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## Analysing the Challenges of Humanitarian Workers in Provision of Assistance to Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Conflict Zones: Study of North Eastern Nigeria

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## Abstract

This study explored the challenges encountered by humanitarian workers in providing assistance to Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) within conflict-ridden zones, with a particular focus on North Eastern Nigeria. Amidst the turmoil of armed conflict and displacement, humanitarian workers serve as vital conduits of aid, striving to alleviate the suffering of affected populations and facilitate their transition towards sustainable recovery. These roles notwithstanding, the humanitarian workers face myriad challenges that hamper their ability to provide sustained and comprehensive aid to vulnerable populations. This study assessed the impact of existing strategies and interventions employed by humanitarian workers in addressing the diverse needs of IDPs; and analysed the specific challenges they encountered while operating in conflict zones. Human security theory was employed as the theoretical framework for the study. The study also used primary and secondary data, and employed discussion and descriptive method of analysis. Findings revealed that the humanitarian workers play a critical role in providing support to IDPs in areas such as healthcare, education, and protection. Also, findings revealed that the humanitarian workers face significant risks to their safety and security while delivering aid to IDPs within conflict zones. The study recommended enhance coordination among humanitarian organizations and government agencies to streamline efforts in providing assistance to IDPs; develop targeted interventions that address the unique needs and vulnerabilities of IDPs in conflict-affected areas; address logistical challenges and security threats that hinder the delivery of aid to conflict-affected areas, among others.

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## Introduction

Humanitarian workers play a crucial role in providing assistance to internally displaced persons (IDPs) in conflict zones, navigating complex and challenging environments to deliver aid, ensure protection, and contribute to the overall well-being of those affected by displacement. The importance of their work is underscored by the increasing frequency and severity of conflicts worldwide, leading to a growing number of displaced individuals. Global humanitarian crises, fueled by disasters or conflicts, significantly contribute to widespread death and suffering. Conflict, often orchestrated by hostile entities through armed aggression and violence, is a primary driver of these crises (Izuakor, 2022). According to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) data from the close of 2022, a staggering 71.1 million people faced internal displacement due to conflict, violence, and disasters. Specifically, 62.5 million individuals were displaced by conflict and violence, while 8.7 million were uprooted by disasters (IDMC, 2023). The year saw a record-breaking 60.9 million internal displacements across 151 countries and territories, an increase of 60% compared to 2021, marking the highest number ever recorded. Of these, 32.6 million were linked to disasters, and 28.3 million were associated with conflict and violence (IDMC, 2023). Nigeria grapples with challenges that undermine the core principles of unity and peace among its citizens. Various forms of violence, including but not limited to terrorism, ethnic conflicts, and political strife, have led to a substantial loss of lives and forced millions of citizens to flee their communities (UNHCR, 2020; Letswa and Isyaku, 2018).

The experiences of humanitarian workers in Nigeria provide a poignant illustration of the complexities involved in aiding internally displaced populations. According to a report by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA, 2019), Nigeria has witnessed a significant surge in internal displacement due to conflicts involving insurgent groups like Boko Haram and the Islamic State of West African Province (ISWAP). As of the end of 2022, the total number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in sub-Saharan Africa was 31.7 million, with Nigeria contributing significantly. Specifically, Nigeria accounted for 3,646,000 displacements due to conflict and violence, and an additional 854,000 displaced by disasters. This positioned Nigeria among the top five countries, alongside Ethiopia, Sudan, Somalia, and DR Congo, with the highest number of IDPs in sub-Saharan Africa as of the end of 2022 (IDMC, 2023)

Humanitarian organizations operating in the Northeastern region of Nigeria grapple with not only the immediate needs of IDPs, such as food, shelter, and healthcare but also the intricacies of navigating security concerns and political sensitivities. Beyond Nigeria, case studies from other conflict zones offer additional insights into the challenges faced by humanitarian workers. In Syria, for instance, the ongoing civil war has resulted in a humanitarian crisis, with millions displaced internally (UNHCR, 2020). Humanitarian organizations operating in Syria encounter obstacles ranging from access restrictions to the politicization of aid, highlighting the need for a nuanced understanding of the dynamics at play. Moreover, the experiences of humanitarian workers in conflict zones globally underline the interconnected nature of their challenges. The dynamics of providing assistance to IDPs involve intricate negotiations with local authorities, engagement with non-state actors, and coordination among various humanitarian agencies. The complexities extend beyond the immediate provision of aid to encompass long-term strategies for sustainable development, community resilience, and the protection of human rights.

