SOCIAL IMPACTS OF INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT IN NIGERIA: IDP CAMPS AND RESILIENCE

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ABSTRACT

Nigeria currently hosts one of the largest populations of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Africa, with over 3.3 million people displaced as of 2024 due to insurgency, communal violence, banditry, and environmental shocks. This paper presents a conceptual and qualitative review of the social impacts of internal displacement in Nigeria, focusing on family structures, education, health, livelihoods, and social identity. It asks: what are the major social consequences of displacement, how do IDPs demonstrate resilience in both camp and non-camp settings, and what policy interventions can strengthen long-term adaptive capacity. Resilience theory is employed not as a rigid framework but as an interpretative lens, helping to explain how displaced populations navigate coping, adaptation, and survival under prolonged vulnerability. The research relies exclusively on secondary data derived from peer-reviewed literature, reports from UNHCR, UNICEF, IOM, and IDMC, and publications from Nigerian agencies such as NEMA and NCFRMI. Findings show that displacement consistently disrupts kinship networks, limits access to education and healthcare, weakens livelihood, and intensifies social exclusion, with women and children disproportionately affected. Yet, resilience is evident in informal economic activities, faith-based support systems, and community-driven initiatives. Comparative evidence from Uganda, Kenya, Colombia, and Syria further suggests resilience becomes sustainable when integrated into national development and social protection systems. In contrast, Nigeria's continued dependence on short-term humanitarian aids constrains durable recovery. The paper concludes that effective response requires shifting from emergency-centered interventions to inclusive, development-oriented policies that prioritise social protection, livelihood, education, healthcare access, and community resilience.

Keywords: Internal Displacement, Social Impacts, Resilience, IDP Camps

Introduction

Internal displacement has emerged as one of the most pressing humanitarian and development concerns in contemporary Nigeria. The country currently hosts one of the largest populations of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Africa, with more than 3.3 million people displaced as of 2024 due to a complex combination of violent conflict, insecurity, and environmental disasters (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), 2023). The persistence of Boko Haram insurgency and counterinsurgency operations in the Northeast, widespread banditry and kidnappings in the Northwest, farmer–herder conflicts and communal violence in the Middle Belt, as well as recurrent flooding and climate-related disasters across

several regions of the country, have collectively intensified patterns of forced migration and social disruption (Ekezie, 2022; Human Rights Watch, 2014; United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 2023). These overlapping crises have produced severe humanitarian conditions and have significantly strained Nigeria's already fragile social, economic, and governance structures (World Bank, 2020).

Unlike refugees who cross internationally recognised borders, internally displaced persons remain within the territorial boundaries of their own country, often relying on national institutions that may themselves be weakened by conflict or inadequate capacity (Crisp, 2001). Consequently, many displaced populations in Nigeria experience prolonged uncertainty, inadequate access to protection, and limited opportunities for long-term recovery. Internally displaced persons frequently reside in overcrowded camps, informal settlements, or host communities where access to basic services such as healthcare, education, water, sanitation, and livelihood opportunities remains severely constrained (International Organization for Migration (IOM), 2022; UNHCR, 2023). The humanitarian burden associated with internal displacement has therefore evolved beyond an emergency concern into a broader developmental and sociological challenge with long-term implications for national stability and social cohesion.

The social consequences of displacement are extensive and multidimensional. At the family level, displacement often disrupts kinship networks, weakens traditional support systems, and alters established gender and caregiving roles (Rodriguez & Sanchez, 2019). Families are frequently separated during violent attacks or migration processes, leading to increased numbers of orphaned children, female-headed households, and unaccompanied minors. Such disruptions contribute to emotional distress, identity fragmentation, and declining social solidarity within displaced communities (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh et al., 2014). Moreover, prolonged displacement frequently exposes individuals to social exclusion, discrimination, and marginalisation, especially when displaced populations compete with host communities over scarce resources and public services (Adedeji et al., 2020).

Education represents another major area affected by displacement. Violent conflict and insecurity have resulted in the destruction of schools, interruption of learning processes, and increased school dropout rates among displaced children (UNICEF, 2023). In many displacement settings, educational facilities are either unavailable or insufficient to accommodate growing populations of school-aged children. Girls are particularly vulnerable to educational exclusion due to early marriage, domestic responsibilities, poverty, and heightened risks of gender-based violence (Brookings Institution, 2019). The long-term implications of disrupted education include reduced human capital development, intergenerational poverty, and weakened prospects for social mobility and economic reintegration.

