

Internally Displaced Persons In An Inclusive Commonwealth: The Nigeria Experience.

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Abstract

Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) are persons who have been displaced by conflicts or natural disaster from their homes and traditional support structure, but have not crossed the borders of their countries. The Commonwealth theme for 2016 is “An Inclusive Commonwealth” which suggests that Commonwealth as a family of nations, each member state and her people are valued equally and has an equal voice. The Paper examines the extent of inclusiveness of IDPs in the enjoyment of “common good” and the extent of implementation of the international instruments on the protection of the rights of IDPs in Nigeria.

The study finds that there is discrimination against IDPs from host community contrary to the provisions of international instruments and that government is not giving required support expected in camps for basic welfare of the IDPs and therefore concludes that IDPs do not enjoy “inclusiveness” in the context of the Commonwealth theme and there is lack of implementation of international instruments. The study offers recommendation among others that national government should collaborate with international actors to give necessary humanitarian and welfare support to cater for the IDPs in camps.

Key words: Commonwealth, Inclusive, Internally Displaced Persons, International Agreements/Instruments, National Government, Refugees.

Introduction:

Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) are defined in the 1998 Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement as:

persons or group of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effect of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized State border.

Two major differences between IDPs and Refugees are:

- Firstly, IDPs are not the subject of a treaty adopted at the universal level, although the Guiding Principles are based on binding international human rights and humanitarian law.
- Secondly, as opposed to refugees, IDPs have not crossed an international border from their country of origin while refugees do.

The meaning of “inclusive” is not farfetched, “your dictionary” online defines inclusive as something that does not leave any part or group out. It means taking everything into account; reckoning everything, with everything included, comprehensive; while Oxford Dictionary defines Commonwealth as an independent state or community, especially a democratic republic. It is also a traditional English term for a political community founded for the common good. It refers to any group of people organized under a single government.

According to Fast Facts on the Commonwealth (2016), Fifty-three countries are members of the Commonwealth. These countries span Africa, Asia, the Americas, Europe and the Pacific and are diverse, they are amongst the world’s largest, smallest, richest and poorest countries. Thirty-one of the members are classified as small states countries with a population size of about 1.5 million peoples and larger member states that share similar characteristics with them. All

members subscribe to the Commonwealth's values and principles outlined in The Commonwealth Charter. The commonwealth countries in Africa are: Botswana, Cameroon, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Rwanda, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Swaziland; Uganda; United Republic of Tanzania; Zambia. All members have an equal say, regardless of size or economic stature.

Sharma (2016), stated that "An Inclusive Commonwealth refers to the values of tolerance, respect and understanding, as well as equity and fairness, set out in the Commonwealth Charter, and the richness of the Commonwealth as a family of nations in which each member state is valued equally and has an equal voice". Thus, by extension, the citizens of commonwealth countries have a right to enjoy values of tolerance, understanding as well as equity and fairness. These citizens as it were include the IDPs displaced from their homes and traditional support structure as a result of conflicts or natural disaster and are settled in camps within their own country and in this Paper in Nigeria, being the locational focus of the study. Technically therefore, the IDPs in Nigeria are part of the political community settled in a camp under a single (Nigeria) government for the common good.

Objectives of the Study

The general objective of this study is to examine the causes and challenges of displacement in the context of commonwealth values, while specific objectives are:

- To investigate the causes of Displacement in Nigeria
- To examine the extent of implementation of the international instrument on the protection of the rights of IDPs in Nigeria

- To examine the extent of inclusiveness of IDPs in the enjoyment of values of tolerance, understanding as well as equity and fairness.

Causes of Displacement

Displacement can occur as a result of incidence of natural disaster or by armed conflict. One of the biggest direct consequence of displacement is the creation of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs,) resulting in the loss of access to land, property, jobs and traditional support structure (Kirsten, 2007).

In Nigeria as well as many other countries of the world, including the United States of America, 2012 presented an unprecedented account of natural disasters leading to many people being displaced from their homes to camps, while some were forced to squat with relations, friends and neighbours as the case may be, many others lost their lives in the natural disasters. Internally Displaced Monitoring Centre (IDMC, 2012) reported that, over 400,000 people have been displaced by floods sweeping across West Africa caused by torrential rains in August 2012.