This study explores the myriad challenges faced by humanitarian workers in the context of assisting IDPs and examines the dynamics of their efforts in conflict-ridden areas. It analyses the intricacies of humanitarian work in conflict zones by examining case studies from Nigeria northeastern region affected by displacement as a result of terrorism and insurgency perpetrated by Boko Haram and Islamic States in West Africa Province (ISWAP). Analysing the challenges faced by humanitarian workers and the impact of existing strategies and interventions employed in addressing the needs of IDPs will contribute maximally to efforts gear towards improving the efficacy of assistance to IDPs in conflict zones and improve the collaboration needed by the humanitarian workers and organisations to perform their duties.

## Conceptual Review

The key terms in this study are briefly reviewed in this section. This includes internally displaced persons, humanitarian organisations, humanitarian workers, and humanitarian aid.

### Internally Displaced Persons/Internal Displacement

There is no single definition of an internally displayed person (Akuto, 2017; Cohen and Deng, 1998;). In this study, internal displacement will be used synonymously as 'forced migration', forced displacement, or forced relocation.

The meanings of these terms are closely related to one another. However, in 1992, the United Nations Secretary-General defined internally displaced persons as "persons or groups who have been forced to flee their homes suddenly or unexpectedly in large numbers as a result of armed conflict, internal strife, systematic violations of human rights or natural or man-made disaster, and who are within the territory of their own country (United Nations Commission or Human Rights 1992: Paragraph 17). In an attempt to fill the gaps in the above definition, the United Nations Guiding Principles on Internal Displaced Persons, defines IDPs as '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 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 (UNCHR, Guiding Principles on IDP's, 2005).

The distinctive feature of internal displacement/internally displaced persons given in the above two definitions is coerced or involuntary movement that takes place within national borders. The reasons for this movement though may vary, include armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights and natural or human made disasters. Although the idea of displacement caused by developmental activities have not been included in the working definitions which was reflected in the 1998 Guiding principles of the UN at international level and regional level, some states have adopted the UN Guiding principles definition and have included many developmental activities as part of the causes of internal displacement in the regions. Regions such as South Asia and West Africa governments have included displacement from developmental projects as one of the causes of internal displacements in their regions (Ejiofor and Oni, 2017). As a result of the negligence of persons displaced by developmental projects, these persons receive less support from their governments and even less of international aids as compared to persons displaced by conflicts and violence (Ejiofor and Oni, 2017). However, for the purpose of this study, internal displacement is defined as a coerced or involuntary movement of people that takes place within national borders resulting from situations of armed conflict, generalized violence, violations of human rights, natural or human made disasters and for the purpose of developmental activities.

**Humanitarian Organizations, Workers, and the Aid**

Humanitarian organisations refer to entities committed to delivering aid and assistance in times of crises and disasters. According to the Sphere Handbook, these organizations operate based on core principles such as humanity, impartiality, neutrality, and independence (Sphere Association, 2018). Humanitarian workers are individuals who are dedicated to providing assistance and support to people in need, especially in times of crises, emergencies, and disasters. These workers are typically associated with humanitarian organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), international agencies, or governmental bodies involved in humanitarian efforts. Their primary goal is to alleviate the suffering of affected populations and address the immediate and long-term needs arising from natural disasters, armed conflicts, epidemics, and other humanitarian crises. (Sphere, 2018; International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, 1994). The main goal of both the organisation and its workers is the delivery of aid. The aid refers to the provision of assistance, support, and relief activities aimed at addressing the immediate and long-term needs of individuals and communities affected by crises, disasters, conflicts, or emergencies. According to the Sphere Handbook, humanitarian aid encompasses a range of essential services, including but not limited to shelter, food, water, health care, and psychosocial support (Sphere Association, 2018). It is guided by principles such as humanity, impartiality, neutrality, and independence, ensuring that aid is provided based on need without discrimination

## The Old and New Humanitarianism

During and after the Cold War, there was a notable surge in humanitarian aid missions globally. This was triggered not just by an uptick in "natural" disasters, but notably by complex emergencies intertwining armed conflicts with severe human rights violations and famine. This shift, coupled with the overuse of the term "humanitarian," has led to confusion regarding the genuine nature and intent of humanitarian efforts. Several factors have contributed to this misconception. The line between operations driven by international security interests and genuine humanitarian actions has blurred. Additionally, there's a stark contrast between the swift and massive public response to natural disasters and the lack of immediate attention to forgotten conflicts that represent severe humanitarian crises. As the world evolved, the concept of "humanitarian" itself underwent significant changes and interpretations, often subject to misuse. It has become more complex and fragmented, referring to a much-varied range of situations of and serving diverse

purposes. Alongside this evolution, Hugo Slim suggests it's crucial to note that humanitarian activities are no longer confined to traditional agencies like the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) or United Nations Human Rights Commission (UNHCR). An increasing number of organizations, agencies, and NGOs, while not exclusively dedicated to humanitarian work, have incorporated humanitarian concerns into their mandates (Slim, 2001).