Health outcomes among displaced populations are equally concerning. Internally displaced persons commonly experience inadequate healthcare access, malnutrition, poor sanitation, overcrowding, and increased exposure to communicable diseases (World Health Organization

(WHO), 2022). Psychological trauma associated with violence, displacement, and uncertainty further contributes to rising cases of anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder among IDPs (Amnesty International, 2015). Women and children remain particularly vulnerable to sexual violence, exploitation, maternal health complications, and other forms of abuse within displacement environments (UNICEF, 2023). These conditions are exacerbated by weak institutional responses and insufficient mental health and psychosocial support systems across many displacement settings in Nigeria.

In addition to social and health-related challenges, displacement significantly undermines livelihoods and economic security. Forced migration frequently disconnects individuals from agricultural land, businesses, employment opportunities, and community-based economic networks that previously sustained household survival (Betts, 2013). Many displaced persons are compelled to depend on humanitarian assistance, informal labour, petty trading, or low-income survival strategies within host communities and camps. Such economic instability deepens poverty levels and reinforces cycles of dependency and vulnerability (World Bank, 2020). Host communities also experience economic pressure due to increased competition over employment, housing, food supplies, and public infrastructure, thereby contributing to social tensions and weakened community cohesion.

Despite these profound challenges, displaced populations in Nigeria continue to demonstrate remarkable resilience and adaptive capacity. Resilience, within the context of displacement studies, refers to the ability of individuals and communities to cope with adversity, adapt to changing conditions, and rebuild meaningful social and economic lives despite prolonged vulnerability (Masten, 2001; Norris et al., 2008). Across various displacement settings in Nigeria, IDPs have developed diverse coping mechanisms including informal economic activities, cooperative associations, community support systems, religious engagement, vocational initiatives, and grassroots educational programmes (Rodriguez & Sanchez, 2019). Faith-based organisations, local community leaders, women's groups, and informal social networks often play significant roles in sustaining displaced populations where formal institutional support is inadequate (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh et al., 2014).

The concept of resilience has increasingly gained attention within humanitarian and development discourse as an alternative to purely victim-centred approaches to displacement (Ungar, 2012). Rather than viewing displaced persons solely as passive recipients of aid, resilience theory emphasises agency, adaptation, and the social processes through which vulnerable populations navigate uncertainty and reconstruct their lives (Betts, 2013). In this regard, resilience provides an important analytical lens for understanding how internally displaced persons negotiate survival, preserve social identity, maintain community relationships, and create new forms of belonging under conditions of prolonged displacement. Comparative experiences from countries such as Uganda, Kenya, Colombia, and Syria further demonstrate that resilience becomes more sustainable when humanitarian interventions are integrated with

broader development policies, livelihood systems, and social protection frameworks (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh et al., 2014).

Although internal displacement in Nigeria has attracted substantial scholarly and policy attention, much of the existing literature remains heavily concentrated on humanitarian response, emergency relief operations, and security management (Crisp, 2001; Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2021; World Bank, 2020). While these studies provide important insights into crisis management and humanitarian coordination, they often devote insufficient attention to the broader sociological dimensions of displacement, particularly the transformation of family relations, identity formation, social cohesion, and long-term community adaptation processes (Rodriguez & Sanchez, 2019). Furthermore, although resilience is frequently referenced in humanitarian discourse, it is not always employed as a rigorous analytical framework for examining how displaced populations construct coping mechanisms and negotiate social survival within changing environments (Norris et al., 2008; Ungar, 2012). Consequently, there remains a significant gap in understanding the everyday social experiences of internally displaced persons in Nigeria and the ways through which resilience is collectively produced and sustained across both camp and non-camp settings.

This study addresses this gap by providing a conceptual and qualitative review of the social impacts of internal displacement in Nigeria through the interpretive lens of resilience theory. Specifically, the paper examines how displacement affects family structures, education, health outcomes, livelihoods, and identity formation, while also analysing the adaptive strategies and coping mechanisms employed by internally displaced persons under conditions of prolonged vulnerability. The study seeks to answer two interrelated questions: what are the major social consequences of internal displacement in Nigeria, and how do displaced populations demonstrate resilience in both camp and non-camp settings? In addressing these questions, the paper further evaluates the policy interventions and institutional responses required to strengthen long-term adaptive capacity, social protection, and sustainable reintegration among internally displaced populations in Nigeria. Ultimately, the study aims to contribute to broader sociological and development-oriented discussions on displacement by shifting attention from short-term humanitarian responses toward more inclusive and resilience-centred policy frameworks capable of supporting durable recovery and social transformation.

