Research Article

Open Access

Political Participation for Social Inclusion of Internally Displaced Persons

Rita Iorbo

O. P. Jindal Global University; rita.iorbo@gmail.com

Sanjeev P. Sahni

O. P. Jindal Global University; drspsahni@jgu.edu.in

Tithi Bhatnagar

National Institute of Advanced Studies (NIAS); bhatnagartithi@gmail.com

Dick T. Andzenge

St Cloud State University; dtandzenge@stcloudstate.edu

Abstract

Internally displaced persons (IDPs) have suffered multiple disadvantages and experienced social exclusion due to involuntary movement to new communities where they struggle to find opportunities for social inclusion. This study examined the political dimensions of social inclusion which focus on engaging IDPs in decision-making on issues that concern them. The study used the democratic participatory theory as a framework for political participation through decision-making. The qualitative exploratory study used in-depth interviews to collect data from twelve IDPs, comprising five females and seven males, who were resident in Benue State, Nigeria. Findings show that government does not incorporate the decisions and choices of IDPs when designing humanitarian measures for protection and assistance; IDPs are not communicated with on issues of interest to them; and IPDs lack sustainable opportunities for interaction with host communities. The study concludes that not incorporating the decisions of IDPs in issues of interest to them creates a culture of humanitarian aid dependency. The study recommends democratising solutions by using grassroots bottom-up measures for sustainable social inclusion of IDPs where solutions emerge from IDPs who are the end beneficiaries of the interventions. A discussion of the study findings is followed by concluding recommendations.

Keywords: internally displaced persons (IDPs); political participation; social inclusion; Benue State-Nigeria

Introduction

Conflict-induced internal displacement has become a serious threat to society since the end of the Cold War. According to the global report by the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC, 2022), over fifty-three million people were internally displaced by conflicts worldwide by year end 2021. The report further showed that an estimated 87 per cent of global displacement population are located in Africa and the Middle East regions while over three million of that population are displaced in Nigeria (IDMC, 2022). According to the United Nations Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement (GPID), internally displaced persons (IDPs) are persons who have not crossed an internationally recognised State border in search of protection and assistance from foreign governments. Therefore, the primary responsibility for their protection and assistance, including responsibility to ensure full participation of IDPs in decision-making, facilitating

Journal of Humanitarian Affairs Volume 5, No. 3 (2024), 3–11 © The authors
http://dx.doi.org/10.7227/JHA.112
This is an Open Access article published under the conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives licence
https://creativecommons.org/licences/by-nc-nd/4.0

Manchester University Press

Downloaded from manchesterarchive.com at 05/23/2025 05:31:45AM
via Open Access. This is an Open Access article published under the
conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives
licence https://creativecommons.org/licences/by-nc-nd/4.0
https://creativecommons.org/licences/by-nc-nd/4.0

their return, integration or resettlement, as well as helping them with opportunities for livelihoods recovery, is that of the affected country (OCHA, 1998). This stipulation is also reiterated by Nigeria's National Policy (National Authorities, 2021) on internal displacement which submits that IDPs will be given opportunities to fully participate in all decision-making on matters that concern them. Despite these stipulations, studies show that the measures provided by governments and humanitarian agencies do not include the involvement or political participation of IDPs in decision-making in issues that concern them (Olanrewaju *et al.*, 2018; Dasuki and Effah, 2021). Additionally, extant literature reveals that available programmes for the protection and assistance of IDPs are limited to life-saving humanitarian aid without a pathway to social inclusion (Kälin and Chapuisat, 2018). This has led to a growing IDP population who live in extremely poor conditions without opportunities for social inclusion (Titilope *et al.*, 2021).

Social inclusion, according to Marlier and Atkinson (2010), is the process of improving the terms of participation by providing equal opportunities and access for all people to participate in society. Silver (2015) identifies three dimensions of social inclusion where participation can take place: political, economic and social. However, most literature on social inclusion of IDPs focus mainly on economic and social dimensions (Titilope *et al.*, 2021), while studies on the political dimension focus on IDPs' rights to vote and be voted for (Dasuki and Effah, 2021; Grace and Mooney, 2010). While the right to vote and be voted for as a component of political participation has been explored in previous studies, it has not adequately demonstrated how exercising electoral franchise contributes to social inclusion of IDPs with a view to helping them integrate into society. This presents the need for research to explore the political participation of IDPs within the context of involving them in decision-making in matters of interest to them. Given that millions of IDPs in Nigeria are socially, economically and politically disconnected from society (Titilope *et al.* 2021; IOM, 2023), exploring the political dimensions of social inclusion provides opportunity for understanding the challenges they struggle with towards integration into society and to regain capacity to perform basic social roles.

