

Article

# Forced Displacement and Urban Migration Trends in Nigeria: Drivers, Outcomes, and Policy Implications

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## Abstract

*Forced displacement remains a persistent challenge in Nigeria, driven by armed conflict (including the Boko Haram insurgency and herder-farmer clashes), climate-induced disasters, and structural vulnerabilities such as poverty and weak institutional capacity. With over 3.3 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) recorded in 2024 – accounting for roughly 3% of the global displaced population – Nigeria faces a displacement crisis of significant scale and complexity. Formal IDP camps, originally established as temporary refuges with access to essential services, are increasingly being deserted by their occupants. Evidence suggests this trend is driven by ineffective camp governance, inadequate food and healthcare provision, and the absence of livelihood opportunities. This has given rise to a new migration pattern: IDPs moving from formal camps into urban centres such as Lagos, Ibadan, and Abeokuta. Upon arrival, however, they face heightened risks of exploitation, abuse, and exclusion from formal humanitarian support systems, as urban IDPs often fall outside the mandate of camp-based relief programmes. This paper examines the driving factors behind forced displacement and the emergent trend of camp-to-urban migration in Nigeria using a mixed-methods approach. The study combines a systematic review of academic literature and policy documents with semi-structured interviews conducted among 20 respondents randomly selected from IDP populations in Lagos, Ogun, and Osun States – three Southwestern states hosting displaced persons from conflict-affected regions. Findings reveal a dual perception of camp interventions: while 75% of respondents acknowledged formal camps as helpful in principle, the majority expressed dissatisfaction with camp conditions. Notably, 70% indicated a willingness to return to their communities of origin if provided with credible assurances of security and sustained access to basic services and livelihood support. The paper discusses the implications of Nigeria's displacement crisis for multiple stakeholders – host communities, humanitarian actors, and policymakers – and argues that the current camp-centric humanitarian model is insufficient for a crisis increasingly characterised by urban migration. It calls for an immediate multisectoral approach to IDP camp reform, alongside the establishment of dedicated frameworks to identify, register, and support the growing urban IDP population. Specific recommendations include investment in climate-resilient infrastructure, the creation of livelihood programmes tailored to displaced populations, and the development of host-community integration systems that promote social cohesion rather than marginalisation.*

**Keywords:** Forced displacement, Internally displaced persons, IDP camps, Urban migration, Humanitarian policy, Nigeria

## Introduction

Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps are notably designed and known to be a holding place of safety and shelter for people who have been forcibly displaced from their homes, families, and communities into formal IDP camps with the presumed expectation of protection and their primary needs of food, water, sanitation, healthcare and shelter met. However, there are growing concerns as most of the IDP camps are becoming empty or underoccupied, which has led to the shutdown of formal IDP camps in Nigeria (Nwannah, 2023). According to the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC, 2025), more than 50% of the world's forcibly displaced persons reside in urban areas as opposed to formal camps, seeking safety, dignity, and well-being. However, these urban settlers face complex challenges, rendering them virtually invisible and forgotten by both their countries of origin and host nations.



By the end of 2023, 117.3 million people were forcibly displaced globally, comprising 50.2 million refugees and 68.3 million IDPs (NRC, 2024). Africa hosts approximately half of the global IDP population, with a recorded 35 million IDPs at the end of 2023 (IDMC, 2024). Nigeria hosts around 90,000 refugees and asylum seekers from around 40 countries, while over 400,000 Nigerian citizens seek refuge in neighbouring countries, and approximately 3.3 million IDPs are within its borders (Jain, 2024). This makes Nigeria hold about 3% of the global forcibly displaced persons.

As Nigeria continues to experience an increase in the number of self-settling IDPs in comparison to IDP camp settlers, Mohammed (2022) calls for unified collaboration on the provision of appropriate IDP camps that meet international humanitarian standards. The United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) (2020) indicated an urgent need to close the widening gap for stereotypical thinking on the provision of formal IDP camps to meet the needs of forcibly displaced persons, but rather time to have academic research, empirical studies, analysis and understanding of the needs of IDPs through inclusive and integrative approaches.

The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC, n.d.) highlighted a significant research gap in understanding the well-being of urban IDPs who have experienced frequent movements between cities and towns, underscoring the need for research that captures the complex and dynamic experiences of this vulnerable population and understands the recent emptying of formal camps.

Nigeria has taken a significant step in addressing the complex challenges of IDPs with the launch of its homegrown State Action Plan in May 2024, which has been incorporated by several states in northeastern Nigeria. This initiative, supported by the United Nations (UN), aims to find lasting solutions that incorporate global standards and the Kampala Convention to reduce or eliminate IDP issues in the country (UN, 2024).

This paper investigates evolving patterns of IDPs in Nigeria, particularly their ongoing movements and relocation from traditional camps to urban areas. It considered related academic literature and semi-structured interviews through detailed investigations of the stimulus behind their drive to move, difficulties encountered and growing numbers of IDP urban settlers. It provides recommendations to Nigeria government and humanitarian actors/stakeholders on how to tackle and prioritise the growing needs of IDP urban settlers.

## **Rationale for the Study**

The growing concerns that IDPs have led them to continue to avoid traditional formal camps established to meet their basic needs, but they have opted for urban areas, prompting this paper. This article intends to investigate emerging patterns among the vulnerable population who have been displaced and forced to flee their homes and communities. They have been displaced by disasters and are in desperate need of shelter, but have purposely abandoned formal camps for alternative informal camps in the urban areas where protection and provision of basic needs are not guaranteed. This change in the behavioural pattern of IDPs' thirst to settle in urban areas has direct implications for humanitarian interventions and responses, and it justifies a paradigm shift from the provision of traditional formal IDP camps to IDP-focused urban development schemes, which will facilitate improved well-being of IDPs.

## **Research Questions**

- i. What are the underlying factors that turn IDPs in Nigeria away from traditional formal camps to urban areas?
- ii. What are the advantages and disadvantages of increasing IDPs opting for urban areas instead of the traditional formal camps in Nigeria?
- iii. How can humanitarian benefactors, stakeholders, and policy makers address presenting shift in behavioural patterns of IDPs and address their needs as IDP urban settlers?

