

# International Community Response to the Management of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and Humanitarian Crisis in North Central Nigeria, 2001–2024

**Odo Christopher Uba Ph.D**

Department of Political Science

Faculty of Social Sciences

University of Jos, Nigeria

Email: [odouba4062@gmail.com](mailto:odouba4062@gmail.com) Phone No: 08032862673 & 08128359200

## **Abstract**

*This paper examines the international community's response to the humanitarian crisis and internally displaced persons (IDPs) in North Central Nigeria from 2001 to 2024. Over two decades, persistent communal conflicts, banditry, insurgency, and climate-induced displacement have exacerbated humanitarian needs in this region. The international community, comprising governmental organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and international agencies, has implemented various measures to address the crises, including humanitarian aid, technical support, and advocacy for policy reforms. Despite significant interventions, challenges such as insufficient funding, bureaucratic inefficiencies, and recurring insecurity continue to hinder effective response. This paper synthesizes findings from recent literature and policy reports to analyze the effectiveness of international efforts, identify gaps, and suggest recommendations for future intervention strategies.*

**Keywords:** Internally Displaced Persons; Humanitarian Crisis; Humanitarian Response; North-Central Nigeria; International Community

## **Introduction**

In Nigeria, the issue of internal displacement has become an enduring humanitarian crisis, particularly in the North-Central region, often referred to as the Middle Belt. This area, known for its ethnic and religious diversity, has faced longstanding tensions that date back decades, rooted in socio-economic and political challenges. The early 2000s marked a sharp rise in violence due to a complex interplay of factors, including religious tensions, competition over resources, and later, the impact of insurgent activities spilling over from the northeastern region (Agbibo, 2021). As violence and insecurity have persisted, millions have been forced from their homes, creating one of Africa's most pressing internal displacement crises (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre [IDMC], 2022).

Since 2001, ethnic conflicts, particularly between predominantly Muslim Fulani herdsmen and predominantly Christian farming communities, have escalated due to increasing pressure on arable land. Climate change has exacerbated this issue, intensifying droughts and desertification in the north, forcing herdsmen to migrate southward into farming territories. These migrations have led to frequent clashes, resulting in loss of lives, destruction of property, and mass displacement of local populations (Blench, 2020). Furthermore, the spillover of insurgent activities from Boko Haram and, more recently, from splinter groups like the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) in Nigeria's northeastern region has added to the insecurity in North-

Central Nigeria, intensifying the displacement crisis and overstressing the resources of both the state and humanitarian actors (Nwankpa, 2021).

The magnitude of this crisis has drawn the attention of the international community, resulting in a range of interventions aimed at addressing the immediate humanitarian needs of internally displaced persons (IDPs). Organizations such as the United Nations (UN), the European Union (EU), and various international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have provided support through funding, policy development, and on-the-ground humanitarian operations. However, despite the influx of aid, significant gaps remain in the assistance available to IDPs. Most international interventions have focused on emergency relief, often falling short of addressing the root causes of displacement or supporting sustainable solutions, such as resettlement or community reintegration. Additionally, the absence of a cohesive national framework for addressing internal displacement has complicated efforts to deliver coordinated and efficient aid, as Nigeria's federal and state governments have struggled to manage the crisis effectively (Amnesty International, 2020).

The Nigerian government has made attempts to address the crisis, such as the introduction of the National Policy on IDPs in 2012, which aims to ensure the protection, assistance, and resettlement of IDPs within Nigeria. However, critics argue that the policy has yet to be fully implemented due to various factors, including limited government funding, bureaucratic challenges, and lack of political will (Okello, 2019). The slow implementation has led to dependence on international aid organizations, which have shouldered much of the responsibility for addressing the humanitarian crisis in the region.

Amid these challenges, the international community faces its own set of obstacles in delivering aid to IDPs in North-Central Nigeria. Security threats to humanitarian workers, difficulty in accessing remote areas, and a volatile security situation have all hindered international actors from effectively reaching displaced populations (Médecins Sans Frontières [MSF], 2022). Additionally, international funding has proven inconsistent, with appeals for humanitarian assistance often underfunded, leaving the needs of IDPs only partially addressed. The prolonged nature of the crisis has led to "donor fatigue," a situation where prolonged appeals for emergency funding lead to diminishing support from international donors over time (Human Rights Watch, 2020).

