

Food Crisis as a Developmental Challenge of the IDPs in Nigeria

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Abstract

The insurgency debacle has increased the awareness to the plight of the internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Nigeria, a phenomenon hitherto limited to either academic circles or practitioners in migration field. A number of challenges trail the IDPs but ironically the IDPs face same challenge that led to their pursuits, even in the camp. The challenge of food security or crisis has been a major one for most IDPs in developing countries because food is a developmental challenge for most third world nations even where there is no displacement. Living in a camp condition exacerbates the narrative as both the camp and the authorities in charge of managing develop a web which aggravates the conditions of the IDPs. This study highlights and explains various dimensions of food crisis hitting the IDPs in their camps. The challenges are explained around developmental concepts rather the state of being displaced. The study is based on the survey design using the exploratory method to tease out new angular explanations in food supply crisis to the IDPs. The solution to the food crisis of the IDPs lies in solving the developmental challenges facing the IDPs as they search for food.

Keywords: IDPs, displacement, northeast Nigeria, food crisis

Introduction

The incidence of internally displaced persons herein refers to as IDPs is becoming a developmental discourse in global politics. What is developmental about it is not the occurrence since IDPs can be found anywhere whether advanced or developing societies. However, Suzan Ilcan, a Professor in Waterloo, Canada, and Marcia Oliver (2018) argue that the factors leading to the displacement of internally displaced persons

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(IDPs) can be classified into developmental categories. According to their research, political conflicts tend to produce more IDPs in less developed countries, while natural disasters lead to a higher number of IDPs in developed countries than political conflicts do. They conclude that rancorous political environment is an index of underdevelopment. They add that even when IDPs creation is taken as a given, regardless of the society where they occur, management of IDPs will ultimately reflect certain developmental challenge if the host community is not developed. The management of IDP camps is often regulated by the level of advancement of the host states. Fundamental to this management, is how food supply gets to the IDPs and the quality of their nutrition. Generally, less developed states have some challenges about taking a vast number of their population out of poverty, thus, adding catering for IDPs, is therefore, a strategic burden on the already fragile economic system.

Food crisis is a central theme in the administration of refugees and IDPs in Africa; it is a phenomenon which often defeats the objective of people who seek safety in government protected camps. In many of the camps, availability of food has created such a sleazy challenge that it eventually affects the entire fabric and health of the protection system offered in protected camps across African states. Part of what makes an individual vulnerable is lack of access to food and most often; this is what ignites the quest for protection. In 1996, the world woke up to a grotesque photo of a mother in Ethiopia who had a few meters to get to a refugee camp with her son. She was so weak but managed to direct the son to the camp, she died at the gate. The son was given some fluid to stabilize him and later he was fed, and he survived (Refwold 1998). This illustrates that when displaced people continue to be hungry while in a protected camp, they become vulnerable once again.

The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) has provided that 55.0 million people have been displaced by the end of 2020 globally, and as at 31 December 2020, 2.7 million are internally displaced in Nigeria as a result of conflict and violence especially in the Northeast region of the Country (<https://www.internal-displacement.org/>). Internally

displaced persons (IDPs) have been seen as development that is peculiar to developing countries (Conference on Internal Displacement in Nigeria 3-6 November 2021, Abuja) for two basic reasons, one, many of the factors propelling them are germinated under unbridled political system like the ones in the third world and two, part of development index is the ability of nations to always prepare for the unknown, therefore swift responses of developed countries to incidence of natural disasters is an indicator of development – something that is obviously missing in third world countries. Although some African theorists are wont to explain first world swift response to natural disaster from point of view of geographical expectations, stating clearly that many countries in the west expect many of the disasters and therefore are pre-ready for their occurrence (Conference on Internal Displacement in Nigeria 3-6 November 2021, Abuja). This view, notwithstanding, does not explain why third world nations are ill-prepared to handle sudden ructions which make recourse to internal displaced arrangement inevitable.

