

Article

Gender-Sensitive Policy Implementation and Human Security among IDPs in Abuja, Nigeria: A Mixed-Methods Study of Wassa and New Kuchingoro

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Abstract

This study investigates the impact of gender-sensitive policies and programmes on human security among internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Abuja, Nigeria, with a focus on Wassa and New Kuchingoro camps. Employing a mixed methods approach, the research explores how national frameworks such as the Revised Gender Policy and others influence safety, access to services, and empowerment. While frequency and regression analyses reveal that the National Educational Policy and VAPP Act are statistically significant contributors to human security, other policies showed limited or mixed effectiveness. Qualitative findings underscore the value of inclusive programming and highlight gaps in gender-responsive implementation, particularly for men, boys, and persons with disabilities. Drawing on feminist peacebuilding and peaceful masculinities frameworks, the study calls for a shift from gender-sensitive rhetoric to transformative practice through context-driven, inclusive policymaking. The findings offer actionable recommendations for state and non-state actors aiming to create sustainable, gender-equitable displacement responses.

Keywords: Gender, Human Security, Policies, Internally Displaced Persons, Abuja

Introduction

In Nigeria, over the past two decades, violent conflicts in Nigeria have escalated, resulting in widespread displacement and immense suffering (Aliyu, Aliyu, Garba, & Galadima, 2022). The Boko Haram insurgency, ethnic and religious clashes, and violent confrontations between nomadic pastoralists and farming communities have wreaked havoc in multiple states, including Borno, Yobe, Gombe, Plateau, Benue, Kaduna, Bauchi, and Kano. These conflicts have not only led to massive population displacement but have also created ripple effects in other regions, such as Abuja, where IDP camps have become overcrowded with those fleeing violence in their home states (Agbaje, 2022). The impacts of these conflicts are multifaceted, manifesting in physical injuries, emotional trauma, and long-term mental health challenges for affected populations.

Reports, such as the Africa Report (2010), highlight the recurrent nature of violent conflicts in northern Nigeria, particularly since the early 1980s. For instance, the origins of Boko Haram, one of the most infamous insurgent groups in the region, can be traced back to the early 2000s in Borno State. Similarly, historical records point to earlier conflicts, such as the Jos riot of April 1994, where ethnic tensions over local governance erupted into violence. The riot was sparked by the appointment of a Hausa-Fulani candidate as Caretaker Committee Chairman of the Jos North Local Government Authority and subsequent rejection by indigenous groups, including the Afizere, Anagutta, and Berom communities (Best, 2008).

Academia and civil society have also contributed significantly to the discourse on gender and conflict. Scholars and experts in peace and conflict studies have extensively analysed the gendered dimensions of war, considering how biological differences, historical contexts, and socioeconomic conditions shape the experiences of men and women. The adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 in 2000 marked a turning point in this discourse, emphasising the need to integrate gender perspectives into conflict analysis, peacebuilding, state-building, and programme implementation. This resolution not only highlighted the unique impacts of conflict on women but also called for their active participation in peace processes.

Despite widespread acknowledgement of the importance of including women in peacebuilding and the ratification of key international frameworks, progress remains limited. The unequal participation of men and women in peacebuilding processes continues to undermine efforts to create sustainable solutions to conflict. As O'Reilly, Suilleabhain, and Paffenholz (2015) note, the gap between rhetoric and action persists, with insufficient measures taken to address the disparities in how conflicts affect and involve men and women. Bridging this gap remains a critical challenge for policymakers, practitioners, and scholars alike.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to conduct a comprehensive analysis of existing gender-sensitive policies and programmes for internally displaced persons in Nigeria. It also seeks to evaluate the effectiveness of these policies and programmes, implemented by state and non-state actors, in addressing the development and security needs of internally displaced persons in Wassa and New Kuchingoro IDP camps.

Objectives of the Study

The study's objectives are, therefore, to:

1. To assess the extent to which gender-sensitive national policies and programmes influence health, safety, education and economic security among internally displaced persons in Wassa and New Kuchingoro IDP camps.
2. To analyze outcomes related to safety, protection from gender-based violence, access to livelihoods, health services, education, housing, and psychosocial support, disaggregated by gender and age where possible.
3. To explore the limitations and gaps in the implementation of engendered humanitarian policies, with a focus on inclusivity and community-led perspectives in peacebuilding and development.

Research Questions

To guide this study, this paper seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What gender-sensitive policies and programmes exist to support Internally Displaced Persons in Wassa and New Kuchingoro IDP camps?
2. In what ways do these policies and programmes meet or fall short of addressing the security and development needs of the IDP population in Wassa and New Kuchingoro IDP camps?