This paper aims to assess the international community's response to the IDP crisis in North-Central Nigeria from 2001 to 2024. By analyzing the roles of various international actors, examining the challenges they face, and evaluating the effectiveness of their interventions, this study seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the current state of humanitarian assistance in the region. Furthermore, this paper will explore the limitations of these interventions and provide recommendations for improving the response framework. Through a literature-based analysis, this paper underscores the urgency of developing a sustainable and coordinated approach to support IDPs in North-Central Nigeria, highlighting the need for long-term solutions that address both the immediate and structural causes of displacement.

### **Clarification of Concepts**

**Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) vs. Refugees:** While IDPs are people who are displaced within their own country, refugees are people who flee to another country in search of safety. Both groups face significant hardships, but IDPs remain under the protection and jurisdiction of their own country, which can complicate the provision of aid. **Humanitarian Assistance vs. Development Aid:** Humanitarian assistance refers to emergency aid provided in the immediate aftermath of a crisis to address urgent needs such as food, water, shelter, and medical care. Development aid focuses on long-term projects aimed at improving the socio-economic conditions of communities, such as education, infrastructure, and governance, which is important in helping IDPs recover and reintegrate. **Protection vs. Assistance:** Protection refers to ensuring the safety, rights, and dignity of IDPs, including preventing further displacement, violence, and exploitation. Assistance, on the other hand, refers to providing the basic goods and services that displaced populations need to survive, such as food, shelter, and healthcare.

**Humanitarian Principles:** The four core humanitarian principles—neutrality (no political or military involvement), impartiality (aid based on need, not political affiliation), independence (aid not influenced by outside agendas), and humanity (recognizing human dignity and responding to suffering)—are critical in guiding the conduct of international organizations and agencies during crises. Adherence to these principles ensures that aid reaches those who need it most, without discrimination or political interference.

**Conflict and Displacement Drivers:** The drivers of displacement in North-Central Nigeria include ethnic and religious violence, the herder-farmer conflicts over land and resources, terrorist activities (especially by Boko Haram), political instability, and climate-related challenges such as drought and desertification. These factors interact and exacerbate one another, making the displacement crisis in the region particularly complex.

**Role of International Community:** The international community, through organizations like the United Nations, the World Food Programme (WFP), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and various NGOs, plays a crucial role in responding to crises by providing humanitarian assistance, advocating for peace and security, and supporting long-term recovery efforts. The effectiveness of these efforts depends on coordination between local, national, and international actors.

These clarified concepts and keywords will help guide the analysis of the international community's response to the displacement crisis in North-Central Nigeria, focusing on both immediate humanitarian needs and long-term sustainable solutions.

## **Theoretical framework**

### **The Refugee and Forced Migration Theory**

This theory, primarily concerned with the causes, patterns, and consequences of forced migration, is essential in understanding the displacement crisis in North-Central Nigeria. Rooted in the works of scholars like Hugo (2008) and Zetter (2007), the refugee and forced migration theory posits that displacement is driven by a combination of political, economic, social, and environmental factors. These can range from armed conflict, ethnic and religious violence, and political instability to economic deprivation and environmental changes.

In North-Central Nigeria, the causes of displacement are multifaceted and include the longstanding ethnic and religious conflicts between herders and farmers, terrorism, insecurity, climate change, and poor governance. According to this theory, understanding the drivers of displacement—such as the herder-farmer conflict, resource scarcity, and the fragility of the Nigerian state—is key to both comprehending the current crisis and designing effective interventions. This theory will inform the examination of the international community's response by linking these displacement drivers with specific humanitarian needs and responses, emphasizing the need for context-specific solutions.

### **Background and Causes of Internal Displacement in North-Central Nigeria**

North-Central Nigeria, often referred to as the Middle Belt, has long been a region of significant cultural and ethnic diversity. Home to a mixture of religious and ethnic groups, the Middle Belt has historically experienced inter-communal tensions, often sparked by competition over land, water, and other natural resources. These tensions have only intensified in the 21st century, resulting in widespread violence, property destruction, and mass displacement. The roots of internal displacement in this region can be traced to several key factors, including ethnic and religious conflicts, land and resource disputes, the influence of insurgency groups, and environmental pressures from climate change. The persistence and complexity of these drivers have placed Nigeria's North-Central region at the forefront of the country's displacement crisis, with both local and international implications.