Statement of the Problem

Internal displacement has evolved into one of the most serious humanitarian and socio-developmental challenges confronting Nigeria, with over 3.3 million people displaced due to insurgency, armed banditry, communal violence, and environmental disasters such as flooding (IDMC, 2023; UNHCR, 2023). Beyond the immediate loss of homes and physical security, displacement has generated widespread social dislocation affecting family systems, education, healthcare, livelihoods, and community cohesion. Many internally displaced persons (IDPs) live in overcrowded camps and informal settlements characterised by poverty, unemployment,

inadequate shelter, food insecurity, poor sanitation, and limited access to essential social services (World Bank, 2020; IOM, 2022). Families are often separated during displacement, kinship networks weakened, and traditional support structures disrupted, thereby increasing the vulnerability of women, children, older persons, and persons with disabilities to exploitation, violence, psychological trauma, and social exclusion (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh et al., 2014; UNICEF, 2023). In addition, displacement has significantly interrupted education and economic activities, forcing many displaced persons into dependency on humanitarian assistance and informal survival strategies.

Despite the growing scale and complexity of internal displacement in Nigeria, existing scholarly and policy responses remain largely focused on emergency relief, humanitarian assistance, and security management, with limited attention given to the broader sociological consequences of displacement and the resilience capacities of affected populations (Crisp, 2001; Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2021). Although resilience is increasingly referenced within humanitarian discourse, there remains insufficient understanding of how displaced persons in Nigeria adapt to prolonged conditions of vulnerability, reconstruct social networks, and develop coping strategies in both camp and non-camp settings (Ungar, 2012; Norris et al., 2008). Consequently, interventions often remain short-term and reactive, failing to adequately address long-term social recovery, livelihood restoration, and sustainable reintegration. This gap highlights the need for a more comprehensive sociological examination of the social impacts of internal displacement and the resilience strategies employed by internally displaced persons in Nigeria.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative conceptual review design grounded in a structured and transparent literature search strategy to ensure rigor and reproducibility. The approach is appropriate given the study's focus on synthesising existing knowledge on internal displacement in Nigeria rather than generating primary empirical data. To identify relevant literature, a systematic search was conducted across academic databases including Google Scholar, JSTOR, Web of Science, Scopus, and ResearchGate. In addition, institutional and policy reports from organisations such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), International Organization for Migration (IOM), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), the World Bank, as well as Nigerian government agencies including the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) and the National Commission for Refugees, Migrants and Internally Displaced Persons (NCFRMI), were reviewed to ensure comprehensive coverage of both scholarly and policy-oriented evidence. The literature search was guided by predefined keywords and combinations of terms, including "internal displacement Nigeria," "IDP camps Nigeria," "resilience and forced migration," "social impacts of displacement Africa," "Boko Haram displacement Nigeria," and "adaptive strategies of IDPs." To ensure relevance and academic quality, inclusion criteria were applied: only peer-reviewed journal articles, institutional reports, and policy documents published between 2005

and 2024, with clear relevance to internal displacement, forced migration, or resilience in Nigeria or comparable contexts, were included. Sources outside this scope, duplicates, or materials lacking sufficient academic credibility were excluded. The selected literature was analysed using thematic content analysis, allowing for the systematic identification and synthesis of recurring patterns across studies. The analysis focused on two principal thematic areas: (i) the social impacts of internal displacement, including effects on family structure, education, health, livelihoods, and identity; and (ii) resilience and adaptation strategies, including coping mechanisms, informal institutions, community responses, and policy interventions. A comparative analytical lens was further applied to situate the Nigerian experience within broader regional and global displacement contexts. This structured approach ensures that the findings are grounded in systematically identified evidence and that the synthesis reflects a coherent and academically defensible interpretation of existing literature.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored in Resilience Theory as its primary analytical framework for understanding the social consequences of internal displacement in Nigeria. Contemporary resilience scholarship has moved beyond viewing resilience as an innate or fixed individual trait, instead conceptualising it as a dynamic, multi-level, and context-dependent process shaped by the interaction of individuals, communities, institutions, and structural environments (Masten, 2001; Norris et al., 2008; Ungar, 2012; Southwick et al., 2014). In this sense, resilience is not merely the capacity to bounce back, but the ongoing process through which vulnerable populations negotiate adversity, access resources, and reconstruct social life under conditions of sustained stress.