In view of the foregoing, the aim of this study is to explore the opportunities availed the Benue State IDPs for political participation. To achieve this, the study is guided by the question, what are the opportunities provided to Benue State IDPs for political participation as a path to social inclusion? The study is limited to the IDPs in Benue State because Benue accounts for 489,245 IDPs of the 495,013 IDPs in the north-central region (IOM, 2023). This places it ahead of other equally badly affected States in the region such as Plateau State (57,899) and Nasarawa State (33,644) IDPs, respectively (IOM, 2023). Studying this population provides the basis for exploring ways in which political participation by decision-making affects social inclusion with the view of making recommendations. Subsequently, the paper is structured under the following sections: review of literature on social inclusion, IDPs and political participation using Rousseau's participatory democratic theory; research methods, including data collection and analysis; and study findings. This is followed with a discussion, before the paper concludes with our recommendations.

Review of Literature

Social Inclusion

The concept of social inclusion is a policy strategy to promote human sustainability by providing access to integration, healthcare, shelter and education, and the political participation of people who have been disadvantaged and marginalised in society (World Bank, 2013). It is the extent to which opportunities, capacities and access are provided to people to enable them to participate in socio-economic and political activities in their communities (Marlier and Atkinson, 2010). According to Birchall (2019), Hayes *et al.* (2008) and Béland *et al.* (2014), social inclusion aims at reducing poverty, inequality, disadvantage and marginalisation of already disadvantaged groups. According to Dasuki and Effah (2021) tackling social exclusion contributes to providing access to participation along the three dimensions of social inclusion – the social dimension, which includes the provision of access to social services such as accommodation, education and social participation; the political dimension, which refers to the provision of access and opportunities for political participation and attainment of human rights; and the economic dimension, which pertains to providing opportunities for economic participation in all spheres.

Olanrewaju *et al.* (2018) explored the financial inclusion of internally displaced women (IDW) who were displaced by the Boko Haram insurgency. The study found that lack of financial inclusion significantly affected social inclusion. Similarly, Titilope *et al.* (2021) also focused on access to socio-economic participation of IDW and found insufficient government support to enable livelihoods recovery and to trigger the capacity of IDW to perform social roles. In another study, Dasuki and Effah (2021) explored how mobile usage could facilitate the social inclusion of IDPs in Nigeria. While these studies have significantly contributed to literature

Downloaded from manchesterhive.com at 05/23/2025 05:31:45AM
via Open Access. This is an Open Access article published under the
conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives
licence https://creativecommons.org/licences/by-nc-nd/4.0
https://creativecommons.org/licences/by-nc-nd/4.0

on the social inclusion of IDPs, there is a gap in the literature on political participation, as these studies are limited to financial inclusion and mobile phone usage for social inclusion of IDPs. It is against this gap that this paper aims to examine the political participation of IDPs in decision-making as a means for social inclusion.

Internal Displacement and Political Participation

Internally displaced persons are entitled to political participation at all levels of society, which includes the right to vote and be voted for, and to be involved in decision-making in their communities and workplace, and even in family settings (OCHA, 1998). These are contained in various international and national frameworks for the protection and assistance of IDPs. For example, Principle 22(1) of the United Nations GPID affirms that IDPs 'whether or not they are living in camps, shall not be discriminated against as a result of their displacement'. Principle 22(1c) re-affirms that IDPs have the 'right to associate freely and to participate equally in community affairs' whether that community is in camps where they are relating with Government, humanitarian agencies, or with members of host communities. Principle 28(2) avails IDPs the right to full participation 'in the planning and management of their return or resettlement and reintegration' as well as '*to participate fully and equally in public affairs at all levels*' (as per Principle 29(1)) on any issue of interest to them (OCHA, 1998) with the view of helping them recover livelihoods and be able to perform social roles.

Despite these stipulations, most literature on the political participation of IDPs is limited to the right to vote and be voted for in political elections (Grace and Mooney, 2007). In Kenya, for instance, Kamungi's (2013) study on political participation of IDPs focused on the politicisation of the democratic processes for IDPs. The study found that IDPs were excluded from exercising their political franchise owing to discriminatory practices related to the politics of 'insider and outsider' issues. Across Europe, Central Asia and North America, Mooney and Jarrah (2005) and Woroniecka-Krzyzanowska and Palaguta (2017) examined institutional approaches towards the voting rights of IDPs. Their findings reveal that IDPs face increasing challenges with documentation and proof of citizenship or residency in host communities. In Nigeria, Ihejirika (2022) also limited the study to political electoral processes and found that while the right to vote in Nigeria is the most popular right to political participation, IDPs are deprived of this right due to inadequate administrative procedures. In a related study of the general elections in north-central Nigeria, Ikyase *et al.* (2022) found insecurity, lack of transportation access and lost civic documents as impediments to IDPs' political participation.

While these studies have contributed to the political participation of IDPs, they are limited to the right to vote and be voted for in representative democratic processes. Consequently, they have not adequately captured political participation as involving IDPs in decision-making on issues that affect them with a view to social inclusion (Ikyase *et al.*, 2022; Mooney and Jarrah, 2005). This makes it imperative for studies to research political participation of IDPs in the context of decision-making on issues that concern them as well as engagement in community.

