

State and Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs) Politics in Managing the Social Consequences of Conflict-induced Internally Displaced Persons in North East Nigeria

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Abstract

Globally, conflict-induced displacement remains a major humanitarian issue affecting millions, with Africa among the most affected regions, particularly Nigeria where it has led to severe social challenges in the North East. To achieve the research objectives, a qualitative research methodology was employed, underpinned by Conflict Theory. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with fifteen purposively selected informants. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data. The results revealed that conflict-induced displaced persons experienced significant social consequences, including livelihood loss, food insecurity, disruption of education, psychosocial distress, weakened family stability, and increased dependence on humanitarian assistance. The study found that state institutions and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) managed the social consequences of displacement through relief assistance, healthcare services, psychosocial support, livelihood interventions, and community-based support programmes aimed at improving the welfare of displaced people. Furthermore, the study identified that the effectiveness of state and NGO responses was hindered by political and institutional challenges such as inadequate funding, weak coordination, insecurity, administrative delays, and limited institutional capacity. The study recommends improved funding and coordination between government and NGOs, strengthened security, expanded livelihood support, simplified administration, and capacity building to enhance displacement management in North-East Nigeria.

Keywords: Conflict-induced displacement; Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs); State institutions; non-governmental organisations (NGOs); Social consequences; Governance and coordination

I. Introduction

Conflict-induced internal displacement has become a major humanitarian and development challenge worldwide. According to Hamza et al. (2024), approximately 45.7 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) were recorded across 61 countries, with a significant proportion concentrated in conflict-affected countries such as Syria, Afghanistan, Yemen, Colombia, and Iraq. These figures demonstrate the growing impact of armed conflict and violence on human security, livelihoods, and social stability across the globe.

In Africa, the situation remains particularly alarming, as the continent hosts a substantial proportion of the world's forcibly displaced population (UNHCR, 2017). Countries such as Sudan, Somalia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, South Sudan, and Ethiopia continue to experience large-scale internal displacement resulting from armed conflict, communal violence, and political instability (Africa Center for Strategic Studies, 2024; IDMC, 2020). Beyond conflict, factors such as environmental disasters and development-induced displacement have further intensified the displacement crisis across the continent (Vancly, 2017).

Nigeria represents one of the countries most affected by conflict-induced displacement in Africa (Nwogu et al., 2024). Prolonged insecurity arising from the Boko Haram insurgency, farmer-herder conflicts, banditry, and communal violence has displaced millions of people from their homes. The North-East region, particularly the states of Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe, has experienced the highest concentration of internally displaced persons, making displacement a major humanitarian and development concern in the region (Pukuma, 2026).

The scale of displacement in North-East Nigeria has necessitated the involvement of various state institutions and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in responding to the needs of affected

populations. These actors are engaged in the provision of humanitarian assistance, protection services, and other interventions aimed at supporting displaced people. However, the effectiveness of these interventions is often influenced by political, institutional, and coordination-related factors. This study therefore examines the politics of state and non-governmental organisations in managing the social consequences of conflict-induced displacement in North East Nigeria.

II. Literature Review

A. Concept of Conflict-Induced Internally Displaced Persons

Scholars explained that internally displaced persons (IDPs) are individuals or groups who are forced to flee or leave their homes or places of habitual residence due to armed conflict, internal strife, systematic human rights violations, or natural and human-made disasters, and who do not cross an internationally recognised State border (Hynes, 2021; Ojonugwa, 2021). Similarly, Ott (2018), notes that although IDPs share similarities with refugees in that both are forcibly displaced due to conflict, violence, or disasters, IDPs remain within their country of origin and therefore do not benefit from the legal status and protection afforded to refugees. Consequently, they experience displacement without access to the formal protection mechanisms available under international refugee frameworks (Ott, 2018).