By expanding its scope to include more participants, the terms "Humanitarian" and "humanitarianism" have evolved into versatile concepts, capable of being both enchanting and misleading. They can seem enchanting by virtue of being lauded for every conceivable positive attribute in successful cases, particularly within diplomatic circles and the media. Yet, they can also be deceptive when perceived to clash with specific political or strategic interests or when viewed as a cover for a hands-off approach (Moore, 1998). These include various activities and legal principles aimed at restraining and mitigating violence, humanitarianism is defined by a specific legal foundation that includes international humanitarian law, human rights law, and refugee law applied in the context of armed conflicts. This legal framework grants humanitarianism a distinctive focus on safeguarding the lives and dignity of those not involved in the conflict (such as civilians, refugees, etc.) and ensuring its adherence by all parties engaged in the conflict (Slim, 2001). In a traditional approach, certain criteria govern humanitarian endeavours, such as the delivery of aid and protection without unfairly favouring any party involved in the conflict. This highlights the importance of guiding such actions based on the principle of impartiality to ensure that assistance is provided equally and solely based on individuals' needs. As advocated by Jorge Castilla,

> "the goal of humanitarian assistance is to preserve human life and dignity. Its area of operation is specifically in war settings but do also operate in other situations where human life and dignity are at risk. Aid is provided taking into account only the needs and disregarding political, ethnic, religious or any other type of interests and considerations" (Castilla, 2002: 16)

In theoretical terms, the driving ideology behind emergency assistance can be summarized as an immediate response to protect vital individual needs without considering future repercussions. This ideology hinges on the belief that

safeguarding and saving individuals equates to preserving humanity as a whole (Pirotte, 2002). The ICRC's perspective aligns with this ideology, viewing humanitarian action as bound by its objectives and inherent nature. It's a contemporary form of charity aiming to alleviate suffering and prevent future anguish by discouraging behaviors contrary to legal and humanitarian principles. Furthermore, in the classic paradigm, humanitarianism encompasses not just the actions taken but also the manner in which they are executed. It emphasizes providing assistance impartially, independently, and without discrimination. The core essence lies in delivering relief and preventing human suffering without making distinctions of any kind. Traditionally, this humanitarian system relied on three fundamental assumptions: a distinction between relief and development, acknowledgment of operational limitations imposed by sovereignty, and the concept of humanitarian aid as neutral, impartial, and separate from political and military objectives. Despite generating both agreements and disagreements, humanitarian action has historically been justified and legitimised by defending ethical values, principles, and a vision of humanity detached from political ideologies (Rey, 2002). Guided by these assumptions and shared principles, civil society actions in the 1980s regarding humanitarian assistance, despite often embarrassing donor governments, underscored the perspective that such aid should be considered a universal and unconditional right.

In prioritizing humanitarian concerns above political agendas, a movement arose that Mark Duffield describes as a critique of the inflexibility of the Cold War's inhumanity (Duffield, 2001). This led to the emergence of a neutral, impartial, and progressive form of humanitarianism, notably exemplified by Operation Lifeline Sudan in 1989. This marked a phase of neutral relief programs negotiated across conflict lines, fostering collaboration between UN agencies and NGOs through security arrangements to provide impartial aid in conflict zones. However, the end of the Cold War brought about significant changes in the nature of conflicts, blurring distinctions between combatants and civilians, leading to what the United Nations termed "complex emergencies" (UNDP, 1998). These crises involved multifaceted humanitarian catastrophes, challenging traditional humanitarian views. Responses to these complex emergencies were often confused, revealing a lack of preparedness and conflicting priorities within the

international community, resulting in ineffective and sometimes counterproductive actions (Weiss, 1999).

Criticism intensified during the 1990s regarding humanitarian aid's impact, citing failures in Somalia, Bosnia, Sierra Leone, and Rwanda (Pérez, 2002). Accusations included aid resources exacerbating conflicts and aid agencies inadvertently facilitating ethnic cleansing, as seen in Bosnia. This criticism prompted a shift toward a more political conception of humanitarianism, challenging the traditional focus on immediate relief by advocating for longer-term goals like peacebuilding and human rights protection. This new humanitarian approach aimed to link emergency aid with development efforts, breaking from the idea that emergency assistance only aimed to restore normalcy without contributing to long-term development goals (Anderson, 1999). Two strategies emerged: the "continuum," emphasizing a phased approach from emergency to rehabilitation to development, and the "contiguum," advocating for a continuous combination of interventions to reduce vulnerabilities and build community capacities (Pérez, 2002). Both approaches stress context analysis, avoiding negative impacts, combining immediate needs with future development, reinforcing local structures, promoting human rights (including gender issues), and contributing to peacebuilding. This transformation in humanitarianism, as Adam Roberts notes, arose as an alternative or complement to liberal democratic ideologies (Roberts, 1996).