Apart from natural disasters (act of god), conflicts can also cause displacement. According to Shah (2011), poverty, high unemployment, global financial crisis, political instability, armed conflicts among others can cause conflict; Bashi (2003), said the worst crisis is armed conflict. It is the worst in the sense that it is widespread. Its consequences are most devastating and it easily leads to or escalates other crises. For example, in armed conflicts, lives and property are lost or destroyed. With the destruction of industries and other production activities, unemployment is increased, so is poverty. Education is brought to a standstill as schools are closed, budgets for education are cut down in favour of the purchase of military hardware.

In Nigeria, conflicts arising from the activities of Boko Haram in the North East has resulted in high threats to lives and properties, death of many and displacement of several people. National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA 2015) put the figure of people that are internally displaced to be about 1,400,000 in the north east Nigeria alone.

Communal clashes is another factor contributing to the high number of displaced persons in Nigeria. Mausi, (2014) reported that clashes between farmers and herdsmen over grazing lands in states such as Benue, Taraba, Zamfara and parts of Kaduna have left more than 1,000 people dead between 2013 and 2014. He said, *“The violence has been almost on a daily basis in some places like Benue State and in a few other places you’ve had it almost on a weekly basis,”*

As of April 2015, Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) estimated that 1,538,982 people forced to flee their homes in Nigeria were still living in internal displacement. This figure includes people displaced as a result of brutal attacks by the Islamist armed group Boko Haram in north-eastern Nigeria, the government-led counterinsurgency operations against the group, ongoing inter-communal clashes and natural hazard-induced disasters.

Pavlish (2007) made reference to United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) (2000) report that, the problem of human displacement in Africa is expanding and becoming increasingly complex. Approximately 4.6 million refugees reside in African border camps, while about 9.5 million of the world’s 20 million internally displaced persons are found in Africa. IDMC reported that in 2014, the total number of people internally displaced by armed conflict and violence worldwide was estimated to be 38 million people, the highest figure IDMC has ever recorded. Also that there were 12.5 million IDPs in the 21 sub-Saharan countries as at end of 2013, which is about a third of the global total, and that Nigeria, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Sudan had the largest populations of IDPs in Africa.

According to the NEMA Displacement Tracking Matrix I DTM (2015), the IDPs population in Nigeria is composed of 53 % women and 47% men; 56% of the total IDP population are children of which more than half are up to 5 years old, while 42% are adults; 92% of IDPs were displaced by the insurgency; The IDPs come mainly from Borno (62%), Adamawa (18%) and Yobe (13%); 87% of IDPs live with host families while 13% live in camps.

Usually, when displacement occurs, the relevant authorities quickly arrange for camps to resettle the affected persons and the living conditions in the camps are in most cases deplorable with many challenges, which include gender based violence (GBV), insecurity of lives and properties, malnutrition, discrimination, among many others.

IDPs Camps in Nigeria.

Bakassi Peninsula

Idumange, (2010) discussed issues on Bakassi. He said, historically, the area popularly called “Bakassi Peninsula” came under British protection on September 10, 1884. The end of the World War I brought Bakassi under British Cameroon. In 1946 following the end of World War II, Britain divided the Cameroon’s into Northern Cameroon and Southern Cameroon. However, the colonial masters did not clarify the maritime boundaries and the navigable portion of the Calabar estuary. Successive administration in Nigeria did not muster up the political will to resolve the crisis until it snowballed into a conflict that attracted world attention.

On October 10, 2002, the International Court of Justice at The Hague ceded to Cameroon the Bakassi Peninsula, whose ownership has been disputed for upwards of three decades, but this only led to tension and arms build up in the area. The mounting interest of the two countries in the Peninsula is attributable to two reasons. First is the huge oil deposit in the area. Second is the

strategic importance of the area in the Atlantic Ocean. In addition, the prolific fishing grounds also provided an additional attraction to the peninsula. The Nigerian media claimed that about 90% of the inhabitants of Bakassi were Nigerians of the Efik ethnic nationality. To prevent the tension leading to conflict, Nigeria withdrew her citizens and settled them around Calabar, Cross River Nigeria in a camp popularly referred to as “Bakassi” IDPs camp.

When this researcher visited the camp in April, 2012, she found that there was a lot of discrimination against the IDPs from the host community and there was lack of welfare support from the Federal and Cross River state government. Though the population of the IDPs was about 2000 people, there was no school and no health care center in the camp, to access the barest medical treatment, the camp residents have to travel 40 Km to Calabar township. Meaning that the camp residents were not included in the “common good” enjoyed by the people of Calabar the host community.