Conflict-induced displacement is characterised by its sudden and disruptive nature. Mekonnen (2020), notes that individuals affected by conflict and violence are often compelled to flee without warning or the opportunity to secure essential assets and belongings for survival. This abrupt displacement heightens vulnerability by disrupting access to shelter, livelihoods, social networks, and basic resources. The scale of internal displacement has increased significantly in recent years, driven by the rising frequency and intensity of armed conflicts, insecurity, and climate-related crises (Wood, 2023). As a result, conflict-induced IDPs constitute a distinct category of forcibly displaced populations who, despite remaining within national borders, face severe protection gaps and humanitarian challenges. In this study, conflict-induced internally displaced persons refer to individuals forced to flee their homes and communities due to Boko Haram insurgency, communal conflicts, farmer-herder violence, banditry and insecurity, while remaining within the internationally recognised borders of Nigeria.

B. Social Consequences of Conflict-Induced Internally Displaced Persons

Conflict-induced displacement often generates severe social consequences for displaced populations and host communities. For instance, in Ukraine, Empirical study carried out by Voznyak et al. (2024), revealed that the consequences of internal displacement include increased social tension, competition for jobs and housing, shortages of places in preschool institutions, and unequal distribution of budgetary resources between host populations and internally displaced persons. Similarly, Njemanze (2024), observed that displacement disrupts family structures through the separation of household members, thereby weakening traditional support systems for childcare, elder care, and mutual assistance.

In the African context, Abdisa and Likal (2024), argue that conflict-induced internal displacement in Ethiopia resulted in severe social consequences, including homelessness, social disintegration, limited access to healthcare and education, psychological trauma, economic hardship, and weakened social cohesion. Likewise, Nwogu et al. (2024), reported that conflict-induced displacement negatively affected the health conditions of affected residents in selected Local Government Areas of Zamfara State, Nigeria, thereby increasing social vulnerability among displaced populations.

In another dimension, research carried out by Hamza et al. (2024), found that internally displaced persons in Bauchi State, Maiduguri, and Gombe State frequently experience limited access to start-up capital, unhealthy business competition, discrimination, and unemployment, which impede their socio-economic stability and integration into host communities. Additionally, Iacoella and Tirivayi (2020) underscores that conflict-induced displacement in North East Nigeria significantly

increased the prevalence of acute child malnutrition, reduced household dietary diversity, and exacerbated food insecurity among displaced households. The study attributed these outcomes to the disruption of livelihoods, food systems, and social support networks resulting from displacement.

C. State Response to Conflict-Induced Internally Displaced Persons

The scholarly literature on state responses to internal displacement has increasingly emphasized that the effectiveness of humanitarian assistance is not merely a function of resource availability, but is fundamentally shaped by governance architectures, political priorities, and institutional capacity (Schwartz, 2023). At the global level, Cantor and Woolley (2020), observe that while international norms around the protection of internally displaced persons (IDPs) have expanded significantly, state-level implementation remains uneven. Their review highlights a critical gap between the humanitarian aspirations encoded in global frameworks and the pragmatic realities of government attitudes, which often fluctuate according to security concerns, administrative capacity, and domestic political calculations. This disjuncture suggests that displacement governance cannot be understood in isolation from the broader institutional environment within which states operate.

In the African context, this governance constraints become particularly pronounced. Mengistu (2024), examines government responsiveness to internal displacement in Ethiopia, arguing that African states bear the primary duty to protect and assist IDPs under the Kampala Convention, yet the translation of this obligation into coherent policy remains contingent on state capacity and political will. The study underscores that effective IDP response requires not only the formulation of dedicated policies but also the institutional machinery to implement them, a challenge common across conflict-affected states on the continent. This regional scholarship reinforces Schwartz's (2023), contention that governance structures determine the modalities through which humanitarian assistance is delivered to displaced populations.

Narrowing the focus to Nigeria's Northeast, the intersection of insurgency, state fragility, and displacement has generated a distinct body of literature concerned with the operational and strategic limitations of state-led response. Raji et al. (2021), provide a systematic assessment of the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) in Borno State, finding that legal restrictions, funding deficits, and bureaucratic dysfunction severely constrain the agency's capacity to ameliorate the conditions of IDPs. Their work demonstrates that even where institutional frameworks nominally exist, capacity gaps and governance failures impede effective service delivery. Complementing this institutional analysis, Saka and Bojang (2022), evaluate specific state management strategies in the Northeast, concluding that the protracted nature of the Boko Haram insurgency has exposed the fragility of existing governance arrangements, forcing the state to adopt reactive rather than preventive approaches to displacement.