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## Research Objectives

- i. To respond to the evolving pattern of IDPs turning away from traditional formal camps to urban areas in Nigeria.
- ii. To identify the challenges, advantages and disadvantages of urban IDPs in Nigeria.
- iii. To embrace a paradigm shift from traditional formal camps to meet the needs of IDPs in urban areas through contemporary humanitarian interventions, collaboration of humanitarian benefactors, stakeholders, policy makers and inclusion of IDPs in decision making to improve their wellbeing.

## Significance of the Study

Nigeria is facing an ongoing complex migration crisis, with challenging factors that impact the provision of appropriate aid to meet the needs of IDPs. This article aims to contribute to knowledge and understanding of upcoming trends among urban IDP communities, and to investigate causal factors behind IDPs' preference for urban areas over traditional formal camps. It will provide in-depth solutions that can influence decision-making and management practices of humanitarian actors, policy makers, stakeholders, Non-governmental Organisations, Civil Society Organisations, and philanthropic bodies. To improve strategies that will promote the well-being of IDPs, especially urban IDP communities in Nigeria, who lack international legal protection, weak domestic legal protection and insufficient provision of humanitarian aid.

## Theoretical Framework

In addition to the challenges and complexities of the migration crisis in Nigeria, IDPs now abandon formal camps for urban areas where they do not have appropriate humanitarian support. This paper employed the Push and Pull Theory to understand the behavioural patterns of IDPs opting out of traditional IDP camps for urban areas.

Push and Pull Theory was coined by Everett Spurgeon Lee (Lee, 1966), which draws on sociological principles that explain the driving factors behind human migration; movements of people from their origins to their new destinations, the host communities. It explains the combination of factors that push individuals and families away from their homes and communities and the pulling factors that draw them to their new communities. Theory takes into account the current global migration crisis and its existence since primitive times, whereby people migrate to search for basic needs, including safety, food, healthcare, and improved well-being (Huang and Graham, 2019).

According to Ikwuyatun (2016), due to people's pursuit of improved socio-economic wellbeing, including safety and protection, Nigeria has continued to experience an increase in the movement of people from rural to urban areas. This is similar to the current abandonment of formal camps for urban areas. IDPs in Nigeria have continued to complain of a lack of essentials in formal camps, and as a result, they are forced to leave and resort to begging on the streets to survive (Nwannah, 2023). These are contributory factors that drive IDPs away from traditional camps to informal camps and IDP urban communities.

It is important to recognise the simplicity of the theory, which is a major limitation of Push and Pull theory as it does not provide explanations of the complexities and challenges associated with migration (Bruzzzone, 2020).

## Methodology

The study used a mixed-method approach, utilising qualitative data from semi-structured interviews with a broad literature review. It investigated IDPs who have purposely abandoned formal camps in Nigeria and relocated to informal shelters in urban areas. Related academic literature was used, including policy papers, newspapers, and reliable online materials that provide

insight into the primary drivers of forced displacement, camp management, IDPs' welfare and the main factors that motivate IDPs to relocate from formal camps to informal urban settlements.

Main data were collected from twenty respondents randomly selected from Lagos, Ogun and Osun States, the southwestern geopolitical zone, though a few were intentionally chosen. They were all engaged in various unskilled jobs, including mayguard, shoe-mender, street vendor and street porters, but they were all approached at different locations. The interview was semi-structured, which enabled respondents to provide a comprehensive description, focusing on key themes, but a relaxed, informal ambience was maintained. Main themes explored include respondents' demographics, rationale for leaving formal camp, description of IDP camp, and intention to return or integrate into the host community.

Ethical considerations were observed, including voluntary participation, informed consent, and confidentiality assurances. Data were analysed thematically, supported by descriptive statistics to illustrate demographic patterns and camp experiences. Graphs and charts were used for visual representation to aid the discussion and interpretation of the findings.

## Migration

Migration is the movement of people from one location to another, which can be within the borders of a country or outside the borders, and it is historical and has been in existence since biblical times. Migration is personal; it can occur due to reasons known to individuals, families or communities, which can be political, economic, climatic, or social. The choice to move and relocate can be temporary or permanent. Depending on the viewpoint, migration can promote socio-economic growth in the community or host country through unity, sharing of skills, economic growth, social development, diversity and cohesion. However, it can also create division, tribal clashes, depletion of available resources for the community and host country, disunity and insecurity.

It is important to view migration from a humanitarian perspective and mitigate through an appropriate approach, rather than individuals, communities and host countries that consider migration from a political point of view and only see insecurity and economic competition (Osah et al., n.d.; Njaim, 2018).

There are four types of migration: voluntary, forced, temporary, and permanent, but this paper will consider the two major types - voluntary and forced migration.

### *Voluntary Migration*

According to Drew (2023), voluntary migration is the free movement of individuals from one location to another (within the borders or outside the borders of a country) by choice without coercion. It is mostly initiated through the desire for a better location that can improve an individual's social and economic opportunities. In Nigeria for example, people migrate to the urban areas, like Lagos and Abuja for job opportunities, better living conditions, to be closer to family/loved ones and other personal reasons IOM Nigeria (International Organization for Migration) (IOM, 2019).

### *Forced Migration*

Forced migration involves coercion; to suddenly flee due to the occurrence of a natural or human-made disaster. UNHCR (2023) described forced migration as when individuals flee from their families, communities, or nations due to disasters such as wars, conflicts and armed conflicts. Disaster affects the functioning of the community, and it can either be contained by the community or it spreads quickly, which mostly will require external support and resources to reduce the impact of loss in the community (UNDRR, 2016). Affected people move from their habitual locations and are forced into alternatives where they may not desire, but there is expected peace and provision of

aids. The most vulnerable population amongst forcibly displaced people are children and women (UNICEF, 2020b).

Forcibly displaced persons have a different category -

*Asylum seekers* - these are people who have crossed the boundary of their country into another country, but await the outcome of their application in the host country.

*IDPs* - these are people who have been displaced from their home or community but remain within the borders of their country.

*People looking for international protection* - these are people who have fled their homes and communities due to armed conflict.

*Refugees* - these are people who have fled their homes and communities, and crossed the borders of their countries for refuge in another country.

