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The Impact of Corruption on Internally Displaced Persons in North-Eastern Nigeria

Olusegun O. Onakoya*

Abstract

Nigeria, a self-acclaimed most populous country of black people in Africa is not only a heterogeneous nation with not less than 300 ethnic groups and over 500 spoken languages, but a developing country plagued with numerous challenges.

The country, in over a decade now has witnessed rise in terrorism and insurgency activities by a group known as "Boko Haram" and of recent, a "splinter" group of armed herdsmen whose activities have displaced millions of Nigerians and rendered them homeless.

The geo-political entity called the Federal Republic of Nigeria is divided into six geo-political zones, but the worst-hit by the activities of the insurgents is the North Eastern Zone of the country, comprising of the following states: Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Taraba and Yobe.

Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) according to the United Nations Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, are "persons or group of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflicts, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters and who have not crossed an internationally recognized state border. As citizens of Nigeria, IDPs also deserve and entitle to constitutionally recognized rights as provided for in the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999 (as amended).

However, in spite of 'no choice' situation the IDPs found themselves, majority of them prefer to return back to where they were displaced from, even when the situation they fled from still persists, or cross the border of Nigeria to any other country as refugees rather than their continued stay at their designated camps. The aforesaid is presumably borne out of challenges such as insecurity, hunger and humanitarian crisis as a whole.

This work seeks to probe into the effect of corruption and corrupt practices on the plight of the IDPs in the North-Eastern Nigeria, and its attendant consequences on Nigeria and its neighbouring countries, such as Cameroon, Chad and Niger Republic.

Keywords: Internally Displaced Persons, Corruption, Humanitarian Crisis, Human Rights.

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The Egregious Impact of Corruption On Internally Displaced Persons In North-Eastern Nigeria.

Introduction

Nigeria, with all her federating units (ethnic nationalities) became an entity upon the amalgamation of 1914 and became an independent country in 1960, having been under the colonial rule of the British for very many years.

Historically, Nigeria is comprised of three major regions, namely; the Northern, Western and Eastern regions. The country was further divided into six geo-political zones, namely: (i) North Central (ii) North-West (iii) North-East (iv) South-East (v) South-South and (vi) South-West.

Aside from the Nigerian civil war which lasted between July 6, 1967 and January 13, 1970, a product of political conflict caused by the attempted secession of South-Eastern region of Nigeria as the self-proclaimed Republic of Biafra, Nigeria has witnessed relative peace since her independence in 1960.¹

However, same cannot be said of the endemic vice of corruption which is prevalent in the country even since the colonial era.

It is imperative to note that every Nigerian has lived peaceably in the country until the year 2002 when one Muhammad Yusuf founded an Islamic Sectarian Movement in the North-Eastern Nigeria which later metamorphoses into an outlaw terrorist group known as *Boko Haram*.

The activities of *Boko Haram* in Nigeria, particularly in North Eastern Nigeria, comprising of: Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Taraba and Yobe states marked the beginning of insurgency and terrorism in Nigeria with its attendant consequences.

Boko Haram's act of insurgencies and terrorism has escalated for over a decade with great havoc on the lives and properties of Nigerians.²

Highlights of *Boko Haram*'s Activities

Boko Haram, a foremost terrorist group in Nigeria has from the outset left no one in doubt as to their readiness to cause huge and deadly impact on Nigerians, particularly people residing in the North-Eastern states of Nigeria.

Their attacks ranged from (i) Killings of innocent persons (ii) Bombing and razing homes and worship centres (Churches and Mosques) and more recently (iii) Kidnapping, among other vices.³

Between 2014 and today, the deadly terrorist group, *Boko Haram* has been reportedly responsible for not less than 2,800 events and over 31,000 fatalities.

Boko Haram's attack on Rann, a town in North East Nigeria on January 29, 2019 resulted in 60 reported fatalities and more than 30,000 affected persons fleeing their homes to seek refuge elsewhere.⁴

¹Nigerian Civil War – New World Encyclopedia. Retrieved Sept. 13 from <https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org>

²History of *Boko Haram*. Retrieved September 12, 2019 from <https://www.britannica.com>

³Yusuf, Y. M, Santuraki, S.U and Buba, T.M, 2012. National Security, terrorism and development in Nigeria cited in O. Oyewo & E. Ojomo Eds. Law, Democratisation and social change NALT Conference held at Unilag, P. 317

⁴Mafes, H. 2019. The Normal: Continuity and *Boko Haram*'s violence in Northeast Nigeria. Report from Armed Conflict Location and Events Dataset, published 11 February, 2019.

One of such *Boko Haram*'s activities that sparked worldwide outrage was the kidnapping of the *Chibok* schoolgirls sometimes in 2014, out of which some of them were later released upon negotiation between the insurgents and the Federal Government.