Earlier scholarship by Mohammed (2017), contextualizes these more recent findings within a longer trajectory of governance failure, documenting fragmented coordination among state agencies, weak institutional frameworks, and the absence of a unified national IDP policy prior to 2019. Together, these studies suggest that in Nigeria's Northeast, the state's response to displacement is characterized by a paradox: while the government asserts sovereignty over humanitarian governance within its territory, its actual capacity to deliver protection and assistance is undermined by the very insecurity and institutional erosion that the insurgency has produced.

D. Role of Non-Governmental Organisations in Conflict-Induced Internal Displacement Management

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) play a critical role in complementing state efforts to address the needs of conflict induced internally displaced people (Hamza, et al., 2025). Their interventions commonly include the provision of food assistance, shelter, healthcare services, psychosocial support, education, livelihood training, and peacebuilding initiatives.

International non-governmental organisation, Mercy Corps (2022), reported that the organisation provided humanitarian assistance to more than 200,000 conflict-affected individuals,

including internally displaced persons and refugees, in eastern Ukraine between 2015 and 2017. The intervention involved the provision of food assistance, water and sanitation services, housing rehabilitation, cash transfers, and livelihood development programmes. The study demonstrates the significant role NGOs can play in reducing the social and economic vulnerabilities associated with displacement.

Similarly, Engwari and Njiei (2021), examined the activities of NGOs supporting internally displaced persons in Cameroon's North-West Region. The study revealed disparities in service delivery, with displaced people residing in urban centres receiving greater assistance than those living in remote rural communities. This finding highlights the operational and logistical challenges faced by humanitarian organisations in conflict-affected environments.

In the Nigerian context, Obiefuna and Adams (2021), indicated that the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) and other faith-based organisations provided humanitarian support to female internally displaced persons through relief distribution and welfare services. Likewise, Muhammad and Yalwa (2018), found that NGOs have made significant contributions to alleviating the suffering of internally displaced persons in North-East Nigeria through the provision of relief materials, financial assistance, and community support programmes.

E. State and Non-Governmental Organisations Management of the Social Consequences of Conflict-Induced Internally Displaced Persons

Francis et al. (2021), advocate stronger partnerships between the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA), State Emergency Management Agencies (SEMAs), and non-governmental organisations in responding to the humanitarian needs of internally displaced persons in Borno State and other conflict-affected areas. Such partnerships are essential for enhancing service delivery and improving emergency response mechanisms. Similarly, Okunade and Ogunnubi (2022) note that institutions such as NEMA, SEMA, the North East Development Commission (NEDC), and the Federal Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs play critical roles in coordinating the activities of international organisations and NGOs operating in North-East Nigeria.

Furthermore, Oghuvbu and Okolie (2020), study found that collaborative initiatives between government agencies and NGOs have facilitated empowerment programmes for internally displaced persons. Additionally, Sadat et al. (2021), demonstrate that NGOs complement government interventions through counterpart funding and the implementation of humanitarian projects in conflict-affected communities. These findings suggest that effective coordination between state and non-state actors remains fundamental to addressing the complex social consequences of displacement.

F. Political and Institutional Factors Affecting State and NGO Responses to Conflict-Induced Internal Displacement

Political and institutional factors significantly influence the effectiveness of state and non-governmental organisation (NGO) responses to conflict-induced displacement. Fernández (2024), in a study of Venezuelan forced displacement in Colombia and Peru, found that policy responses to displacement are shaped by political considerations, foreign policy priorities, and institutional decision-making processes. The study further revealed that the effectiveness of displacement policies depends on the extent to which governments integrate evidence-based planning and cost-benefit analyses into humanitarian interventions.

