

# Social Inclusion and Justice for the Internally Displaced by the Herdsmen-Farmers Conflict in Benue State, Nigeria

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## Executive Summary

Herdsmen-farmers conflict has displaced 1.5 million residents of Benue State, Nigeria, according to government officials. Internally displaced persons (IDPs) have lost livelihoods, farms, personal property and community infrastructure. The paper highlights the social challenges they have experienced and the response by government and international humanitarian agencies (IHAs) to their situations. Based on interviews with 12 IDPs belonging to the displaced population from Guma Local Government Area of Benue State and interviews with seven humanitarian workers, the paper finds that the IDPs:

- Have lost family members, neighbors, farms, churches, health centers, and means of mobility.
- Cannot safely return home or access their ancestral lands.
- Cannot support themselves.
- Cannot attend public school or progress to a university.
- Lack access to quality health care.
- Live with multiple families in insecure shelters.
- Cannot reliably obtain birth registration and replace other destroyed documents.
- Can register their names, family relations, and former villages, but not their losses, which might lead to compensation and help them to rebuild their lives.

The paper makes the following recommendations.

- **Registration, Effective Remedies and Access to Justice:** The Benue State Emergency Management Agency (BSEMA), Federal Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs (FMHA) and United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) should document personal and community socio-economic losses to ascertain the extent of damage to IDPs in order to facilitate effective remedies. The

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Ministries of Justice, the National Human Rights Commission, and UNHCR should support the IDPs by providing them with information and procedures that allow them to secure full compensation for their losses, and with safe, permanent solutions to their situations, including full integration into their host communities, safe and voluntary return home, or resettlement in a third community.

- **Engage IDPs as Stakeholders:** The Benue State Government should ensure that BSEMA communicates to IDPs the possibilities for voluntary and dignified safe return. If return is not immediately foreseeable, BSEMA should offer IDPs the means to relocate and resettle elsewhere.
- **Provision of Sustainable Social Amenities:** BSEMA, the FMHA, and international humanitarian agencies (IHAs) should provide sustainable healthcare, shelter, education in IDP camps, financial assistance and the means to access services outside of IDP camps.
- **Peace through Establishment of Ranches:** Benue State Government's Peace Commission should resolve the herdsman-farmer conflict and restore peace by promoting peaceful co-existence between the conflicting parties. Herdsmen should be educated on the procedures for legal land acquisition for ranching, and farmers should be able to seek legal redress when their farms are damaged by grazing cattle. BSEMA and the Federal Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs should also facilitate voluntary, safe and dignified return of IDPs or their resettlement in another community.
- **Safeguard IDP Camps:** BSEMA and the Nigeria security agencies should safeguard official and unofficial IDP camps.
- **Inclusive Policy Implementation:** The FMHA in collaboration with the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) should develop humanitarian response plans that are beneficial to all IDPs in Nigeria irrespective of the cause of their displacement.

## Keywords

Internally displaced persons (IDPs), social inclusion, justice for Benue IDPs, herdsman-farmer conflict, Benue State, Nigeria

## Introduction

There are 3.646 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Nigeria because of the Boko Haram insurgency in the northeast, and the Fulani herdsman-farmers conflict and generalized violence in the northwest and Middle Belt regions (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre [IDMC], 2023). Benue State accounts for 1.5 million IDPs due to the Fulani herdsman-farmers conflict (Africanews 2022). This makes Benue State the epicenter in the Middle Belt of displacement due to this conflict (Godfrey and Tafida 2022). Benue IDPs and communities have not received necessary assistance for recovery or integration (Andzenge and Iorbo 2022; Inyang and Effiong 2022). Additionally, Benue State and other states affected by the Fulani herdsman-farmers conflict have not been included in Nigeria's humanitarian response plans from 2015 to 2023 (OCHA, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2021, 2022, 2023).

A report by Medecins Sans Frontieres, MSF (2020) indicates that while the herdsman-farmers conflict persists in the Middle Belt States, global attention and humanitarian response have diminished. The report added that by 2019, most international humanitarian agencies (IHAs) had left the Middle Belt States of Benue and Nasarawa. Besides, a ten-billion-naira (the equivalent of \$32.7million) fund promised the Benue State Government by the Nigerian Vice President in 2015 to resettle the IDPs had not been released by 2023 (Omogbolagun 2023).