## North Eastern Nigeria: A Conflict Zone

The North East is the one of the six geopolitical zones of Nigeria representing both a geographic and political region of the country's northeast. It comprises six states – Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Taraba, and Yobe. Geographically, the North East is the largest geopolitical zone in the nation, covering nearly one-third of Nigeria's total area. In terms of the environment, the zone is primarily divided between the semi-desert Sahelian savanna and the tropical West Sudanian savanna ecoregions. The region has a population of about 26 million people, around 12% of the total population of the country. Maiduguri and Bauchi are the most populous cities in the North East as well as the fifteenth and seventeenth most populous cities in Nigeria. Other large northeastern cities include (in order by population) Bauchi, Yola, Mubi, Gombe, Jimeta, Potiskum, Jalingo, Gashua, and Bama. The North East geopolitical zone is primarily agricultural and produces crops such as

cocoa, coconuts, cashews, and yams. Its main industries are the refining of crude palm oil and the production of rice

For the past decade, northeastern Nigeria has been in the throes of a devastating humanitarian crisis, displacing millions and creating a dire need for aid (WHO, 2018). Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe are the hardest-hit states. By September 2018, over 1.8 million people were internally displaced, and an additional 5.8 million required (UNHCR, 2018). Borno, the epicenter of the crisis, holds over 80% of the displaced population, with over 60% living in host communities, straining their already limited resources (UNHCR, 2018). The number of internally displaced people has steadily grown since 2014 due to the ongoing violence that makes returning home impossible. A study by Onwuemele, and Salleh (2019) found that roughly a third of internally displaced people had attempted to return home, only to be forced back by renewed violence. Between November 2017 and mid-August 2018, nearly 153,000 new internally displaced people and 36,000 returnees were recorded in Adamawa and Borno, further increasing the overall displacement in the region (UNHCR, 2018). The causes of this crisis are rooted in the region's historical context, socioeconomic conditions, and environmental degradation. The crisis finds its origins primarily in the Boko Haram insurgency, a terrorist group that has carried out attacks across Nigeria, Chad, Cameroon, and Niger (UNHCR, 2015). Boko Haram's activities and the Nigerian government's counter-insurgency efforts have resulted in the most severe humanitarian crisis in Nigeria's history (Hamid *et al*, 2017). The volatile socioeconomic landscape of northeastern Nigeria, characterized by a fragile climate and neglect from the central government, has been identified as a breeding ground for Boko Haram's rise (Rizzo, 2015). The group's strategic location not only offers them a sanctuary from state security forces but also access to a pool of desperate youth struggling to survive (Onuoha, 2014). Boko Haram targets its recruitment efforts towards disenfranchised youth, unemployed graduates, and impoverished children, primarily from northern Nigeria. Discussions on the underlying causes of the insurgency have centered on a combination of factors, including climate change, poverty, religious tensions, community loyalties, and poor governance (Magrin and De Montclos, 2018).

## The Plight of IDPs in Nigeria's Conflict Zones

The living conditions of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in conflict zones in Nigeria are often dire and challenging, with numerous issues affecting their

well-being and stability (Personal Interview, January 2024). IDP camps in Nigeria are often overcrowded, with limited space and resources to accommodate the displaced population adequately. This overcrowding leads to increased health risks and lack of privacy (UNCHR, Nigeria, 2022). Many IDPs in conflict zones lack adequate shelter, forcing them to live in temporary accommodations such as makeshift tents or overcrowded shelters, exposing them to harsh weather conditions. In these zones access to healthcare services is often limited for IDPs leading to challenges in treating injuries, illnesses, and mental health issues resulting from the trauma of displacement and conflict (Personal Interview, January 2024). In addition, the IDPs in Nigeria conflict zones such as Borno and Yobe, where the height of insecurity is worrisome, frequently face food insecurity, with limited access to nutritious food. This situation is exacerbated by disrupted agriculture, restricted movement, and limited opportunities for livelihoods (UNCHR: Nigeria, 2022; Personal Interview, January 2024). Furthermore, IDP camps often lack adequate access to clean water and sanitation facilities, increasing the risk of waterborne diseases and poor hygiene practices among the displaced population (Personal Interview, January 2024).