3. What are the key gaps and implementation challenges in these interventions, and what strategies can enhance their gender-responsive effectiveness?

Methodology

This study employed a case study design complemented by descriptive and explanatory approaches to examine the gendered human security needs of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Wassa and New Kuchingoro IDP camps, Abuja. A mixed-methods approach was used to collect qualitative and quantitative data from key stakeholders, including IDPs, camp officials, state actors, and non-state actors.

For qualitative methods, data were gathered through in-depth interviews (IDIs), key informant interviews (KIIs), and focus group discussions (FGDs) with IDPs and key stakeholders. Participants were selected using purposive sampling, ensuring diversity in age, gender, and roles. More so, a structured survey was administered to state and non-state actors using probabilistic sampling. The sample size (237 responses) was calculated to ensure reliability, with a focus on gender-sensitive service delivery.

Qualitative data were analysed thematically using Atlas.ti, identifying patterns and themes related to gendered human security. Quantitative data were analysed with STATA software, employing univariate, bivariate, and multivariate analyses to explore relationships between variables.

Theoretical Frameworks

Feminist Peacebuilding Theory

Feminism posits that women face many threats to their well-being, including both local and global instances of violence. Therefore, conducting a comprehensive analysis of the factors that constitute a security threat facilitates the formulation of broader strategies to address and mitigate these risks. This could be done in the following ways:

- i. A recognition and understanding of the gendered nature of the values that are highly valued in the field of security.
- ii. The recognition of the substantial and diverse impact that gender has on the conceptualisation and implementation of global security.
- iii. The exclusion of gender from security-related work does not result in a state of gender neutrality or lack of issues. The inclusion of gender is not contingent upon it being a factor in analysis or technique, but rather on the progression of security studies (Arestizabal, Arino, & Arino, 2020).

Feminist scholarship has, since the early 1990s, emphasised the differentiated experiences of insecurity between women and men. Scholars critique the predominantly male-centric narratives in security discourse, arguing that these perspectives marginalise the unique vulnerabilities and contributions of women and girls. Feminist methods aim to integrate women's perspectives into the broader security agenda while also identifying disparities in security experiences across diverse demographic groups. These disparities are shaped by intersecting factors such as age, ethnicity, religion, and socioeconomic status, which determine how

individuals experience security and insecurity at local, national, and international levels (Rosenow-Williams & Behmer, 2015).

Adopting an individual-centred lens necessitates recognising the interconnectedness of factors that contribute to insecurity. These factors often intersect with gender, amplifying vulnerabilities. Feminist movements and academic feminism have consistently advocated for a redefinition of security to address the specific needs of women and individuals with non-normative gender identities. Historically, security discourses have been dominated by state-centric frameworks that prioritise national sovereignty over human welfare. However, a gradual shift has occurred, with increasing attention given to human security – a paradigm that places individual well-being at the forefront (Arestizabal, Arino, & Arino, 2020).

Human Security Theory

Human Security theory, as defined by the UNDP (1994) and developed by scholars such as Amartya Sen, Sabina Alkire, and the Commission on Human Security (2003), reframes security by placing people, and not states, at its core. It argues that genuine security exists only when individuals are protected from pervasive threats that erode freedom from fear and want. This perspective combines two essential pillars of protection from sudden and chronic risks and empowerment of individuals and communities to realise their potential and safeguard their own well-being (Alkire, 2003; Commission on Human Security, 2003).

Unlike traditional military security, Human Security recognises interconnected threats, spanning economic hardship, health crises, environmental degradation, personal and community safety, and governance failures (Walnshak, 2018; Macpherson et al., 2020). It calls for systematic, preventive measures, coordinated policies, and robust institutions to uphold basic rights and freedoms. Equally, it emphasises people's agency to act for themselves and their communities, mobilising solutions to challenges such as food insecurity, conflict and rights violations (Danjuma, 2021).

Applied to IDPs, Human Security theory views displacement as a failure of human security on multiple fronts – terrorism, conflict, livelihood loss, and weak institutions. It thus supports assessing economic, health, food and personal security as indicators shaped by gender-responsive policies and collaborative peacebuilding efforts. By combining protection with empowerment and integrating a top-down governance with grassroots participation, this approach aligns with feminist peacebuilding perspectives, ensuring security strategies respond to the diverse needs of women, men, boys and girls, before, during and after crises.

