



## Research Article

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**The Experiences of Internally Displaced Women and Girls in Nigeria and the Implementation of the WPS Agenda**

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**Abstract:** The insurgent group's constant violent attacks in Nigeria have heightened the terrific experiences of girls and women. However, their experiences in Internally Displaced People's (IDP) camps and beyond the camps are more terrible. This article took a feminist perspective to illustrate how girls and women suffer the most in IDP camps. This perspective is essential because it gives a gender perspective on the experiences of women and girls who have been displaced by conflict and how diverse organizations have implemented the WPS agenda. Women's Refugee Commissions (WRC), Women's Peace and Humanitarian Fund (WPHF) at the international level, and Nigerian Stability and Reconciliation Programme (NSRP) at the national level are among the organizations relying on WPS and depicted in this article as taking active steps in providing relief needs and humanitarian assistance to displaced girls and women globally and particularly in Nigeria. The study reveals that girls and women who suffer from conflict-related displacement are more likely unable to finding and sustaining meaningful livelihood. Thus, the need for self-reliance and resilience. I contend that the WPS agenda, particularly in remote rural regions, requires holistic and thorough execution.

**Keywords:** Internally displaced persons, displaced women and girls, conflict-related displacement, WPS agenda, relief, and recovery pillar

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**INTRODUCTION**

Women, children, people with disabilities, ethnic and religious minorities, the elderly, LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer) people, and people living with HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) people are among the major groups of people in Nigeria's IDP (Internally Displaced Persons) camps who face social exclusion, marginalization, and more challenging situations. The experiences of women and girls in Nigerian IDP camps were studied in-depth in this study. As Birchall (2019) points out, displaced women and girls are particularly vulnerable in Nigeria, suffering harsh circumstances, abuse, and social isolation. I contend that the violence perpetrated against displaced women in Nigeria is not confined to sexual abuse; they also face societal prejudice, hindering their ability to make a living. The North-East has the most significant number of IDPs in the country. In 2019, about 7.1 million displaced people in Borno, Adamawa, and Yola (BAY) required humanitarian assistance (OCHA, 2019).

In comparison, OCHA estimates roughly 3 million SGBV survivors in Borno, Adamawa, and Yola (BAY). Borno state, which is also a devastated area of conflict, is the hub of IDP camps in Nigeria, with 65 per cent of the population in need of humanitarian assistance in Maiduguri camps in Borno state. While 25% and 10% of the people in need of humanitarian assistance are located in Adamawa and Yola respectively. The study focuses on displaced girls and

women living in the BAY area under this backdrop. As a result, the study is confined to Nigerian displaced women and girls because they are the group that face the most hardships and abuses in IDP camps, particularly in Borno state. In Nigeria's Borno state, female IDPs account for more than 53% of all IDPs (OCHA, 2019).

The study's goal is to look at the activities of displaced girls and women in Nigerian IDP camps through Women Peace and Security (WPS). Prevention, protection, participation, and relief and recovery are the four pillars of the WPS. The necessity for and relevance of the relief and recovery pillar were investigated in this study since most IDPs are in grave need of assistance and empowerment. Many writers find it challenging to come up with a comprehensive and practical description of internal displacement. The term "internally displaced persons" is fraught with difficulties and ambiguities. For Example, the ambiguous elements that define when a particular group of people is displaced, such as the imprecise indication of forced and voluntary displacement and the ambiguous time when displacement is said to have ceased. Because certain populations are displaced due to natural disasters, development, and infrastructure initiatives, Aloba & Obaji (2016) argue that determining whether someone qualifies as an IDP becomes difficult. As a result, no universally recognised definition of IDP exists. For them, the definition of IDP should include when a displacement is considered to stop. In Nigeria, for example, some IDPs frequently return to IDP camps

after having left, owing to their inability to obtain meaningful employment. So, how can this circumstance be adequately taken into account to arrive at a comprehensive definition of internally displaced persons? According to Aloba & Obaji (2016), internally displaced persons are a group of people who are forced to abandon their homes due to armed conflict, internal strife, human rights violations, natural or man-made disasters, and/or unanticipated circumstances. In this context, internally displaced girls and women are considered individuals who were forced to abandon their homes unexpectedly due to armed conflict and systemic human rights violations by Boko Haram militants.