Similarly, another set of schoolgirls were later kidnapped by the insurgents and the release of few of the victims followed the earlier pattern of negotiation.

In a recent release by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), it was reported that nearly 22,000 people, mostly children, are missing as a result of the *Boko Haram* insurgency in northeast Nigeria.⁵

A major consequence of the activities of *Boko Haram* insurgency is the astronomical increase in homeless persons, otherwise referred to as the Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), migrants and refugees. It was reported that the insurgents' killings in northeast Nigeria, particularly in Borno State have left more than two million persons displaced, according to the Council on Foreign Relations' Nigeria Security Tracker⁶.

Many of the displaced persons were forced to illegally migrate to the neighbouring countries of Cameroon, Chad and Niger Republics among others.

It is essential that we define who is qualified as an internally displaced person (IDP). An IDP is someone who is forced to flee his or her home as a result of extreme violence or natural disaster. The life of such a person is obviously in danger of loss of life or properties. However, the movement of such a person is still within the border of his country of residence. Where such a person moves to another country as a result of religious or political persecutions, then he or she becomes a refugee.

A United Nations report, *Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement* defines IDPs thus:

Persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular, as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflicts, situations of generalized violence, violations of human or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized state border⁷.

Response to IDPs Challenges

Against the backdrop of high incidence of IDPs resulting from the alarming rate of insurgency in the northeast Nigeria, it becomes necessary to put in perspective the machinery put in place by the government to ameliorate the plight of the IDPs.

Barely, a year after the insurgency in northeast Nigeria became noticeable, with its attendant consequence of many displaced persons, the Federal Government of Nigeria set up a committee to draft a National Policy on IDPs to do the following: (i) Registration (ii) issuance of identity cards (iii) setting up of agencies and assign tasks to them, among others⁸.

⁵ *Book Haram*: 22,000 missing in Northeast Insurgency – ICRC. Retrieved September 12, 2019 from channelstv.com

⁶ 10 years of *Boko Haram*: Death, anguish and flickers of hope. *Saturday Tribune* 3 August, 2019.

⁷ Deng, Francis. "The guiding principles on internally displacement". E/CN.4/1998/53/Add. 1. February 11, New York, NY: United Nations

⁸ Bukar, B. A., Nigeria needs to take responsibility for its IDPs, cited in Internally Displacement Monitoring Centre. December 2011. Retrieved September 13, 2019 from [http://tinyurl.com/Nigeria-IDPs2011ForcedMigrationReview\(FMR\)](http://tinyurl.com/Nigeria-IDPs2011ForcedMigrationReview(FMR)).

The said draft policy could be said to have been moulded after the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement and the African Union Convention for the protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa (the 'Kampala Convention) of 2009.

One of such agencies put in place to take care of the welfare of the IDPs is the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) which reported in 2011 that there were some 370,000 IDPs in the country, including about 74,000 in camps.

The statistics or data collection of the numbers of the IDPs in Nigeria, numbers of camps, census of sex and age classification are no doubt important for the enforcement and execution of humanitarian services to the IDPs, but what is most important is the implementation and monitoring of the project which involves many agencies and organisations. Some of these agencies are non-governmental organisations, human rights groups, International Committee of Red Cross (ICRC) and many other aid agencies from Europe and America who play collaborative roles. However, NEMA coordinates emergency relief operations and assists in the rehabilitation of victims where necessary.

Insight into the workings of Government, its agencies, other collaborative bodies becomes imperative because of the chain effect of mismanagement of the IDPs, which may ultimately turn to refugees in other countries where they out of desperation crossed the border of their country of residence in search of a better life. This no doubt will swell the growing refugee crisis in some parts of Africa, Europe and America.

The UNHCR, the United Nations Refugee Agency in its report stated that, part of Nigerian's 2017 Humanitarian Needs Overview (HNO) according to its protection working group revealed that about 6.7 million people were estimated to be in need of protection from Adamawa, Borno and Yobe states. The report further brings to the fore the psychological needs of the displaced population which are not taken care of.⁹

However, where basic needs such as security, shelter, food, potable water, healthcare and clothing are yet to be met, the issue of psychological needs will sadly be secondary.

Aside from absence of proper coordination of the humanitarian activities for the IDPs which among other consequences has resulted in humanitarian deficit and astronomical increase in cross border refugees, corruption is a major problem.

Corruption Factor

The definition of corruption is vast. The variations have given rise to classifications of corruption given the subject it affects. It ranges from political, bureaucratic, and economic; to other forms which are not so pronounced.