Existing Engendered Policies and Programmes for Internally Displaced Persons in Nigeria

Nigeria's challenge with Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) has gained increasing national attention due to the escalating impact of violent insurgencies, ethno-religious tensions, and climate-related disasters that have forced many communities to abandon their homes (Adewale, 2016; Bamidele & Pikirayi, 2023). By 2012, the situation intensified as thousands fled Boko Haram violence, communal clashes,

and recurring floods, resulting in widespread displacement, resource strain on host communities, and heightened insecurity in affected areas. Before 2012, the absence of a unified, rights-based policy meant government responses were often reactive, fragmented, and insufficient to meet IDPs' needs (Bamidele & Pikirayi, 2023). To address this, the National Policy on IDPs was adopted, drawing on international and regional frameworks to build Nigeria's capacity for prevention, protection, assistance, and durable reintegration through a multi-sectoral and participatory approach (National Policy on IDPs, 2012).

The policy's core objective is to protect the rights, dignity, and welfare of vulnerable populations affected by displacement. It covers all phases, from prevention and emergency support to rehabilitation and resettlement, guided by global humanitarian standards and principles of sovereignty, participation, non-discrimination, and accountability. The policy outlines government responsibilities, including awareness, data collection, enforcement of rights, and coordination of interventions. Humanitarian organisations are therefore required to align with these standards, while host communities are entitled to support and protection. Even armed groups are obliged to respect IDPs' rights and allow humanitarian access.

To operationalise this framework, the policy mandates a broad institutional structure involving 26 ministries and agencies under the coordination of the Presidency through the National Commission for Refugees, Migrants, and IDPs. This structure covers mobilisation, implementation, and monitoring, with dedicated funding and sector-specific strategies. It includes immediate relief measures like camp administration, food distribution, basic health services, and restoring lost documentation. Longer-term actions address rebuilding livelihoods, restoring infrastructure, providing psychosocial support, and facilitating voluntary return, relocation, or local integration based on safety, social cohesion, and access to justice and reparation.

Despite its ambition, the policy's impact is undermined by persistent gaps, including unreliable data, under-resourced structures, limited legal backing, and poor inter-agency coordination. Bureaucratic delays and over-reliance on donor funding further weaken accountability and sustainability. To tackle these gaps, the revised National Gender Policy (NGP) 2021-2026 strengthens Nigeria's humanitarian response with a gender lens, recognising that displacement amplifies pre-existing vulnerabilities for women, children, and marginalised groups.

The NGP outlines specific measures to mainstream gender equity in disaster preparedness, crisis response, and recovery. Its objectives include integrating inclusive principles into all emergency planning, building institutional capacity, especially within the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) and ensuring that aid is accessible, culturally relevant, and responsive to diverse needs. It also acknowledges the critical contributions of women and communities in resilience and risk reduction. To translate this vision into practice, the policy specifies targets such as universal access, alignment with human rights norms, systematic data collection, gender-focused training, and cultivating specialised local expertise through education. It further sets out nine interconnected strategies that prioritise community engagement, continuous data gathering, sustainable funding, and participatory decision-making.

While the updated policy framework is an important step towards addressing the gendered dimension of displacement and crisis management, its effectiveness relies on strong leadership, adequate funding, institutional accountability, and meaningful involvement of local communities. By aligning human rights, equity, and participatory principles, the NGP aspires to equip Nigeria to manage future crises with fairness and inclusion, ensuring that no vulnerable population is neglected during conflicts, climate disasters and other emergencies.

National Policy	Agree	Disagree	Neutral	Strongly Agree	Strongly Disagree
National Policy IDP	22.78	18.57	22.36	18.57	17.72
National Policy on Safety	20.25	20.25	21.52	17.72	20.25
National Policy on Food	20.68	20.25	15.61	21.94	21.52
National Policy on Education	18.57	23.21	19.41	22.36	16.46
Safe School Initiative	20.25	14.77	22.36	23.63	18.99
National Action Plan	25.32	17.3	20.25	18.99	18.14
VAPP Act	18.57	15.61	25.32	18.57	21.94
Revised Gender Policy	18.99	21.94	19.83	20.25	18.99

Table 1 presents a detailed breakdown of how respondents assess the effectiveness of key national policies and programmes intended to promote human security in IDP camps. The distribution of responses across categories – strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree – reveals the nuanced realities of policy impact at the community level. The National Policy on IDPs demonstrates a relatively even spread of agreement and neutrality, suggesting that while many acknowledge its presence and intent, there remains ambivalence about its practical effectiveness. In contrast, the National Safety Policy attracted a higher proportion of negative responses, highlighting perceptions that current safety provisions in camps may be inadequate or inconsistently enforced.