Early conceptualisations by Masten (2001) describe resilience as "ordinary magic," emphasising that adaptive outcomes often emerge from normative human systems such as family relationships, education, and community support. However, more recent scholarship has significantly expanded this view. Norris et al. (2008) advances a community resilience model that highlights the importance of adaptive capacities embedded in social networks, communication systems, economic resources, and collective problem-solving mechanisms. Similarly, Ungar (2012) introduces a social-ecological interpretation of resilience, arguing that positive adaptation depends not only on individual strengths but also on access to culturally meaningful resources and supportive environments. Southwick et al. (2014) further integrate psychological, social, and biological dimensions, demonstrating that resilience is shaped by trauma exposure, environmental stability, and institutional responsiveness. In forced migration studies, these developments are particularly relevant as resilience is increasingly understood as being shaped by structural violence, governance systems, and humanitarian policy environments rather than individual agency alone (Betts, 2013; Fiddian-Qasmiyeh et al., 2014).

In this study, resilience theory is operationalised as an analytical framework structured around three interrelated categories. First, risk factors refer to the structural and situational

conditions that produce vulnerability among internally displaced persons, including armed conflict, loss of livelihoods, disrupted education, gender-based violence, and psychological trauma (Crisp, 2001; Fiddian-Qasmiyeh et al., 2014). Second, protective factors refer to the social and institutional resources that buffer these risks, such as family cohesion, religious and cultural systems, humanitarian assistance, and community-based support networks (Masten, 2001; Norris et al., 2008; Ungar, 2012). Third, adaptive processes describe the coping and adjustment strategies employed by displaced populations, including informal economic activities, community schooling initiatives, cooperative farming, and psychosocial coping mechanisms (Betts, 2013; Rodriguez & Sanchez, 2019). These categories guide the thematic organisation of the analysis by allowing the study to systematically examine how vulnerability is produced, mitigated, and negotiated within displacement settings.

To deepen analytical sensitivity, the study also incorporates Social Capital Theory as advanced by Putnam (2000). Social capital is understood as the networks, norms, and trust that facilitate collective action and social cohesion. In displacement contexts, bonding social capital refers to strong ties within displaced groups that promote internal solidarity, while bridging social capital refers to weaker ties that connect displaced populations to host communities and institutional actors. In Nigeria, empirical evidence suggests that displacement often strengthens bonding ties within IDP communities while weakening bridging ties with host populations, thereby contributing to social exclusion and integration challenges (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh et al., 2014; Rodriguez & Sanchez, 2019). This framework therefore complements resilience theory by explaining how social relationships shape adaptive capacity.

In addition, the Vulnerability and Capacities Approach (VCA) is used as a supplementary analytical lens to ensure a balanced interpretation of displacement experiences. Rather than focusing solely on deficits and exposure to risk, the VCA framework emphasises the existing strengths, resources, and coping capacities within affected populations (Cannon et al., 2003; Betts, 2013). This perspective is particularly important in avoiding a reductionist "victim-only" framing of internally displaced persons and instead foregrounds their agency and adaptive strategies within constrained environments.

Collectively, the integration of resilience theory, social capital theory, and the vulnerability-capacities approach provides a robust multi-dimensional framework for analysis. It enables this study to examine how structural conditions generate vulnerability, how social relations mediate survival and adaptation, and how displaced populations actively reconstruct meaning, identity, and livelihood systems under conditions of prolonged instability. This integrated framework is consistent with contemporary developments in forced migration scholarship and provides a clear analytical structure for interpreting the empirical literature reviewed in this study.

Literature Review

Internal displacement has been widely examined within the broader literature on forced migration, conflict studies, and humanitarian crises. Globally, internally displaced persons

(IDPs) are recognised as one of the most vulnerable populations, largely because they remain within their national borders and therefore depend on state institutions that are often themselves implicated in the drivers of displacement or weakened by conflict (Crisp, 2001). In sub-Saharan Africa, displacement is commonly linked to armed conflict, communal violence, and climate-related shocks, with significant implications for social stability, development, and human security (Betts, 2013; IDMC, 2023). Nigeria, in particular, represents a major case study due to the scale and persistence of displacement caused by insurgency, banditry, and environmental degradation (UNHCR, 2023; World Bank, 2020).

A central strand of the literature focuses on the social impacts of internal displacement, particularly its effects on family systems and community cohesion. Studies show that displacement frequently disrupts kinship networks, alters household structures, and weakens traditional systems of social support (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh et al., 2014; Rodriguez & Sanchez, 2019). In many contexts, families are separated during forced migration, leading to increased vulnerability among children, women, and elderly dependents. This fragmentation of family life contributes to emotional distress, identity disruption, and the erosion of intergenerational support systems. In Nigeria, research highlights how repeated cycles of violence have produced a rise in female-headed households and unaccompanied minors, further deepening social vulnerability (Adedeji et al., 2020).