Theoretical Framework of Participatory Democratic Theory

The participatory democratic theory by Rousseau (1986) provides the basis for citizens' participation in decision-making processes in society. It takes a departure from the representative democratic process which focuses on electing representatives to act on behalf of citizens (Loeper, 2017). Because social inclusion aims at breaking the barriers of social exclusion by providing opportunities for participation, representative political participation is limited in advancing social inclusion.

Participatory democratic theory focuses on allowing people to take part in decision-making, and owning solutions to their challenges. It states that when people are involved in decision-making they feel happy and satisfied with the outcomes. Rousseau submits that not allowing people to take part in decision-making is akin to suppressing their will and forcing them to accept whatever decision is made by others which, he asserts, is not fulfilling to the beneficiaries. Schütze (2013) and Hilmer (2010) added to Rousseau's notion of participatory democratic theory in asserting that involving citizens in decision-making also protects their interests while also advancing good and self-governance, especially in non-political sectors. Rousseau's theory has been used in several contexts. For instance, Sekerák and Valkovičová (2014) used it to interrogate sustainable inclusion in the workplace, where employees participated in decision-making about their welfare and felt a sense of commitment and ownership to work processes and a greater satisfaction with the outcomes. Pateman (1989) used it to discuss equal and inclusive opportunities for every gender to be part of decision-making in the workplace.

In this study, however, political participation through decision-making is seen as a first step towards social inclusion. The study looks at the involvement of IDPs in decision-making and how non-inclusion of IDPs in decision-making affects their capacity to perform

Downloaded from manchesterhive.com at 05/23/2025 05:31:45AM
via Open Access. This is an Open Access article published under the
conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives
licence https://creativecommons.org/licences/by-nc-nd/4.0
https://creativecommons.org/licences/by-nc-nd/4.0

social roles and, invariably, the extent of their social inclusion.

Methodology

This qualitative study adopted the participatory action research (PAR) strategy that used semi-structured questions to conduct in-depth interviews with IDPs in official and unofficial camps in Benue State. This strategy was deemed most suitable owing to its principle of working collaboratively with participants on finding answers to a social phenomenon and not seeing participants as objects of study (Baum *et al.*, 2006). It used semi-structured questions to conduct in-depth interviews with IDPs in official and unofficial camps in Benue State between July and September, 2021. The official camp was in Daudu II, Guma Local Government Area and the unofficial camp in Federal Housing Authority, Makurdi Local Government, both in Benue State. The camps host approximately 7,500 and 9,000 IDPs, respectively. Access to the IDP camps was obtained from the Benue State Emergency Management Agency (SEMA).

Prior to the commencement of the study, a written application was sent to the University's Research and Ethics Review Board and initial approval obtained with approval number RERB/2023/053 to proceed with the study. Study participants were purposively selected by the researcher because of knowledge or experience of displacement (Sekaran and Bougie, 2016). Twelve participants, comprising seven males and five females, who were between nineteen and sixty-two years of age took part in the study. The sample size of twelve was deemed adequate upon reaching data saturation, with evidence that there were no more new ideas flowing from the participants (Bryman, 2016).

Participants were recruited with support of Benue SEMA and the Community Links and Human Empowerment Initiative, who the lead researcher had contacted for this purpose. These organisations invited IDPs for a meeting, notified them of the researcher's desire to interview them and requested those willing to indicate by a show of hands. The researcher interacted virtually with the willing participants and requested only those who understood and spoke English take part in the study, during which the research objectives were shared with those who had indicated interest. They were informed that the study was purely an academic exercise that was voluntary, anonymous and posed no harm to them. Participants were told to seek clarification on any doubts and to feel free to withdraw or decline to answer any question without explanation or legal implication on them. Once they were convinced and opted to participate, the researcher obtained written and spoken informed consent for participation, for audio recording of the interview and for anonymous publication of study findings. Semi-structured interview guides were used for the in-depth interviews which were conducted via WhatsApp audio calls. The telephonic medium was imperative owing to the long distance and the COVID-19 lockdown restrictions that affected international travel (Gibson, 2020). Each of the interview sessions lasted between fifty-five to eighty minutes, and these were recorded and transcribed verbatim.

The interview sessions began with greetings and self-introduction by the researcher, who also requested participants to introduce themselves and briefly speak about their engagement with society prior to displacement, give an account of their families, describe what led to their displacement, what they were doing prior to displacement and what they do in displacement. This helped to understand IDPs' involvement in their communities and lack of such opportunities in displacement. The researcher also asked the participants if they felt comfortable that the study findings would be published, albeit, anonymously. They all consented, and added that it was their desire for people to know what is happening to them because this would give visibility to their predicament and attract intervention.