The National Food Policy stands out for its polarised responses, with significant numbers of respondents at opposite ends of the spectrum, with some strongly affirming its effectiveness while others strongly dispute its adequacy. This divergence may reflect uneven food distribution and varying experiences across camps. The National Educational Policy and the Safe School Initiative were viewed more favourably overall, with higher levels of strong agreement indicating that education and protective measures within schools are relatively better received. Nonetheless, the presence of notable disagreement suggests persistent gaps in equitable access and delivery.

The National Action Plan received considerable agreement, implying that respondents see it as contributing positively to human security objectives, although disagreement responses point to lingering challenges in practical implementation. Perceptions of the VAPP Act were largely neutral, but with a significant portion expressing strong disagreement, indicating uncertainty or dissatisfaction with how effectively the Act addresses violence in these contexts. The Revised Gender Policy similarly drew mixed responses, with a prominent share of disagreement, implying that its objectives are not yet fully translating into tangible improvements for displaced populations.

Overall, this pattern of perceptions underscores the reality that while national frameworks exist to promote human security within IDP settings, their success is contingent on responsive implementation, adequate resourcing and stronger alignment with the lived experiences and priorities of displaced persons.

Table 2: Aggregate Scores for Policy Impact and Security Measures on Engendered Human Security in IDP Camps

Variable	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
National IDP Policy	236	12.02542	1.55993	8	16
National Safety Policy	237	11.99156	1.46134	8	16
National Food Policy	237	12.05907	1.48034	8	16
National Educational Policy	237	12.0211	1.58234	8	16
Safe School Initiatives	237	12.06329	1.36241	8	16
National Action Plan	237	12.10549	1.39363	8	16
VAPP Act	237	12.14346	1.38564	8	15
Revised Gender Policy	237	12.16034	1.4349	9	16
Safety Measure	237	11.92405	1.54403	8	15
Security Effect	237	9.080169	1.30104	6	12

- i. **Central Tendency (Mean Values):** Mean scores for most policies hover around 12, suggesting that respondents generally perceive the policies as moderately effective across the various dimensions measured. The highest mean score is for the Revised Gender Policy (12.16), indicating it may be perceived as one of the more impactful policies in terms of engendering human security in IDP camps. VAPP Act (12.14) and National Action Plan (12.11) also scored highly, suggesting a positive perception of their contributions to security in IDP camps.
- ii. **Dispersion (Standard Deviation):** The standard deviations for each policy and measure are relatively low (between 1.3 and 1.6), which indicates that there is low variability in responses. Most respondents' views on the effectiveness of these policies are similar. Security Effect has the lowest standard deviation (1.30), suggesting a more uniform perception of security outcomes in the camps. National Educational Policy has a slightly higher standard deviation (1.58), hinting that perceptions of this policy's effectiveness may vary more among respondents.
- iii. **Range (Minimum and Maximum Scores):** The minimum scores across policies range from 8 to 9, and the maximum scores range from 15 to 16. These ranges show that although respondents generally rated these policies and programs positively, some lower scores indicate room for improvement in specific areas.
- iv. **Safety Measures and Security Effect:** The Safety Measure score has a mean of 11.92, similar to the policy scores, suggesting that respondents perceive safety measures as an integral but moderately effective part of reinforcing human security. Security Effect has a mean score of 9.08, lower than the policy and safety measure scores. This lower score could indicate a perception that, despite the policies in place, security outcomes still face

challenges, particularly in fully addressing human security needs in IDP camps.

The results suggest that engendered policies such as the Revised Gender Policy, VAPP Act, and National Action Plan are viewed as particularly effective, which aligns with their focus on gender-sensitive and rights-based approaches. There is a generally positive perception of policy effectiveness, as indicated by the mean scores around 12, but the slight variation in scores and standard deviations highlights areas where policies may not yet be fully effective or consistent in impact. The Security Effect score (mean of 9.08) points to potential gaps in actual security outcomes, which could reflect ongoing challenges in translating policy into tangible security improvements.

While policies related to gender, violence prevention, and IDP protection are generally perceived positively, there may still be challenges in achieving comprehensive security outcomes in IDP camps. These findings can guide targeted policy improvements and further analysis to assess specific policy elements that contribute most to perceived security in IDP settings.

The analysis of gender-specific policies reveals a nearly equal division in perceptions of their effectiveness among the IDP population. This indicates that while some perceive the policies as beneficial, others find them lacking.