Another major area of concern in the literature is the impact of displacement on education. Evidence consistently shows that conflict and forced migration significantly reduce school attendance, increase dropout rates, and damage educational infrastructure (UNICEF, 2023). In IDP settings, overcrowding, lack of teachers, insecurity, and poverty create major barriers to learning continuity. Girls are particularly affected due to early marriage, domestic responsibilities, and heightened exposure to gender-based violence (Brookings Institution, 2019). The long-term consequences include reduced human capital development and intergenerational cycles of poverty, which further entrench structural inequality.

Health outcomes among displaced populations have also been extensively documented. Internally displaced persons often experience poor access to healthcare services, inadequate sanitation, overcrowded living conditions, malnutrition, and increased exposure to communicable diseases (World Health Organization (WHO), 2022). Mental health challenges such as anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder are also widespread due to exposure to violence, loss, and prolonged uncertainty (Amnesty International, 2015). Women and children face heightened risks of gender-based violence, maternal health complications, and psychosocial distress, particularly in poorly resourced camp environments (UNICEF, 2023).The literature further highlights the economic and livelihood consequences of displacement. Forced migration often results in the loss of agricultural land, employment, and business opportunities, thereby disrupting household income sources (Betts, 2013). Many IDPs are pushed into informal economic activities such as petty trading, casual labour, and subsistence farming where possible. While these strategies provide short-term survival, they rarely offer sustainable economic

security. Host communities may also experience increased pressure on limited resources, which can generate tension, competition, and in some cases, social conflict (Crisp, 2001; World Bank, 2020).

In response to these challenges, an emerging body of literature focuses on resilience and adaptation among displaced populations. Resilience is increasingly understood not as an individual trait but as a social and ecological process shaped by access to resources, institutional support, and community networks (Masten, 2001; Norris et al., 2008; Ungar, 2012). In the Nigerian context, studies show that IDPs adopt a range of coping strategies, including informal trade, communal support systems, religious coping mechanisms, and collective survival practices (Rodriguez & Sanchez, 2019). These adaptive strategies demonstrate that displaced populations are not passive recipients of aid but active agents capable of reorganising social and economic life under conditions of adversity.Community-level studies further emphasise the importance of social capital in shaping resilience outcomes. Strong bonding ties within displaced groups often provide emotional and material support, while bridging ties with host communities determine levels of integration and access to external resources (Putnam, 2000). However, in many displacement contexts in Nigeria, weakened bridging capital contributes to exclusion and limits opportunities for long-term reintegration (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh et al., 2014). These dynamic highlights the importance of social networks in shaping both vulnerability and resilience.

Despite these contributions, the literature reveals a persistent gap in understanding the deeper sociological processes underlying displacement in Nigeria. Much of the existing research prioritises humanitarian response and security concerns, with limited attention to the lived social experiences of displaced persons, particularly how identity, meaning-making, and everyday social relations are reconstructed in displacement settings (Rodriguez & Sanchez, 2019). Furthermore, while resilience is widely referenced, fewer studies systematically apply it as an analytical framework to examine how vulnerability, protection, and adaptation interact over time in both camp and non-camp environments. This gap underscores the need for a more integrated sociological analysis of internal displacement that links structural conditions with lived experiences and adaptive strategies, which this study seeks to address.

Conceptual Clarification of Key Terms

To provide conceptual clarity and establish a common analytical foundation for this study, it is necessary to define and contextualise the key concepts that underpin the discussion of internal displacement and resilience in Nigeria.

Internal Displacement

Internal displacement refers to the involuntary movement of individuals or groups from their habitual places of residence to other locations within the borders of their own country as a result of armed conflict, generalised violence, human rights violations, or natural and human-induced disasters (IDMC, 2023; Fiddian-Qasmiyeh et al., 2014). Unlike refugee movements, internal

displacement does not involve crossing internationally recognised borders, meaning that affected populations remain under the jurisdiction and protection of their national governments (Crisp, 2001). In Nigeria, internal displacement has been driven primarily by insurgency in the Northeast, armed banditry in the Northwest, communal conflicts in the Middle Belt, and recurrent environmental disasters such as flooding. These factors have resulted in significant disruptions to livelihoods, social networks, and access to essential services (Ekezie, 2022; Adedeji et al., 2020).

Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)

Internally displaced persons are individuals or groups who have been forced or obliged to flee or leave their homes or places of habitual residence but who have not crossed an internationally recognised state border (UNHCR, 2023). As a distinct category of forced migrants, IDPs often face multiple forms of vulnerability arising from displacement, including loss of property, insecurity, limited access to public services, and weakened social protection systems (Rodriguez & Sanchez, 2019; Fiddian-Qasmiyeh et al., 2014). In the Nigerian context, many displaced persons experience prolonged displacement, resulting in long-term social, economic, and psychological challenges that extend beyond immediate humanitarian concerns.

IDP Camps

IDP camps are organised settlements established to provide temporary or semi-permanent accommodation, protection, and basic services for displaced populations (IOM, 2022). These camps are typically created by governments, humanitarian organisations, or development agencies in response to large-scale displacement crises. In Nigeria, many IDP camps have evolved into semi-permanent settlements because persistent insecurity, inadequate resettlement programmes, and limited livelihood opportunities continue to impede durable solutions. Although camps provide immediate shelter and access to humanitarian assistance, they are frequently characterised by overcrowding, inadequate infrastructure, poor sanitation, and limited access to healthcare, education, and economic opportunities (UNHCR, 2023; Rodriguez & Sanchez, 2019). Consequently, camp environments may simultaneously serve as spaces of protection and sites of continuing vulnerability (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh et al., 2014).

Resilience

Resilience refers to the dynamic process through which individuals, households, communities, and institutions adapt to, cope with, and recover from adversity, disruption, or prolonged exposure to risk (Masten, 2001; Norris et al., 2008; Ungar, 2012). Contemporary resilience scholarship emphasises that resilience is not a fixed personal characteristic but rather a multidimensional process shaped by social relationships, access to resources, institutional support, cultural systems, and environmental conditions (Southwick et al., 2014; Ungar, 2012). Within displacement settings, resilience is manifested through the ability of affected populations to maintain social functioning, rebuild livelihoods, strengthen support networks, and develop

adaptive strategies despite significant hardship (Betts, 2013). Among internally displaced persons in Nigeria, resilience may be expressed through informal economic activities, community-based support systems, religious engagement, vocational initiatives, and other coping mechanisms that facilitate survival, adaptation, and recovery (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh et al., 2014; Rodriguez & Sanchez, 2019).

Analysis and Discussion

Social Impacts of Internal Displacement in Nigeria: Family Structure and Community Relations

Internal displacement profoundly disrupts family structures and community relations, which serve as important sources of social support, identity, and protection. Forced migration often separates family members during attacks, evacuations, and relocation processes, resulting in the fragmentation of kinship networks and the weakening of traditional systems of care and support (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh et al., 2014; Rodriguez & Sanchez, 2019). In many displacement settings across Northeast Nigeria, the death, disappearance, or prolonged absence of household members has contributed to the emergence of female-headed households, orphaned children, and unaccompanied minors, thereby increasing social and economic vulnerability among affected populations (Adedeji et al., 2020).Beyond the family unit, displacement alters community structures and social relationships. The loss of familiar social environments often undermines established patterns of cooperation, mutual assistance, and collective identity. Many internally displaced persons experience varying degrees of social exclusion and marginalisation, particularly when they settle in host communities already facing economic and infrastructural pressures. Competition over housing, employment opportunities, educational facilities, and social services can generate tension between displaced populations and host communities, thereby weakening social cohesion and limiting opportunities for integration (Crisp, 2001; World Bank, 2020). These disruptions illustrate how displacement extends beyond physical relocation to affect the social foundations upon which community life is organised.

Educational Disruption and Human Capital Development

Education remains one of the sectors most severely affected by internal displacement in Nigeria (UNICEF, 2023; Brookings Institution, 2019). Armed conflict and insecurity have resulted in the destruction of educational infrastructure, displacement of teachers, school closures, and interruptions in learning activities across many conflict-affected areas, particularly in Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe States. The abduction of 276 schoolgirls from Chibok in April 2014 further underscored the vulnerability of educational institutions in conflict zones and contributed to heightened fears regarding school attendance in affected communities (Human Rights Watch, 2014; Amnesty International, 2015).

Displaced children frequently encounter barriers to education arising from poverty, insecurity, overcrowded learning environments, and inadequate educational resources. Girls

often face additional challenges, including early marriage, domestic responsibilities, and heightened exposure to gender-based violence (UNICEF, 2023). The cumulative effect of these disruptions extends beyond immediate learning losses and significantly affects long-term human capital development. Reduced access to education limits future employment opportunities, weakens economic productivity, and contributes to the persistence of poverty and vulnerability among displaced populations.