According to Black's Law Dictionary, corruption is defined as:

*The act of doing something with an intent to give some advantage inconsistent with official duty and rights by others; a fiduciary's or official's use of a station or office to procure some benefits either personally or for someone else, contrary to the rights of others.*¹⁰

⁹UNCHR Report – Supplementary appeal – January. Retrieved September 13, 2019 from <https://www.unchr.org>

¹⁰ Garner, B. A. (ed.) 2004 *Black's Law Dictionary*, 8th edition, St. Paul, MN: Thomson/West Publishing Co. P. 371

The word 'corruption' indicates impurity or debasement and when found in the criminal law it means depravity or gross impropriety¹¹. Hence, corruption involves the subversion of public for private interest. It is a situation in which a public officer's judgment is clouded by personal interest or self-enrichment. Such private interest induces such behaviour as bribery, nepotism and misappropriation of public resources for private use.

In what appears to be an all-embracing definition, a writer defines corruption as:

*. . . the diversion of natural course of events, with a view to conferring undue advantage on an individual or a group of individuals. It is an action or inaction which gives advantages or bestows favour on a person that he or she is not legally or morally entitled to. It is an abuse of all offices of trust for private gains whether in public or private sector. It is any form of illegal self-enrichment or the conferment of same on any individual to the detriment of the society. It is synonymous with moral decay, uncleanness, want of character and value deterioration*¹².

World Bank defines 'corruption' with emphasis on the public sector as follows:

*. . . the abuse of public office for private gain when an official accepts, solicits or extracts a bribe. It is also abused when private agents actively offer bribe to circumvent public policies and processes for competitive advantage and profit. Public office can also be abused for personal benefit even if no bribery occurs through patronage and nepotism, the theft of state assets, or the diversion of state revenues.*¹³

The menace of corruption has no doubt eaten so deep into the fabric of the gamut of Nigeria as a nation, with avalanche of corrupt practices in both the private and public sectors. Almost all the aspect of life in Nigeria is tainted with corruption.

The manifestations of corruption in Nigeria today includes contract inflation, upfront payment of gratification to public officers, diversion of public funds for private use, outright bribery and extortion from the populace; violation of due process in award of contracts and payments among others.

This abnormal situation made an elder statesman and a technocrat to lament about almost two decades ago thus:

. . . for a long time, we have been operating plutocracy, that is the government of thieves by thieves and for thieves and the entire society was enmeshed in these. It doesn't matter how long you go, you will find givers and takers. It doesn't matter how high you go, you will find givers and takers, obviously, we can't go on like this.

¹¹ Nye, J. S. 1967. Corruption and Political Development. A case benefit Analysis. *The American Political Science Review* pp. 417-427 cited in Corruption and Political Development Countries – Defining Corruption. Retrieved August 13, 2019 from <http://science.jrank.org/pages/8845.html>.

¹² Kuta, K. D. The Legislature and Nigeria's Anti-Corruption War. Retrieved September 13, 2019 from <http://www.tribune.tribune.com.ng/index.php/politics/12351-the-legislature-and-nigeria's-anti-corruption-war>.

¹³ Helping Countries to Combat Corruption: The Role of the World Bank, retrieved September 12, 2019 from <http://www.worldbank.org/publicsector/anticorruptn/cor02.htm>

*Nigeria cannot be a great country until corruption ceases to be an issue. There is corruption everywhere.*¹⁴

Given the budget of the Federal Government for the IDPs, several aids and grants from collaborative non-governmental organisations, one begins to wonder why the deplorable state of the IDPs continue unabated even to the extent that most of the victims now have preference for seeking asylum in other neighbouring countries or as illegal immigrants.

Admittedly, absence of legal framework/legally recognized and enforceable national policy, together with mismanagement are some of the factors responsible for the plight of the IDPs, however beyond that, corruption plays a major role.

Corruption in humanitarian work is among the worst kind. It can mean the difference between life and death. It robs people of essential resources, destroys dignity and gives rise to desperation.

Humanitarian support runs into huge sums of money and goods with the aim of rehabilitating and possibly resettle the IDPs. According to transparency international, the possibility of corruption is very high.

Often, these aids are channeled through diverse new and unverifiable passages. The emergency nature and urgency usually required to channel funds from different parts of the world makes it difficult and extremely hard to track where aid goes.

Food, clothing, water and medical supplies can be stolen or diverted for sale or private use. Sometimes in the aspect of supplies, companies can bribe procurement officials to win contracts. This simply translates to either shortage of essential facilities or supply of sub-standard ones.

Aid agencies often feel the need for speed; sometimes this makes the international agencies and donors to bypass standard anti-corruption measures.¹⁵ Similarly, funds allocated for the purpose of providing for the shelter, food, clothing, medicals and other facilities to cater for the IDPs are sometimes stolen.