## **Causal Factors of Forced Migration/Displacement**

Forced migration and displacement are longstanding, complex and challenging with no positive resolution in Nigeria. This results from interconnected factors, including natural and human-made disasters, and structural vulnerabilities. According to UNDRR (2020), natural disasters are nature-induced events with devastating impact on the communities and societies, examples include tsunamis, floods, dust storms, or droughts. Insurgencies, armed conflicts, or human actions/negligence are examples of human-made disasters (IFRC, 2022); this equally results in forced migration. Nigeria has structural weaknesses and vulnerabilities that have continued to fuel forced migration and displacement, such as frail infrastructure and services, social inequality, patriarchal society, poor disaster management, corruption, and poor legal and institutional safeguards. These factors lead to loss of homes, livelihoods, and social networks, creating severe humanitarian needs and straining host communities' resources, services, and infrastructures (Anene-Maidoh, 2021).

According to George and Adelaja (2022), Nigeria is an exemplary nation where forced displacement has a severe impact not only on the forcibly displaced population but on host communities, impacting its socio-economic stability and increasing the vulnerability of IDPs to abuse and exploitation.

## **Migration Crisis in Nigeria**

Migration crisis in Nigeria is multifaceted, a nation saddled with a huge population of about 226,166,443; 520, 371 recognised ethnicities, about 520 native languages (National Bureau of Statistics, 2024), making it complex. A combination of different factors has made migration protracted in nature, a national problem that the government has struggled to understand or control.

Nigeria has the push and pull factors that influence the movement of people in and out of the country, including many Nigerians fleeing the country for the developed countries such as the UK, USA and Canada. Equally, some Nigerians migrate to neighbouring developing countries like Cameroon, Niger and Chad. Some of the factors pushing Nigerians out of the country include conflicts, insecurity, poverty, unemployment, abuse of human rights, and political instability. Alternatively, factors pulling them over to the developed countries are safety/peace, employment, healthcare, economic opportunities, and improved quality of life. In the plight to migrate from Nigeria in search of a better life, many Nigerians become exposed to economic exploitation that easily leads to sex abuse, illegal migration, slavery, mental health issues, etc.

Children constitute about 60% of the thousands of displaced people in the camps (UNICEF, 2020b); many of them are orphans and unaccompanied (Obaji, 2018). These children live in awful conditions,

stripped of their rights, without easy access to shelter, water, food, healthcare and education (Adelakun, 2021; Vittozzi, 2016; UN, 2016). They are traumatised, malnourished, dehydrated and exposed to sexual and gender-based violence (UN, 2016).

Porous border control is a significant challenge in the management of migration in Nigeria, which has led to easy cross borders into Nigeria as refugees. This increases the population that is already stretched, impacting negatively on the socio-economic growth and planning of the nation. Verme and Schuettler (2021) call it an economic shock on both the consumer and labour market. Likewise, when Nigerians are forcibly displaced internally, they move to an alternative state/community, where they are mostly not welcome but treated with hostility (Amina and Ibrahim 2019).

Humanitarian responses to refugees and IDPs in Nigeria are not up to the Sphere Standard (The Sphere Handbook, 2018). OCHA (2024) identified malnutrition and food insecurity in Yobe, Adamawa and Borno, resulting from disease outbreaks, floods, conflicts, involuntary movements and relocation due to camp closure. Overcrowding, inadequate amenities and insecurity are major problems in formal camps in Nigeria and result in forcibly displaced individuals' preference for informal settlements. Insufficient funding is a major factor that has continued to hinder the full functioning of humanitarian agencies and mandates, leading to forcibly displaced individuals turning to informal camps, including urban areas, privately sourced shelters, and other illegal shelters. According to UNHCR (2024), by the middle of 2024, about 119.9 million forcibly displaced individuals were assisted, as opposed to a total of 122.6 million forcibly displaced individuals. This demonstrates significant funding gaps, with direct impact on available aid and effective management of refugee/IDP camps. with overcrowding, insufficient food, water, healthcare, education, etc. Despite the huge number of IDPs in Nigeria, there is no operational framework for them. Similarly, there has not been any tangible positive impact of the National IDP Policy (2021) on the well-being of IDPs. It has not enabled IDPs to retain their political, economic, and social rights as citizens, nor have humanitarian protection, resettlement or integration support.

All these crises contribute to the reasons why forcibly displaced individuals will prefer alternative shelter to formal camps.

## **Formal Camps**

Formal camps are intentionally built settlements to provide shelter and protection for forcibly displaced individuals and communities affected by natural and human-made disasters. They are officially recognised and managed by national authorities in collaboration with humanitarian actors. These camps are intended to provide centralised, timely and coordinated services including basic needs like food, water, health care, sanitation, education and protection. Although formal camps are meant to be short-term or transitional planned holding locations, due to prolonged conflicts, violence and natural disasters, displaced individuals often spend decades in them (Ferris 2018). According to Camp Coordination and Camp Management (CCCM) (2020), an effective formal camp must have a mechanism that promotes IDPs' participation and inclusion in camp management.

## **Urban IDPs in Nigeria**

There is an increasing IDP population moving from formal camps into urban areas. IDMC (2019) reported that about 60% of recorded global IDPs now reside in urban areas without any legal protection or access to humanitarian aid. This new trend, triggered by ineffective IDP camp management, insecurity and poor outcomes, has resulted in abandonment of formal camps and the pursuit of improved well-being and economic livelihood in urban areas.

With the increasing IDP population in Nigeria, there is a significant phenomenon of IDPs migrating from IDP camps to informal urban settlements. Some move in with their families/friends or into unsafe open spaces, uncompleted buildings, or car parks. Understandably, these informal settlements

are not confined, but it offers freedom of movement to search for self-preferred shelter, but it exposes them to abuse, exploitation, bad weather and re-displacement.

Mbombo & Shittu (2024) gave an account of IDPs in Kwara State, providing space in the peripheries of the communities to build temporary shelters without humanitarian support/services. Similarly, in Abuja, IDPs were denied citizen rights and denied access to services (Amina & Ibrahim, 2019). This demonstrates the heightened vulnerabilities urban IDPs are exposed to. They are excluded from humanitarian aid because they are not registered, and are exposed to gender-based violence and other types of sexual exploitation.