Health and Psychosocial Consequences

The health consequences of internal displacement are extensive and multifaceted. Many displaced populations reside in overcrowded settlements characterised by inadequate sanitation, limited access to healthcare services, poor nutrition, and insufficient access to clean water (World Health Organization, 2022). Such conditions increase susceptibility to communicable diseases, maternal health complications, and childhood illnesses. Women and children remain particularly vulnerable due to inadequate reproductive healthcare services and heightened risks of exploitation and abuse within displacement settings (UNICEF, 2023).In addition to physical health concerns, displacement generates significant psychological and emotional challenges. Exposure to violence, loss of family members, destruction of property, and prolonged uncertainty contribute to anxiety, depression, trauma-related disorders, and other psychosocial difficulties (Amnesty International, 2015). Children exposed to violent conflict often experience developmental and behavioural challenges that may persist long after displacement has occurred. The limited availability of mental health and psychosocial support services within many displacement settings further exacerbates these conditions, making recovery more difficult for affected populations.

Livelihood Disruption and Economic Vulnerability

The loss of livelihoods constitutes one of the most immediate and enduring consequences of internal displacement. Many displaced persons are compelled to abandon agricultural land, businesses, employment opportunities, and productive assets during periods of conflict and insecurity (Betts, 2013). As a result, household income levels decline significantly, and many families experience increased dependence on humanitarian assistance or informal survival activities.Economic exclusion often persists long after displacement occurs. Limited access to land, credit facilities, employment opportunities, and vocational training constrains the ability of displaced persons to achieve economic self-sufficiency. Host communities may also experience increased pressure on local labour markets and public resources, creating additional socio-economic challenges (World Bank, 2020). Consequently, displacement contributes not only to immediate economic hardship but also to the long-term reproduction of poverty and social inequality.

Identity, Social Exclusion, and Belonging

Displacement frequently affects how individuals understand themselves and relate to wider society. The forced loss of homes, communities, cultural environments, and social networks often undermines established identities and senses of belonging (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh et al., 2014). Many internally displaced persons encounter stigma and discrimination within host communities, particularly where displaced populations are perceived as competitors for scarce resources or public services.The resulting social exclusion can limit participation in community life and reduce access to economic and social opportunities. At the same time, displacement may lead to the emergence of new collective identities based on shared experiences of adversity and survival. The reconstruction of identity therefore becomes an important aspect of adaptation and long-term recovery, particularly in contexts where displacement is prolonged and return to original communities remains uncertain.

Resilience and Adaptive Strategies among Internally Displaced Persons

While internal displacement exposes individuals and communities to significant risks, evidence from Nigeria demonstrates that displaced populations also exhibit considerable resilience and adaptive capacity. Consistent with the resilience framework adopted in this study, adaptation occurs through the interaction of individual agency, social networks, community resources, and institutional support systems (Masten, 2001; Norris et al., 2008; Ungar, 2012). Rather than remaining passive recipients of humanitarian assistance, many displaced persons actively develop strategies that enable them to cope with adversity and rebuild aspects of social and economic life.

One important dimension of resilience is economic adaptation. Across various displacement settings, internally displaced persons engage in informal trade, small-scale entrepreneurship, vocational activities, and cooperative income-generating initiatives to reduce dependency on humanitarian aid and strengthen household resilience (Betts, 2013; Rodriguez & Sanchez, 2019). These activities often provide essential sources of income and contribute to the gradual restoration of self-reliance despite constrained economic opportunities.

Social and community networks also play a critical protective role. Family members, religious organisations, women's associations, youth groups, and community-based organisations frequently provide emotional support, information sharing, material assistance, and collective problem-solving mechanisms. Such networks strengthen social capital and create informal safety nets that help individuals navigate periods of uncertainty and hardship (Putnam, 2000; Norris et al., 2008). Religious institutions are particularly significant in many Nigerian displacement settings, offering both material support and psychosocial resources that foster hope, solidarity, and social cohesion.

Resilience is further strengthened through institutional interventions that support education, skills development, and social protection. Humanitarian agencies, government institutions, and

non-governmental organisations have implemented programmes designed to improve access to education, healthcare, livelihood opportunities, and psychosocial support services. Vocational training initiatives, for example, seek to equip displaced persons with marketable skills that can enhance employment prospects and economic independence. Although the effectiveness of such programmes varies across locations, they contribute to the development of adaptive capacities and support long-term recovery efforts.The resilience demonstrated by internally displaced persons should not be interpreted as evidence that vulnerability has been overcome. Rather, resilience and vulnerability often coexist within displacement settings. The ability of displaced populations to adapt is shaped by the availability of resources, the strength of social networks, and the responsiveness of institutions. Consequently, resilience is best understood as an ongoing process through which individuals and communities negotiate adversity, mobilise available resources, and pursue pathways toward recovery and social reintegration.