Despite enormous damages from the conflict, there is no good documentation of the socio-economic losses incurred by IDPs and their communities. Available records have combined the property losses incurred by communities, potential losses of revenue suffered by the government, and the financial cost of providing humanitarian assistance to IDPs. However, they do not specify what the victims have suffered. For example, Nwakanma and Boroh

(2019) report a loss of \$14 billion worth of combined property and government's management of the crisis. Others report \$16 billion (Africanews 2018) and \$13.7 billion (Africa Center for Strategic Studies, 2019) in terms of annual revenue loss suffered by the Federal Government of Nigeria. The official report by Benue State Emergency Management Agency (BSEMA, 2022) maintains that the state needs \$5.85 billion to meet the humanitarian needs of IDPs and affected communities. However, the BSEMA report failed to provide estimates of losses incurred by the IDP population and their communities and did not clarify whether the \$5.85 billion would provide adequate compensation for IDPs. Furthermore, the report failed to indicate the time frame for use of the estimated \$5.85 billion. Thus, it is difficult to ascertain the damage the Fulani herdsman-farmers conflict has inflicted on the affected population and communities, and whether adequate compensation might be available to them.

In view of the above, the objective of this study was to explore the conflict-induced socio-economic losses and the response of Benue State Government to help IDPs recover from their losses. To achieve this goal, the study was guided by the research question: What are the social losses incurred by the IDPs and what are the remedies provided by the Benue State Government to help them access justice for effective recovery?

The rest of the paper is structured in six sections. The introduction provides background on Benue State and the herdsman-farmers conflict. The other sections review relevant literature, describe the research methodology, outline the study's findings, discuss findings, and offer conclusion and policy recommendations.

### **Benue State**

Known as the food basket of the nation, Benue State is one of Nigeria's six states, which, along with Abuja, the federal capital, make up the region variously known as the Middle Belt, Central Nigeria, and Northcentral zone (Adetunji 2021).<sup>1</sup> Benue State is predominantly a Christian state with a diverse ethnic composition that includes Tiv (the majority), Idoma,

Igede, and other minority groups (ibid.). Its economy is predominately based on crop farming (Britannica 2015) and land is considered a major source of capital.

### **Herdsman-Farmers Conflict**

The conflict between the Muslim Fulani herders and the non-Fulani Christian crop farmers involves contested access to farmlands and water resources. A BSEMA (2022) report and Lenshie and Jacob (2020) suggest that the conflict dates to small-scale disturbance in the 1980s, which deteriorated beginning in 1999 after the return of democratic rule in Nigeria. The BSEMA report showed that from 2011 to 2018, the herdsman-farmers conflict escalated, with peaks in 2014 and 2018 when hundreds of people, including pregnant women and children, were murdered, and property and livelihoods worth billions of naira were destroyed across 21 of 23 local government areas in Benue State.

The United Nations Trust Fund for Human Security, UNTFHS (2019) reports that the escalation cut across the Middle Belt region, with huge damages mostly in Benue and Nasarawa States. The International Organization for Migration (IOM 2022) attributes the escalation to environmental degradation and Boko Haram terrorism in the north. IOM also identified open grazing on farm crops, greater farmer encroachment on grazing routes in the Middle Belt, and the poor response to insecurity by the Nigerian security as the enablers of the conflict. According to the International Crisis Group (ICG 2018), the Fulani herdsman-farmers conflict is six times more deadly than the Boko Haram insurgency and a growing threat to national stability. The conflict — with its mass population displacement, loss of means of survival, and human casualties — threatens the affected populations, their communities of origin, and the communities that host them (United Nations Development Programme (UNDP 2022)).

## **Review of Literature**

### **Definition of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)**

The African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in

<sup>1</sup>The other Nigerian states are Kogi, Kwara, Nasarawa, Niger, and Plateau.