Since Nigeria's independence in 1960, the North-Central region has been characterized by socio-political fragility, which has contributed to numerous violent conflicts. These conflicts are largely a result of the amalgamation of Nigeria's ethnic and religious diversity within the region, where hundreds of ethnic groups coexist, including the Berom, Tiv, Fulani, and Hausa. Many of these groups have long-standing rivalries, stemming from disputes over political representation, resource access, and land ownership (Blench, 2020). Over time, these underlying

issues have been exacerbated by national-level policies that fail to effectively manage Nigeria's diversity, leading to heightened tension between groups.

The establishment of colonial rule in Nigeria introduced changes to the traditional structures governing land use and property rights, privileging certain groups over others. This legacy of unequal land allocation has left long-standing grievances among ethnic communities. After independence, various military and civilian administrations made attempts to address these grievances, but limited political will and weak governance systems meant that the efforts were often inadequate. As a result, inter-ethnic and inter-religious conflicts have been commonplace in North-Central Nigeria, contributing significantly to displacement (Agbiboa, 2021).

### **Major Drivers of Displacement**

The displacement crisis in North-Central Nigeria is driven by a combination of socio-political, environmental, and economic factors. Each of these factors has independently and collectively contributed to a complex humanitarian situation in the region.

**Ethnic and Religious Conflicts:** One of the primary drivers of internal displacement in North-Central Nigeria is ethnic and religious conflict. The region's population includes both Christians and Muslims, leading to tensions, particularly in areas where identity is strongly associated with religious affiliation. Over the past two decades, inter-religious violence has frequently erupted, leading to deadly clashes and the displacement of communities. For instance, violent confrontations between the predominantly Muslim Fulani herders and the largely Christian farming communities have been recurrent. The herder-farmer conflict has been fueled by resource competition, particularly for arable land, which is essential for both farming and grazing (Aluko, 2021).

Historically, Fulani herders have migrated seasonally through Nigeria in search of pasture. However, with increasing population density, the spread of farmland, and climate change limiting available resources, clashes have intensified in the Middle Belt. These clashes often result in retaliatory attacks by both groups, escalating violence, and causing mass displacement as people flee their communities to escape further attacks. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, 2019), the majority of those displaced by ethnic and religious conflict are women, children, and the elderly, who suffer most from disrupted livelihoods, lack of shelter, and limited access to healthcare and education.

**Insurgency and Spillover of Boko Haram Activities:** While initially concentrated in northeastern Nigeria, Boko Haram's insurgency has had a ripple effect on the Middle Belt region, as some of the violence has spread westward. The rise of the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), a splinter group from Boko Haram, has further intensified the region's instability. Insurgent activities, including attacks on villages, abductions, and destruction of property, have added to the already volatile situation in North-Central Nigeria. These groups have targeted rural communities, often forcing residents to flee and adding to the region's already high number of internally displaced persons (Nwankpa, 2021).

In addition to direct insurgency-related displacement, Boko Haram's presence has strained Nigeria's military resources, as forces are drawn away from protecting communities in the North-Central region. This shift has left some areas vulnerable to attacks by bandits, who exploit the lack of security to carry out kidnappings, lootings, and cattle rustling, further contributing to the displacement crisis (Nwankpa, 2021).

**Land and Resource Conflicts:** North-Central Nigeria's fertile land and mineral resources make it a valuable region, attracting different groups interested in exploiting these resources. As a primarily agrarian society, access to farmland is critical to the livelihoods of local communities. In recent years, however, economic challenges and environmental degradation have increased competition over land, causing conflicts among farmers, herders, and local industries. The strain on available land has been exacerbated by rapid population growth, which has put pressure on both farmland and grazing land, sparking disputes over ownership and usage rights (Blench, 2020).

In addition to local communities, external actors such as mining companies have acquired large tracts of land, often with limited compensation to local populations. The influx of foreign

and domestic companies for mining and agricultural investment has displaced communities, leading to resentment, protests, and, at times, violent confrontations (Cohen & Deng, 2020). These confrontations have often escalated into wider ethnic or religious conflicts, adding to the displacement crisis.