Table 3: Ordered Logistic Regression Results for Gendered Human Security Outcomes

Security Effect	Coef.	Std. Err.	Z	P>z	[95% Conf. Interval]	
National IDP Policy	-0.0877882	0.0772051	-1.14	0.256	-0.2391074	0.063531
National Safety Policy	0.0296513	0.0827786	0.36	0.72	-0.1325917	0.191894
National Food Policy	-0.0658101	0.08331	-0.79	0.43	-0.2290947	0.097475
National Educational Policy	0.1668907	0.0783772	2.13	0.033	0.0132743	0.320507
Safe School Initiatives	-0.04125	0.0872934	-0.47	0.637	-0.2123419	0.129842
National Action Plan	-0.039828	0.0913109	-0.44	0.663	-0.218794	0.139138
VAPP Act	0.2445577	0.0920781	2.66	0.008	0.0640879	0.425028
Revised Gender Policy	0.01179	0.0824187	0.14	0.886	-0.1497477	0.173328
Safety Measure	0.0453589	0.0798693	0.57	0.57	-0.1111821	0.2019

- i. **Significant Variables:** National Educational Policy (Coef. = 0.1669, $p = 0.033$) has a statistically significant positive association with human security, suggesting that programs and initiatives within this policy framework positively reinforce human security outcomes in IDP camps. The confidence interval (0.0133, 0.3205) does not include zero, reinforcing the significance of this result. VAPP Act (Coef. = 0.2446, $p = 0.008$) also shows a statistically significant positive association with human security, with a confidence interval of [0.0641, 0.4250]. This result implies that the VAPP Act, which addresses violence and enhances safety for vulnerable groups, contributes meaningfully to reinforcing human security in the IDP camps.
- ii. **Non-Significant Variables:** National IDP Policy (Coef. = -0.0878, $p = 0.256$), although focused on IDP welfare, did not show a significant relationship

with engendered human security in the model. National Safety Policy (Coef. = 0.0297, $p = 0.720$) did not have a significant impact on engendered human security, as indicated by the high p -value. National Food Policy (Coef. = -0.0658, $p = 0.430$), although a critical aspect of human security, was not statistically significant. Safe School Initiatives (Coef. = -0.0413, $p = 0.637$) did not demonstrate a significant gendered effect on human security. National Action Plan (Coef. = -0.0398, $p = 0.663$) did not show a significant association with human security in this model. Revised Gender Policy (Coef. = 0.0118, $p = 0.886$) did not significantly impact human security despite its gender-focused framework. Safety Measure (Coef. = 0.0454, $p = 0.570$), although necessary, did not show a statistically significant relationship with human security in this model.

The data presented above reveal that Educational Policy and the VAPP Act are the two significant predictors of human security in the IDP camps. This suggests that policies focusing on education and violence prevention play a particularly important role in enhancing human security for vulnerable groups, including women and children, in the camps. Although designed to support human security, policies such as the National IDP, Safety, and Food Policy did not show statistically significant impacts in this model. This could indicate that their implementation may not be as robust, they do not consider the gendered impact on Internally Displaced Persons, or their impact may require further resources or complementary initiatives.

The model's pseudo-R-squared value (0.0223) indicates that while the independent variables contribute to explaining engendered human security outcomes, much of the variation is likely due to other factors not captured in this model. This suggests room for further investigation and potentially additional policies or support mechanisms to enhance human security that comprehensively impacts women, men, girls, and boys.

In conclusion, the data presented above partially support the hypotheses that certain engendered policies, specifically the National Educational Policy and the VAPP Act, significantly reinforce human security in the IDP camps. However, other policies and measures did not show significant impacts, highlighting areas where policy execution or resources may need to be enhanced to fully support a gendered approach to human security in IDP camps. This insight underscores the value of targeted educational and anti-violence initiatives in supporting vulnerable groups in displacement settings.

This highlights a critical need for thorough evaluations of existing programmes. A structured assessment could reveal the strengths and significant gaps in services, particularly regarding education and health access, which are paramount for the well-being of IDPs.

The qualitative data align with the broader challenges internally displaced persons (IDPs) face regarding access to support programmes, particularly emphasising the uneven distribution of resources and reliance on local initiatives. Participants reported a mix of governmental and non-governmental support systems that impact their daily lives.

The effectiveness of these programmes varies. While some initiatives, such as the container school provided by the National Commission for Refugees, Migrants and Internally Displaced Persons, were praised for supporting education and nutrition, gaps remain. As one participant described, the availability of food for children fluctuates, highlighting the need for consistent support: “Unless they don’t send the food, we cook from home to give the children at school.”