Africa also known as the Kampala Convention (2009) defines internal displacement as the:

the involuntary or forced movement, evacuation or relocation of persons or groups of persons within internationally recognized state borders

This definition highlights the fact that since IDPs have not crossed any known international state border to seek protection by another government, their own governments bear primary responsibility for their recovery, protection and wellbeing. The Kampala Convention spells out government responsibilities to their populations before and after displacement. Article III(1) prohibits arbitrary displacement, and Article IV(5) requires governments to prevent the displacement of communities that depend on land for their livelihoods and socio-economic activities. Article XII(1) seeks to ensure that IDPs have effective remedies and access to justice for fair compensation in view of their rights not to be arbitrarily displaced and to own property, including land. Article XIII(1) requires states to carry out registration and documentation in the event of displacement. Under Article VII(2), governments must safeguard IDPs against armed attacks. To fulfill this requirement, Article IX(2) provides that governments must provide, without delay, adequate humanitarian assistance, shelter, access to medical and health care services, education, and necessary social services.

While states have primary responsibility for their residents, Article V vests international organizations and humanitarian agencies with shared responsibility for IDPs, who must be treated fairly and without discrimination in order to ensure their meaningful recovery (Kälin 2008). The Kampala Convention derives from the United Nations Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement and other international legal instruments that provide for fairness and access to basic rights and services for all.

### *Social Dimensions of Inclusion*

The concept of social inclusion is articulated by the European Foundation (2023) as:

a process that ensures citizens have the opportunities and resources necessary to participate fully in economic, social and cultural life and to enjoy a standard of living and well-being that is considered normal in the society in which they live. It encompasses, but is not restricted to, social integration . . . equal access to facilities, services and benefits.

According to the World Bank (2013) identified there are four dimensions of social inclusion that are critical for reducing multidimensional social exclusion challenges such as disadvantage and marginalization. It argues that since social *exclusion* manifests across multiple interwoven dimensions — economic, cultural, political, and social — social *inclusion* also requires a multi-dimensional approach. This study is limited to the social dimensions of social inclusion; that is, the social infrastructure and services needed for the protection, development, and wellbeing of people, including education, healthcare, shelter, and access to justice, security, and safety.

The literature on the social dimensions of social inclusion of IDPs has focused primarily on immediate needs like shelters, food, healthcare access, and education (Dasuki and Effah 2021; Inyang and Effiong 2022). These studies demonstrate the daily social challenges that IDPs experience in displacement camps and they make recommendations to facilitate their participation in society. However, these studies have failed to address the broader issue of social dimensions or justice. Addressing internal displacement from a justice perspective provides the basis for understanding the losses incurred, which could lead to effective remedies for the recovery, safety, and wellbeing of the Benue State IDPs and their communities.

### *Internal Displacement and Justice*

Internal displacement results in the loss of personal and community socio-economic infrastructure such as land, education, healthcare, housing, political, and cultural relations. By virtue of such disruptions, affected IDPs are forced to migrate to safer locations where they lack adequate protection, safety, livelihoods, and social services (Ndimurwimo and Opara 2019). Ferris and Kerwin (2023) assert that internal displacement continues to rise globally due to very



limited access to traditional durable solutions, and the lack of new complementary strategies to help IDPs recover and integrate. Adenitan (2015) and Olanrewaju, et al. (2019) found that government and non-government humanitarian agencies in Nigeria deprive IDPs in unofficial camps of access to social services and humanitarian aid. As a result, IDPs live in extreme poverty and lack food, education, decent shelter, healthcare, and security.

Gever et al. (2021) examined ways in which IDPs could be provided with skills to enable them to become self-sufficient. They recommend focusing on counselling to enable IDPs to communicate their socio-economic needs. Moreover, Dasuki and Effah (2021) found that while IDPs make personal efforts to participate in society, stringent government policies for acquiring civil documents continue to frustrate such efforts toward social inclusion. Jonah et al. (2022) examined how Nigerian media excluded IDPs from media coverage on the impact of COVID-19. Overall, the media have also poorly covered the millions of Nigerian IDPs living in camps without sustainable livelihoods or protection. Lack of durable solutions and inclusive policies for IDPs indicate that they are not afforded fair and equitable assistance for recovery. The objective of this study was to explore the displacement-induced social losses and the response of Benue State Government to help IDPs recover from these losses. The study was guided by the research question: What are the social losses incurred by the IDPs and what are the remedies provided by the Benue State Government to help them recover?