Data Analysis

Analysis followed five steps: bracketing and phenomenological reduction; delineating units of meaning; clustering of units of meaning to form themes; summarising interviews, validating and modifying; and development of themes (Groenewald, 2004: 49–51). The researcher paid attention to the wordings, phrases and sentences which formed a pattern, meaning that led to emerging themes that addressed the research objective. The themes were reviewed, defined and clustered with sub-themes and verbatim quotes. To ensure quality of the study, the process recommended by Bryman (2016) for ensuring quality in qualitative research, which includes trustworthiness, confirmability, credibility, transferability and dependability, was followed. This was achieved through triangulation, including member checking, where participants were consulted to ascertain whether the themes generated and explained represented their sentiments reproduced with the verbatim quotes, consultations with members of Benue SEMA and analysis of official documents.

Findings

This section presents empirical findings based on themes generated from the study. Five major themes emerged: social characteristics of IDPs; opportunities for political participation; available opportunities for economic

Downloaded from manchesterhive.com at 05/23/2025 05:31:45AM
via Open Access. This is an Open Access article published under the
conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives
licence https://creativecommons.org/licences/by-nc-nd/4.0
https://creativecommons.org/licences/by-nc-nd/4.0

participation; performing social roles; and interacting with host communities.

Social Characteristics of IDPs

Twelve people participated in the study who were all residents of Benue State farming communities prior to displacement and were all displaced by the Fulani herdsmen–farmers conflict. Owing to the objective of studying IDPs displaced in Benue by this conflict, all participants qualified for participation in the study. They were above eighteen years of age and were all farmers who produced food in quantities large enough for consumption and for sale. All participants had attained at least primary and secondary school education, were literate and communicated in English. All participants indicated they were displaced from Guma Local Government Area of Benue State owing to the Fulani herdsmen attacks on their communities:

> I am from Yelewata in Guma Local Government Area. I was displaced in 2018 in February. I fled to this place because the Fulani herdsmen were attacking, burning and killing people in our villages. I have 5 children – 2 girls and 3 boys. My husband is not here because there is no shelter for us and nothing to feed the family. He is in another place. (Participant 10, unofficial camp)

Participants narrated how they were doing well as farmers and had capacity to perform social roles, including clothing and feeding their families until internal displacement changed their stories from being independent to being humanitarian aid dependent:

> When I was in my community, I used to farm cassava, sesame, melon and corn. Whenever I harvest my farm produce, I would sell them and feed my family, I never depended on anyone, I used to wear any kind of cloth I wanted…. Now that I am in the IDP camp, I am faced with the challenge of hunger, shelter and clothing. If we are not given by well-meaning Nigerians, we go without food. (Participant 07, unofficial camp)

They also gave insights into how they were actively participating members of their communities prior to displacement:

> Sometimes I used to sell *akpukpa* (bean cake) and *ibier* (pap made of millet) on the market day and contribute in local saving. We were living very happily in our village and we used to have meetings for different things like wedding or if someone died, we attend the funeral. My husband was the vice chairman of the village meeting so during the meeting I used to cook with other women. (Participant 03, official camp)

Participants also gave disturbing narratives about transitions from the very things they enjoyed in the villages to life-changing encounters once they arrived in the communities that now host them:

> On arrival in this community, we were stranded, we didn't know anybody. Things were tough because there was no food, water and even where to sleep. Government and NGOs had not started bringing things. (Participant 07, official camp)

They added however that it was after days of staying without any support that help started to come from humanitarian organisations and members of the public:

> After some days, some people started bringing food, clothes and then Doctors Without Borders also came and gave us mosquito nets which we used for making tents. (Participant 12, unofficial camp)

> It took some days before we started receiving help from Government and the organisations. (Participant 07, official camp)

Opportunities for Political Participation

Our study also explored the available opportunities availed IDPs to be involved in decision-making at various levels and regarding different issues that directly affect them. These include opportunities for involving them in decision-making to decide the type of economic activities they prefer, and discussing the possibility of return, integration or resettlement. Five themes emerged from the data, which are supported with verbatim quotes and presented below. They include: involvement in decision-making for economic recovery; available opportunities for economic participation; performing social roles; and interacting with host communities.

Involvement in decision-making for economic recovery: Study findings show that IDPs lack opportunities to decide what kind of livelihoods they prefer. Participants gave accounts of how they were asked by government officials and humanitarian agencies to fill out forms and indicate their livelihoods recovery preferences. They stated that after indicating their preferences, they were never consulted nor offered those opportunities:

> For the Government people, which is SEMA [Benue State Emergency Management Agency] and other NGOs, they asked us to write our names and the type of support we want to start our livelihoods. I wrote my name for farming so that they can help me with the farm items like hoes, cutlass, seeds and chemicals. But as I speak with you now, it is more than one year ago and nobody has come back here. (Participant 08, unofficial camp)

Involvement in decision-making on shelter: This study also found that IDPs are not involved in decision-making regarding location for their temporary resident camps,