Participants expressed a desire for more comprehensive and accountable support systems. Although specific suggestions were not provided, the call for enhanced programmes reflects a community seeking recognition and tailored solutions to their unique challenges. The current landscape of support programmes for IDPs showcases both strengths and weaknesses. While local initiatives significantly impact lives, there is an urgent need for more equitable, transparent, and responsive governmental programmes. Enhancing these capabilities frameworks will require a deeper understanding of the diverse needs within the IDP community, ensuring that all individuals, particularly marginalised groups, receive fair access to assistance.

When reflecting on the effectiveness of existing support programmes, participants conveyed mixed perceptions. While some acknowledged that food and basic assistance are provided, many expressed that these programmes do not comprehensively meet community needs, especially concerning safety, education, and health. This gap underscores the necessity for rigorous evaluation to identify service strengths and critical areas for improvement.

As Excerpt 1 illustrates, logistical barriers often limit participation: “Most times, because we are many, it’s difficult carrying everyone along, and also because of the age group specification.” Such challenges highlight the need for more adaptable and inclusive programme designs. Limited dissemination of information, often channelled through community leaders, was also noted as a barrier, emphasising the need for improved outreach strategies.

The demand for economic empowerment emerged strongly:

“I would love the Government to help us with programmes on empowerment with grants to start up little businesses, which can help us provide for our families.” (Excerpt 2).

Furthermore, there is a clear call for improved healthcare access.

Excerpt 3 noted, “We also need hospitals because some of our pregnant women need access during delivery.” The lack of healthcare facilities within the camp poses significant risks, particularly for maternal health. **Excerpt 4** proposed training programmes for elderly women as Local Birth Attendants, suggesting a proactive approach to addressing maternal health needs in the absence of medical facilities.

These indicate a holistic view of support, where economic empowerment and health services are intertwined. By expanding the types of assistance available, particularly for vulnerable groups such as widows and older women, programmes can enhance their effectiveness and foster greater resilience within the community. The discussions in the FGDs reveal a pressing need for targeted and inclusive programmes for IDPs in Wassa and New Kuchingoro. While existing initiatives

provide some level of support, they often fall short of addressing the comprehensive needs of diverse demographic groups. By focusing on inclusivity, enhancing healthcare access, and providing opportunities for economic empowerment, organisations can significantly improve the well-being of internally displaced persons. Ultimately, creating responsive and community-centred support systems will foster resilience and help IDPs navigate their challenges more effectively.

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Effective coordination among stakeholders is essential to maximise the impact of housing initiatives. Participants also addressed the focus on women and the importance of including men and boys in programmes:

Excerpt 5: *“While our organisation has prioritised women, because of the gender equality movement and which we also see from our own evaluation. We're looking at how we can bring a balance to both genders”* (P4, Female, KII, Full Life Empowerment Programme)

This acknowledgement of the importance of gender balance in programming reflects a comprehensive approach to community support. The KII interview highlighted various economic empowerment initiatives aimed at women:

Excerpt 6: *“We have initiated programmes that include vocational training and economic empowerment. For instance, we partnered with a fashion organisation to help women turn waste into valuable products like bags and hats. This not only provides income but fosters community engagement.”* (P4, Female, KII, Full Life Empowerment Programme)

By creating safe environments for learning, these programmes empower girls and provide them with essential knowledge. Participants acknowledged the role of the government in supporting IDPs:

Excerpt 7: *“The government provides relief materials, food, sanitary products, and educational support for children in camps. They also facilitate training for income-generating skills, helping individuals become self-reliant.”* (P6, Male, KII, Federal Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs-Special Needs Department)

The collaboration between the government and NGOs is vital for addressing the comprehensive needs of displaced populations. The discussion included specific initiatives for persons with disabilities:

Excerpt 8: *“Programmes have been designed to enhance accessibility for PWDs in camps, such as constructing accessible toilets and facilities. Although some initiatives are targeted at PWDs, all community members benefit from these improvements.”* (P6, Male, KII, Federal Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs-Special Needs Department)

This approach ensures that the needs of all individuals are considered, fostering inclusivity. Participants highlighted the importance of community involvement:

Excerpt 9: *“Local and international individuals contribute significantly to the welfare of IDPs, providing resources like clothing, school supplies, and food. These acts of kindness create a supportive environment and help to meet immediate needs.”* (P3, Male, KII, National Commission for Refugee, Migrants, and Internally Displaced Persons)

Discussion of Findings

This discussion critically examines the extent to which gender-responsive and protective policies influence diverse dimensions of human security within internally displaced persons (IDP) camps. The quantitative analysis for the Hypothesis confirms that certain policies, notably the National Education Policy (NEP) and the Violence Against Persons Prohibition (VAPP) Act, show significant statistical associations with strengthened human security outcomes, particularly for gendered groups most vulnerable to social and economic exclusion. This finding suggests that when properly contextualised and inclusively implemented, targeted policies can enhance human security within displacement contexts.

