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IDP Camps Closure in Yobe State: Government Preparation and Willingness of the Internally Displaced Persons (IDP's) to Return to Origin

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Abstract:

This review examines the issue of internally displaced persons camp closure in Yobe State North Eastern Nigeria where Boko Haram insurgency led to the formation of the IDP's camps. The camps were established in order to give protection to the displaced persons and give room for assistance and health services to reach them. However, since the camp is a temporary settlement pending the time situation will normalize to facilitate their return, life there will never be the same with their original homes as there will be restrictions, congestions and inadequate resources. With improvement of security situation in the areas, the IDPs will be require to return to base on government assessment of the security situation and the willingness of the people to return to their origin. Government decision should also be in collaboration with willingness of the people which should be predicated on security report presented by the security agencies.

Keywords: *Insurgency, Camp Closure, Boko Haram, Internally Displaced Persons, Security*

1. Introduction

Insurgency and terrorism are two criminal activities that are fast spreading over the world, especially in the recent decades. Here, what could first come to mind are the activities of terrorist groups such as the Al-Qaeda, Al-Shabaab, Mujawo, ISIS and Boko Haram. These groups are located in different parts of the world, but seem to show some degree of interconnectivity. They have severally, but at different times staged destructive crusades to unseat incumbent governments and/or claim some territories. Sadly, their activities consumed the lives of many innocent productive people. As at December, 2015 the figures of displaced people in 12 states of Nigeria and Abuja are; Adamawa (13,481), Bauchi (70,078), Benue (85,353), Borno (1,434,149), Gombe (25,332), Kaduna (36,976), Kano (9,331), Nasarawa (37,553), Plateau (77,317), Taraba (50,227), Yobe (131,205), Zamfara (44,929) and Abuja (3,481). (IDMC, 2016)

Moreover, internal displacements are cause by insurgency, communal conflicts, natural disasters and development-based projects. The gravity of the displacement by each of these could be seen thus, as observed insurgency 85%, natural disaster 2.4% and communal conflicts 12.6%. (IDMC, 2016) Insurgency obviously carries the lion share. Their activities have equally destroyed uncountable valuable assets and properties. This makes life unbearable for many people, in addition to destroying their communities, places of worship, markets, businesses and indeed houses.

In the attempts to justify their dirty and unacceptable crusade in the eyes and minds of the people, they at all times, hide under the banner of something precious and acceptable to the society or country. Typical to this is the use of religion as a banner for their activities. That is pretending to be carrying out "Jihad" to propagate the religion of Allah, but still killing and destroying the people who are believers of that same faith. The incidences of Boko Haram attack on places of worship such as mosques and churches, during sessions of worship, especially, could be recalled vividly. Also of relevance to recall is the attack on market places and schools.

The Boko Haram group assumed militancy pattern in Nigeria in 2009 affected most parts of the north eastern region of the country. They killed people indiscriminately in mass, kidnapped many women, youths and children; classical to this is the *Chibok Girls* which attracted both national and international concerns. The group claimed taking over of some local government areas in Borno, Yobe and Adamawa states to form a proclaim Kaliphate, with a Seat in Gwoza town in Borno State.

As all these happened, many towns and villages were destroyed, people killed and the remaining displaced. This is obviously what led to the formation of the temporary resettlement units known as the Internally Displaced Persons (**IDPs Camps**) by the governments of the affected states. The intention is to harbour the displaced people, provide them with security, protect their wellbeing and supply them with other basic needs of life. Today, there are many IDPs Camps in the north eastern region of Nigeria, particularly in Borno and Yobe states.

However, with the gradual and appreciable return of peace in the region and the country at large, the governments intend to close the Camps and facilitate the return of the IDPs to their places of origin or abodes. In this regard, they get known as **"Returnees"**. This refers to people who return after they were forced to flee. In a similar consideration, for those people who were initially displaced, but have resettled and re-established in another place and prefer to remain, are considered as **"Relocated"**.

In the light of this, the research intends to critically and thoroughly ascertain the need and feasibility of the IDPs Camps closure identify the issues, the challenges and the effects associated with the closure. The research will then provide far-reaching recommendations base on the findings to guide the government decision further.

2. Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)

The internally displaced persons (IDPs) refers to persons, groups and/or communities that have been forced or obliged to flee or leave their homes or places of habitual residence in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situation of generalized violence, violation of human rights, natural or human made disasters and who have not crossed international border, (Cohen & Deng, 1998). However, this is not in all cases. The causes of internal displacements are diverse depending on the area. However, in the contemporary global scenario, IDPs are commonly those who flee their homes as a result of internal conflicts, communal violence and other forms of human right violations which put them at risk within the borders of their own country. The IDPs remain within the border of their country, under the jurisdiction of government that is thought to have caused their displacement in the first place and were often unwilling / unable to ensure their "wellbeing and security with nowhere to run and nowhere to hide (Cohen, 2004). This remains the fundamental differences that exist between refugees and IDPs, where refugees cross international boundaries the IDPs remain within the boundaries of their countries. IDPs remain within the borders of their countries they are not subject to equal treatment by United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) such that the UNHCR does not automatically have mandate to assist the IDPs. This situation informed the UN Commission on Human Rights to call on the UN Secretary General to appoint a representative on IDPs (UNHCR, 2011).

The African continent has more IDPs than the rest of the world put together. This could be due to growing conflict of different types, the number is on the rise (NRC, 2002). By the end of 2001, the number of IDPs in Africa alone has reached 13.5 million. The magnitude of such displacement is a reflection of the worsening situation of armed conflict. In 2002 more than one quarter of the African continent of 53 countries were engulfed in wars of various scales causing unprecedented human displacement. The protracted wars in Angola, Sudan and the DRC have given a total of 10million IDPs while at the beginning of 2002armed conflict in Liberia, Republic of Congo and Nigeria also displaced hundreds of thousands (NRC, 2002). Humanitarian displacement in Nigeria did not start with Boko Haram. There were series of IDP waves caused by various conflicts as provided by NRC (2002);

- February-march 2000, religious violence in Kaduna displaced over 100,000 persons
- October 2000, ethnic violence in Lagos, Yoruba group – Hausa –Fulani displaced 20,000 people
- June 2001, Tiv-Azaras in Nasarawa state displacing 50,000 persons and the conflict spread to Taraba in July which displaced 25,000 persons
- July – august 2001, Hausa Fulani Muslims and indigenous Christians in Jos displacing 60,000 persons
- January 2002, Mambila land crises between Fulani and Mambila farming communities displacing thousands
- January 2002, revenge attack on Christians displacing 3000 in Jos
- January 2002, 1000 displaced as a result of fear of reprisal attack moved from Taraba to Benue
- January 2002, thousand displaced as a result of clash over fishing right in Nasarawa state
- February 2002, Yoruba and Hausa speaking in Lagos displacing 2000

Importantly, despite all the above and others not mentioned, Boko Haram insurgency can only be equated to the Civil War which seemed to have cause the worse human displacement in Nigeria.

3. Security Situation to Guarantee Return

In the event persons displaced have been camped at a place, the camp is a temporary provision to ensure safety of lives of the IDPs and enable assistance to reach them. It is also believe that with normalization of the situation that caused displacement the IDPs are expected to return home while the camp should be closed. In a study conducted by Mwangi (2015) after armed conflict that rocked Uasi-Gishu County in Kenya in 1992, 1997 and 1998 respectively, the IDPs were not willing to return as there was security threat alert. Such threat was demonstrated by the brutal killing of some persons who have gone to check their farms in the fled area. Thus any attempt to close the camp and the IDPs occupying such camps to return should build on security assessment and report by the security agencies. The guarantee of security in places of return for the IDPs is

an indispensable condition for their return. To these end the security situation in the origin where the displaced persons ought to return shall be the first determining factor in the decision to close the camps across the state so that problems may not emerge again.

4. Willingness of the IDPs to Return to their Original Homes

Once persons are displaced from their original homes / habitual residence as a result of any problem particularly armed conflict as in the focus of this research, situation may improve that may warrant the possibility of the IDPs to return. This calls for the closure of the IDP Camps. The IDPs have the right to decide if they want to return to their habitual places of residence, be integrated in to the host community or be relocated to another place within the country or seek asylum in another country (FGN, 2012). Whichever happens to be the decision of the Internally Displaced Persons in relation to remaining within the country, the following rights are specifically attached to them (FGN, 2012);

- They have the right not be discriminated against on the account of displacement
- They have the right to participate fully in public affairs, access to public services and to vote or be voted for
- They have the right to own property whenever durable solution has been achieved for them like other Nigerians under the constitution of the federal republic of Nigeria and other relevant laws
- They have the right to any special or general existing empowerment

In the event the IDPs choose to return, relocate or to integrate, a comprehensive rehabilitation package should be designed to enable a smooth process. Appropriate agencies and the NGOs should be able to carry out a comprehensive measure which shall embody shelter, food, household items and means of transportation for the persons with special need or the disabled persons who might in one way or the other sustained disability in the curse of the displacement. Whatever the decision of the IDPs (return, relocate or integrate) they have the obligation to abide by laws as every other citizens.