Recurring abandonment of formal camps for informal settlements in urban areas and increased vulnerabilities demonstrate the experiences of informal settlements. Humanitarian interventions and policy responses must be inclusive, with the reformation of urban IDP frameworks incorporated into national and humanitarian IDP planning schemes.

## **Urban IDPs, Benefits and Difficulties**

According to IDMC (2019), there is a global trend of IDPs opting for urban areas instead of formal IDP camps due to “conflict and insecurity, climate shocks and changes in the rural economy drive displacement toward cities in many countries”. In the 20th century, urban IDPs were wrongly labelled self-sufficient and left with minimal access to humanitarian assistance. It was demonstrated that humanitarian funds mostly focus on formal/traditional camps that IDPs do not benefit from due to ineffective management of the camps. Urban IDPs enjoy benefits from settling into new areas with high expectations for a better outcome, there are significant challenges and difficulties they encounter, which result in secondary displacement and increased vulnerability.

Benefits and Advantages of Urban Settlement:

### *Access to Services and Opportunities*

Urban areas often offer better access to healthcare, education, employment, and social services compared to rural or camp-based settings. UNHCR (2024) notes that cities may offer more infrastructure and economic opportunities for displaced populations.

### *Anonymity and Freedom of Movement*

Urban IDPs move freely as opposed to formal camps. They move without restrictions to pursue livelihoods of their choice. Zetter & Deikun (2010) emphasised the positive impact of their independence and freedom of movement. Urban IDP settlers mingle with the host community, which reduces/removes stigma and improves their mental health.

### *Integration with Local Communities*

Some urban IDPs integrate easily with the host community where they have similar religion and ethnicity, which promotes social inclusion and ease of settling in. Although Culbertson et al. (2016) submit that diversity can promote resilience, adaptability, and capacity to cope with stressors and shocks. It can enable urban/community growth and cohesion by accommodating IDP settlers in the host community.

### *Urban Agenda*

It is important to incorporate IDPs settling in cities into urban development plans/policies, as this will be beneficial to the host community and the displaced population (IDMC, 2019). The Sustainable

Development Goal (SDG) 11 is targeted at building inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable cities by 2030. This will benefit urban IDPs, host communities and the nation.

Difficulties of IDPs in Urban Areas:

#### *Limited Humanitarian Support*

Restricted access to aid is a predominant problem for the displaced population. It affects urban IDPs more because they are not registered and not in formal camps. They are wrongly labelled self-sufficient; according to UNHCR (2024), about 60% of urban IDPs are left without humanitarian assistance.

#### *Precarious Living Conditions*

The majority of urban IDPs live in dangerous settlements, uncompleted buildings, open fields or other unsafe shelters without essentials. In Kwara State, IDPs were allowed to build makeshift tents along the borders, which exposed them to severe weather and community hostility (Mbombo & Shittu, 2024).

#### *Increased Vulnerability to Exploitation*

Urban IDPs encounter multi-faceted challenges; they are not protected by national/international humanitarian laws, which deepens their vulnerability to abuse. Due to a lack of legal documentation and representation, they do not have access to humanitarian aids/support. Urban IDPs are subjected to exploitation and trafficking common among women and children.

#### *Tension Between IDPs and Host Community*

Migration of IDPs to urban areas results in conflicts due to an increase in competition for scarce resources and services, including healthcare, housing, jobs and funds. IOM Nigeria (2023) confirmed increased tensions due to the arrival of the displaced population and overstretched services/resources. Amina & Ibrahim (2019) described the unfair treatment of IDPs in Abuja, Nigeria. IDPs were stigmatised and denied equal rights and citizenship in the nation by the community.

#### *Ineffective Managed Urban Area Growth*

Urban areas have their own challenges, including poor housing management, poverty, poor city planning and inequality. Unplanned and ineffective urban growth, in combination with its inherent problems, contributes to the increased vulnerability of the displaced population in the community. This has a detrimental impact on the IDPs who have left formal camps and migrated to urban areas for improved livelihood, which often leads to re-displacement.

### **Challenges of IDPs in Nigeria**

Forced migration is a global problem. Nigeria has its share of increasing numbers of IDPs who have been forced to flee from disasters. IDPs are forced to leave their communities, homes and families. The World Food Program (WFP) (2023) highlighted that IDPs do not have easy access to food, and children, pregnant women, the elderly and those who are ill or require care assistance are severely affected. The lack of effective frameworks for IDPs that promote basic human rights, including their cultural and socioeconomic rights, exposes IDPs to increased vulnerability and risks of re-displacement (Kolawole, 2013).

Some of the specific challenges include:

#### *Basic Needs*

Basic amenities include adequate availability of water, food, sanitation, health and protection, but these have become scarce or lacking in Nigerian IDP camps. This is a major challenge in the management of

formal camps in Nigeria. The vulnerable population among the IDPs, including children, pregnant women, the elderly and the sick, are severely impacted, leading to morbidity and mortality through outbreaks of diseases and sicknesses.

#### *Job Opportunities and Poverty*

IDPs often face multifaceted struggles following loss of their homes, families, income, social connections and influence. These challenges often result in persistent poverty, as it becomes difficult for them to secure a new source of income or sustainable means of maintenance to provide for their family. In the northeastern part of Nigeria, for example, most of the IDPs who were previously engaged in farming could not continue because of displacement; the majority could not resume agricultural activities in their new locations (formal and informal settlements) because of lack of access to farmland, seeds, security and other resources. This has consequently led to some IDPs leaving formal camps to engage in street begging, with reports of children being used for sexual exploitation or as a means to solicit for money (Nwannah, 2023). The situation of IDPs in urban areas poses added complexity because they must learn to navigate and adapt to city life to maintain their well-being. Securing shelter is essential for IDPs in urban areas, not only for protection and safety but to secure a job and other employment opportunities, as it will not be easy to secure a formal job without a fixed address.

#### *Health and Mental Health*

Mental health is a major concern in Nigeria, but is predominant among IDPs who have been forcibly displaced. The World Health Organisation (WHO, n.d.) recognised wellbeing components and the need to manage daily pressures, remain active/effective, engage in community life, and it emphasized importance of healthcare plans.