### *Theoretical Framework of Justice*

This study is premised on the fundamental principles of justice theory, which is rooted in Rawls' (1971) theory of justice. Justice for Rawls is about fair treatment of and the equitable distribution of social resources, access to opportunities, and guaranteed protection to the greatest benefit of the disadvantaged members of society. According to this perspective, justice is not just about providing access and opportunities, but also ensuring that they improve the wellbeing, safety and living conditions of beneficiaries. From this perspective, the fair treatment of IDPs will depend on whether the healthcare,

education, shelters, and documentation services are decent and sustainable.

Just treatment of IDPs requires that their losses be documented, and effective remedies be provided to them, including compensation, conflict resolution, and permanent solutions such as safe return or resettlement. The government's duty to IDPs is premised on the fact IDPs are a displaced community of citizens who have not crossed any known state borders (African Union 2009). States must safeguard the rights and privileges of IDPs and every other citizen, such as the right not to be arbitrarily displaced, to own property, to access justice and social services, to live in safety and dignity, and to enjoy fundamental liberties.<sup>2</sup>

The justice framework underscores the need for governments to ascertain the losses suffered by IDPs and their communities, provide fair and sustainable access to social services and opportunities to mitigate the effects of these losses. It includes the need to reduce violence and threats to life by resolving the herdsman-farmers conflict and ensuring the safety of the affected persons and their communities, while also providing them access to effective remedies and compensation. Accordingly, addressing the social dimensions of internal displacement from a justice perspective starts with assessing the damages and losses suffered by the population, which can serve as a yardstick for determining the necessary interventions. Justice requires that IDPs be fairly compensated, treated with dignity, and provided opportunities to exit displacement camps and to integrate into society.

### **Methodology**

This qualitative study used in-depth interviews to explore the social dimensions of internal displacement amongst IDPs in official and unofficial camps in Benue State. The Official Camp at Daudu II is in Guma Local Government Area while the unofficial camp is at the Federal Housing Authority (FHA) also known as Yandev, in North Bank, Makurdi Local Government Area. The IDPs in these camps were displaced from communities in Guma Local Government Area of Benue State due to the

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<sup>2</sup>Of course, fundamental rights also apply to non-citizens.

herdsmen-farmers conflict. The lead researcher/author obtained permission from the Benue SEMA to access the IDP camps. She then recruited a civil society organization, Community Links for Human Empowerment Initiative (CLHEI), to facilitate digital data collection via WhatsApp call.

CLHEI mobilized IDPs in official and unofficial camps for interview sessions with the researcher. A total of 19 participants comprising 12 IDPs and seven humanitarian workers took part in this study. They comprised eight females and eleven males, between the ages of 19 and 62. The purposive sampling technique was used for selecting participants who the researcher believed had requisite experience and knowledge about displacement in Benue State. The snowball technique was then used for the selection of humanitarian workers, who were asked to refer the researcher to colleagues. The IDPs all indicated they had families, with an average household size of six. The seven humanitarian workers interviewed, in turn, worked with IDPs in Benue State.

Data were collected between July and October 2021 during the global lockdown, which necessitated the use of telephonic interviews as a tool for data collection as recommended by Block and Erskine (2012). The CLHEI staffer recruited to assist with mobilization of IDPs handed their WhatsApp phone to the IDP to speak with the researcher. The initial WhatsApp calls introduced the research aims and objectives and answered participants' questions. Thereafter, the researcher recruited interested IDPs and obtained their verbal and written consent to be interviewed and for recording of interviews. A mobile phone and an audio recorder were used side-by-side to conduct and record interviews. Interview sessions lasted between 30 and 45 minutes. They were conducted in the English language, using semi-structured interview guides.

The interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using the six thematic analysis strategies recommended by Nowell et al. (2017). Thematic data analysis strategy was preferred because it is useful for identifying and grouping patterns of significance to the broader and narrower research questions, with the aim of generating answers that represent the larger data set (Coffey and Atkinson 1996). Analyzed data were coded, clustered into themes and sub-themes, and are supported with verbatim quotes in

this report. Participants were engaged at various stages of analysis for member checking and triangulation. Microsoft Word was used for data analysis.