## **A BRIEF HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT IN NIGERIA**

Internal displacement is not a recent occurrence in Nigerian history. I briefly discussed the historical backdrop of internal displacement during the colonial and post-colonial periods in this section. The British colonialism of Nigeria brought the southern and northern halves of the country together. Since the country's unification in 1914, it has rarely been free of ethnic and religious strife. Many individuals were relocated as a result of these disasters. Conflict persisted after the colonial period. Many people were internally displaced during the Nigerian civil war, which lasted from 1967 to 1970. Following the civil war, a series of riots, religious and ethnic violence occurred. At the time, there were no records of the exact number of IDPs. Countless IDPs were displaced throughout the nation between 1999 and 2015. (Akpoghome, 2015; Mohammed, 2017) The advent of the Boko Haram insurgency in Borno state in 2009 spurred an increase in the number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in northeastern Nigeria (Aghedo & Osumah, 2012). Approximately 2.2 million people have been displaced in Nigeria as a result of the Boko Haram insurgency up until 2017. (Leowenberg, 2017; IDMC, 2017). As of 2020, Nigeria accounts for more than 2.7 million IDPs in the Northeast (Abdulahi, 2020).

### **Causes and Consequences of Displacement in Nigeria**

The overall causes in Nigeria are several. The reasons behind this may be divided into two categories: natural and man-made factors. Natural catastrophes such as floods, droughts, and erosion are examples of natural causes, whereas man-made causes include displacement resulting from conflict, infrastructure development, the search for meaningful livelihood, agro-pastoral crises, oil spills, etc. on (Mohammed, 2017). Man-made causes of violence originating from the conflict between Nigeria and Boko Haram were investigated in this study as the present cause of internal displacement in Nigeria. As a result, the effects of

displacement are limited to those brought on by internal strife.

Internal displacement was seen as a sign of instability, violence, and underdevelopment in any country. Individual and social effects are both present. People are frequently deprived of their sources of income and their houses in this sort of circumstance. The number of individuals in need of humanitarian aid grows as a result of internal displacement. Internal displacement causes increased hunger, human rights violations, malnutrition, and SGBV, among other things. A more significant number of individuals are subjected to physical and mental degeneration, resulting in loss of dignity, severe stress, and irreparable injuries and damage. Therefore, displaced people are unable to participate effectively in the economic, political, and educational spheres due to a lack of opportunity (OCHA, 2019).

### **An Assessment of the Experiences of Displaced Women and Girls in Nigeria**

Boko Haram's relentless attacks in North-East Nigeria have resulted in a steady increase in the number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Nigeria. Women suffer terrible moments during attacks, but their experiences in IDP camps are much more horrific. As a result, immediate attention is necessary not just towards violence prevention and protection but also towards empowerment and resilience. Many displaced women in Borno State are forced to work in hazardous occupations in order to survive. Among displaced women and girls, especially in Maiduguri camps, transactional sex in return for basic needs has grown common (UN, 2016). Because of the constant attacks by Boko Haram militants on schools and instructors, young girls have been denied access to education. According to Aloba & Obaji (2016), 338 schools have been damaged in the Northeast, with 304 school students and 196 instructors dead.

It is nearly difficult to discuss displaced women without mentioning SGBV. In Nigeria's IDP camps, sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) is the most severe form of violence against women. Following a thorough investigation of camp authorities abusing displaced women and girls, Human Rights Watch (2018) reported that camp leaders, military and paramilitary personnel, vigilante groups, and other Nigerian authorities have sexually abused young girls and women in IDP camps. Despite the fact that Boko Haram's violent operations have led to a rise in SGBV, the unpleasant and abusive behaviour of camp authorities towards women has inexorably raised the rate of SGBV. Women and girls are particularly vulnerable to sexual assault perpetrated by camp officials. Women who cannot meet their duties are more likely to engage in transactional sex in return for food and other essentials. Thereby placing women as sex objects exploited by authorities meant to protect them

(OCHA, 2018; Le Van *et al.*, 2018; Ojengbede *et al.*, 2019).

Sexual assault, prejudice, a lack of resources, and personal hardship are common situations among displaced women and girls. Cases of women washing their clothing with just water have been recorded in Borno state's Kaga and Konduga local government districts (Christian Aid, 2016), showing the urgent need for humanitarian supplies. Women and girls are degraded to sex objects, suicide bombers, and prisoner objects by the government to guarantee that Boko Haram terrorists are negotiated with (Laccino, 2017; Oriola, 2017). In a nation like Nigeria, where abortion is prohibited unless the mother's life is in danger and unplanned pregnancy is typically stigmatized, displaced women resort to illicit and unsafe abortions. Only 19 of 47 displaced women with sexual violence-related pregnancies (SVRP) in Borno state were ready to retain the pregnancy, according to Oladeji *et al.* (2018), while the rest vanished without a trace.