In the context of displacement, restricted access to humanitarian aid such as food, water, sanitation, healthcare, and security has been shown to significantly affect the psychological well-being of IDPs. Hamid & Musa (2010) found that victims of war represent one of the highest populations with mental health disorders. The losses and distress associated with forced displacement increase IDPs' vulnerability to depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorders (PTSD). Furthermore, Olufadewa et al. (2022) observed that adolescents and young adults in IDP camps are at heightened risk of developing mental health conditions, including anxiety, depression, PTSD, and even psychosis, because of prolonged exposure to trauma and the unsuitable living conditions within formal and informal camps.

#### *Protection in IDP Camps*

Security and protection are paramount to forcibly displaced individuals, families or communities, but in most of the IDP camps in Nigeria, this remains a severe challenge. IDP camps are meant to provide safety and shelter from violence, abuse, and deprivation, but reports show this is not always the case. The majority of the IDPs who returned to their communities of origin were subjected to new risks. The vulnerabilities of IDP returnees were escalated when the UN's World Food Programme terminated the supply of its aid/support, leading to food scarcity; IDPs were left without essentials; women and children were abducted by Boko Haram (IRIN, 2020).

#### *Limited Access to Services*

In Nigeria, due to challenges of restricted access to services and poor living conditions in formal IDP camps, IDPs have abandoned formal camps and relocated to urban areas. IDPs in informal settlements are not registered and can be excluded from humanitarian aids/support. Their conditions most often do not improve due to the inability to find suitable accommodation, job or livelihood. In addition, most urban IDPs do not have the proper documentation required to access essential services, including healthcare, social support and education. In formal IDP camps, Anene-Maidoh (2021) identified similar challenges such as yearly funding gaps, political indifference, poor coordination/logistics and corruption. According to IOM (2023), there is limited access to services in some of the formal IDP camps

in northeastern Nigeria because of overcrowding, and available humanitarian aid does not meet their identified needs. Akinrolie et al (2022) added that due to poor living conditions, including overcrowding, poor healthcare and sanitation, shortage of food and water, about 40% of IDPs in formal camps are susceptible to diseases and infections. In Borno State, about 35% healthcare services were destroyed, while about 30% were partly damaged; this further reduced IDPs' access to healthcare services (WHO 2017; Ekezie, 2019).

## Findings and Data Analysis

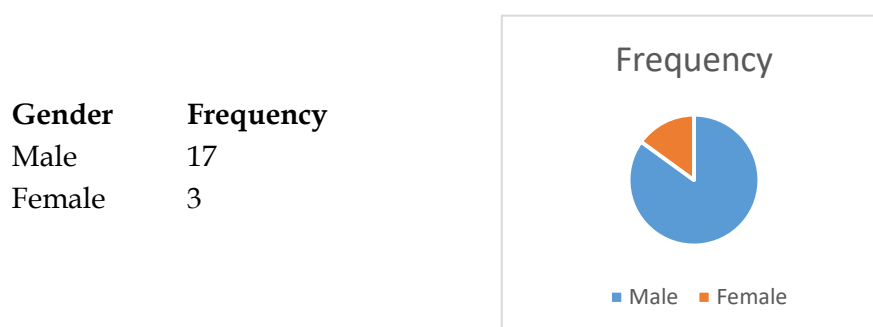
The study interviewed 20 IDPs, 17 relocated from formal IDP camps, and three moved from informal shelters. Respondents were randomly selected from Lagos, Ogun and Osun States situated in the southwestern geopolitical zone of Nigeria, but a few were purposely chosen. All respondents were interviewed at various locations of their menial jobs, such as shoe-mending, mayguard and street porter. There were 85% men, which implied that men who are majorly heads of family leave formal IDP camps to search for financial support to sustain their families. Furthermore, 80% of the respondents lived in formal camps before migrating to urban areas.

Regionally, 45% of the respondents originated from the northeast of Nigeria, which is the most affected region in Nigeria by armed conflict and Boko Haram. According to the age distribution, 45% are between 31 and 45 years, which represents the working-age population. 60% respondents were married, and 75% have children, demonstrating the need for a steady flow of income to provide for their families.

Half of the respondents were farmers before they were forcibly displaced into IDP camps. This aligns with the literature that posits disasters are the major drivers of forced displacement. It highlights that farmers are forced to flee their farms because of farmer-herder conflicts, drought, and deforestation. In addition, the unavailability of farmland and required incentives in formal camps for agricultural activities also contribute to the abandonment of formal camps for informal settlements.

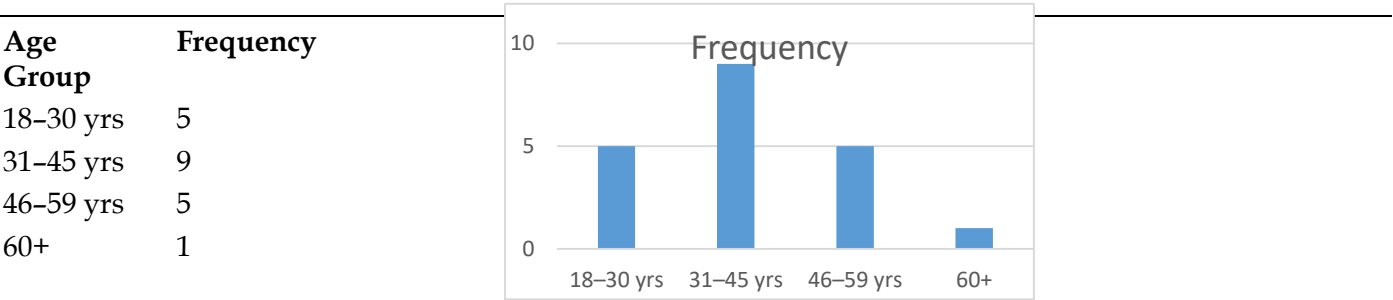
Based on camp experience, 75% of respondents confirmed that camp is a place of safety and provision of aids, but 70% do not have any regrets leaving the camp. This strongly demonstrates dissatisfaction, even though there are provisions of aid in the camps. But a significant 70% of the respondents desire to return to their communities and be reunited with their families if security and access to essential services are guaranteed.