The incidence of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Nigeria is quite a recent phenomenon associated with the rise of insurgents in the North-East part of Nigeria, hitherto, Nigeria was only aware of refugees who crossed from festering nations to seek protection in Nigeria especially during the Liberian civil war in the 1990s. The Boko Haram insurgency is the most potent singular factor which gave rise to IDPs in Borno states and other states in the region have witnessed the incursions of Boko Haram, thereby extending the prevalence of IDP camps to them. According to a UN statistic of May 2014, report showed that between 2013 and 2014, six other states had been affected by the crisis (Adamawa, Borno, Bauchi, Gombe, Taraba and Yobe) (UNHCR, 2014). Nigeria's IDP population currently stands at 2.7 million; however, the country is still not among top three countries with the largest internally displaced population due to conflict and violence. As at December 2020, DR Congo, Syria and Ethiopia are ranked in this category. The top three countries with the largest number of IDPs due to disasters in 2020 were China, the Philippines and Bangladesh (<https://www.internal-displacement.org/>).

When food Scarcity leads to Malnutrition in Camp

Food supply to the IDP camps is statutorily the responsibility of the Federal Government of Nigeria. This is coordinated by the Federal intervention programmes such as the Presidential Initiative on North East (PINE) and National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) - two organisations that spearhead the relief chains. Other non-governmental organisations like the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), Muslim Brothers Initiatives etc join the government to provide humanitarian aid to the IDPs in Nigeria. However, in spite of various levels of interventions to ameliorate the plight of the IDPs, a larger percentage are still either malnourished or completely not feed in IDP camps in North East Nigeria. The recent United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs' (OCHA) reports show that 4.4 million IDPs are facing food crisis while 4.24 million are malnourished (OCHA, Nigeria: 2023)

The causes of food crisis in IDP camps are multifaceted especially when virtually all the causes have some human dynamics in their creation. There have been reports about how IDP camp officials engage in sharp practices to divert food supplies meant for the IDPs to personal use. More damning is the reports that suggest that some officials horde food supply only to sell same to the IDPs later. This complaint was the basis of President Buhari's order to the nation's head of Police, in September 2022, to arrest anyone caught in such acts. The international Center for Investigative Reporting (ICIR), in June 2022 reported that the IDPs claim that IDP camp officials connived with store keepers to steal foods meant for them and later sell to them or take to the open market to sell. The high incidence of malnutrition in IDP camps is linked, by the ICIR, to the fact that camp officials rather cook food with substandard ingredients, than give the IDPs raw foods to cook by them. This, the ICIR, explained is preferred by camp officials because it ensures surplus for them.

One IDP in Dalori camp in Bornu was reported to have told the ICIR:
the amount of food items that are donated to the camp

should be enough “but they won’t bring out enough food for us to cook and eat. The women in the kitchen won’t give us the raw food items to cook by ourselves. Instead, they would rather cook in the kitchen and then dish out portions that won’t be enough for us to feed... At night they usually connive with the store officials who would sneak out the food at night and the women would go to sell them for N800 a measure in the market” (ICIR, 2022)

The issue of diversion of food meant for the IDPs, is as old as the existence of IDP camps in Nigeria where greed and avarice are assumed to be legitimate official conduct. Investigations show that most officials at every level in Nigeria who have anything to do with food supply to IDPs make money illegally from the supply and they do so to the degree of crime permissible by their desk responsibilities. In 2016, the nation woke up to the disappearance of 360 trucks of grains meant for the IDPs in Borno. After its investigation, the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) reported that out of the 600 trucks of grains that left Minna in Niger state, only 240 made it to Borno (All Africa, 2016).

In Nigeria, the major cause of food crisis in IDP camps is official corruption in varied degrees (Adeoti, 2009). More often, what the IDPs term as stealing of foods by officials, is a snippet of the actual stealing which happens at the level that they do not have access to the bedrails of the nefarious act. For instance, in May 2017, a Federal High Court in Maiduguri jailed two local government officials in Borno to one year in prison and N1m fine each for misappropriating 180 bags of rice meant for Internally Displaced Persons. The gross implication of this is that the incidence of food crisis, *a la* malnutrition, in IDPs camps is created primarily by those saddled with the responsibility of managing the camps (REUTERS, 2017).