Downloaded from manchesterhive.com at 05/23/2025 05:31:45AM
via Open Access. This is an Open Access article published under the
conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives
licence https://creativecommons.org/licences/by-nc-nd/4.0
https://creativecommons.org/licences/by-nc-nd/4.0

nor are their preferences adhered to. Participants reported that government officials abandoned them in the open fields without any shelters or amenities. They indicated that on arrival to their present location – an open field – government directed them to move to a certain location farther away from town. However, they objected due to insecurity in that location. This, they alleged, led to government abandoning them in the open fields without support:

> Government has not offered me accommodation. When we arrived from our villages to this camp, Government asked us to move to the IDP camp at Uikpiam. We refused to because the Uikpiam camp is not safe. Fulani herdsmen have attacked the camp several times and killed many IDPs. Because of our refusal, government has abandoned us in this camp. Our shelters are made of mosquito nets and grass and very uncomfortable to sleep in. (Participant 08, unofficial camp)

Informational support: Participants also indicated not being provided with information about employment opportunities or employment offers, even though they desire such opportunities:

> In the aspect of employment, government has not looked into it yet and they have not told us whether there are plans to help people to get jobs. (Participant 01, official camp)

> Government or these NGOs have not helped with access to employment. But if you will offer me employment right now, I will gladly do because I do not have any means of livelihoods. (Participant 06, unofficial camp)

Return or Integration: Findings also revealed that participants remain in camps incommunicado, as they are informed neither about return nor integration:

> Government has not told us when we will return to our villages or whether they want us to remain here. Nobody tells us anything about going and we cannot just go back to our villages. (Participant 09, unofficial camp)

Available Opportunities for Economic Participation

Owing to the failure to implement IDPs' preferences for livelihoods recovery reported above, we explored how IDPs had embraced the economic opportunities that government and agencies had provided to them to know how useful the interventions were to IDPs. Some of the participants indicated that they had gained knowledge but that has not translated into economic recovery:

> It has helped me to gain knowledge of making those things but I have not been able to use it to help me because they did not have the equipment and chemicals to give us and help us start the business. I cannot say the training is helpful. (Participant 02, official camp)

Performing Social Roles

Findings also show that failure to implement IDPs' preferences and the inadequacy of available government economic measures to empower IDPs, mean participants lack financial capacity to perform basic social roles. Among the basic social needs, they lack capacity to address feeding and the high cost of food, sleeping items, clothing, school supplies and transportation to health-care centres.

Feeding: The study found looming hunger among IDPs who were once producing food in commercial quantities and guaranteeing national food security but now cannot afford this same food:

> My problem here is hunger. When I don't see a job to do, I am unable to provide food for my family since we don't have farmland here. There are days we drink only water and sleep because there is no money to buy food. (Participant 11, unofficial camp)

High cost of food: Participants also identified the rising cost of food, saying:

> Internal displacement has affected me a lot like when we are hungry and I cannot provide food for my children. Because food is very expensive here, the money we get sometimes from the small jobs is not plenty to buy enough food. (Participant 06, official camp)

Clothing: Participants added that clothing and hygiene products are also a challenge:

> When I was in my house, I was happy with my life. I used to take care of children and keep them clean. I used to feel happy with myself seeing them clean. But here in the camp, they can't be neat because we are suffering. Sometimes, it takes months even to rub cream or use soap to bath because we do not have these things and there is no money. (Participant 01, official camp)

Transportation to healthcare facilities: The study also found that official IDP camps have limited, makeshift primary healthcare facilities treating minor health challenges only. Participants added that humanitarian doctors often refer them to government hospitals in other parts of the town, since the healthcare facilities are limited. Due to a lack of financial capacity to access transport to town, they are unable to access the services:

> Doctors Without Borders are here but it is not everyone that gets treatment from them…. They treat only minor

Downloaded from manchesterhive.com at 05/23/2025 05:31:45AM
via Open Access. This is an Open Access article published under the
conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives
licence https://creativecommons.org/licences/by-nc-nd/4.0
https://creativecommons.org/licences/by-nc-nd/4.0

problems like headache and fever. They would tell us to go the hospital and use our card. But that is not possible because we do not have transport money to go to Makurdi for treatment. (Participant 05, official camp)

School supplies: It was found that IDPs of school age are out-of-school because their parents cannot meet basic school enrolment requirements:

> The first two are supposed to be in secondary school but are not in school because we do not have money to send them to public school. You know public school is free but there are other things that we have to pay money, like registration, books and uniform. (Participant 11, unofficial camp)

Sleeping items: The study also found that IDPs live in extremely poor and unhygienic conditions on bare floors, all because they lack capacity to afford sleeping items:

> We don't have mattresses or mats. We spread empty sacks, cartons and mosquito nets on the bare floor and sleep. My children are infested with bugs because the ground is usually wet throughout the raining season. (Participant 08, unofficial camp)

Interacting with Host Communities

Asked whether they have opportunities to participate in host communities and community affairs, IDPs in the official camp say that although not being stopped from participating, they are neither involved nor invited:

> No one stops us from doing things. But since we are not from here, they do not allow us to be part of the things they do because whatever they do in their communities, they do it based on family ties. (Participant 05, official camp)

In the unofficial camp, however, participants submitted that they did interact with host community when there is conflict between IDPs and their hosts:

> They do not involve us in their community meetings except when the traditional ruler wants to address a conflict between IDPs and the host community people. (Participant 07, unofficial camp)

IDPs in the unofficial camp added that meeting with the local leaders and discussing IDP–host community challenges improved their relationship:

> In the past, they used to have issues with IDPs fetching water and gathering firewood from their places…. But the Chief invited us for a meeting with the people and has resolved the problem. (Participant 10, unofficial camp)

Discussion

Owing to its objective to examine the possible opportunities availed to the Benue IDPs to participate in political processes for social inclusion, this study contributes to the body of literature on political participation for social inclusion of IDPs. Our study found that prior to being displaced, IDPs were happily engaged in different community activities, including ceremonies and trade, while others were involved in decision-making as community leaders with a sense of belonging. However, additional findings show that in displacement situations IDPs lack opportunities for political participation. Evidence suggests non-involvement of IDPs in decision-making to decide their preferences for livelihoods recovery. They are not availed informational support for employment, return or integration and lack adequate opportunities for interacting with host communities. Where they are invited to decide preferred livelihoods recovery options, neither government nor humanitarian agencies implement IDPs' preferences. The implication is that while IDPs' choices are never implemented, government's preferred livelihoods recovery measures have failed to create pathways to social inclusion. Failure to implement IDPs' preferred measures shows that the humanitarian approach towards the assistance of IDPs is not only undemocratic but also not in their interest. It demonstrates that while IDPs desire to recover livelihoods/agency and exit humanitarian aid dependency, the assistance provided encourages a culture of humanitarian aid dependency through a top-down approach that is non-reflective of IDPs' desires.

This position resonates with Rousseau's (1986) participatory democratic theory which argued that successful solutions must spring from the grassroots/bottom-up where people make decision on issues that concern them. Therefore, handing down benefits to IDPs without regard for their input is akin to exclusion and forcing them to accept measures that are not necessarily beneficial to them. Therefore, successful social inclusion of Benue IDPs is not taking place; their desires are neither implemented nor are they communicated with regarding issues of interest to them such as return, integration and employment opportunities.

The study opines that extreme poverty among IDPs in official and unofficial camps is directly related to failed political participation – a failure to involve IDPs in decision-making for livelihoods recovery. In both camps, the study found that IDPs lack adequate capacity to afford basic needs like clothing and sleeping items, and the financial resources to provide transport to designated healthcare centres. They also decried extreme hunger

Downloaded from manchesterhive.com at 05/23/2025 05:31:45AM
via Open Access. This is an Open Access article published under the
conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives
licence https://creativecommons.org/licences/by-nc-nd/4.0
https://creativecommons.org/licences/by-nc-nd/4.0

because the cost of food items is beyond their reach while the skills acquisition trainings have not financially empowered them to afford these items. These findings agree with Sekerák and Valkovičová (2014), who assert that sustainable inclusion in the workplace should be democratic and take cognisance of staff participation in defining their economic welfare. They also resonate with Olanrewaju *et al.* (2018) and Titilope *et al.* (2021), who also found lack of capacity to perform social roles and afford basic needs directly linked to lack of sustainable assistance by government to facilitate livelihoods recovery of IDP women. Lack of capacity also has implications for literacy attainment, as most IDP children and youths are out-of-school due to lack of finances to meet basic school enrolment requirements like registration fees, books and uniforms.

Two distinct results were found at the host community level. First, IDPs live in the same community as their hosts but lack sustainable opportunities for social cohesion and solidarity because they are neither invited nor involved in community affairs. This presented grave obstacles to social integration, especially through community interactions. Second, where IDPs *are* involved in decision-making by host communities when resolving IDPs–host community differences they can experience harmonious relations, because every member across the divide is offered an opportunity to contribute views towards solutions. This finding agrees with Pateman (1989) on Rousseau's participatory democratic theory that providing equal opportunities for different social groups yield successful outcomes and creates a sense of satisfaction among participants. While this study contributes to literature on the political participation for social inclusion of IDPs, it is a departure from previous studies which focused on the right to vote and be voted for (Grace and Mooney, 2010), security threats and logistics challenges that disenfranchised IDPs (Ikyase *et al.*, 2022). It goes on to show that grassroots solutions/political participation lay the most viable path to social inclusion.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Conflict-induced internal displacement in Benue State, Nigeria has socially excluded millions of people from mainstream society and deprived them of opportunities to be heard through decision-making on issues that concern them. This has significantly worsened IDPs' living conditions, as they lack sustainable means of livelihoods owing to unsustainable assistance measures provided by government and humanitarian agencies who do not involve IDPs in formulating nor implementing intervention. Beyond the conflict and insecurity, failure of stakeholders to democratise solution-making processes has further excluded the displaced. It has also prolonged displacement, as IDPs are unable to exit humanitarian dependency. Further, it worsened humanitarian crises and resulted in the extremely poor living conditions of the displaced, which is evident in the daily struggle to feed families and the lack of sleeping items and decent shelters, healthcare and school supplies like books and uniforms.