While the number of new displacements decreased in 2022, the total count of individuals internally displaced due to conflict and violence at the close of 2022 reached the highest level ever recorded since 2013. This highlights an ongoing absence of lasting solutions. By the end of 2022, Nigeria hosted 3.6 million IDPs, with 1.9 million enduring prolonged displacement in Borno, a state in the northeast (IDMC, 2022). In 2022, the government recommended the closure of IDP camps. Reports indicated persistent insecurity in certain regions, leading to a lack of information on the status of those who departed the camps. In locations where humanitarian access is constrained by insecurity, IDPs are unable to access assistance, intensifying their vulnerability to issues like food shortages, limited healthcare, and other essential services. This situation also heightens their risk to protection concerns, such as gender-based violence (IDMC, 2022).

The complex and challenging conditions in conflict-affected zones in Nigeria have exposed IDPs to various forms of harm. They have tragically been victims of violence and abuse including: direct violence, gender-based violence (GBV), child protection concerns, exploitation and trafficking and general insecurity (UNHCR, 2020). IDPs have been directly targeted in attacks, with incidents of physical

violence, killings, and injuries reported within and around IDP camps. Armed groups and conflict dynamics have also contributed to these direct acts of violence against IDPs. women and girls among the IDP population are particularly vulnerable to gender-based violence, including sexual violence, exploitation, and abuse. The lack of security in camps and surrounding areas has heightened the risks of GBV for female IDPs. Aside from GBV, children in IDP settings have faced risks of recruitment by armed groups, abduction, and physical harm. The vulnerabilities of children are exacerbated in conflict zones, leading to increased risks of abuse and exploitation (Personal Interview, January 2024). The precarious situation of IDPs has made them susceptible to exploitation and trafficking, both for labour and sexual purposes. Traffickers take advantage of the instability and desperation in conflict zones to target vulnerable individuals, including IDPs. Meanwhile, the overall insecurity in conflict zones in Nigeria has created an environment where IDPs are exposed to multiple risks, including arbitrary arrests, extortion, and intimidation, further exacerbating their vulnerability to violence and abuse (Personal Interview, January 2024; UNHCR Global Report 2020).

## Theoretical Framework

**This study is based on the principles of human security theory**.

The concept of "human security" is largely linked to the 1994 Human Development Report on Human Security (UNDP, 1994), which was developed and promoted by Mahbub ul Haq, even though it had been discussed earlier (Rothschild, 1995). The aim of human security is to reconcile the concepts of freedom from want and freedom from fear, both of which are fundamental to the United Nations' mission. As early as June 1945, the U.S. Secretary of State highlighted the necessity of addressing both aspects in the "battle of peace"—security from fear and security from want. This perspective emphasizes the interconnectedness of achieving global peace through both security initiatives and the resolution of economic and social challenges (UNDP, 1994). Human security has specific boundaries; it does not cover all important aspects of human life but instead focuses on a limited yet essential set of human activities and capabilities. This core is often articulated through fundamental human rights, basic capabilities, or absolute needs. The term "vital core" serves as a more accessible way to express the issues central to human security, defined within the realm of capabilities—the

freedoms individuals have to act and exist. This vital core includes fundamental human rights that individuals and institutions are expected to uphold or provide, even if these obligations are not always clearly defined. The rights and freedoms within this core pertain to survival, livelihood, and basic human dignity. Individuals who possess basic security regarding their survival, livelihood, and dignity, even in extreme situations like poverty, conflict, or disasters, are better off than billions who currently struggle.

Human security takes a "people-centered" approach, shifting institutional focus toward individuals and their communities worldwide. This emphasis on people differentiates human security from the traditional security policies of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, which primarily aimed at protecting state territories. Human security prioritizes individuals regardless of their gender, race, religion, ethnicity, citizenship, or other distinguishing traits. This perspective aligns with trends in economic development and international law that prioritize human development and rights over purely instrumental goals like economic growth or state sovereignty. Thus, human beings become the ultimate objective of development rather than just a means to enhance productivity or legal order, making these activities inherently "people-centered." Tanaka (2015) offers a viewpoint on human security, defining it as individuals' right to live in conditions characterized by freedom and fairness, free from poverty and despair. He categorizes threats to human security into three dimensions: physical threats (like natural disasters), biological threats to livelihoods (such as epidemics), and threats to social systems (including war and displacement). Tanaka argues that the interactions between these systems represent the real danger to human security. To combat these threats, he recommends two strategies: addressing their root causes or alleviating their impacts. Gasper and Gomez (2014) critique the focus on what they consider less significant threats like terrorism and conflicts, advocating instead for attention to more pressing issues such as human trafficking, social exclusion (which leads to psychological insecurity), and climate change challenges. Ultimately, human security is centered on people, concerned with their quality of life within society, their ability to make choices freely, their access to market and social opportunities, and whether they live in peace or conflict (UNDP, 1994).