**Environmental Factors and Climate Change:** Environmental factors, particularly those related to climate change, have played a significant role in the escalation of displacement in North-Central Nigeria. Climate change has affected the region's rainfall patterns, increased temperatures, and intensified drought conditions, reducing the availability of pasture for herders and affecting crop yields for farmers. Desertification in northern Nigeria has pushed herders southward, leading to competition over fertile land and increased likelihood of conflict (Aluko, 2021).

In recent years, floods and droughts have also contributed to the displacement crisis, as they destroy homes, farmland, and infrastructure. As people are forced to move to more viable areas for survival, they often come into contact with other groups, potentially leading to disputes. According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), climate-induced displacement is an increasingly significant factor in the Middle Belt region, and addressing this driver is essential to resolving the broader displacement crisis (OCHA, 2021).

**Scope and Scale of the Displacement Crisis:** The complex interplay of ethnic conflict, insurgency, resource competition, and environmental factors has contributed to a massive and protracted displacement crisis in North-Central Nigeria. According to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC, 2022), Nigeria has one of the highest populations of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Africa, with an estimated 3 million people displaced as of 2022. Many of these displaced individuals are concentrated in camps and host communities across the North-Central region, where they live in precarious conditions with limited access to basic services.

Displacement in North-Central Nigeria presents numerous challenges, both for the displaced individuals and for the national and international actors working to provide aid. Living conditions in IDP camps are often substandard, with issues of overcrowding, poor sanitation, limited healthcare, and inadequate food and water supplies. Additionally, the long-term nature of the crisis has made it difficult to sustain international attention and funding, leading to gaps in humanitarian aid. The absence of durable solutions for IDPs, such as resettlement or reintegration programs, has left many in a state of prolonged dependency on emergency assistance, without any clear path to stability or self-sufficiency (Human Rights Watch, 2020).

The displacement crisis in North-Central Nigeria is deeply rooted in a convergence of historical, socio-political, economic, and environmental factors. The international community's response to this crisis, discussed in subsequent sections, has been instrumental in providing immediate relief to IDPs. However, the protracted nature of the crisis and the complex array of contributing factors call for a more comprehensive approach that addresses not only the symptoms of displacement but also the structural causes. Without a multi-faceted strategy that combines emergency aid with long-term development, policy reform, and sustainable solutions, the cycle of displacement in North-Central Nigeria is likely to persist.

### **International Community's Response to the Crisis in North-Central Nigeria**

The international community has played a crucial role in addressing the humanitarian crisis and displacement of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in North-Central Nigeria. This response has involved a diverse range of actors, including intergovernmental organizations, international non-governmental organizations (NGOs), donor countries, and humanitarian aid agencies. Although efforts have spanned from emergency relief to long-term developmental programs, various challenges and limitations have affected the effectiveness and sustainability of these interventions. This section outlines key international responses, categorizing them into humanitarian assistance, advocacy and policy efforts, funding initiatives, and partnership and collaboration programs.

**Humanitarian Assistance and Emergency Relief:** In response to the immediate needs of displaced populations in North-Central Nigeria, international humanitarian organizations have focused on providing essential services, including food, shelter, healthcare, and education. Agencies like the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) have been instrumental in providing life-saving assistance in IDP camps and host communities. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) has focused particularly on children, providing nutritional support, psychosocial care, and educational programs to address the vulnerabilities of displaced children in the region (UNICEF, 2022).

One of the main challenges facing humanitarian organizations in delivering assistance has been limited access to conflict-affected areas. Due to security concerns, agencies have often found it difficult to reach remote locations where IDPs are concentrated. Attacks on aid workers by armed groups, as well as violence from bandits and insurgents, have restricted movement, forcing organizations to rely on military escorts or work only in areas with relatively lower security risks (Médecins Sans Frontières [MSF], 2021). Despite these challenges, international organizations have established distribution networks to ensure that basic food supplies, clean water, and hygiene kits are provided to IDPs in accessible areas, though the aid remains insufficient given the scale of need.