In the Nigeria, the study conducted by Babajide et al. (2024), argued that humanitarian responses are frequently constrained by institutional weaknesses, inadequate funding, and increasing pressure on limited humanitarian resources. Similarly, Bamidele and Pikirayi (2023), revealed inadequate coordination between government agencies and non-governmental organizations in the provision of humanitarian assistance at the New Kuchingoro IDP camp. The study found that although NGOs were willing to provide humanitarian assistance to displaced women, limited administrative support from the National Commission for Refugees, Migrants and Internally Displaced Persons

(NCFRMI) and the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) hindered effective service delivery.

Likewise, Badeson and Chatharal (2020) found that weak institutional support and inadequate intervention planning negatively affected relationships between internally displaced persons and host communities. In another dimension, Okunade and Ogunnubi (2022) observed that fragmented coordination among humanitarian actors undermines the sustainability and effectiveness of displacement interventions, leading to duplication of efforts, inefficient utilization of resources, and gaps in humanitarian assistance provision.

G. Gap in Literature

After reviewing existing literature, it is evident that although studies have examined conflict-induced internal displacement, its social consequences, and the roles of state and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), there remains limited empirical attention to the political and institutional dynamics that influence the effectiveness of these responses in North East Nigeria. Most existing studies treat state and NGO interventions separately and give less consideration to how coordination, administrative processes, and institutional relationships shape humanitarian outcomes. This study therefore addresses this gap by examining the politics of state and NGOs in managing the social consequences of conflict-induced internally displaced persons in North East Nigeria.

III. Theoretical Framework

The study is guided by Karl Marx's Conflict Theory (Marx & Engels, 1848), which argues that society is structured around class struggle and unequal access to resources, where dominant groups control power, wealth, and institutions to the disadvantage of weaker groups. The theory assumes that social life is characterized by competition over scarce resources, inequality is embedded in social structures, and social change occurs through conflict between opposing groups. In relation to this study, the theory explains that conflict in North East Nigeria arises from unequal power relations and competition over resources, leading to violence and the displacement of vulnerable populations. It further helps to explain how these structural inequalities influence the experiences of displaced persons and shape the responses of state institutions and NGOs in addressing their needs.

IV. Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative research approach to explore the politics of state and non-governmental organisations in managing the social consequences of conflict-induced displacement in North East Nigeria. The study employed a phenomenological research design to understand the lived experiences and perceptions of internally displaced persons, government officials, NGO personnel, and community leaders. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with 12 informants purposively selected based on their knowledge and experience of displacement management, alongside secondary data obtained from relevant documents, reports, and policy materials. The collected data were analysed using thematic analysis, which involved coding, categorizing, and interpreting participants' responses to identify major themes related to the study objectives. Ethical principles, including informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation, were strictly observed throughout the research process.

V. Results and Discussion

The findings are presented in line with the research questions and interpreted based on informants experiences and perspectives regarding the social consequences of conflict-induced internally displaced persons in North East Nigeria.

A. Social Consequences of Conflict-induced Displacement in North East Nigeria

The results indicated that conflict-induced displacement has significant socioeconomic consequences for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in North East Nigeria. These consequences

include disruption of livelihoods, loss of income sources, interruption of children's education, weakened family stability, and increased emotional distress. The findings further show that displacement creates uncertainty, dependency, and difficulties in rebuilding everyday life among affected populations. For instance, informant IDP1 stated:

"When the conflict happened, we left suddenly without preparing. We abandoned our farms, animals, and many things we worked for over the years. Before, farming helped us survive, but now life is difficult because we depend on support from others. Some days food is enough, and some days it is not. What worries me most is not knowing when life will become normal again."

Similarly, informant IDP4 explained that:

"The situation has affected our children a lot. Many of them stopped going to school because we could not afford basic needs. As parents, we struggle to provide food and also worry about their future."

Adding to the discussion, informants COM1, GOV4, IDP3, and NGO3 noted that:

"Displacement changes people's lives in many ways. Families that were once independent now depend on assistance, and this creates frustration. Even relationships in the community are affected because both displaced people and host communities are struggling with limited resources."