The theory is relevance to this study because the humanitarian workers operating in the northeast Nigeria face a myriad of challenges that can be understood through the human security framework. The conflict in Northeast Nigeria, driven by the Boko Haram insurgency, severely undermines all dimensions of human security for IDPs. This context directly impacts the work of humanitarian workers and creates significant challenges. IDPs face constant threats of violence, abduction, and sexual assault. Humanitarian workers also share these risks, experiencing attacks, kidnappings, and harassment while attempting to deliver aid. Their safety and the security of the aid convoys are paramount. Humanitarian workers are often targets of violence, kidnapping, and attacks from non-state actors like Boko Haram. This environment of insecurity not only jeopardizes their safety but also limits their operational capacity to reach and assist IDPs effectively. The fear of violence undermines the fundamental human right to safety for both humanitarian workers and the IDPs they aim to assist.

## Methodology

This paper employed interactive methodologies in the form of key informant interview to assess the knowledge, attitude and experience of humanitarian workers who renders assistance to IDPs particularly in conflict zones in the northeastern Nigeria. In-depth interviews were conducted on individuals who are knowledgeable about the subject. The sample size includes six (6) humanitarian workers selected from three (3) Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO) in Nigeria, two (2) returning IDPs and two (2) security officers. Thus, a total of ten (10) respondents participated in this study. Also, the study used purposive sampling technique to select the respondents while interactive method was used to elicit information from them. This method is preferable because it allows the researcher to purposively select out of the population, those who have first-hand experience, or, who are directly connected or involved in the subject of discussion. Secondary data was collected from academic journals, gazettes, textbooks, newspaper publications, periodicals, press releases, publications by international organizations, internet sources, conferences and seminar papers.

## Discussion of Findings

This study has two specific objectives: to analyse the challenges faced by humanitarian workers in Nigeria's conflict zones and to assess the impact of

existing strategies and interventions employed to address the needs of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in northeastern Nigeria.

### i. Challenges

Humanitarian workers face numerous obstacles in delivering aid to internally displaced persons (IDPs) within conflict zones. Conflict zones are often characterized by violence, armed groups, and lack of law and order. Humanitarian workers face significant risks to their safety and security, including the threat of kidnapping, attacks, and targeted violence. Constraints on humanitarian access are usually due to security threats, especially in non-international armed conflicts that are complex, unstructured, and occur unexpectedly (Personal Interview, January 2024; ICRC, 2014). Armed groups have committed several attacks against humanitarian workers and facilities, either for criminal purposes, political reasons, or both (UNICEF, 2009). Security related concerns make it difficult for humanitarian actors to reach populations situated in areas where hostilities are ongoing, due to the fear of being killed or abducted. As such, some relief operations are cancelled or suspended when the risk of casualties is significant. For instance, on March 1, 2018, three aid workers were killed in an attack in Rann, a remote village in North-East Nigeria, which houses more than 55,000 IDPs. This attack resulted in the evacuation of fifty-two aid workers, with the resultant effect of lack of free medical attention as well as lack of treatment for malnourished children (Held, 2018).

This insecurity hinders the delivery of aid and restrict access to IDP populations in need (Personal Interview, January 2024). Findings revealed that governments, armed groups, and other actors do impose restrictions on humanitarian access to conflict-affected areas, including IDP camps. This mostly prevent aid workers from reaching vulnerable populations, assessing their needs, and delivering essential assistance to them. Humanitarian access may also be denied for political reasons. A state may deny access to some areas on the pretext of trying to protect the humanitarian workers from danger, "when in reality it has a hidden agenda of limiting witnesses to human rights abuses (UNICEF, 2009). Access may also be denied when relief actions are seen as a threat to the sovereignty of a state or because of the perceived "legitimization" of a non-state

group as a result of engagement with it for humanitarian purposes (ICRC, 2011; Personal Interview, January 2024). This access constraints occur through bureaucratic barriers, checkpoints, roadblocks, or deliberate obstruction by parties to the conflict (Personal Interview, January 2024). Another instance was revealed in the findings, on December 16, 2017, Boko Haram terrorists ambushed a food convoy of one of the U.N. agencies, the World Food Programme, which was taking food to IDPs in Ngala, Borno State. The U.N. Humanitarian Coordinator in Nigeria, Edward Kallon, described the attack as "a setback in delivering humanitarian assistance in the northeast. This attack resulted in the reported loss of at least four civilians as well as the destruction of basic aid items initially destined to alleviate the suffering of thousands of women, children and men (Maina, 2017)

