by Australian government, among others. From the sum of N55.92 billion pledged by donors for the Safe School initiative, the N23 billion has been redeemed (Odufowokan, 2023). However, much of the fund were expended through bogus contracts and did not translate to alleviation of the challenges of IDPs in the North East.

The humanitarian crisis has now been turned into a humanitarian industry where people make a profit. The situation of the North-East internal displacement has been turned to “cash cow” with people profiting from the agony of IDPs. For instance, Zorro (2017) posits that the absence of strong central regulatory or coordinating agencies on internal displacement is occasioned by the following challenges to tackling internal displacement in North-East:

- i. Too many actors with varied and often conflicting roles in the field.
- ii. Lack of coordination and monitoring mechanisms by stakeholders.
- iii. Absence of a road map or approved policy regulatory framework for IDPs.
- iv. Delays in the passage of bills.
- v. Refusal to implement bills and resolutions from the National Assembly on matters relating to internal displacement by the Executive.
- vi. Absence of top government functionaries as advisers or managers of IDPs
- vii. Mismanagement of resources meant for IDPs/Misappropriation of funds to national emergency agencies, and sundry corruption.
- viii. Ineffective legislative oversight
- ix. Lack of synergy between the National Assembly and emergency agencies.
- x. Lack of transparency and accountability from the emergency agencies.

**Table 3: Donations and Funds Received by NGO’S on the Field in North-East Nigeria**

Organisation	USD
Caritas	146.200
Danish Red Cross	906.440
Danish Refugee Council	292.254
ICRC	4.386.000
Save the Children	102.340
UNHCR	835.972
Total	6.669.205

**Source:** UNHCR, 2023.

Lomo (2020:1) stated that members of various institutions, like the UNHCR, are not capable to put into practice current provisions for protecting the people for whom they are responsible. Where fund is not available facilities that are of standard will be unavailable and agencies will be inefficient. When linked to Lomo (2020:13), government in the country lack adequate machinery to address the plights of IDPs in the country and agencies government created have minimal ability to handle internally displaced persons’ challenges. When funds are not sufficient it has to do with the issue of low budgeting for emergency.

The issue of policy is another problem in managing IDPs in country. There is the issue of overlapping, unclear policies and institutions as been problematic to agencies responsible in the management of IDPs as they bring about restrictions and hindrances in the discharge of responsibilities. The agencies responsible for managing IDPs are somewhat ignorant of the particular responsibility allocated to them (Osagioduwa & Oluwakorede, 2016). According to Ezeanokwasa, Kalu and Okaphor, (2018) insufficient coordination among actors managing displaced persons, in terms of institutions that are overlapping, government have



established various IDPs management agencies with related structures and mandates. An authentic instance is the National Commission for Refugees (NCFR) (Tasiu, Mohammad, and Laila, 2018).

More so, those who bring food from other parts of Nigeria to most North-eastern States for sales have tremendously reduced in number due to insecurity in the area, which could lead to worsening cases of food insecurity and low food intake related diseases such as malnutrition in the camps, which afflict inmates due to escalating cases of poor food consumption by the IDPs. Security concerns will also continue to contribute to hunger and food insecurity in North-eastern Nigeria. Within the geo-political zone, for instance, cultivation of major staple grains that are naturally taller than human beings (sorghum, maize, and millet) was restrained during the 2014 to 2019 farm seasons due to security intelligence report, which indicates that insurgents could hide in grain farms. Apart from irregular supplies and shortages in the supply of food to the IDP camps, there are many cases of food pilfering and diversion by many stakeholders involved in the distribution of the food items. For instance, some officials of the Borno State Government were caught in the act of diverting IDPs' food to the markets. A Borno state high court later jailed two men for stealing and subsequently selling off 145 bags of rice meant for IDPs. The diversion of food and other relief items meant for the IDPs by the person charged with the responsibility of their distributions largely unabated, food insecurity among IDP inmates will likely worsen and increase hunger in camps (interview with P5: May, 2024).

The IDPs in the Northeast also have inter and intra camp school Lessons in the absence of regular school attendance, which is largely coordinated by IDP members with higher educational attainment. Thus, it is very common to see secondary school students teaching those in primary schools while educated parents in the camp, especially mothers teach their children and those of their neighbors. There is regular inter and intra camp football competition among the youth to uplift their mood and promote inter and intra camp harmony. Some of the IDPs are trained as soap makers and cap, bag, and basket designers; they sell their products in the neighborhood market for survival. The youth hire barrow to carry goods for people on the market day while others fetch water for people to get money. In virtually all the camps in Maiduguri, every last Saturday of the month is declared as sanitation day reserved for the clean-up of the environment by the IDPs.