### *Limitations of the Study*

The displacement caused by the herdsmen-farmers conflict affected both the animal and crop farming communities. However, this study was limited to the crop farming communities and to residents in official and unofficial camps. IDPs living with friends or families were not included. Due to the remote nature of interviews, there were incidences of internet disruptions and non-availability of internet network in some locations. This meant that only camps within internet network coverage areas were selected.

### **Findings**

The findings fall into three major categories, and several sub-themes. These are conflict-induced social losses; social services; and security and return. The sub-themes that the participants discussed were education, unresolved conflicts and insecurity, shelter and accommodation, registration services, and compensation and access to justice. All the participants were literate, communicated in the English language. Findings are presented below with verbatim quotes.

### *Conflict-Induced Social Losses*

IDP participants said they were engaged, prior to their displacement, in different forms of social activities in their communities. However, they lost everything due to the conflict and lost the capacity to perform social roles:

I was schooling and farming before I was displaced but now as I have been displaced, I can't continue any of that. I started my National Diploma program in 2016 and would have completed it by now. But I am out of school because I have no money to go back to school. (IDP Participant 12-Unofficial camp)

Participants narrated how their stories changed the moment they reached the displacement camps, where they met untenable living conditions that pushed them into begging for survival:

When we arrived in this place, we used to beg from house to house for food and clothes because we fled and left our things which have been destroyed. We used to go to these people for even water to drink. (IDP Participant 11-Unofficial camp)

All participants in official and unofficial camps indicated that owing to the conflict, they suffered enormous personal losses and their communities also suffered loss of social amenities. The losses included houses, means of mobility, schools, the peace and security of their communities, and access to their ancestral homes and land:

We were in our village and the Fulani herdsmen started attacking us but we thought it was not going to end like this. We tried to fix the problem but our strength was limited so they over-powered us and started killing and destroying our properties. There was nowhere to run and hide because they were burning everything . . . churches, schools, trees and the marketplace where we used to buy and sell things. Even the community health center where pregnant women used to go for antenatal was destroyed. Our farms, houses, and the food barns, everything was burnt down. The entire communities went up in flames. We lost everything.” (IDP Participant 01, Official Camp)

## Social Services

***Lack of Access to Continuous Quality Education:*** The majority of participants in both official and unofficial camps indicated that they lack opportunities for social inclusion through access to public schools. They cited lack of financial capacity to meet basic requirements in public primary schools, which parents said were free, but the enrollment requirements demanded finances:

My younger children attend school under the tree in this camp, we know it is not a school but we cannot afford to enroll them in the school outside the camp. We will have to buy uniforms, sandals, books and other things but I don't have the money. (IDP Participant 02-Official camp)

Parents stated that available primary schools in official camps are makeshift schools, which depend on volunteer teachers:

There is education for primary school pupils here in this camp. However, as you can see the trees in this camp, those are the classrooms where children are taught. The teachers are fellow IDPs who volunteer to teach the children. Sometimes, individuals come around and volunteer too. (IDP participant 03-Official camp)

Findings show that Benue State Government does not provide IDPs of secondary school age opportunities for secondary education. The displaced children must work hard to get an education and often entertain fears of dropping out of school due to lack of finances. In their words:

If I don't work hard, my dreams of going to the university will die. And I fear that one day, I may drop out of school because I do not have money . . . It gets bad when they send me away from school because of fees and I don't know where to get money. (IDP Participant 11-unofficial camp)

***Lack of Access to Quality Healthcare:*** It was found that there are no healthcare facilities in the unofficial camps where the majority of Benue displaced population live. Participants reported that they were provided access cards to healthcare services at Daudu, a small town that is host to official camps. However, due to lack of finances and livelihoods, they were unable to travel to access these services:

I have access to free healthcare services. There is a clinic at the Daudu Camp where Doctors Without Borders operate. They registered and gave me a card for visits to the clinic whenever we are sick. There is another one at Katungu. Although I have visited the clinic in the past, I don't go there again because the locations are far from here and the cost of transportation is a problem. (IDP participant 07-Unofficial camp)

In official camps, participants reported that health-care facilities exist, but cater only to minor illnesses. As such, IDPs with serious health challenges are referred to Government hospitals. Like those in unofficial camps, participants said these hospitals are too far from their camps and due to lack of financial capacity, they are unable to travel to town to access healthcare services:

There is a camp clinic here. It is Doctors without Borders that treat us. They gave me registration card that will let them treat me for free if I showed them the card. But they treat only simple sicknesses like headache and fever and pain. They always refer people to government hospital when it is something very serious. But it is not easy to go to government clinic. (IDP Participant 01-Official camp)

A humanitarian worker affirmed that:

IDPs in Benue State do not have access to adequate healthcare delivery. The healthcare facilities are either too distant from the displaced persons camps location or they are poorly equipped and the private ones too expensive for the displaced persons since they do not have any livelihoods. Most of them rely on traditional medications and some rely on quacks to be able to meet up with their health needs. (Humanitarian Worker participant 03)

**Shelter and Accommodation:** IDPs report grossly inadequate shelters in official camps where they are being packed into tiny rooms with different families without adequate sleeping items. They also described the shelters as not having windows or doors, thereby posing safety concerns:

This camp is one of the official government camps. The rooms were allocated to us by the government. But not all the rooms have windows and doors. It is not safe without windows and doors. Also, we were given one room for different families. I live there with my family and other IDP families. We were also given a small mattress. Each family receives one mattress or mat irrespective of the size. We are a family of five. (IDP participant 04-Official camp)

In unofficial camps, study findings show that IDPs are treated without any element of fairness as they live in the most disturbing conditions without government assigned shelters or sleeping items:

Government has not provided us any shelter. When we escaped from our village to this community, we saw this uncompleted building and moved in. When the owner of the building learnt that IDPs had moved into his property, he came and inquired. We explained to him that we were forced to flee our villages in Kase Iyo, and we are homeless . . . That's how we got accommodation in this place. Although there are no

windows on this building, but it is better than sleeping in mosquito nets. (IDP participant 11-Unofficial camp)

Corroborating the reports of IDPs in official and unofficial camps, humanitarian workers reported:

Most of the IDPs do not have shelters, they sleep in uncompleted buildings while some sleep in the fields. Others are well accommodated in government shelters, primary schools and makeshift tents. This is not standard accommodation. (Humanitarian Worker participant 01)

**Registration and Documentation of IDPs:** IDPs reported being registered and issued identity cards by different humanitarian agencies, including government agencies. However, these registrations served as head counts and a way to identify their community of origin. They did not document losses suffered due to the conflict, which would have laid the groundwork for financial support and assistance:

They asked for my name, the name of my husband and the name of my village. They also asked how many children I have. (IDP Participant 09, unofficial camp)

Participants indicated being registered and issued means of identity. They added that their registration offered the benefits that were limited to humanitarian aid such as camp shelters, food, non-food items, and access to healthcare:

I have been registered by SEMA and Doctors without Borders. The tents that we use here were provided by Doctors without Borders. They gave me cards and advised me to keep it safe because without it, they will not give me food, and I cannot go to the clinic when me or my family is sick . . . They ask my name, age, how many children I have, what killed my wife, and the name of my village, which is Umenger. (IDP Participant 03 in official camp)

Speaking on the registration of IDPs and provision of documentation services, government humanitarian workers said:

In the area of registration of IDPs, replacement and issuance of documents, we have also been collaborating with international partners. For the issuance of documents like birth registration and replacement of



documents, it is a big challenge now because for some time, we have not been able to do that. We conduct the profiling of IDPs as they arrive which helps us to determine persons per household, number of households and other disaggregates like gender, adults, people with special needs, children, women and so on. (Humanitarian Worker Participant 03)

Non-governmental humanitarian workers added that the registration and documentation process is rife with bureaucratic bottlenecks:

The issue is that there is huge deficit with the outreaches that should be conducted by these agencies. The reason is because their budgets are centrally controlled by the government. And the bureaucratic process involved is challenging. (Humanitarian Worker participant 05)

Some said registration focuses on generating displacement figures and media attention:

. . . at the level of registering IDPs and accumulating displacement figures, at the level of generating the necessary media attention and state authorities visiting, NGOs visiting, photographs flying over the media, those have been very consistent. (Humanitarian Worker Participant 01)

Findings on registration of IDPs and documentation point to the absence of IDP registration for the purpose of identifying the socio-economic losses associated with the herdsman-farmer conflict.