Boko Haram IDPs

Nwanegbo & Odigbo, (2013) reported that Boko Haram is a religious Islamic sect that came into the limelight in 2002 when the presence of the radical Islamic sect was first reported in Kanama (Yobe state) and also in Gwoza (Borno state). “Boko Haram,” which in the local Hausa language means “Western education is forbidden,” officially calls itself “Jama’atul Alhul Sunnah Lidda’wati wal Jihad,” which means “people committed to the propagation of the Prophet’s teachings and jihad”(Meehan and Speier 2011: 6). Beyond religious explanations, Boko Haram could be arguably described as a „home-grown“ terrorist group that romances with some desperate politicians in the North. It appears that the sect enjoys effective support from some well-to-do individuals, religious leaders, allies, admirers of their ideology and highly placed politicians in the

North who claim to be Nigerians but are clandestinely working against the State. For instance, Lister, (2012), observed that it is no longer a sect of Islamic fanatics but has the support of disgruntled politicians and their paid thugs (cited in Adagba,Ugwu and Eme, 2012:85). Recently, revelations and security investigations into the activities of the sect tend to affirm that the group is also sponsored from within the country.

Thus, Boko Haram seems to be a destructive political tool with a cosmetic pretension of being religious. The bombing of Nigeria Police Force Headquarters⁶⁶ in Abuja on June 16, 2011, the U.N house in Abuja on August 26, 2011, two consecutive Nyanyan motor park on 14th April, and 1st May, 2014, and other high profile bombings attest to this assertion. The state of insecurity reached a scaring dimension with the abduction of over 200 girls from their examination hall in Chibok Borno State in April, 2014, according to the report of Naijagists.com (2014), this has become a global debate against Nigeria's insensitivity to the security of her people. In 2014 only, 32,658 people were killed by Boko Haram compared to 18,111 in 2013. This extremist has taken responsibility for deadly attacks in Nigeria's capital and northern parts; with Borno, Adamawa and Yobe as the hotbed. These attacks have led to massive and incessant displacement of people in this geopolitical zone of Nigeria. The biggest rise in the number of IDPs was registered in Borno state, one of the three north-eastern states most affected by Boko Haram violence, followed by Adamawa and Yobe. In addition to this, another 47,276 IDPs consisting of 5910 households were identified in Plateau, Nasarawa, Abuja, Kano and Kaduna states, according to NEMA, and IDPs camps are found in different locations in these states.

International Instruments on the Protection of IDPs

To protect the rights of IDPs, the United Nations and African Union have put in place some international Agreements. Some of the international instruments include the UN 1998 Guiding principles on Internal Displacement, Declaration on the Protection of Women and Children in Emergency and Armed Conflict 1974, UN Security Council Resolution 1325 of 2000, African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa (Kampala Convention), among others.

Though the 1998 Guiding Principles on IDPs are not binding, but they are based on, and consistent with existing international legal instruments. The provisions include that the national government must ensure that displaced persons (IDPs) enjoy the same rights as other citizens of the same country and protection from arbitrary displacement and from violent treatment.

Article 1 (1) provides that: “Internally displaced persons shall enjoy, in full equality, the same rights and freedoms under international and domestic law as do other persons in their country. They shall not be discriminated against in the enjoyment of any rights and freedoms on the ground that they are internally displaced”.

Article 3 (1 & 2) states that: “National authorities have the primary duty and responsibility to provide protection and humanitarian assistance to internally displaced persons within their jurisdiction. . . and that “ Internally displaced persons have the right to request and to receive protection and humanitarian assistance from these authorities. They shall not be persecuted or punished for making such a request”.

Another instrument is the Declaration on the Protection of Women and Children in Emergency and Armed 1974. The Declaration among other things provides that women and children belonging to the civilian population in circumstances of emergency and armed conflict in

the struggle for peace, self-determination, national liberation and independence, or who live in occupied territories, shall not be deprived of shelter, food, medical aid or other inalienable rights.

Not only that, UN Security Council Resolution 1325, an international instrument relating to women, peace and security adopted on 31st October, 2000, expressed concern that civilians, particularly women and children, account for the vast majority of those adversely affected by armed conflict, including as refugees and internally displaced persons. To this end, the Council reaffirmed the need to implement fully, international humanitarian and human rights law that protects the rights of women and girls during and after conflicts and called for a number of actions which includes, increasing female participation in decision-making with regard to conflict prevention and resolution; equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security; and embracing a gender perspective during repatriation, settlement, rehabilitation, reintegration and post-conflict reconstruction.