The coping strategies among the IDPs in the Northeast are very diverse. Their coping and survival strategies for reducing hunger include food rationing and food skipping. Food rationing entails the family's extension of breakfast consumption of both the raw and cooked food more than once with a small portion for each member of the family while many families sometimes eat once in a day by completely skipping breakfast, lunch, or dinner. Also, adults skip food in many instances to preserve sufficient rations for the children. Some IDPs take to begging for food or for money to buy food items. IDPs do sell off some of their raw foods to buy the required condiments to prepare soup while root flakes, especially the cassava flake Garri drink raw rather than been cooked. Due to acute food shortage in the camp, many inmates scavenge for food from eateries and wealthy homes with its attendant danger and concern for the health of the inmates over the possibility of consuming contaminated food. Some IDPs do hire motorcycles from their neighborhood resident owners to carry passengers, which enables them to get money for their basic needs while there is the practice of cultivating a small garden within the camp backyard to grow vegetables and other food condiments for family use. Some inmates, especially children, and the youth engage in outright stealing food from fellow inmates to survive while many women engage in prostitution as an opportunity to be fed directly or to get money to buy food for the family. Some of the children do offer their services as sale boys and girls in nearby markets and business areas with a token to take care of the family.

Since security has largely relapsed in the camp, there is a joint inter neighborhoods watch to wade off criminals from outside but serious intra camp offenses are reported to the camp administrators by the security outfit. Owing to the high cost of buying drugs, many IDPs do not go to the hospitals but rely essentially on local medications from traditional herb sellers, which sometimes result in health complications, even though the herbs are very effective in many instances (interview with P8: May, 2024).

Despite the glaring difficulties faced by the IDPs in Borno, Adamawa and Yobe (BAY) States, Northeast Nigeria, diversion of the little available relief materials by collection of certain elements among officials saddled with the responsibility of providing relief to the people remains a fundamental challenge to the activities of the UNHCR in the region. Those entrusted with responsibilities of providing, co-ordinating, organizing and distributing relief materials in the IDP camps in BAY States unfortunately have unpatriotically engage in diversion of relief material, thus increasing the suffering of the IDP, and reducing the impact in the activities of the IHO's (Interview with P4 - May, 2024).

According to Mohammed & Yalwa (2018) some NGOs come under the guide of providing humanitarian services to the people of the State to make some profit from the available resources in the land. Thus, because of the mistrust in the activities of some NGOs, the government, military officials and the citizens tend to be careful in dealing with the NGO's. The mistrust among the people and the government officials was further deteriorated by the discovery of some fake NGO's claiming to be on humanitarian services, with accreditation, thus contribution to the already existing mistrust, inherent in the role of NGO's in Borno State.

### **Discussion of Findings**

- i. The study observes that partnership with the state government and other non-governmental organizations to restore delivery of basic education, health, food security through surveillance, water, sanitation and hygiene are the mechanisms adopted by UNHCR in its assistance to IDPs in the North Eastern Nigeria.
- ii. The study reveals that the IDPs have not been adequately assisted because of certain challenges faced by the UNHCR, including lack of reliable data, unclear policies and institutions, corruption by government official, inadequate funding and security challenge among others.

### **Conclusion**

The study established that the critical factors that were responsible for weak responses of UNHCR to the plights of the IDPs in North-eastern Nigeria revolve around the weak legal foundation and difficult operational terrains. Within the confines of legal ambit, the IDPs live within the borders of their own country while the responsibility for their protection and assistance rests on their national government, unlike the refugees whose protection is guaranteed in international law. However, due to the lack of precise and codified domestic laws to protect the IDPs in Nigeria, their protection has been incoherent, fragmented, and on an ad-hoc basis. These non-protective legal gaps have worsened the intractable position IDPs have found themselves as citizens as the capacity of the UNHCR to effectively manage internally displaced persons is mainly limited to providing short term solutions on the humanitarian ground rather than legal.

IDPs can become refugees, and refugees returning to their countries can in turn become internally displaced. However, because they are displaced within national borders, IDPs do not benefit from the legal status of refugees and its associated protections, and they fall outside of the mandate of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Therefore, they should benefit from all the protections afforded to other citizens and inhabitants of their country. While states retain primary responsibility for protecting their populations, the international community has a responsibility to assist and support them.

## Recommendations

The following recommendations are made to enhance the optimal response of UNHCR to the plights of the IDPs in North-Eastern Nigeria.

- i. The UNHCR and other humanitarian and development actors should strive for closer coordination and cooperation when addressing the needs of IDPs and finding sustainable solutions, particularly in situations of protracted displacement. For development policies and programs to be tailored to the situation they aim to address, including its gender dimensions, they need to be built on solid data, recognition of the population's needs and an understanding of how those needs can best be addressed.
- ii. Stiffer penalties, including long term imprisonment, should be meted out to any responder caught diverting relief materials meant for the IDPs by the concerned authorities to serve as deterrence to others. Likewise, all the tiers of governments in the affected states and other stakeholders, including private sectors, international organizations, and civil society organizations should be more committed to alleviating the plight of the IDPs through improved funding.

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