Humanitarian organizations often face funding constraints that limit their ability to provide adequate support to IDPs in conflict zones. Insufficient resources do result in gaps in essential services such as shelter, food, water, healthcare, and education. Lack of funding also impede the recruitment and retention of qualified staff and the procurement of necessary supplies (Personal Interview, January 2024). Also, considering the complexities political dynamics involving multiple parties with conflicting interests. Humanitarian workers face challenges navigating these complexities, negotiating access with various stakeholders, and maintaining neutrality and impartiality in their operations. Political interference also impacts the delivery of aid and compromise the safety of humanitarian personnel (Personal Interview, January 2024). Humanitarian workers operating in conflict zones in Nigeria sometimes encounter cultural differences and language barriers that hinder effective communication with IDPs and local communities. Understanding local customs, traditions, and social norms is essential for building trust, gaining acceptance, and ensuring the relevance and effectiveness of humanitarian interventions.

The delivery of aid in conflict-affected areas in Nigeria is significantly impacted by logistical challenges, which hinder the effective and timely distribution of humanitarian assistance to those in need. These obstacles encompass various aspects such as management, communication, government policy, security concerns, and finances, ultimately influencing the effectiveness of relief organization logistics. Organizational effectiveness in humanitarian contexts differs from that of for-profit entities, as highlighted by Anjomshoae et al. (2017).

While for-profit organizations may measure effectiveness through financial performance and shareholder return, humanitarian organizations often evaluate their accomplishments in relation to their stated objectives. However, insufficient funding poses a significant barrier to the hiring and training of logisticians within humanitarian organizations, as noted by Beyene (2018), Maon et al. (2009), and Tomasini and Van Wassenhove (2009). Despite occasional financial donations, these organizations may encounter bottlenecks due to limited resources, potentially resulting in inadequate provision of relief materials in terms of quantity, timing, and quality. Communication plays a pivotal role in disaster response, as aid organizations rely on gathering information from affected areas to coordinate the delivery of necessary supplies. McLachlin & Larson (2011) emphasize that security issues are often contingent upon government performance, underscoring their impact on the efficiency of humanitarian logistics. Stefan (2015) further highlights the challenges faced during the initial reaction stage after a disaster, attributing inadequate relief efforts to a lack of cooperation and coordination. Factors such as limited gasoline supplies, difficulties in evacuation or reaching affected areas in time, and impassable roads exacerbate logistical problems, hindering the timely delivery of aid.

## ii. Impact of Existing Strategies and Interventions

The impact of current strategies in meeting the diverse needs of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in conflict zones is a topic of debate and analysis. There are different opinions and perspectives on this matter. One of these perspectives are those of the positive views who believe that current strategies have led to increased access to essential needs such as food, shelter, healthcare, and education for IDPs in conflict zones. To these individuals, coordination among humanitarian organizations, government agencies, and other stakeholders has improved tremendously, leading to better delivery of aid and services to IDPs (Personal Interview, January 2024). They argue that strategies focusing on protection measures have helped in reducing vulnerabilities, particularly regarding gender-based violence and child protection. Another perspective argue that limited resources and funding constraints hinder the effective implementation of strategies, resulting in gaps in addressing the diverse needs of IDPs. Some pointed out that current strategies often focus on short-term relief efforts rather than sustainable solutions, leading to long-term challenges for IDPs in achieving self-reliance

(Personal Interview, January 2024). The ongoing conflict and insecurity in certain areas create challenges for aid delivery and hinder access to IDPs, impacting the effectiveness of strategies in meeting their needs.

However, calls for improvement on the existing strategies and interventions employed by humanitarian workers have been made. Suggestions include enhancing the empowerment and participation of IDPs in decision-making processes to ensure that strategies reflect their voices and priorities effectively. While emphasis has been laid on the importance of conflict-sensitive approaches to address the root causes of displacement and mitigate risks faced by IDPs in conflict zones, advocates stress the need for sustainable, long-term solutions that go beyond immediate relief efforts to support the self-reliance and resilience of IDPs in rebuilding their lives (Personal Interview, January 2024). Findings show that humanitarian workers play a critical role in providing support to Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in areas such as healthcare, education, and protection (Personal Interview, January 2024). Humanitarian workers often provide medical services, including primary healthcare, maternal and child health services, and treatment for common illnesses and injuries. They also conduct nutrition assessments and provide therapeutic feeding programs to address malnutrition among IDPs, especially children and pregnant women. The psychosocial impact of displacement and trauma prompted humanitarian workers to offer mental health and psychosocial support services to IDPs, while they also organise vaccination campaigns to prevent disease outbreaks and ensure IDPs have access to essential vaccinations (Personal Interview, January 2024).