Figures below provide a graphic illustration:



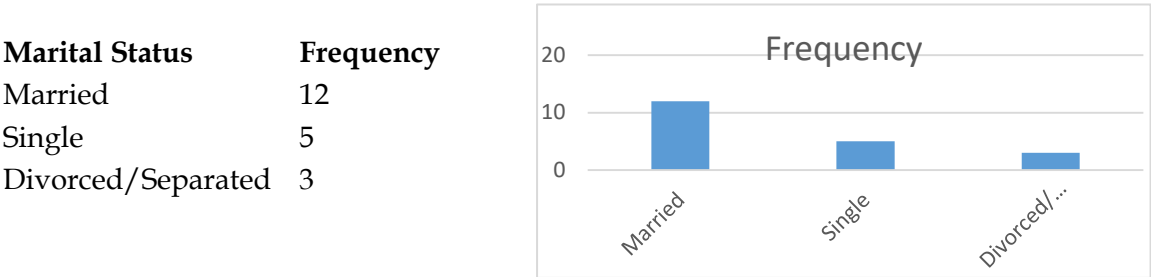
**Fig.1 – Gender of Respondents**

This reveals substantial male dominance at 85%, while female respondents accounted for only 15%. It shows that men are more likely to leave their families in IDP camps, migrate to urban areas to pursue profitable opportunities and livelihood.



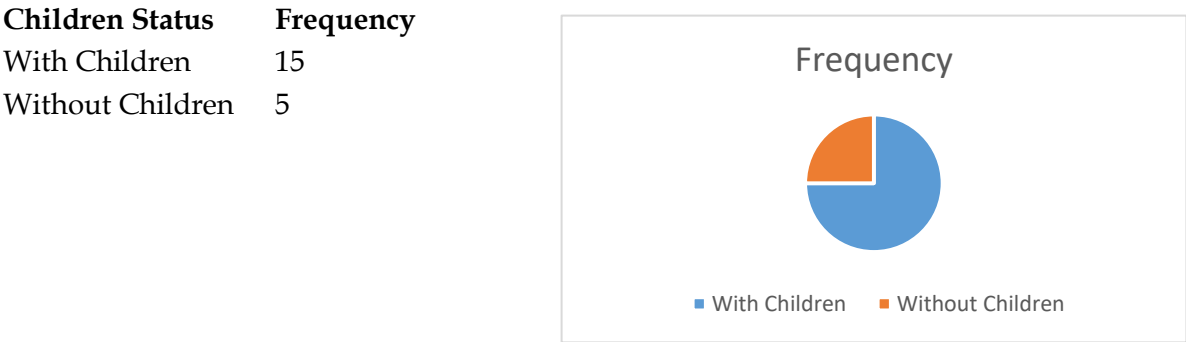
**Fig.2 - Age Frequency of Respondents**

Age distribution indicates that 45% were aged 31 – 45 years, signifying the most economically active group, while 25% were 18 – 30 years, another 25% were between 46 – 59 years, and only 5% were above 60 years. This demonstrates that migration largely affects people in their productive years.



**Fig. 3 – Marital Status of Respondents**

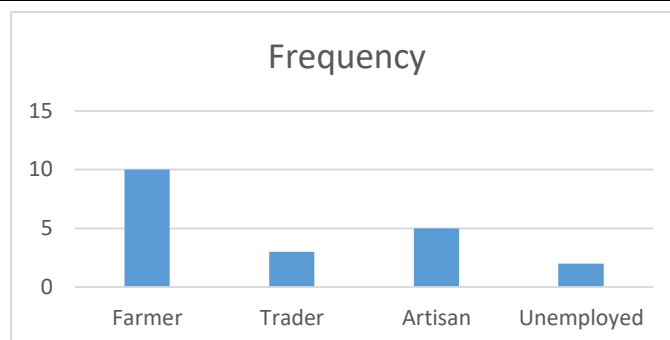
The results show that 60% of respondents were married, 25% were single, and 15% were separated or divorced, indicating that marital status influences livelihood decisions and planning.



**Fig. 4 – Respondents’ Parental Status**

Findings above reveal that 75% respondents have children, which suggests a high level of dependence and requirement for regular income sent to their families left in formal camps. Remaining 25% respondents do not have children but will likely remit money to their relatives or loved ones.

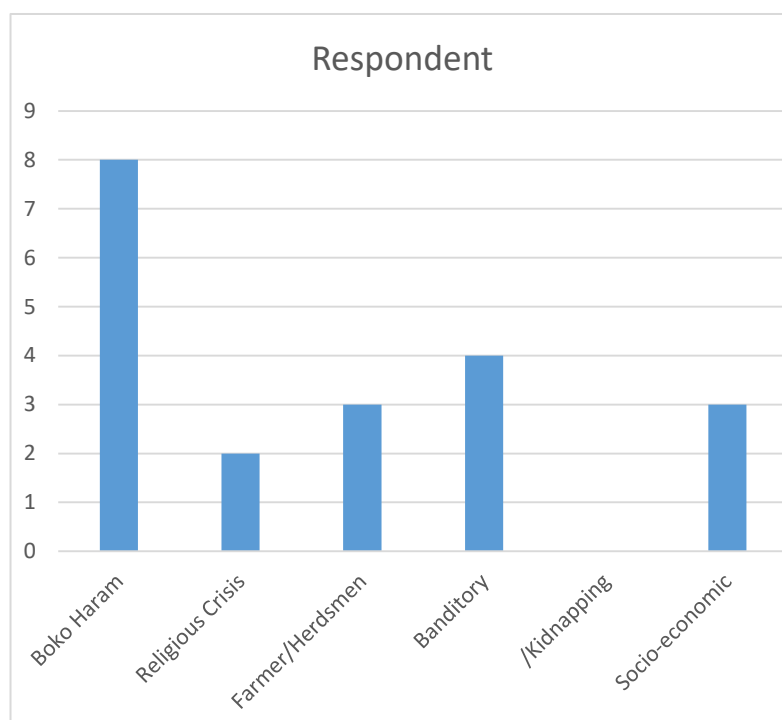
| Occupation | Frequency |
|------------|-----------|
| Farmer     | 10        |
| Trader     | 3         |
| Artisan    | 5         |
| Unemployed | 2         |



**Fig. 5 – Pre-Displacement Occupation of Respondents**

The results denote that before displacement, 50% of the respondents were farmers. This aligns with the literature on farmers forcibly displaced from their farmlands because of insecurity. National insecurity, especially herder-farmer conflicts, highlights challenges and risks in Nigerian farming communities. It contributes to the primary causal factors of forced displacement and subsequent relocation to urban areas.