While previous studies addressed political participation for social inclusion through electoral processes in representatives' participation, this current study went a notch further and focused on political participation through decision-making as the first step towards social inclusion. Achieving sustainable social inclusion should be a bottom-up democratic process that involves IDPs in decision-making to contribute solutions to their challenges.

In view of the above, the study recommends that government and other humanitarian agencies should:

- Ensure that IDPs are actively engaged to participate in different aspects of society as they were in their communities prior to displacement.
- Ensure that there is a bottom-up democratic process that includes IDPs in decision-making to contribute solutions to their challenges, particularly as it relates to economic and socio-cultural activities. This will also eliminate the chances of further exclusion of IDPs particularly from issues that concern them.
- Ensure that decisions reached by IDPs are implemented. Doing so more profitably provides solutions that best address their needs, sets them for greater chance of livelihoods recovery and improves capacity to perform social roles for sustainable social inclusion.
- Ensure the provision of informational support for IDPs on various aspects such as return, integration and access to employment opportunities.
- Ensure that IDPs make decisions that concern them, especially to help break the culture of humanitarian dependency and to reduce the chances of seeing IDPs as incapable of proffering solutions to their challenges. Achieving this helps government and humanitarian agencies to eliminate financial and material wastes that are often channeled towards skills acquisition and economic empowerment schemes that bear very little positive results.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank the peer reviewers for their effort and time spent reviewing the original manuscript.

Downloaded from manchesterhive.com at 05/23/2025 05:31:45AM
via Open Access. This is an Open Access article published under the
conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives
licence https://creativecommons.org/licences/by-nc-nd/4.0
https://creativecommons.org/licences/by-nc-nd/4.0

Declarations

This study was not funded by any organisation.

The authors declare that there is no potential conflict of interest.

Works Cited

Baum, F., MacDougall, C. and Smith, D. (2006), 'Participatory Action Research', *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*, 60:10, 854–7, doi: 10.1136/jech.2004.028662.

Béland, D., Blomqvist, P., Andersen, J. G., Palme, J. and Waddan, A. (2014), 'The Universal Decline of Universality? Social Policy Change in Canada, Denmark, Sweden and the UK', *Social Policy & Administration*, 48:7, 739–56.

Birchall, J. (2019), 'Overview of Social Exclusion in Nigeria', *K4D Helpdesk Report*, United Kingdom Foreign, Commonwealth, & Development Office Institute of Development Studies, https://opendocs.ids.ac.uk/opendocs/handle/20.500.12413/14809 (accessed 23 April 2023).

Bryman, A. (2016), *Social Research Method*, 5th edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

Dasuki, S. and Effah, J. (2021), 'Mobile Phone Use for Social Inclusion: The Case of Internally Displaced People in Nigeria', *Information Technology for Development*, first published online 13 September 2021, doi: 10.1080/02681102.2021.1976714.

Gibson, K. (2020), 'Bridging the Digital Divide: Reflections on Using WhatsApp Instant Messenger Interviews in Youth Research', *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, first published online 17 April 2020, doi: 10.1080/14780887.2020.1751902.

Grace, J. and Mooney, E. (2007), 'Democracy and the Displaced: Political Participation Rights, in Particular the Rights to Vote and to be Elected', The American Society of International Law and Brookings-Bern Project on Internal Displacement (forthcoming).

Grace, J. and Mooney, E. (2010), 'Political Participation Rights in Particular the Right to Vote', in Kälin, W., Williams, R. C., Koser, K. and Solomon, A. (eds), *Studies in Transnational Legal Policy No. 41: Incorporating the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement into Domestic Law: Issues and Challenges'*, The American Society of International Law and Brookings-Bern Project on Internal Displacement, pp. 507–50.

Groenewald, T. (2004), 'A Phenomenological Research Design Illustrated', *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 3:1, 42–55.

Hayes, A., Gray, M. and Edwards, B. (2008), 'Social Inclusion: Origins, Concepts and Key Themes' (Canberra: Social Inclusion Unit, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet), https://apo.org.au/sites/default/files/resource-files/2008-10/apo-nid8799.pdf (accessed 16 September 2023).

Hilmer, J. D. (2010), 'The State of *Participatory* Democratic Theory', *New Political Science*, 32:1, 43–63, doi: 10.1080/07393140903492118.

IDMC. (2022), *Global Report on Internal Displacement 2022: Children and Youth in Internal Displacement* (Geneva: IDMC/Norwegian Refugee Council), www.internal-displacement.org/global-report/grid2022/ (accessed 10 April 2023).