In the area of education, the humanitarian workers establish temporary learning spaces in IDP camps to ensure children have access to education despite the displacement. They distribute educational materials and school supplies to IDP children to support their learning and educational development, and conducted training programs for teachers in IDP settings to enhance their capacity to deliver quality education to displaced students. Apart from education, protection against gender-based-violence (GBV) is prioritise. Humanitarian workers implement prevention programmes and provide support services for survivors of gender-based violence among IDPs (Personal Interview, January 2024). Internally displaced children have many needs essential to their development, physical growth, and future, all of which can be addressed through humanitarian actions. Article 4(3) of

the second Additional Protocol to the Geneva Conventions mandates that parties in conflict provide children with the care and aid they need (Olusegun and Ogunfolu, 2019). Thus, efforts should be made to meet children's needs during armed conflict, despite the obstacles that stand in the way. In this wise, child protection through family reunification efforts, psychosocial support, and creation of safe spaces for children in conflict-affected areas are embraced (Personal Interview, January 2024). Legal aid services are also offered to IDPs to address protection concerns, such as documentation issues, land rights, and access to justice.

However, several improvements could enhance the effectiveness of interventions for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in conflict zones. These include strengthening coordination among humanitarian organizations, government agencies, and stakeholders; increasing funding for basic needs like shelter, food, water, healthcare, and education; prioritizing protection and safety to prevent violence and abuse; promoting community participation and empowerment; providing psychosocial support for trauma; enhancing monitoring and evaluation mechanisms; and addressing root causes through peacebuilding efforts. By implementing these changes, interventions for IDPs can better meet their needs and support their recovery and resilience in conflict-affected areas (Personal Interview, January 2024; Olusegun and Ogunfolu, 2019).

## Conclusion

This study sheds light on the intricate and pressing challenges faced by humanitarian workers in providing assistance to internally displaced persons (IDPs) within conflict zones, particularly in the context of North Eastern Nigeria. Through a comprehensive analysis of the specific objectives, including analysing the challenges encountered by humanitarian workers, and assessing the impact of existing strategies and interventions employed in addressing the plight of IDPs, several key findings have emerged. Firstly, the study underscores the dire living conditions endured by IDPs in conflict-affected areas, marked by severe shortages in basic necessities such as food, shelter, and healthcare. Moreover, the prevalence of violence and abuse against IDPs further exacerbates their vulnerability, highlighting the urgent need for targeted interventions to address these issues. Secondly, while humanitarian workers play a critical role in providing assistance to IDPs, the study reveals notable gaps and inefficiencies in the existing strategies

and interventions. Despite efforts to meet the diverse needs of IDPs, challenges persist in delivering adequate support, particularly in healthcare, education, and protection. Enhancing coordination among humanitarian actors and implementing tailored interventions are crucial steps towards improving the impact of humanitarian assistance in conflict zones. Thirdly, logistical challenges present formidable obstacles to humanitarian operations, including limited access, security threats, and inadequate resources. Addressing these challenges requires strategic planning, resource allocation, and collaboration with relevant stakeholders to ensure the timely and efficient delivery of aid to those in need.

## Recommendations

**This study therefore recommends the following;**

- Enhance coordination among humanitarian organizations, government agencies, and local authorities to streamline efforts in providing assistance to IDPs. Establishing regular communication channels and coordination mechanisms can facilitate the sharing of resources, information, and best practices, leading to more effective and efficient humanitarian response.
- Develop targeted interventions that address the unique needs and vulnerabilities of IDPs in conflict-affected areas. This may include implementing programs focused on healthcare, education, psychosocial support, and protection, tailored to the specific challenges faced by IDPs in North Eastern Nigeria.
- Provide training and capacity-building programs for humanitarian workers to equip them with the necessary skills and knowledge to effectively respond to the needs of IDPs in conflict zones. This may include training in conflict sensitivity, cultural competency, trauma-informed care, and security awareness to ensure the safety and well-being of both aid workers and beneficiaries.
- Address logistical challenges and security threats that hinder the delivery of aid to conflict-affected areas. This may involve negotiating access with armed groups, improving infrastructure, establishing secure transportation routes, and implementing risk management strategies to mitigate security risks faced by humanitarian workers.
- Advocate for political and diplomatic solutions to address the root causes of conflict and instability in North Eastern Nigeria. Engage with national and international stakeholders to promote peacebuilding efforts, conflict resolution initiatives, and respect for humanitarian principles to create a conducive environment for humanitarian operations.

- Strengthen monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to assess the impact and effectiveness of humanitarian interventions in addressing the needs of IDPs. Regular monitoring and evaluation of programs can help identify gaps, measure progress, and inform evidence-based decision-making to improve the quality and accountability of humanitarian assistance.

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