## Security and Return

**Unresolved Insecurity and Possible Return:** Participants gave accounts of how the unresolved Fulani herdsman-farmers conflict challenges their safety. They reported that Fulani herdsman killed some IDPs who had visited their villages to check the possibility of returning home:

I am still displaced because of insecurity and killings in our village. The villages are not safe to go back to since the conflicts have not been resolved. (IDP participant 10, unofficial camp)

Participants in official camps also expressed similar views:

Truth is we can't go home now or we will be killed. Even in places we used to go to farm are no longer safe and we can't go there now. Some IDPs who went back to check whether it was safe to go back got killed. (IDP participant 04, official camp)

Participants in unofficial camps also reported that insecurity constituted a major threat and barrier to their return to their villages:

If you are looking at going back to the village, it is still not safe because only yesterday, someone was killed in Yelewata. It is not as though I prefer to remain here. But if I go back, the Fulani will kill me and my family . . . It is better to be in this place until government will resolve this problem. (IDP participant 11, unofficial camp)

Humanitarian aid workers affirmed that unresolved conflicts threatened the safety of IDPs in their communities and hindered their return:

When we talk to them, we see a lot of fear and anxiety because people who have attempted to return to either carryout their livelihoods activities like farming have been killed or harassed. Their communities are still unsafe. (Humanitarian worker participant 02)

## ***Insecurity and Safety Concerns in IDP Camps:***

Besides the insecurity in their home villages, IDP camps are not safe. Participants in official and unofficial camps reported on threats to life and property in neighboring communities, and the threats they posed to peaceful living in their camps. In official camps, they cited an instance of renewed attacks on an IDP camp in a neighboring settlement called Abagana. They feared they might be the next victims since government had not provided security in their camps:

Another insecurity that makes us fear every day is the attacks on IDP camp at Abagana that killed some IDPs. It could be this camp because there is no security here. (IDP participant 01-Official camp).

They added:

Because of the attack on the IDP camp at Abagana, we live in fear too, so there is a limit to freedom of

movement because you can never tell. (IDP Participant 03-Official camp).

IDPs reported no government security measures in official and unofficial camps. They also said that the government had not provided security for their camps. However, they felt relatively safer in one unofficial camp thanks to the local community chief who has extended vigilante security surveillance in their camps:

I feel secure in this place but not in my village. The traditional ruler of this community has been very nice to us and has asked the local vigilante group in the community to be frequenting our camp. (IDP Participant 07-Unofficial camp)

**Compensation and Remedies:** IDPs also reported they had not been compensated for their enormous losses due to the conflict. Nor had they been provided access to justice with the view of providing adequate compensation and remedies. A resident in an unofficial camp said:

I have not been paid any compensation for the losses I suffered. That is why I am still here because we cannot go back even if the conflict has ended since all our farms and houses were burnt. We don't have any justice and we have not been told whether government will pay us for our farms and food stuff that were destroyed. Nobody has said they will help us to go to court or for government to compensate us. (IDP Participant 11-Unofficial camp)

Their responses were corroborated by IDPs in official camps, who suggested that despite huge losses, their primary interest is return to their villages, which no one even talks to them about:

I have not been compensated. Nobody is talking about any compensation. All that we are talking about is whether we can go back to our villages. Even that, nobody tells us anything. (IDP Participant 05-Official camp)

Similarly, humanitarian workers reiterated the views expressed by IDPs on the absence of compensation and access to remedies. They stressed the need for IDPs to understand and act on their rights:

In terms of compensation for the IDPs, there is nothing of such for them. The displaced people don't even know what their rights are, they don't believe they have rights. As civil societies, we keep going to sensitize, create awareness, and tell them what they ought to do. But it's not easy. (Humanitarian Worker participant 05)

In short, for IDPs, surviving the conflict had not translated into security or justice.

## Discussion

Based on empirical evidence, IDPs in Benue State, Nigeria suffered enormous loss of property, livelihoods and access to land. The challenges to their social inclusion revolve around lack of government's commitment to providing sustainable access and opportunities for recovery, integration, personal safety and compensation/remedies. In both official and unofficial camps, IDPs lacked access to quality and continuous education, healthcare, shelter, and safe communities. The social services provided to them such as registration did not document the extent of their lost and damaged property and lost livelihoods. Thus, they had been denied access to justice and the possibility of effective remedies.