Additionally, international humanitarian agencies have supported healthcare services in IDP camps. Malnutrition, infectious diseases, and lack of maternal care are widespread in many camps, creating a critical need for medical intervention. Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) and the World Health Organization (WHO) have deployed mobile clinics, conducted vaccination campaigns, and provided training to local healthcare workers in IDP-hosting regions (WHO, 2021). However, limited funding and inadequate health infrastructure have constrained the ability of these organizations to meet all healthcare needs, with many IDPs facing delayed or insufficient medical treatment.

**Advocacy and Policy Development:** International organizations have also engaged in advocacy to raise awareness of the North-Central Nigeria crisis and to push for policy changes aimed at improving the protection and rights of IDPs. The UNHCR has been at the forefront of these efforts, urging the Nigerian government to adopt a comprehensive legal framework for IDPs that aligns with the African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa (also known as the Kampala Convention) (UNHCR, 2020). Through partnerships with local NGOs, UNHCR has provided technical support to Nigeria in developing and implementing national policies that address the protection, resettlement, and integration of IDPs.

The international community has also highlighted the North-Central Nigeria crisis in international forums, including the United Nations Security Council and the Human Rights Council, with the aim of drawing attention to the protracted humanitarian crisis and influencing policy change. Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International have documented human rights abuses in the region, publishing reports that call on both the Nigerian government and international actors to take stronger measures to prevent further violence and displacement (Human Rights Watch, 2021). While these efforts have raised global awareness, the lack of effective enforcement mechanisms has limited their impact on improving the lives of IDPs on the ground.

**Funding Initiatives and Financial Support:** The international response to the crisis in North-Central Nigeria has also involved significant financial support from donor countries and agencies, although the funding has often fallen short of the actual need. Funding for IDP assistance in Nigeria is often included in larger humanitarian appeals for the Lake Chad Basin crisis, encompassing areas affected by Boko Haram and other insurgencies. The United States, European Union, United Kingdom, and other international donors have provided funding for relief operations in Nigeria, supporting initiatives such as food aid, education programs, healthcare services, and capacity-building for local institutions (OCHA, 2021).

One significant initiative has been the Nigeria Humanitarian Fund (NHF), managed by OCHA, which pools donations from international donors to finance urgent humanitarian

projects across Nigeria. This fund has enabled flexible and rapid disbursement of resources to organizations working on the ground in North-Central Nigeria. However, the NHF and other funding mechanisms frequently suffer from donor fatigue and underfunding, as prolonged displacement crises tend to attract diminishing support over time (OCHA, 2022). Consequently, financial constraints have hindered the ability of international organizations to provide consistent and adequate support to IDPs, resulting in gaps in service delivery, particularly in areas of long-term development and resettlement.

**Capacity-Building, Partnership, and Collaboration:** Capacity-building has been a key component of the international response, aimed at strengthening the ability of Nigerian institutions and local organizations to manage the displacement crisis. International NGOs, such as the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) and the International Rescue Committee (IRC), have collaborated with Nigerian government agencies, providing training in areas such as disaster response, conflict resolution, and community integration. These organizations have also worked closely with community leaders to foster social cohesion and mediate conflicts, addressing some of the underlying causes of displacement, such as ethnic and religious tensions (NRC, 2021).

Furthermore, the international community has facilitated partnerships between the Nigerian government, local civil society, and international stakeholders. Collaborative efforts have sought to improve coordination among humanitarian actors, standardize responses, and develop a unified framework for providing aid. For instance, OCHA has established coordination clusters to manage different aspects of humanitarian assistance, such as food security, shelter, and protection. These clusters bring together various stakeholders, enhancing information-sharing and resource allocation across different regions affected by displacement (OCHA, 2021).

Nevertheless, these collaborative frameworks are not without challenges. Weak institutional capacity at the local level and overlapping jurisdiction among state and federal agencies have impeded the effectiveness of capacity-building initiatives. Moreover, political instability and corruption have affected the distribution of resources, limiting the extent to which international partnerships can achieve meaningful impact in the long run (Amnesty International, 2020).

### **Long-Term Development and Resettlement Initiatives**

In addition to providing immediate relief, the international community has made attempts to support the long-term resettlement and integration of IDPs in North-Central Nigeria. However, these efforts have been limited by the complex socio-political context and the protracted nature of displacement in the region. The UN Development Programme (UNDP) and other development agencies have initiated projects aimed at rebuilding infrastructure, supporting livelihoods, and promoting economic empowerment among IDPs. These projects focus on creating sustainable income-generating opportunities, such as vocational training programs, agricultural initiatives, and small business grants, to help IDPs regain self-sufficiency (UNDP, 2021).