From an institutional perspective, informants GOV1 and GOV3 highlighted that:

"The increasing number of displaced persons has placed serious pressure on state institutions, especially in the provision of shelter, food, and healthcare services."

Informants GOV2, NGO1, NGO2, and NGO4 observed that displacement has also affected psychosocial wellbeing:

"We observe that displacement affects not only livelihoods but also psychosocial well-being of IDPs. Many displaced persons experience trauma, loss of dignity, and long-term dependence, which requires continuous humanitarian support."

B. State and NGO Management of the Social Consequences of Displacement

The findings show that both state institutions and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) play important roles in managing the social consequences of conflict-induced displacement in North East Nigeria. These interventions focus on providing emergency relief, psychosocial support, livelihood assistance, and community-based programmes aimed at improving the wellbeing and coping capacity of displaced persons. Reflecting on this, informants COM2, GOV4 and IDP4 articulates that:

"Both government and NGOs support IDPs in different ways. Sometimes we receive food items, healthcare support, or other forms of assistance. NGOs also speak with IDPs, encourage them, and support some families through training or small livelihood opportunities to help displaced persons start over."

Similarly, informants GOV2 and GOV3 noted that:

"Government institutions provide emergency support such as food distribution, temporary shelter, healthcare services, and other humanitarian assistance to displaced persons. The government also collaborates with humanitarian organisations to ensure that support reaches affected communities and addresses their immediate social needs"

Corroborating this views, informants NGO1 and NGO3 shared that:

"NGOs support displaced persons in different ways, including food assistance, psychosocial counselling, livelihood training, and support for women and young people to improve their"

means of survival. We also organise awareness programmes and community engagements that help displaced families adapt to their living conditions. Through these interventions, many displaced persons are able to access basic needs and acquire skills that can help them rebuild their lives.”

Another group of informants, GOV1, IDP2, NGO2, and NGO4, added that:

“Apart from relief assistance, NGO programmes focus on psychosocial support and empowerment activities. Many displaced persons have experienced trauma and social disruption, so counselling services, skills acquisition programmes, and community support initiatives are important in helping them regain confidence and improve their livelihoods.”

C. Political and Institutional Factors Hindering the Effectiveness of State and NGO Responses to Conflict-Induced Displacement in North-East Nigeria

The findings reveal that the effectiveness of state and NGO responses to conflict-induced displacement is constrained by several political and institutional challenges. Informants identified inadequate funding, insecurity, weak coordination among stakeholders, administrative delays, and increasing humanitarian demands as major factors limiting the delivery and sustainability of assistance programmes. These challenges affect the capacity of both government agencies and NGOs to adequately address the needs of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and ensure timely access to essential services. To corroborate this, informants GOV1, NGO2, and NGO4 stated that:

“One of the major challenges affecting response efforts is limited funding because the number of displaced persons continues to increase while available resources remain inadequate. Delays in coordination and administrative processes also affect the timely delivery of assistance. In many cases, agencies are expected to meet growing humanitarian needs with limited resources, making it difficult to sustain support programmes and adequately respond to the needs of displaced populations.”

Sharing similar views, informants COM1, GOV2, NGO1, and NGO3 noted that insecurity and coordination challenges significantly undermine the effectiveness of intervention efforts. They explained:

“Insecurity in some communities makes humanitarian work difficult, while inconsistent funding limits the continuity of interventions. At times, weak coordination between organisations and institutions also reduces the effectiveness of support programmes.”

Adding to the discussion, collectively informants GOV4 and NGO3 explained that:

“Government agencies, in collaboration with NGOs, are committed to supporting internally displaced persons through the provision of food assistance, healthcare services, shelter, and other humanitarian interventions. The increasing number of IDPs continues to place pressure on available resources. In some cases, the demand for assistance exceeds available capacity, affecting the timely delivery of support.”

Furthermore, COM2 and GOV3 highlighted issues of implementation gaps and inequitable distribution of assistance, stating:

“People sometimes complain that assistance is delayed or does not reach everyone equally. Limited coordination and inadequate planning can reduce the impact of support provided to displaced families.”

D. Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study revealed that conflict-induced internally displaced persons in North East Nigeria has generated significant social consequences for internally displaced persons.

Participants reported the loss of livelihoods, food insecurity, disruption of children's education, psychosocial distress, weakened family stability, and increased dependence on humanitarian assistance. These findings corroborate the studies of Olanrewaju et al. (2019), which found that displacement frequently results in food insecurity, educational disruption, psychological distress, and the erosion of social support networks among displaced populations. Similarly, the findings align with Abdisa and Likal (2024), who reported that conflict-induced displacement in Ethiopia led to homelessness, social disintegration, economic hardship, and weakened social cohesion. The findings also support previous study conducted by George and Adelaja (2022), which discovered that displacement led to the destruction of livelihood assets, reduced agricultural productivity, and increased food insecurity among both displaced populations and host communities.

The study further revealed that state institutions and non-governmental organisations play important roles in managing the social consequences of displacement through the provision of food assistance, healthcare services, psychosocial support, livelihood interventions, and community-based support programmes. These findings are consistent with Adekola and Bamiloye (2022), who found that NGOs in North-East Nigeria have been at the forefront of delivering essential services, including food aid, medical supplies, shelter, and water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) facilities to displaced populations in both official camps and border communities. The findings also corroborate Eweka and Olusegun (2016), who, in a comparative study of IDP management in Nigeria and Cameroon, reported that both state agencies and non-governmental stakeholders are actively involved in the management of displaced populations through the provision of relief materials, healthcare interventions, and empowerment programmes.

Furthermore, the study found that the effectiveness of state and NGO responses is constrained by several political and institutional factors, including inadequate funding, insecurity, administrative delays, weak coordination, and limited institutional capacity. These challenges were perceived by participants as major barriers to the timely and equitable delivery of humanitarian assistance. This finding is consistent with Akanni et al. (2025), who observed that fragmented governance, overlapping institutional mandates, and unpredictable funding among Nigerian displacement agencies produce duplication of efforts and inconsistent aid distribution. The findings also support Mohammed (2017), who, in a comprehensive study of the causes and consequences of internal displacement in Nigeria, documented that the multiplication of actors such as NEMA, NCFRMI, and SEMAs has created confusion, duplication of efforts, and inadequate resource allocation. She further noted that the absence of a domesticated legal framework for the Kampala Convention has left IDP governance fragmented and largely focused on relief rather than addressing the deeper rights and assistance needs of displaced populations.

VI. Conclusion and Recommendation

This study examined the politics of state and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in managing the social consequences of conflict-induced displacement in North East Nigeria. The study results revealed that displacement has resulted in significant social challenges, including livelihood loss, food insecurity, educational disruption, psychosocial distress, weakened family stability, and increased dependence on humanitarian assistance. Although state institutions and NGOs have implemented various interventions to address these challenges, their effectiveness is constrained by inadequate funding, weak coordination, insecurity, administrative delays, and limited institutional capacity. The study concludes that addressing these political and institutional challenges is essential for improving the management of internally displaced persons and enhancing the effectiveness of humanitarian responses in North East Nigeria.

Considering the findings of the study, the following recommendations are put forward:

- i. Funding for displacement management programmes should be increased to ensure the sustainable provision of humanitarian assistance and social support services for internally displaced persons.

- ii. There is a need to strengthen coordination and collaboration between government agencies and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to enhance the effectiveness of humanitarian interventions and reduce duplication of efforts.
- iii. Security measures should be reinforced in conflict-affected areas to facilitate humanitarian access and ensure the protection of internally displaced persons and aid workers.
- iv. There is a need to expand livelihood support and economic empowerment programmes to promote self-reliance and reduce dependence on humanitarian assistance among displaced populations.
- v. Administrative procedures relating to humanitarian assistance should be streamlined to minimise delays and improve the efficiency of service delivery.
- vi. Lastly, capacity building initiatives should be strengthened for government institutions and NGOs involved in displacement management to enhance their operational effectiveness and responsiveness to the needs of displaced persons.

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