Ihejirika, O. N. (2022), 'Internally Displaced Persons and Right to Political Participation in Nigeria', *African Journal of Criminal Law and Jurisprudence*, 7, 77–84.

Ikyase, T., Elyon, E. S. and Shamaki, I. (2022), 'Internally Displaced Persons and the 2019 General Elections in North Central Nigeria: A Study of Daudu Camp in Benue State', *Ilorin Journal of Business and Social Sciences*, 24:1, 136–46.

IOM (International Organization for Migration). (2023). *IOM Nigeria-North-Central and North-West Zones Displacement Report March 2023, Round 11 Needs Monitoring*. UN Migration, dtm.iom.int/sites/g/files/tmzbdl1461/files/reports/DTM%20Nigeria%20-%20North-west%2C%20North-central%20Round%2011%20-%20Needs%20Monitoring%20Report_final%20%282%29.pdf (accessed 28 April 2023).

Kälin, W. and Chapuisat, H. E. (2018), 'Guiding Principle 28: The Unfulfilled Promise to End Protracted Internal Displacement', *International Journal of Refugee Law*, 30:2, 243–68. doi: 10.1093/ijrl/eey030.

Kamungi, P. (2013), 'Identity, Democracy and Internally Displaced Persons in Kenya', *Africa Portal*, Backgrounder No. 47, January, https://africaportal.org/publication/identity-democracy-and-internally-displaced-persons-in-kenya/ (accessed 22 August 2024).

Loeper, A. (2017), 'Cross-Border Externalities and Cooperation among Representative Democracies', *European Economic Review*, 91, 180–208, https://e-archivo.uc3m.es/handle/10016/25180.

Marlier, E. and Atkinson, A. B. (2010), *Analyzing and Measuring Social Inclusion in a Global Context* (New York: UN Department of Economic & Social Affairs).

Mooney, E. and Jarrah, B. (2005), 'Displaced and Disenfranchised: Internally Displaced Persons and Elections in the OSCE Region', *Ethnopolitics*, 4:1, 29–48. doi: 10.1080/17449050500072747.

National Authorities (2021), 'Nigeria: National Policy on Internally Displaced Persons' (Abuja: Federal Republic of Nigeria), www.refworld.org/pdfid/632af49b4.pdf (accessed 20 April 2023).

OCHA (Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs). (1998), *Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement*, www.unhcr.org/43ce1cff2.pdf (accessed 22 August 2024).

Olanrewaju, F. O., Omotoso, F. and Alabi, J. O. (2018), 'Datasets on the Challenges of Forced Displacement and Coping Strategies among Displaced Women in Selected Internally Displaced Persons' (IDPs) camps in Nigeria', *Data in Brief*, 20, 152–8, doi:10.1016/j.dib.2018.07.042.

Pateman, C. (1989), *The Disorder of Women* (Stanford: Stanford University Press).

Rousseau, J. J. (1986), *Political Writings*. Edited and translated by Frederick Watkins (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press).

Schütze, C. (2013), *Including Citizens? Participation of National Members of European Civil Society Organizations* (Master's thesis, Lund University), https://lup.lub.lu.se/luur/download?func=downloadFile&recordOId=3809754&fileOId=3809758 (accessed 30 April 2023).

Sekaran, U. and Bougie, R. (2016), *Research Methods for Business: A Skill Building Approach*, 7th edition (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons).

Sekerák, M. and Valkovi ová, V. (2014), 'Political Effects of Employee Participation: an Empirical Conundrum', *Teorija in Praksa*, 51:5, 944–1001, http://dk.fdv.uni-lj.si/db/pdfs/TiP2014_5_SekerakValkovicova.pdf.

Silver, H. (2015), 'The Contexts of Social Inclusion', DESA Working Paper No. 144 ST/ESA/2015/DWP/144, UN Department of Economic & Social Affairs, www.un.org/esa/desa/papers/2015/wp144_2015.pdf (accessed 22 August 2024).

Titilope, A. G., Zakuan, U. A. A. and Osman, N. (2021), 'The State of Conditions and Challenges Faced by Internally Displaced Women (IDW) in Nigeria: A Social Inclusion Perspective', *Journal of International Studies*, 17, 1–26, doi: 10.32890/jis2021.17.1.

World Bank. (2013), 'Social Inclusion', www.worldbank.org/en/topic/social-inclusion (accessed 27 July 2023).

Woroniecka-Krzyzanowska, D. and Palaguta, N. (2017), 'Internally Displaced Persons and Elections under Military Conflict in Ukraine', *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 30:1, 27–46.

Downloaded from manchesterhive.com at 05/23/2025 05:31:45AM
via Open Access. This is an Open Access article published under the
conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives
licence https://creativecommons.org/licences/by-nc-nd/4.0
https://creativecommons.org/licences/by-nc-nd/4.0