Additionally, access and opportunities to quality healthcare, continuous education and decent shelters remain grossly inadequate in official camps. In unofficial camps however, neither the Nigerian/Benue State Government nor the IHAs have provided shelter for IDPs. They lived in uncompleted buildings without windows and doors, in tents made of mosquito nets and grass. Moreover, where IDPs were provided access cards to services in distant locations, they lacked transportation or the means to reach those places.

People and communities displaced by the herds-men-farmers conflict across Nigeria are excluded from Nigeria's humanitarian response plans. Exclusion is not only a form of discrimination against IDPs but is also inconsistent with the Kampala Convention (2009) which derives from the UN Guiding Principles (OCHA 2004). These instruments prohibit all forms of discrimination and injustice against IDPs. Moreover, exclusion exacerbates

human suffering by leaving millions of IDPs behind in multidimensional poverty, disadvantaged and marginalized. It constitutes a direct threat to the realization of the sustainable development goals (SDGs), which stress the need for reducing poverty and disadvantage, and creating safe, inclusive, just and peaceful societies. That IDPs have remained displaced, without sustainable security protection of their camps or safety in their communities, and without remedies, highlights the failure of the Nigerian/Benue State governments to prioritize long-term durable solutions for IDPs and their communities. Dasuki and Effah (2021) found that government bureaucracies and stringent policies frustrated the registration of IDPs and issuance of documents to facilitate access to social services. These findings demonstrate that whilst the herdsman-farmer conflict threatens human security and the safety of affected communities, the government's failure to rehabilitate and return/resettle IDPs threatens justice and social inclusion, and compounds the enormous challenges faced by the IDPs. IDPs cannot successfully integrate as long as their socio-economic losses and security concerns go unaddressed.

While previous studies have contributed to the body of literature on social inclusion of IDPs from the human needs (Olanrewaju et al. 2019) and capability approach (Dasuki and Effah 2021), this current study focused on social inclusion from a justice perspective.

## **Conclusion and Policy Recommendations**

The inadequacies of interventions to address the needs of IDPs in Benue State, Nigeria have prevented them from accessing social services, participating in society, and receiving meaningful remedies. This situation has left them in extremely poor and insecure living conditions in official and unofficial camps. Although the IDPs have escaped the herdsman-farmers conflict, the government has not adopted sufficient measures to address their personal safety, or to facilitate their recovery, either to permit sustainable integration into a local community or safe, voluntary and dignified return to their home villages. Based on these findings, the paper recommends the following.

**Registration, Effective Remedies and Access to Justice:** The Benue SEMA should establish a post-conflict database for documentation of socio-economic losses incurred by affected persons and communities to ascertain the extent of their damages. To achieve this objective, Benue SEMA, Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs and the UNHCR should collaboratively carry out targeted registration of IDPs with the view of identifying socio-economic losses, for purposes of providing effective remedies. The Ministries of Justice, National Human Rights Commission, and the UNHCR should support the IDPs with information and procedures to access justice for compensation and effective recovery.

- **Engaging IDPs as Stakeholders:** Benue State Government should fulfill its obligation to the displaced by engaging and communicating to IDPs as stakeholders. To achieve this goal, SEMA should take immediate steps to communicate to IDPs issues that directly affect them, such as possibilities for voluntary and dignified safe return, or relocation or resettlement.
- **Provision of Sustainable Social Amenities:** Benue SEMA, the Federal Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs, and international Humanitarian Agencies should improve assistance measures and provide sustainable social amenities such as healthcare, shelter, and education within IDP camps. They should also provide financial assistance/means to access services outside IDP camps.
- **Peace through Establishment of Ranches:** Benue State Peace Commission should collaborate with the relevant Federal Ministries and security agencies and reconcile parties in the conflict by educating the herdsman on the benefits of ranching. They should also assist the herdsman to access land for ranches, while ensuring that the displaced farming communities are safe and ready for return. Benue SEMA should collaborate with the Nigerian security agencies to safeguard IDP camps.
- **Inclusive Policy Implementation:** The FMHA in collaboration with OCHA should implement inclusive policies by developing humanitarian response plans that are beneficial to all IDPs regardless of the cause of their displacement.

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