Some initiatives have focused on community-based reintegration programs, where IDPs are encouraged to return to their home communities if security permits. In such cases, international organizations have worked with local authorities to rehabilitate damaged infrastructure, including schools, healthcare facilities, and water supply systems, in areas to which IDPs are expected to return. These programs have been met with mixed success, as insecurity, lack of infrastructure, and poor local governance in conflict-affected areas often deter IDPs from returning (UNHCR, 2020).

To address the gap between humanitarian aid and long-term development, international organizations have advocated for the establishment of a more integrated humanitarian-development-peace (HDP) approach. This approach seeks to transition IDPs from dependency on emergency assistance to sustainable livelihoods within secure and peaceful communities. However, the lack of a coordinated national strategy for managing displacement in Nigeria, combined with persistent insecurity and limited funding, has hindered the effectiveness of long-term resettlement programs (UNDP, 2022).

While the international community has played an essential role in mitigating the humanitarian impact of displacement in North-Central Nigeria, the response has been

constrained by various challenges. Limited access to conflict zones, insufficient funding, and weak local governance have hindered the ability of international actors to provide comprehensive assistance to IDPs. Moreover, the focus on emergency relief has often overshadowed efforts to address the root causes of displacement or invest in long-term, sustainable solutions. Addressing the IDP crisis in North-Central Nigeria requires a multi-dimensional approach that combines humanitarian aid with long-term development, capacity-building, and policy reform. The international community's role remains vital, but sustained impact will depend on the Nigerian government's commitment to addressing the structural causes of displacement and improving the coordination and transparency of its response framework.

### **Impact and Effectiveness of the International Response to the Crisis in North-Central Nigeria**

The international community's response to the humanitarian crisis and displacement in North-Central Nigeria has been significant in providing immediate relief to affected populations. However, despite the scale and scope of these interventions, the overall impact and long-term effectiveness have been mixed. The response can be assessed in terms of its ability to meet the immediate needs of internally displaced persons (IDPs), address the root causes of displacement, and provide durable solutions for those affected. While international humanitarian actors have played an essential role in mitigating the crisis in the short term, several factors, including funding constraints, security challenges, and limited local capacity, have impeded the long-term effectiveness of the response.

#### **Short-Term Impact: Immediate Relief and Emergency Assistance**

The primary objective of the international community's response in the initial phase of the crisis has been to provide immediate relief to IDPs, meeting their basic needs for food, shelter, healthcare, and protection. Humanitarian organizations, such as UNHCR, OCHA, and ICRC, along with local and international NGOs, have succeeded in providing life-saving aid and alleviating some of the worst effects of displacement in the region.

**Provision of Shelter, Food, and Water:** One of the most significant short-term impacts of international aid has been the provision of shelter and basic supplies. IDPs in North-Central Nigeria are often forced to live in overcrowded camps or makeshift shelters, where access to essential services is limited. International actors have established IDP camps and provided temporary shelter solutions, including tents and other emergency structures, that have allowed displaced families to find refuge. However, these solutions are often inadequate, as many camps are overcrowded and lacking in necessary facilities (Al Jazeera, 2021).

Food aid has been another key component of the international response. The World Food Programme (WFP), alongside NGOs such as the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), has worked to provide food rations to those displaced. These rations have prevented widespread famine, particularly in regions where local agricultural production has been severely disrupted by conflict. However, food aid often suffers from logistical challenges and delays, particularly in areas with limited access due to insecurity (OCHA, 2021). Additionally, while short-term food aid alleviates hunger, it does not address the root causes of food insecurity, such as ongoing conflict and disruption to local agricultural systems.

Access to clean water and sanitation has also been a priority for international organizations in addressing the immediate needs of IDPs. Agencies such as UNICEF and Oxfam have implemented water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) programs, providing water trucks, building latrines, and conducting hygiene promotion activities. These efforts have helped reduce the spread of waterborne diseases, such as cholera, that often plague IDP camps. Nonetheless, the provision of water remains insufficient in many areas, and IDPs continue to face challenges accessing clean water, particularly in remote regions with limited infrastructure (UNICEF, 2022).