The frequency distribution results further illustrate this trend. Notably, the Safe School Initiative recorded the highest “Strongly Agree” responses, followed closely by the NEP and the National Action Plan. These results highlight the perceived value of education-focused and rights-based frameworks in addressing critical aspects of human security, such as access to safe learning spaces and protection from gender-based violence, especially for girls and young women.

Nevertheless, respondent perceptions also reveal significant polarisation regarding the practical impact of policies. For example, the National Food Policy elicited both strong support and notable criticism, which may reflect persistent intra-household disparities that disadvantage women, girls, and other dependents. Similarly, the

VAPP Act's concentration of Neutral and Strongly Disagree responses suggests that, despite its legislative strength, its application within camp environments remains limited or poorly understood, an issue consistent with wider critiques of gender-focused laws in fragile and humanitarian settings.

Table 2 further substantiates these insights, presenting aggregate mean scores for policy effectiveness across economic, food, health, and personal security dimensions. Although most policies recorded moderate mean scores around 12 (out of 16), the Revised Gender Policy, VAPP Act, and National Action Plan achieved the highest averages, indicating that respondents recognise their potential contributions to gender-equitable human security. However, the relatively low Security Effect score demonstrates the persistent gap between policy frameworks and the lived realities of insecurity faced by camp residents.

Qualitative evidence from focus group discussions and key informant interviews reinforces this finding. While the National Policy on Internally Displaced Persons (2021) articulates principles of gender equality and empowerment, its practical implementation within Wassa and New Kuchingoro camps remains constrained by structural challenges, including inadequate data systems, unclear lines of accountability, and the absence of robust statutory enforcement mechanisms. These barriers limit the translation of policy into tangible protection and empowerment outcomes.

The analysis also underscores the importance of comprehensive gender-sensitive programming. While initiatives focusing on women's economic empowerment, such as vocational training, are regarded as essential for strengthening resilience, there is a growing recognition of the need for interventions that equally engage men and boys. Key informants highlighted that balanced gender approaches are vital for addressing harmful gender norms and for preventing unintended social tensions. Examples include skills training for women to reduce aid dependency and parallel strategies that promote non-violent masculinities and encourage men to serve as agents of positive social transformation (Pankhurst, 2012).

Interpreted through the lens of the gendered human security framework adopted in this study, these findings reiterate that meaningful security goes beyond basic protection to encompass dignity, choice, and participatory agency. Feminist peacebuilding perspectives clarify that protection and empowerment must be mutually reinforcing, calling for structural shifts that elevate women's voices in leadership, economic decision-making, and community safety planning. Despite the overall positive perception of the Revised Gender Policy, qualitative insights suggest that women remain underrepresented in key decision-making spaces, limiting the policy's transformative potential.

In sum, the evidence suggests that while gender-sensitive national policies and frameworks contribute to improvements in human security for displaced communities, significant implementation gaps persist. Bridging these gaps demands more than policy refinement; it calls for deeper participatory processes, robust enforcement mechanisms, context-responsive programming, and a shift from gender-sensitive rhetoric to genuinely transformative practice capable of securing freedom from fear, want, and indignity for all IDPs.

Gaps and Challenges Impacting Gender-Sensitive Humanitarian Responses in IDP Camps in Nigeria

This study further demonstrates that only limited dimensions, such as HIV testing and treatment, show statistically significant results for gender-responsive integration, indicating that other critical areas like education, sanitation, and general healthcare remain insufficiently mainstreamed. This highlights a structural weakness in the broader impact of existing frameworks. The findings reflect Nigeria's dual approach to peacebuilding, where long-term political democratic strategies coexist with integrated peace and justice measures aimed at immediate conflict resolution. While these frameworks seek stability, they often contrast with a human security perspective that prioritises individual agency, protection, and empowerment.

Short-term funding cycles exacerbate these challenges by disrupting programme continuity, undermining trust and the sustainability of outcomes for displaced communities. This situation illustrates how interdependent dimensions of human security must be addressed holistically to secure durable outcomes (Commission on Human Security, 2003). Furthermore, misaligned priorities among implementing partners frequently cause operational frictions, making effective collaboration and accountability more difficult to achieve.