In this connection it is enshrined in the National Policy on Internally Displaced Persons in Nigeria that, the IDPs shall be responsible for the followings (FGN, 2012):

- Individual criminal responsibility under national and international laws
- Individual criminal responsibility for genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity
- Individual and group crime of very serious nature under national and state laws
- Respect for culture and norms of host communities
- Abide by rules and regulations in collective settlement

Deninger et.al (2004) while analyzing the motivations for the desire to return, arrived at the followings:

1. **Economic Opportunities:** they observed that the desire for IDPs return to their original place of residence in some cases is motivated by the economic opportunities in the reception and the origin. This is to say that, economic calculations play a significant role in the decision to return. This is particularly in a situation where the IDPs owned assets in the place of origin such as lands and buildings no matter the values of such assets. Here most of the IDPs left their homes unprepared, thus, leaving their movable and non-movable belongings behind as Boko Haram insurgents attacks places unexpectedly.
2. **Socio-Demographic Characteristics:** this implies that households which belongs to the minority groups, have single parent, have females as household heads or are having large dependency ratio in most cases use to be reluctant toward returning to the their original residence. This view is in accordance with the position of Cohen and Deng (1998) that displacement changes the structure and
3. **Original residence.** This view is in accordance with the position of Cohen and Deng (1998) that displacement changes the structure and size of households, family pattern, and gender role with number of female headed households increasing significantly. In the situation under focus, in some of the cases the male heads have been killed while in others even the females members and children were killed leading to the level either members of family were killed or relatives were killed. This has altered the original structure of relationship in the areas.
4. **Level of Trauma:** the level of trauma which the Internally Displaced Persons passed through also contribute significantly towards the decision and desire to return, persons who passed through serious trauma are more likely to be less willing to return as a result. A similar research conducted in Indonesia by Turnip (2003) revealed that those who lost relatives were less willing to return. Similarly the trauma some people experienced during the Boko Harm attack in their areas cannot be easily forgotten especially what happened in Katarko near Damaturu that people were thrown in to a well and followed with bullets sends trauma not only to the villagers but even other nearby areas.
5. **Duration of Displacement:** once displacement has taken a long time, some of the people/families will be less willing to return. As observed by Gleditsh (2005) that where insurgents/rebels are weak they tend to operate in the periphery and the duration of conflict and return become prolific.

5. Provision of Facilities for IDPs Return

Most displacements especially those caused by armed conflicts usually have serious destructive consequences on the area fled by the IDPs. It is therefore expected that when situation normalize and the IDPs are being prepared to return , certain fundamental measures need to be put in place in order to facilitate smooth return of the IDPs to their origin homes.

Thus, the FGN (2012) states that strategies for return, relocation, or integration of Internally Displaced Persons shall include the following:

1. Provision for post-traumatic disorder counseling support services to enable the IDPs observed the traumatic conditions that affected them so that they accept returning to their homes
2. Provision of a comprehensive return policy
3. Recovery and restoration of lands, houses and other properties left behind by the Internally Displaced persons (IDP) during the displacement
4. Ensuring safety and security before, during and after the return as it is the primary issue of concern
5. Reconstruction of shelter and settlement lost during the displacement
6. Provision of suitable livelihood opportunities
7. Restoration of social services including health services and education among others
8. Activation of society protection and safety measures

These lofty ideals if properly implemented, the return policy will yield a meaningful result as the IDPs will welcome such policies and will be eager to return as there is no place like home. However the IDPs who have voluntarily chosen to or have returned seems to be in serious need of most of the factors listed above as their voices are not hidden. This is to say adequate arrangement were lacking in terms shelter, food and other basic needs which are fundamental to return of IDPs. In this connection therefore as government particularly in Yobe State is building efforts toward closing the remaining IDP Camps in the State it is expected that such factors should be taken in to cognizance.

6. Conclusion

The closure of the camps is a necessary situation as the camps are not permanent abode for the occupants, but adequate Preparation has to make in order to ensure that the closure which will subsequently lead to the return of the IDPs to their original homes did not cause more damage in terms of security and means of livelihood. In this connection it is our believe that government intention to close the caps across the state has taken in to cognizance the situation that may warrant safe return and guarantee peace continuation of normal activities.

7. Recommendations

1. The first issue to consider is the security assessment of the area to determine whether the situation can guarantee the safe return and stay of the people since it was based on the deteriorated security situation that they fled the area.
2. Security personnel must be adequately provided in the area with modern and functional security facilities to be able determine and control any possible security threat
3. The closure of the camp has to be with the understanding and agreement of the IDPs
4. Facilities such as water, clinics, schools, light, markets and roads should be provided in the areas
5. Food stuff has to be provided for them as they have not had the opportunities to work on their farms during the rainy seasons and without food they cannot survival is not possible

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