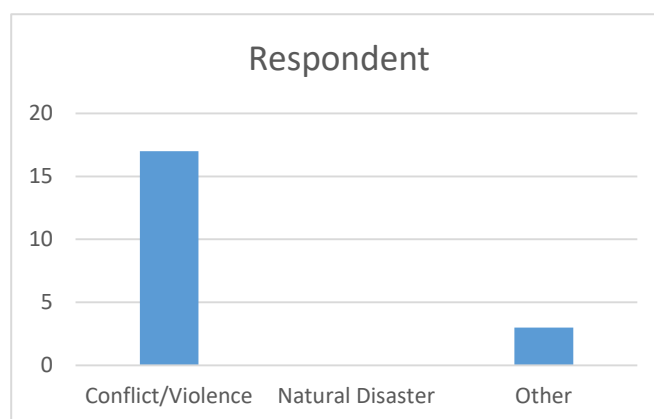
| Reason for leaving CAMP  | Respondent |
|--------------------------|------------|
| Boko Haram               | 8          |
| Religious Crisis         | 2          |
| Farmer/Herdsmen          | 3          |
| Banditory<br>/Kidnapping | 4          |
| Socio-economic           | 3          |



**Fig. 6 – Rationale for Exiting IDP Camps among Respondents**

40% of the respondents were forcibly displaced because of Boko Haram, while 20% respondents were displaced due to banditry/kidnapping, and 15% accounted for farmer/herdsmen and socio-economic factors, respectively. 10% respondents were displaced due to a religious crisis.

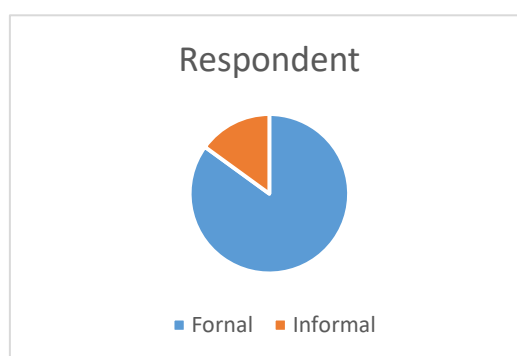
| Cause of displacement | Respondent |
|-----------------------|------------|
| Conflict/Violence     | 17         |
| Natural Disaster      | 0          |
| Other                 | 3          |



**Fig. 7 - Cause of displacement**

Findings indicates 85% of the respondents were displaced because of conflict and violence, 15% respondents reported other, undetermined causes, and none recorded natural disasters.

| Type of Camp | Respondent |
|--------------|------------|
| Formal       | 17         |
| Informal     | 3          |



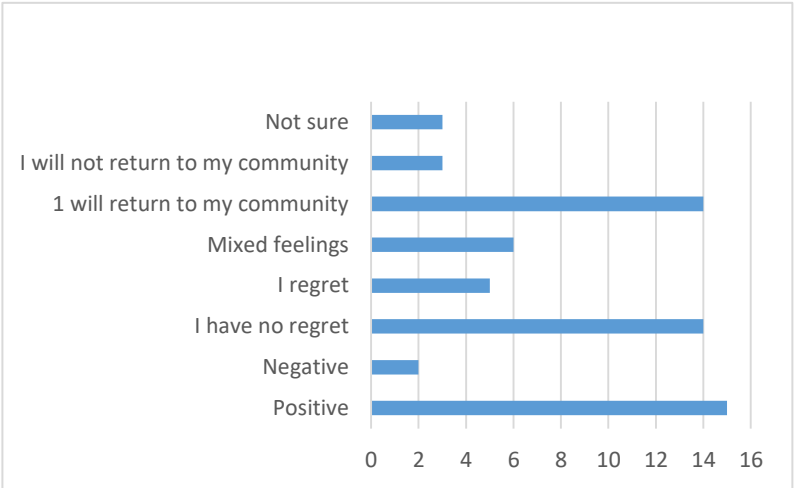
**Fig. 8 - Type of Camp**

Findings reveals 85% of the respondents formerly lived in formal IDP camps while 15% resided in informal shelters.

#### IDP Camp Experience

|                  |    |
|------------------|----|
| Positive         | 15 |
| Negative         | 2  |
| I have no regret | 14 |
| I regret         | 5  |
| Mixed feelings   | 6  |

|                                   |    |
|-----------------------------------|----|
| 1 will return to my community     | 14 |
| I will not return to my community | 3  |
|                                   |    |
| Not sure                          | 3  |



The findings reveal 75% of respondents confirmed that formal camps provide aid and it has a positive impact, but 10% disagreed. 70% do not regret leaving formal camps, 25% have regrets, but 30% are not sure; they have mixed feelings. Regarding returning to their communities, 70% indicated a desire to return, 15% is ascertive about not returning because they have integrated into the host community, and 15% were not certain; their decision could be linked to future events.

Conclusion

Migration catastrophes remain a global concern driven by unmanageable human-made and natural disasters, including structural vulnerabilities. Nigeria has 3% of recorded global IDPs (UNHCR, 2024). It typifies a nation saddled with multifaceted driving factors with acute impact on host communities and the IDPs. Displaced populations are vulnerable and exposed to different types of abuse and exploitation, including evictions and re-displacements (George & Adelaja, 2022).

The paper underscores the difficulties that encompass management of IDPs’ wellbeing in Nigeria, especially with the new phenomenon of abandonment of formal camps and an increase in urban IDP settlements. This occurrence is heightened by national insecurity, inadequate government commitment, funding gaps and reduced humanitarian interventions/responses. Some of the main causal factors of forced displacement include natural and human-made disasters, e.g. floods, farmer-herder conflicts and socio-political insecurity.