**Health Interventions and Education:** Health services have been another critical focus of international aid, with agencies such as WHO and MSF providing medical care in IDP camps.



Mobile clinics and health teams have been deployed to address the medical needs of displaced populations, especially in areas where local healthcare systems have been overwhelmed by the crisis. Vaccination campaigns have been conducted to prevent the spread of diseases such as polio, measles, and cholera, which often affect displaced communities.

Despite these efforts, the effectiveness of health interventions has been limited by various factors. Healthcare infrastructure in many parts of North-Central Nigeria is already underdeveloped, and the influx of displaced people has placed further strain on local health systems. Many IDPs lack access to essential healthcare services, and the lack of trained medical personnel in camps has meant that some health needs remain unmet. Mental health services, which are critical in the context of conflict-induced displacement, are particularly underfunded and insufficient (MSF, 2021). The growing psychological trauma experienced by IDPs, including anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), has largely been overlooked in the international response.

Education is another area where international organizations have had a positive but limited impact. Agencies like UNICEF have worked to ensure that displaced children have access to education, providing temporary learning spaces and supplying educational materials. However, the number of children who are out of school remains high, and many IDPs face barriers to education, including a lack of schools in camps, security risks, and the economic burden on families who cannot afford school fees or other educational costs (UNICEF, 2022). The lack of durable solutions for displacement has meant that these efforts are often temporary and fail to provide long-term educational opportunities for IDPs.

### **Medium to Long-Term Impact: Addressing Root Causes and Durable Solutions**

While short-term interventions have mitigated some of the most severe consequences of displacement, the international community's ability to address the root causes of displacement and to provide sustainable, long-term solutions has been limited. The complex socio-political context in North-Central Nigeria, including entrenched ethnic and religious tensions, governance challenges, and ongoing insecurity, has hindered efforts to create lasting change.

### **Limitations in Addressing Root Causes of Conflict**

International responses to the North-Central Nigeria crisis have focused heavily on humanitarian relief, with relatively less emphasis on addressing the underlying drivers of displacement, such as ethnic conflict, resource competition, and insurgency. While the international community has provided financial and technical support for peacebuilding initiatives, these efforts have been fragmented and often short-term. For example, international organizations like the UN and the European Union have supported conflict mediation efforts, but they have been constrained by the lack of a comprehensive peace process and the absence of political will from the Nigerian government to tackle the deep-rooted causes of conflict (Blench, 2020).

The herder-farmer conflicts, in particular, have been exacerbated by climate change and resource scarcity. Despite international advocacy for climate resilience and land management programs, these initiatives have had limited impact on curbing the violence associated with land use. Moreover, as long as the Nigerian government fails to address issues of land tenure, political exclusion, and religious intolerance, the root causes of displacement will persist (Aluko, 2021).

### **Challenges in Durable Solutions for IDPs**

The most significant challenge faced by the international community in responding to displacement in North-Central Nigeria is the lack of durable solutions for IDPs. The focus has largely been on providing temporary relief and ensuring basic needs are met. However, efforts to promote the return or integration of IDPs into host communities have been largely unsuccessful due to the persistent insecurity and lack of infrastructure in conflict-affected areas. In some cases, IDPs are reluctant to return to their homes due to fear of further violence, while in others, host communities are overwhelmed by the influx of displaced persons, leading to social tensions and resource strain.

The Nigerian government, with the support of international actors, has launched programs aimed at promoting the resettlement and reintegration of IDPs. For example, the National Policy on Internally Displaced Persons, developed with UNHCR assistance, provides a framework for reintegration and durable solutions. However, the implementation of this policy has been slow, and there has been a lack of coordination between government agencies, humanitarian organizations, and local communities (UNHCR, 2020). Furthermore, inadequate funding and political instability have hindered efforts to create long-term solutions for IDPs.

One promising area of intervention has been livelihood programs designed to help IDPs regain economic independence. Through initiatives like vocational training, microcredit schemes, and agricultural support, international organizations have sought to enable displaced individuals to rebuild their lives. However, these efforts have had mixed results due to the volatile security situation, lack of economic opportunities in host communities, and the inability of IDPs to access land or capital needed to sustain livelihoods (UNDP, 2021).