Miscommunication, bureaucratic delays, and rigid performance metrics also constrain state and non-state actors' ability to deliver inclusive, context-driven responses. To address these challenges, stronger goal alignment, transparent processes, and participatory engagement with displaced persons are vital. A genuinely multidisciplinary approach drawing insights from economics, sociology, political science, environmental studies, and human rights can enable stakeholders to co-create adaptive and innovative solutions (Bajpai, 2000; UNCHS, 2003). Integrating these perspectives can strengthen policy coherence and implementation, ultimately fostering more consistent and sustainable improvements in gendered human security for Nigeria's IDP populations.

Recommendations

- i. Institutionalise participatory, gender-responsive frameworks for sustainable peacebuilding.
To build sustainable peace in IDP settings, it is essential to embed participatory mechanisms that meaningfully engage women, men, and marginalised groups in decision-making. Jointly designing policies and programmes with affected communities will ensure that interventions reflect diverse needs, strengthen local ownership, and address gender inequalities more effectively.
- ii. Implement intersectional approaches in economic empowerment, healthcare, and education programmes.
Responses must go beyond uniform models by recognising how overlapping factors, such as age, disability, or socio-cultural barriers, influence access to opportunities and services. For example, targeted adult education for parents who missed formal schooling and tailored youth programmes for displaced young adults can bridge persistent gaps and promote equitable development.

- iii. Transition from short-term displacement responses to sustainable reintegration strategies.

To address the protracted nature of displacement in places like the FCT, the government should prioritise long-term solutions that restore dignity and stability. This includes securing land tenure, rehabilitating infrastructure, creating livelihoods, and fostering social cohesion to enable displaced populations to transition from temporary camps to secure, thriving communities.

Conclusions

This mixed-methods study of IDPs in Wassa and New Kuchingoro camps in Abuja demonstrates that gender-sensitive policy implementation can meaningfully contribute to human security for internally displaced populations, but transformative impact hinges on context-driven, inclusive, and well-implemented practices. Grounded in Feminist Peacebuilding Theory and Human Security Theory, the findings illuminate both the opportunities and the gaps that shape safety, access to services, and empowerment for women, men, girls, boys, and persons with disabilities within displacement settings.

Policy relevance and impact is evident in the quantitative results, which indicate that the National Educational Policy and the Violence Against Persons Prohibition (VAPP) Act are statistically associated with improved human security outcomes for particularly vulnerable groups in IDP camps. Education-centered and rights-based policy frameworks are perceived as having high value, underscoring the importance of investing in schooling, safety from violence, and rights awareness as pathways to empowerment.

However, the effectiveness of policies is not uniform. Some policies show positive associations, while others demonstrate limited or mixed effects. The broader Neighbourhood and national policy landscape does not automatically translate into lived security, suggesting gaps in design, resource allocation, and implementation. Notably, policies such as the National IDP Policy, Safety Policy, and National Food Policy did not yield statistically significant impacts, signaling the need for more robust, gender-responsive deployment and monitoring.

A persistent gap exists between rhetoric and reality, as reflected by relatively low Security Effect scores. This highlights the need to move beyond gender-sensitive rhetoric toward transformative practice that actively mitigates risks and addresses intersectional needs in daily life within camps.

Qualitative insights shed further light on programming and access. IDPs report uneven distribution of resources, inconsistent support, and logistical barriers that limit participation in programs. While interventions like container schools are praised, there is a clear demand for more comprehensive, accountable, and transparent support systems that are tailored to diverse needs, including maternal health and broader healthcare access.

A recurring theme across findings is the necessity to engage men and boys as allies in transforming harmful gender norms. Programs that promote non-violent masculinities, shared decision-making, and economic empowerment for both women and men can reduce social tensions and support more equitable outcomes. Women's underrepresentation in key decision-making spaces remains a challenge to achieving transformative policy impact.

Constraints on implementation—such as logistical barriers, outreach gaps, and insufficient resource allocation—hinder effective policy translation. Strengthening governance, accountability mechanisms, and community-informed delivery models is essential to ensure equitable access and sustainable outcomes.

In sum, achieving sustainable, gender-equitable displacement responses requires moving from policy rhetoric to actionable, context-sensitive, and inclusive practice. The study's findings offer actionable directions for state and non-state actors to refine policy design, improve implementation, and strengthen the human security of IDPs in Abuja, with implications for other displacement settings facing similar challenges.

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