Insurgents and Food Crisis in the IDP Camps

Food supply plays an important role in warfare as it is potent in the determination of war outcomes. Maintaining steady supply of food is key to the eventual victories of war victors while a warring party that does not have access to food supply is likely to die off of starvation than from battles. As a matter of fact, law of armed conflict, criminalises the use of starvation as tool of war and the International Criminal Court (ICC) has maintained a steady competence on cases of genocide and the methodical use of starvation to achieve mass killings. The centrality of food in conflict situation is easily discernable when one discovers that both parties in the offensive and defensive desire it. On the 4th of July 2022, the World Food Program (WFP) sent 40 trucks load of food to the IDPs in Mobbar, Borno State but members of the Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP) attacked the convoy and intercepted four of them, This was a few days after the ISWAP attacked and freed insurgents in Kuje Prison – a move edging in the point that the intercepted trucks meant for the IDPs were taken to the fleeing insurgents (SAHARA REPORTERS, 2022). Such act sparks the observation that insurgents not only displaced victims from their homes but they also disrupt their food supply network. And the report of the interception of food is nothing compared to when insurgent actually attack IDPs in their camps with the sole aim of carting away foods that had been supplied to them for sustenance.

This event at the IDP camp in Bama in Borno state confirms the growing fear that the fight against insurgents is far from being won, if they retain such audacious venture to attack IDP camp that is assumed to be under the protection of the military. Insurgents waylaying or attacking food stores of IDPs cascades to the general food crisis hitting the IDPs in a fundamental way. The many cases of malnutrition in the IDP camps are ignited by shortage of food. The insurgents, as we have seen above, also need food to sustain their own camps too. The pressure for food supply in insurgent camps could be further heightened when they have large number of kidnapped victims. Food is a necessity for them to continue to

hold on to their victims while they negotiate with authorities desirous of their release.

The Fleeing Farmers

Insurgency in the entire Northeast of Nigeria has contributed to the rising cases of food crisis and insufficiency in the region. Both Boko Haram and the ISWAP have forced farmers to flee their farms leaving, according to 2021 OCHA report, at least 2,3 million hungry. Save the Children, an international NGO, whose country acting director is Shannon Ward, estimated that about 700,000 under the age five are among the children affected by hunger in the Northeast of Nigeria. In general, the food crisis in the region has a snowballing effect on food shortage at the IDP camps in various areas of the region. OCHA again reported that the Northeast of Nigeria is witnessing a “growing threat of catastrophic food insecurity”. And the country Coordinator Edward Kallon had maintained that the growing food crisis in a region will surely incapacitate humanitarian aid.

Related to the above is the fact that IDPs who are farmers, when faced with hardship, may forage farther from the areas of military protection coverage, in the hope to farm for the need of their families and other IDPs. In another study, this has been related to why IDPs proclaim cessation clause on themselves. This is an instance where certain measures are needed in individual choices of the IDPs, there have been reports of IDPs who are farmers who insisted on going back to their farm lands, especially during harvest or during planting season. Most often, many fall into the hands of insurgents who most likely know that the harvesting time would lure the IDPs to the farms. Some were killed summarily and some were kidnapped. The right of IDPs to make informed and voluntary decisions as to whether they want to return, or settle and integrate at the place where they found refuge or elsewhere, is one of the cornerstones of the Guiding Principles (E/CN4/1998/53/Add2).

In sum, the IDPs leave camps in search of food thus jeopardizing the protection framework of the camp. In this instance, insurgents benefit in multiple folds when they capture IDPs who are supposed to be under the

protective custody of a Camp Commandant. Apart from the fact that such incidence is an indication of a porous camp, it also destroys the security architecture of a state and forms a clog in the comprehensive fight against insurgent. But food crisis is a major culprit in this analysis.

Related to this is the influx of more IDPs into a camp, generally, this exacerbates and stretches conflicts arising from food supply to the camp. In AgiriMafa Local Government of Borno, the three IDPs camps have come under series of influxes of IDPs from one IDP camp to the other or from new displacements. Camps in Marte, Agiri and Shuwari have experienced multiple attacks from Boko Haram which leave the camps with lopsided populations – where the attacks are more; IDPs move to less attacked camps, thereby swelling the population there and vice versa. The uneven distribution of IDPs to camps already filled to capacity lay the foundation for food crisis in such camp. An over populated IDP camp is also prone to outbreak of diseases such as it happened in Muna Garage camp in Borno hosting about 32,000 internally displaced people (IDPs). The outbreak started in Maiduguri, and later spread to communities like Dikwa, Mafa and Monguno, before finding effective accommodation in the camp where conditions were exacerbated by over population of the IDP camp. More than 4,800 suspected cases and 61 deaths were recorded in that area.