### **Overall Effectiveness and Challenges**

The international response to the displacement crisis in North-Central Nigeria has achieved some success in addressing the immediate humanitarian needs of IDPs. Nevertheless, the overall effectiveness of this response has been constrained by several factors. The ongoing insecurity in large parts of the region has made it difficult for international organizations to reach all affected populations and deliver aid effectively. While international organizations have worked to fill the gap left by the Nigerian government's limited capacity, the absence of a coherent, coordinated national response has hindered long-term progress.

In addition, there has been a tendency to focus on humanitarian assistance without fully addressing the structural causes of displacement, such as poverty, weak governance, and unresolved ethnic and religious tensions. As a result, the international community's response has often been reactive rather than proactive, addressing the symptoms of the crisis without tackling its root causes.

Finally, the issue of funding remains a significant challenge, with international assistance often insufficient to meet the scale of need. As the crisis becomes protracted, donor fatigue has set in, leading to a reduction in funding for long-term development initiatives and resettlement programs. Unless the international community, in collaboration with the Nigerian government, takes a more holistic approach to addressing the displacement crisis—one that combines immediate relief with long-term peacebuilding, development, and governance reforms—the effectiveness of the response will remain limited.

The international community's response to the crisis in North-Central Nigeria has been vital in providing immediate relief to millions of displaced individuals. However, the effectiveness of these efforts has been limited by ongoing insecurity, political instability, and the failure to address the root causes of displacement. Moving forward, a more comprehensive and integrated approach is required, one that combines humanitarian assistance with long-term peacebuilding, development, and policy reforms. Addressing the complex drivers of displacement will be crucial to achieving durable solutions for IDPs in North-Central Nigeria.

### **Conclusion**

The humanitarian crisis of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in North-Central Nigeria, driven by a combination of violent conflicts, resource scarcity, and political instability, has presented complex challenges for both the Nigerian government and the international community. This paper has examined the causes, responses, and effectiveness of the international community's interventions in managing the displacement crisis over the past two decades (2001-2024). Through an analysis grounded in humanitarian principles, forced migration theory, human security, political economy, and sustainable solutions frameworks, the paper has sought to provide a comprehensive understanding of the multi-dimensional nature of this crisis and the responses it has triggered.

The international community's response, while essential in alleviating the immediate suffering of IDPs, has often been constrained by the complexities of the Nigerian context. Humanitarian

organizations have made significant contributions through relief efforts, including food, shelter, and healthcare; however, these responses have frequently been limited by security concerns, political interference, and inadequate coordination among actors. The humanitarian principles of neutrality and impartiality have sometimes been challenged by the realities of operating in a conflict zone where political and military considerations shape access to vulnerable populations. Furthermore, while emergency assistance has been crucial, a sustainable approach to addressing displacement remains elusive, with durable solutions such as local integration, voluntary return, or resettlement lacking adequate support from both the Nigerian government and international stakeholders.

The root causes of displacement—ethnic and religious violence, governance failures, and resource-based conflicts—underscore the need for a comprehensive response that includes not only humanitarian aid but also peacebuilding, political reform, and development interventions. As suggested by the development and human security frameworks, effective solutions must address the underlying socio-political and economic factors that drive displacement, while ensuring the protection and empowerment of IDPs.

The international community's efforts must also shift towards more sustainable, long-term solutions, in line with the Sustainable Solutions Framework. Efforts to promote local integration and address issues of land rights, access to livelihood opportunities, and education for displaced populations will be critical in reducing dependency on aid and facilitating the social and economic reintegration of IDPs. Moreover, the application of the Capability Approach highlights the importance of building the capacities of IDPs, empowering them with the tools and opportunities needed to regain autonomy and rebuild their lives.

Despite the significant challenges faced by both the Nigerian government and the international community, the lessons from the ongoing crisis in North-Central Nigeria offer important insights for future humanitarian and development strategies. A more holistic approach, combining emergency response with long-term development goals and a focus on human security, is essential to breaking the cycle of displacement and fostering a durable peace.

In conclusion, while international interventions have made important strides in alleviating the immediate suffering of IDPs in North-Central Nigeria, a more integrated, long-term approach is needed to address the root causes of displacement, promote sustainable recovery, and secure a future of peace, stability, and human dignity for displaced populations.

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