#### **Relief and Recovery Pillar: The Need for Self-Reliance and Resilience**

Approximately 1.8 million individuals have been internally displaced as of 2019. COVID-19 raised the number of IDPs in need of humanitarian aid from 7.9 million in early 2020 to 10.6 million in early 2021. (OCHA, 2019). The National Action Plan (NAP) is a critical tool that supports one of the WPS pillars, the "Relief and Recovery" pillar. This mechanism has tackled significant humanitarian concerns affecting displaced women and girls as part of the WPS agenda through its policies. NAP's policy addressed vital issues such as women being used by terrorists as suicide bombers, sexual violence against women, HIV infections, unwanted pregnancies, early marriage, motherhood, and other health-related complexity. However, these places women in a more complex condition, especially when faced with humanitarian needs (Nigeria NAP 2017-2018).

The Women Peace and Humanitarian Fund (WPHF), creating a platform for humanitarian actions in partnership with CSO and UN in Nigeria, has offered funds for SGBV projects addressing violence prevention (especially SGBV) the protection of women's rights in conflict situations. WPHF acts as the center for WPS resources. Through the regulation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on the WPS agenda, WPHF has promoted women's livelihood by engaging in essential service delivery and ensuring equal distribution of resources and provision of technical support to the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA).

The Women's Refugee Commission (WRC) addressed the difficult situations faced by displaced women and girls and the importance of giving adequate attention to implementing the WPS agenda. Adequate

emphasis is required for the WPS agenda on relief and recovery to meet the requirement of displaced women (Peace Women, 2020). However, more emphasis has been made on survivors of SGBV and women living with disabilities within official IDP camps than displaced women living outside IDP camps. Although women living outside the official camps have freedom of movement, yet they face more difficult conditions in trying to pay house rents, bills, and catering for other responsibilities. REACH (2017) reported that Internally Displaced women in Nigeria who live outside formal camps struggle so much to pay house rents and have access to quality education.

The WRC assists displaced women and girls in gaining a better future by providing funding and utilities for skill development to increase their self-reliance and resilience. Because of their focus on women's empowerment, many displaced women have been able to make autonomous decisions for the betterment of their lives (WRC, 2020). The commission has had personal encounters with displaced women in Borno State, Nigeria, as part of its humanitarian efforts. They observed that contraceptives are more needed by women and girls during and after conflict as a result of their personal interactions with women. Women in the region who have been affected by the Boko Haram conflict seek to avoid or postpone childbearing. As a result, the need for contraceptives has increased. According to the report, due to the crisis, an estimated 1.7 million women and girls in northeastern Nigeria have been forced into early marriage, raising the risk of unplanned pregnancy. They went on to say that women have the freedom to choose when they want to have a family. WRC is striving to reduce the increasing rate of SGBV in more severe conditions, such as the COVID-19 period. According to their findings, the global rate of SGBV has grown by 25%. This means that women are more likely to contract STDs, have unplanned pregnancies, and have abortions. On the other hand, the commission is currently debating the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on displaced women and how it has impacted contraception availability, resulting in unsafe abortions (Gambir, 2020).

Diverse organisations and funders, including UN agencies, NGOs, and individual/private organisations, are collaborating with WRC to provide assistance and empower women and girls for self-reliance in the area of sexual and reproductive health (SRA) (Krause and Jacobi, 2019). WRC has revealed that women with physical and mental impairments are more vulnerable to sexual abuse perpetrated mostly by camp authorities and are routinely denied access to social activities (Rhowerder, 2017). However, the commission's report on the subject did not go into detail on what steps could be taken to avoid such misuse. The commission's initiatives lack legal provisions and protection for disabled displaced women.

Working with the International Organization of Migration (IOM) and Camp Coordination Management (CCCM) in Nigeria, WRC also addresses the need to enhance women's involvement in camp leadership roles. A displaced woman at Malkohi camp in Yola, Adamawa State, in North-East Nigeria, according to the WRC, complained about women's inactivity in camp activities. She simply eats and sleeps, she claims. Women are not allowed to participate in essential jobs such as peacekeeping, camp upkeep, or public collective activities. They are mainly restricted to domestic tasks such as child-raising, cleaning, cooking, among others. The commission has worked to remove obstacles to women's involvement by developing an inclusive governance structure, bridging leadership skills shortages, promoting economic growth, and setting a quota for women's participation to ensure equity and effective decision-making (WRC, 2016).

Despite the presence of a significant number of humanitarian organizations and support for displaced girls and women, according to a research conducted by Laouan (2018) in Borno state, more has to be done. As the number of displaced people grows, so does the demand for food, shelter, and medical treatment. There must be a strong focus on excellent education, leadership, and economic growth, as well as resilience. The humanitarian needs of displaced women must be met to accomplish a holistic change (Zaynep, 2018). Improving women's livelihood will facilitate their participation in decision making and other public affairs geared towards peace building.

At the international level, The UNHCR collaborates with international and national NGOs to make provisions for displaced women and girls in Nigeria. They have achieved this by coordinating the 2019 Regional Refugee Response Plan prepared by 47 UN agencies and NGOs partners responding to the humanitarian needs of displaced girls and women. The UNHCR has successfully carried out routine activities on the protection against sexual violence in the various camps, especially against violence perpetrated by camp officials at the state and local levels (Abdulahi, 2020).