Ineffective IDP camp management can be attributed to the overlapping challenges stretching from insufficient provision of basic amenities, abuse, overcrowding, and insecurity. These are contributory factors to the migration of IDPs from formal camps to informal settlements in urban areas. Head of families migrate from formal camps, and they relocate to urban areas in search of improved well-being and job opportunities. Though urban areas are not an easy environment for the IDPs to blend/settle in, considering associated risks and concerns in host communities - restricted access to services, exploitation, stigmatisation/hostility and ill health.

Identified concerns highlight inherent national structural challenges, weak governance, socio-economic inequalities, and national insecurity. With direct impact on Nigeria’s capability to

achieve SDG 11, regarding sustainable cities and communities by 2030. The outcome of the paper demonstrated that Nigeria's migration crisis cannot be managed solely by a humanitarian approach but through collaborative practice, review of the sustainable development frameworks utilizing a multidisciplinary approach.

### **Recommendation**

The study provided insight into ongoing challenges of managing IDP camps in Nigeria, particularly around the prevailing phenomenon of IDPs abandoning traditional IDP camps for urban areas. It identified that the traditional camp is a positive humanitarian response to forcibly displaced populations who are in dire need of shelter and protection. However, it indicates that "a straight jacket does not fit all" because formal camps can no longer be considered the primary response for shelter, bearing in mind the evolving patterns of urban IDP communities.

#### *Security and Peacebuilding Initiatives*

National insecurity is a major driving factor of forced displacement in Nigeria; therefore, the federal, state and local governments must strive to restore a peaceful nation. Recurring insurgencies, banditry, and continued violence have resulted in increased forced displacement, prevalent in the northeastern part of Nigeria. Peacebuilding projects are a positive way of restoring communities; these projects are used to promote security. Examples of peacebuilding projects in Nigeria include Community Response Networks and early warning systems in Kaduna State (used to report human rights abuses and response to disaster management); The Conflict Prevention and Peace Building Initiative (this focuses on youth identity and security), etc. Although it may appear that this is not effective because of persistent violence, unrest and an increase in IDPs across the nation. Government, humanitarian actors and stakeholders cannot relent but to continue peacebuilding projects. 70% of the respondents showed willingness to return to their communities if security is assured. It provides evidence of the need for security and peacebuilding initiatives.

#### *Improve IDP Camp Infrastructure*

Makeshift shelters and a lack of essential aid in most of the IDP camps in Nigeria have contributed to secondary displacement. This paper recommends an urgent review of IDP camp management. The Nigerian government, humanitarian agencies and other stakeholders must collaborate and come up with modernised IDP camp structures across the nation in line with CCCM standards. This will improve camp living conditions and environment that can instil reassurance, resilience, confidence and hope instead of unrest.

#### *Structural Vulnerabilities*

Nigeria has long-term structural vulnerabilities across all the agencies, such as healthcare, security and the judicial. These systemic failures are added challenges to meeting the welfare and needs of IDPs. Poor maintenance, mismanaged available funds, and infrastructure deficits have a parallel and direct impact on the welfare and protection of forcibly displaced individuals. The government and policymakers must prioritise the identified needs and vulnerabilities of IDPs by executing a complete transformation. This can be achieved through renewed focus on building and investing in resilient infrastructure, creating job opportunities in rural areas and villages to discourage forced migration to urban areas. In addition, the establishment of early warning systems to manage disaster risk reduction and the review of the National Policy on IDPs (2021) are vital.

#### *Livelihood and Economic Integration*

Provision and easy access to job opportunities are significant requirements and recommended for forcibly displaced persons. The Nigerian government must therefore create sustainable frameworks and strategies for job creation that can absorb IDPs of working age across the nation. Findings from

this study revealed that many respondents left IDP camps in search of livelihood opportunities in urban areas, and 75% of them have dependent children. This indicates the importance of economic inclusion that promotes resilience and reduces dependency. Importantly, forcibly displaced farmers must be supported through safe access to farmlands, free of insurgencies, where they can start crop or animal husbandry. Such farmers must be provided quality seeds and livestock, and other sustaining agriculture inputs, including essential training on improving crop cultivation and animal husbandry.

#### *Urban IDP Policy and Frameworks*

There is an urgent call for the development of policies and frameworks that can address the increasing number of IDPs leaving formal camps for informal camps and urban IDP communities in Nigeria. The National Policy on IDP (2021) is a positive development, but it has its challenges as it does not incorporate the awareness, legal protection or needs of informal settlers and urban IDPs. This article emphasised a review of the National Policy on IDPs that will integrate the needs of informal and urban IDP communities; recognise their legal rights, mitigate their protection and absorb them into the national infrastructures, including access to healthcare, education, housing, and identification documents for livelihood.

#### *Collaboration of Agencies*

Effective management of IDPs in Nigeria requires manageable collaboration between humanitarian agencies, the government, and other relevant stakeholders. These partnerships are crucial for reducing corruption, efficient resource allocation, and timely distribution of aid. This will maintain sustainable solutions of forcibly displaced persons, including resettlement, integration and voluntary return to original communities. Nigeria can still foster effective humanitarian response frameworks and meet long-term goals of IDPs through inter-agency cooperation, with working control mechanisms in place and achieve SDG 11.

#### *Awareness and Support in Host Community*

Diversity in Nigeria is significant, with about 371 ethnic groups and more than 500 languages, which has contributed to one of the challenges of managing IDPs. This disunity has exacerbated vulnerabilities of IDPs, challenged their social inclusion and quality of life. The study recommends that the federal government develop social integration programs and training that will create awareness in host communities, develop infrastructures that will accommodate the influx of IDPs, reduce strain on public resources, and eradicate tension build-up and hostility. State government to implement IDP Hubs and Centres where urban IDPs can meet, support each other and have access to resource information about the host community.

#### *Monitoring and Evaluation Systems*

The lack of a unified monitoring and evaluation system for IDPs in Nigeria has resulted in inconsistent data collection, poor accountability and impaired coordination. Information discrepancies undermine the significance and effectiveness of responses to workable developments and IDPs management. For credible monitoring and appraisal, the Nigerian government must invest in a standardised national monitoring and evaluation system that will certify the collection of reliable data and analysis. This will facilitate smooth collaboration, logistics and coordination between stakeholders and, in parallel, improve transparency, strategic planning and IDP camp decision-making processes.

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