

Policy Brief

Internally Displaced Persons in Nigeria: brief notes from field visits to Benue state

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Summary

This brief provides insight into the lived experiences of internally displaced Persons (IDP) in Benue state, Nigeria, reflecting on some of the challenges encountered. The information gathered in this brief is from the visit to Abagana IDP camp and the International Market IDP camp across two periods in 2017 and 2019. The author observes that the conditions in the camp is inadequate in meeting the needs of IDPs. There is a need for enhanced response to the IDP situation in the state.

1 Introduction

Benue State is located in the north-central geographical zone of Nigeria, comprising of major ethnic groups such as Tiv, Igede, and Idoma with its capital in Makurdi. The state is endowed with natural resources and a fertile land for growing crops such thus, positioning the state as Nigeria's food basket. However, in recent years, it has been affected by situations of internal displacement. At least 9 out of the 23 local governments

in the state are affected by crisis leaving over 50,000 displaced people (Christian Aid Organisation 2015). The causes of the displacement, are particularly herder –farmer clashes and banditry (Higazi, A. et al 2018). This Brief reflects on the challenges that IDPs encounter. The findings in this brief were collected across two separate periods. Firstly, between July and September 2017 and subsequently, between February and April 2019.

2 Findings from the Field in Benue State IDP camps

The author's observations show that IDPs seek social assistance to rebuild their lives in their quest to meet their basic needs. However, the conditions of the camps are inadequate in meeting these needs. The response received from IDPs reveals that a large number of them are unaware of their rights and those who do, are unsatisfied with the bureaucratic bottleneck associated with its enforcement. In a focused group discussion carried out with some respondents, one of the families noted that they encounter health-related issues and do not receive required support from the camp administration for treatment of their health issues. They further lamented that one of their children who is asthmatic had multiple crisis due to lack of proper medical attention. A female interviewee complained that the camps run out of medications to handle simple health issues such as malaria and typhoid, hence when sick they seek treatment elsewhere. Another interviewee lamented about the poor conditions of the camp as well as the quality of food being consumed. Speaking on the conditions of the camp, another female interviewee stated:

It is so unfortunate, whenever the rain falls, we experience ... severe cold and plenty mosquitos. My family and I stay in this settlement. We are 10 in number. In some instances, my children eat once in a day or go on hunger strike. The painful aspect is that our children do not go to school anymore.

There is also little social support for victims with special needs. These categories of persons include the physically challenged and elderly. In an unstructured group discussion with women including girls between the ages 15 – 47, the women expressed their fears and concerns over sexual harassment, rape, and other forms of abuses. In discussions with children, access to education was a significant issue. They expressed fear, particularly the girls who admitted that if nothing is done, they may consider the option of early marriage. This is because some of them perceived themselves as liabilities to their parents and are desirous of lifting away the burden of responsibility. Further investigations on experiences of IDPs indicate that some of the children are providing support for their households through street hawking and alms begging.

With respect to camp management, some IDP leaders and community members made reference to corruption and lack of trust in some camp management officials. IDP leaders emphatically allude to the fact that B-SEMA a government agency is responsible for coordinating humanitarian aid and shelter support. They noted that the officials divert humanitarian reliefs in collaboration with some humanitarian workers. They added that no concrete plan has been made by the government to ensure their return to their homes and livelihoods. In an interview with the head of B-SEMA, he refuted all allegations against the agency. An evident observation was the role of civil society organisations in the provision of support. The author observed the presence of the Benue NGOS Network (BENGONET) and INGOs like the Red Cross Society in the camps, working to meet the needs of the IDPs. However, there is still a need for sustained interventions.

3 Conclusion and Recommendations

Benue state is confronted with challenges of internal displacement which have affected mostly local communities who are predominantly agricultural farmers. Thus, the IDPs in Benue state seek social intervention from stakeholders for a better life. IDPs recognizes the effort of camp officials, and B-SEMA in camp management but are concerned with the state of increasing level of corruption in the management of humanitarian aid, and they desirous of a transparent process. On the other hand, the allegation of poor management of the camps was rebutted by the management B-SEMA. This brief recommends the following for the Benue state government of Nigeria:

- Engage an independent agency to conduct periodic monitoring and evaluation to assess the impacts of coordinated relief materials and monetary donations to IDPs.
- Implement policies to address IDPs needs and take specific efforts towards ensuring that IDPs with special needs are adequately protected.
- Create a synergy by designating responsibilities to stakeholders to adequately respond to the humanitarian crisis. This strategy will enable the humanitarian sector to curb duplicity in intervention, and will facilitate their reintegration into the society.

References

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