Above all, the African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa (Kampala Convention), was adopted in October, 2009 and came into force on 6th December 2012, currently, it legally binds 15 African countries and it is a continental instrument that binds governments to provide legal protection for the rights and well-being of those forced to flee inside their home countries due to conflict, violence, natural disasters, or development projects. It reaffirms that national authorities have the primary responsibility to provide assistance to IDPs and recognises the critical role that civil society organisations, and the communities which take them in, play in assisting IDPs and obliges governments to assess the needs and vulnerabilities of the forcibly displaced, and the host communities, in order to address the plight of people uprooted within their borders.

Despite the laudable provisions of these international instruments which Nigeria is signatory to, the extent of compliance is still in doubt as IDPs in Nigeria are being discriminated against within the host communities, lack of welfare provisions for them in camps, issues of gender based violence against them, palpable insecurity of lives and properties are the order of the day among IDPs in Nigerian camps. Olawale (2015) noted that there is thoroughly poor condition of IDPs in Nigeria and that there is a wide gap of commitment to the welfare, security and rehabilitation of IDPs from the Federal and State government authorities. Briefly examined below, there are three major problems confronting government recognized IDPs camps in Nigeria, which are welfare, security and rehabilitation.

Olawale (2015) reported that displaced persons are finding it difficult to regain pre-conflict way of living because of the poor living condition; poor sanitation which exposes members of the camps to infectious diseases, poor medical facilities which accommodate growth of infectious bacteria, fungi and virus in their bodies, poor feeding which exposes them to malnutrition and poor condition of infrastructure such as power, water, roads, among others.

On the issue of security, Olawale (2015) said, in September 2015, the deadly terrorist group, Boko Haram in a suicide mission, attacked members of IDPs Camps in Madagali and Yola killing 12 persons. In one of the attacks, bombs were reported to have been detonated inside a tent at the IDPs camp. This among others are security threats faced by members of IDP camps in Nigeria. Yet to recover from psychological trauma from loss of families, friends and properties, displaced persons are faced with security challenge coupled with a responsibility to protect themselves in their various camps. The inadequacy of security at the IDP camps opens them to attacks from terrorists and armed robbers.

Olawale (2015) noted that hosting IDPs in camps without solid rehabilitation plans makes them vulnerable to crime in a bid to survive. He said, rehabilitation process of IDPs have been sufficiently low. There seem to be a deliberate attempt from the government to ignore the displaced persons; this is evident in several failed, unfulfilled promises made by government and the politicizing of IDPs. Today, the IDP camps is emerging a ground for politicians to score cheap political popularity by visiting to donate scanty items while leaving out long term solutions.

Gender based violence is another problem faced by camp residents in Nigeria and this is common across IDPs camps. For example, Marama, Yusuf & Ojeme (2015), reported that the Boko Haram, struck in their determined bid to overrun the North Eastern States of Borno, Yobe and Adamawa has led to displacement of people from their various communities, these victims of terrorists attacks were resettled in selected camps in the capitals of the affected States, including the Federal Capital, Abuja and that the IDPs in these camps were experiencing “incidents of unwanted pregnancies, rape, child labour/trafficking and sexually transmitted diseases”

In addition to the comprehensive challenges stated above, it's pertinent to also note that there are some IDP camps that are unrecognized by the Federal and state governments. This implies that, the figures of IDPs projected by the government are not accurate since they are limited to camps organized or recognized by the government.

Thus, it has been established that whether IDPs in recognised or unrecognised camps in Nigeria, non can be said to be enjoying fairness and justice nor the protection of their rights under the Nigerian government as provided in the relevant international instruments discussed, therefore, these category of people cannot be said to be part of the inclusiveness of the common good of the commonwealth.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The deplorable conditions faced by IDPs in various camps in Nigeria is a clear indication that IDPs do not enjoy the inclusiveness of commonwealth in terms of welfare and protection of their rights as stipulated in the international instruments that Nigeria is signatory to. Thus, considering the unprecedented number of IDPs in Nigeria and the enormous challenges presently faced in camps, this study recommends that the Nigerian government through the relevant agencies like NEMA and IDMC invite and collaborate with international actors to give huge humanitarian and welfare support to cater for the IDPs in camps. Also, Nigeria should domesticate and implement relevant international instruments its already signatory to, which include: United Nations 1998 Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement; African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa (Kampala Convention) 2009; UN Security Council Resolution 1325, on women, peace and security of year 2000; among others.

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