Prolonged Internal Displacements and Food Crisis of IDPs

General observations show that displacements are better managed when it is focused on addressing short term displacements challenges especially relating to IDP camps (Egbuna, (2001). The tendency for a prolonged displacement to breed varied degrees of abuses is rife especially in developing countries where officers in charge of managing camp facilities have mastered the loopholes in the administration of IDP camps. The incidence of IDPs in Northeast of Nigeria has been so prolonged with some IDPs living in a camp for close to 12 years on the average. Continued attacks by insurgents make IDPs feel safe in protected camps than in their homes. Even when towns and communities appeared to have been captured

from insurgents by military authorities, palpable fears still greet the order to return home. This is partly because the IDPs doubt the durability of military assurance of safety of the towns especially when news would still reach them of insurgents dislodging other towns or kidnapping of large number of school children.

Authorities in charge of the management of IDP camps also have some structural imbalances between their assurances of safety, propelling them to revoke a hasty cessation of protection on IDPs, on one hand, and the realities of security outside the camps, on the other hand. The controversy between claims, assurances and realities make IDPs refuse to return to their homes. But this has implication for policy and management of the IDP camps. When provisions are made for food and other amenities to the camps, they are made for those who should be in the camp, not those who are in the camp. The difference between these is that the former is captured in planning while the latter is not planned for. The reality of this vibrates in scarcity that will hit food supply and general camp facilities.

Insecurity and Aid Agencies

Humanitarian assistance to IDP camps is heavily supported by international donors and relief agencies (Davies, 2012). As a matter of fact, a recent study suggests that international donor agencies contribute more to humanitarian assistance to IDPs than the governments that set them up in developing countries (UN, Deliver Humanitarian Aid). International donor agencies consist of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the World Food Programme (WFP) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), all have primary roles in the delivery of relief assistance. The World Health Organization (WHO) coordinates the response to humanitarian health emergencies. There are others that are not United Nations based relief agencies such as the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), the Red Crescent and others. But these international relief agencies have often come under severe attacks from insurgents when trying to render humanitarian

services. In Nigeria, humanitarian agencies have been attacked so often that in March 2021 alone there were multiple attacks of UN facilities in Damasak and Dikwa areas of Borno where operational vehicles, including ambulances were taken away, properties were looted and the UN hub was set ablaze. (GOV.UK, 2021)

All these attacks have implication on the supply of relief materials from these agencies. Many of them do not make it to their designated dispatch locations, others have their vehicles already vandalized and goods looted, when insurgents raid. The relief materials such as foods and drinks, meant for IDPs, end up in untargeted hands while the IDPs groan in hunger when reliefs would not get to them.

International relief agencies have often complained that two major factors hampered their operations in Nigeria, one is funding and the other is attacks on their operations by insurgents. Invariably the inhibitions on the relief operations of the international aid agencies is a very strong factor causing food crisis in IDP camps in Nigeria. Understanding the first-tier level of humanitarian intervention of these agencies will help to locate one of the fundamentals of food conflict in IDP study.

Environmental factor has its impact on food crisis bedeviling the IDPs in Nigeria. The effect of climate change on the food crisis of IDPs in Nigeria used to be a mere academic contention until the devastation that rocked the IDP camps in Yobe sometime in September 2022. Internally-displaced persons in Gujba and Damaturu, the state capital became victims of flooding which occurred as a result of a heavy downpour leading to overflow of water channels. This disaster left many of IDPs homeless and due to the destructions to their food stuffs, they became victims of starvation. There have been other instances where the environment contributes its quota to the despondent state of IDPs; there was a report in the same Damaturu area in 2021 when flood submerged a bridge leading to IDP camp. This prevented vehicular movement to the camp leaving the camp management to resort to human portage to transport relief materials to the IDP camp. Other human factor crept into the event, when those who

offered to render assistance helped themselves with some sacks of grains which they took for personal use.

Conclusion

The internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Nigeria face myriad of challenges, partly because IDPs have no international convention guiding its operations, unlike refugees and migrants who have well established legal frameworks and customary international law interpretations. IDPs are under the municipal framework of their states. For a state like Nigeria where effectiveness of law is to the extent of who is applying them, degrees of abuse are likely. Food crisis in IDP camps in Nigeria should not be treated as part of general challenges confronting IDPs everywhere. In Nigeria, this has its peculiarity as in most third world nations. In the entire frame of the argument in this study, there is a bent toward an underlying developmental challenge which acts as the foundation of food crisis in IDP camps in Nigeria.

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