At the national level, the Nigerian Stability and Reconciliation Programme (NSRP), funded by the Department of Internal Development (DFID), supported the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development (FMoWASD) in outlining the National Action Plan (NAP) through the lens of the WPS agenda, with the Regulation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325. NSRP and FMoWASD are working hand in hand by mapping out policies such as NAP that are promoting empowerment for displaced women, especially in ensuring active participation in decision making. Key elements on economic and leadership skill acquisition are addressed to empower women for a better livelihood. Additionally, NSRP promotes displaced women's participation in peace building by

creating a 'safe space' called 'peace club' where women freely express their feelings without fear of abuse or intimidation. Inclusive dialogue between men and women on conflict management and reports of abuse are encouraged. There is also a virtual space provided by the commission called 'observatory' where girls and women, including internally displaced persons, can safely lay complaints of any form of gender-based violence. The commission is, however, responding to violence against displaced girls and women through this means.

NSRP is creating awareness and ensuring the effective implementation of NAP by creating a forum where civil society organisations in WPS Networks (WPSNs) at both the federal and state level come together to take up critical issues facing girls and women, especially those internally displaced. Through the support of NSRP, the State Action Plans (SAPs) have been implemented in up to 8 states in Nigeria including 2 of the states that account for the highest number of displaced persons in Nigeria – Borno, and Adamawa. There were indications of a gap (especially internally displaced girls and women) in the first NAP implemented in 2011. Through the support of NSRP, a second NAP was evaluated in 2017 to meet the needs of internally displaced girls and women (Nwadinobi, 2017).

## DISCUSSION

A significant number of internally displaced persons are women and girls. A more significant number of those who are suffering from conflict-related displacement are women and girls. Nevertheless, this category of people has been often neglected. Despite the increasing number of IDPs, the NAP (National Action Plan) at the state level has not provided a better platform to address conflict-related displacement among women and girls in Nigeria. The problem of SGBV should be given full attention. A clear picture of what kind of violence and how victims are affected by conflict-related displacement should be created. More profound knowledge of a conflict situation where women suffer from intimate partner abuse in multiple IDP camps is needed, in addition to women who are victims of sexual assault by Boko Haram attacks. This will improve what conflict looks like in a particular environment, allowing for more precise and adequate conflict resolution methods.

Women and girls who have been displaced are continuously looking for methods to make a living. Displaced people are frequently unable to find work due to community prejudice against IDPs and the loss of a household's principal revenue earner due to warfare. However, they are forced to live in poverty and deprivation as a result of this. Women, more than any other demographic, are disproportionately affected by economic problems. In the quest to make a livelihood, women are forced to work in high-stress, low-paying

occupations, leading to unhealthy, inferior, and impoverished lifestyles. The continuous bouts of recession in Nigeria have exacerbated the situation for IDPs.

The notion that IDPs are subjected to sympathy and cannot access or take advantage of economic opportunities poses a challenge to IDPs' livelihood in Nigeria. Special measures should be set out to give special attention to displaced women who suffer from various pregnancy-related diseases. The unavailability of essential holistic services to SGBV survivors poses a significant challenge to implementing the WPS agenda. OCHA (2019) reported that 80% of SGBV survivors in Maiduguri camps do not have access to essential services.

Women and girls in rural regions are mostly unreachable, and they are more likely to be violated and denied access to healthy living. As a result, WPS must address the needs of displaced women and girls living in inaccessible rural regions. According to OCHA research, just 8 of Borno's 27 LGAs are accessible. This indicates that a higher proportion of displaced women and girls are likely to go unnoticed. A comprehensive and suitable solution is required to reach out to displaced women and girls living in remote rural areas.

## CONCLUSION

In any crisis or post-conflict context, women and girls endure more challenging circumstances. Although males are more likely to die in battle, women and girls are more likely to face poverty, abuse, prejudice, and many types of violence. The study looked at displaced women's experiences and the importance/need for the WPS agenda to be implemented. The research focused on the 'Relief and Recovery Pillar' as a critical instrument for maintaining and empowering girls and women in Nigeria who have been internally displaced by Boko Haram militants. The analysis has shown that various organisations working under the aegis of WPS have adversely contributed to the provision of humanitarian needs, economic empowerment, and leadership skills acquisition of displaced girls and women. Yet, more needs to be done to elevate the livelihood of displaced women. Girls and women who are displaced and live in remote rural regions are frequently left out of IDPs' humanitarian efforts. A comprehensive strategy is necessary to effectively address the deplorable situations of girls and women both within and outside the IDP camps.

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