A bizarre situation was revealed when it was reported that the Nigerian Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) discovered 40 fake NGOs feeding on IDPs' plight in Borno State. The NSCDC commandant, Mr. Ibrahim Abdullah was reported to have stated that the illegal NGOs "were running nothing more than a certified scam by their actions. . ." Many of the NGO's, he stated were merely identifying with the IDPs physically and not their plight, usually with a view to defrauding their donors by sending fake data, messages and pictures *via* internet to access fund.¹⁶

In a similar report, hundreds of IDPs in Maiduguri, the Borno State capital trooped out on the street to protest the poor feeding system being adopted by the government. The state government quickly responded with immediate suspension of the central feeding system and subsequently adopts the "household feeding" which ensured that nobody has the undue advantage of selling the food items and other products meant for the traumatized IDPs.¹⁷

¹⁴ Onosode, G., *National Concord*. August 5, 2000: 6.

¹⁵ Transparency International doc. Retrieved July 25, 2019 from <http://www.transparency.org/topic/detail/humanitarian-assistance>.

¹⁶ NSCDC discovers 40 fake NGOs feeding on IDPs' plight in Borno. *Nigerian Tribune* 29, August, 2016 p. 10.

¹⁷ Hungry IDPs on the rampage in Maiduguri: Borno government stops central feeding system. . . *Nigerian Tribune*, 16 August, 2016 p. 6

In 2017, a mind-blowing scam involving the then Secretary to the Government of the Federation (SGF) Alhaji Babachir Lawal whose office was saddled with the responsibility of overseeing the well-being and the general welfare of the IDPs was discovered. It was alleged that among other things, Babachir Lawal awarded spurious contract of ₦220 million for the clearing of wild grass and provision of 115 hectares of simplified irrigation.¹⁸ This action perhaps was what led to his unceremonious removal as the SGF.

Arguably the sum of money in question could have been used for rehabilitation of the IDPs.

Interestingly the former SGF Babachir Lawal was arraigned for corruption at the High Court of Justice, Federal Capital territory and the trial is still pending before the court.¹⁹

It is also revealed that over a period of time since the IDPs camps were set-up, various sums of money were realized as follows:

- i. ₦1 billion annually for water and sanitation facilities by Federal Ministry of Water Resources since 2016²⁰
- ii. ₦25 billion – donation by the victim support fund set up under the leadership of Gen. T.Y. Danjuma (Rtd.)
- iii. \$900 million – Australia and other like-minded countries
- iv. \$200 million – donation by the United States government
- v. \$800 million – donation by the World Bank
- vi. \$6.3 billion – donation by Dangote and other individuals.
- vii. \$248 million – donation by the UNDP.
- viii. \$750 million – Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.
- ix. N10 billion annually – from Nigeria budget since 2016²¹.

The above data is a mere reflection of the huge sums of money realized to take care of the IDPs' need, it does not capture all the income, as there are numerous others not captured. The above data; though remains unverifiable does not include donation of foods and other relief materials.

The question begging for answer however is that, with the huge donations (money and relief materials) for the IDPs, why are they still going through difficult situations that made most of them seeking refuge outside the shore of Nigeria, with many others desiring to leave the IDPs camps?

Conclusions

The horrendous impact of corruption on Internally Displaced Persons in Northeast Nigeria cannot be over-emphasised and this has led in no small measure to refugee crisis in Africa, with many IDPs migrating to neighbouring countries, like Cameroon, Niger and Chad Republic among others.

Arguably, were the IDPs camps to be habitable with the necessary facilities in place, and the rehabilitation/resettlement exercises fully in force, the level of migrants that swell the refugees all over Africa and by extension America and Europe would have been minimized.

¹⁸ Revealed SGF, Babachir Lawal awarded ₦220 million grass removal job to his firm-Senate Report. Retrieved September 13, 2019 from www.vanguard.com

¹⁹ Court remands ex-SGF Babachir Lawal in EFCC custody. Retrieved September 13, 2019 from m.guardian.ng

²⁰ We budget N1 billion annually for IDPs water-minister. Retrieved September 13, 2019 from <https://puncng.com>

²¹ Corruption war and the plight of IDPs. Retrieved September 13, 2019 from <http://tribuneonline.com>

For instance, in August 2019, the National Commission for Refugees, Migrants and Internally Displaced Persons received back to Nigeria, 4,000 Nigerian refugees from Cameroon. This was done under the auspices of the United Nations Commissioner for Refugees (UNCHR). Does that indicate the return of peace to Northeast Nigeria? No! We think not, but a measure to reduce the high incidence or refugee crisis in Africa, with its attendant effect on host countries.²²

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²²FG delegation in Yola to receive 4,000 Nigerian refugees from Cameroon. *Nigerian Tribune*, 23 August, 2019, p.7.