Policy Implications for Sustainable Recovery and Reintegration

The findings of this review suggest that durable solutions to internal displacement in Nigeria require a transition from short-term humanitarian responses to long-term development-oriented strategies. While emergency assistance remains essential during periods of crisis, sustainable recovery depends on policies that strengthen livelihoods, expand access to education and healthcare, promote social inclusion, and support community resilience.Particular attention should be directed toward livelihood restoration programmes, social protection mechanisms, psychosocial support services, and initiatives that strengthen relationships between displaced populations and host communities. Government agencies, humanitarian organisations, and development partners should prioritise interventions that enhance economic self-reliance and reduce long-term dependency on humanitarian assistance. Equally important is the need to address the structural drivers of displacement, including insecurity, poverty, weak governance, and environmental vulnerability.Comparative experiences from countries such as Uganda, Kenya, Colombia, and Syria indicate that resilience is more sustainable when integrated into broader national development frameworks rather than treated solely as a humanitarian concern (Betts, 2013; Fiddian-Qasmiyeh et al., 2014). For Nigeria, achieving durable solutions will require a coordinated approach that combines protection, development, and social integration policies capable of restoring dignity, opportunity, and long-term stability for internally displaced populations.

Recommendations

Drawing from the analysis of the social impacts of internal displacement and the demonstrated adaptive strategies of internally displaced persons in Nigeria, it is evident that durable solutions require a shift from short-term humanitarian responses to more integrated, development-oriented and resilience-building interventions. The following recommendations are therefore proposed to strengthen policy effectiveness, improve social outcomes, and enhance the long-term adaptive capacity of displaced populations and host communities.

i. **Strengthening Livelihood Restoration and Economic Empowerment:** Government agencies, development partners, and humanitarian organisations should prioritise sustainable livelihood programmes for internally displaced persons. Beyond emergency relief assistance, interventions should focus on vocational skills acquisition, entrepreneurship development, access to microcredit facilities, agricultural support programmes, and employment generation initiatives. Strengthening economic self-reliance will reduce dependency on humanitarian aid and improve the long-term socio-economic resilience of displaced populations.

ii. **Expanding Access to Quality Education:** Efforts should be intensified to ensure uninterrupted access to education for displaced children and youth. This requires the construction and rehabilitation of educational facilities in displacement-affected areas, recruitment and training of qualified teachers, provision of learning materials, and implementation of special programmes targeting girls and other vulnerable groups. Educational policies should also support accelerated learning and reintegration programmes for children who have experienced prolonged disruptions to their schooling.

iii. **Improving Healthcare and Psychosocial Support Services:** Healthcare interventions in displacement settings should extend beyond basic medical assistance to include comprehensive mental health and psychosocial support services. Government and humanitarian actors should strengthen healthcare infrastructure within camps and host communities, improve access to maternal and child healthcare services, and provide trauma counselling for individuals affected by violence and displacement. Community-based psychosocial programmes can also help address emotional distress and facilitate social recovery.

iv. **Promoting Social Cohesion and Community Integration:** Policies should encourage stronger relationships between internally displaced persons and host communities through community dialogue initiatives, joint development projects, and inclusive social programmes. Strengthening social cohesion can reduce tensions arising from competition over resources and foster mutual trust, cooperation, and integration. Particular attention should be given to supporting bridging social capital that connects displaced populations with local institutions and host communities.

v. **Strengthening Institutional Coordination and Governance:** Effective responses to internal displacement require stronger coordination among federal, state, and local government institutions, as well as humanitarian and development partners. Clearly defined responsibilities between agencies such as NEMA and NCFRMI would minimise role overlap and strengthen support for the displaced. In addition, aligning Nigeria's national laws and policies with relevant international and regional frameworks such as the Kampala Convention would provide a stronger legal foundation for the protection and rights of internally displaced persons. Existing frameworks should be strengthened through improved data collection, monitoring systems, and accountability mechanisms. The implementation of

national policies on internal displacement should be adequately funded and supported to ensure consistent protection and assistance for affected populations.

vi. **Adopting a Development-Oriented Approach to Displacement:** Nigeria's response to internal displacement should move beyond short-term humanitarian assistance towards integrated development planning. Displacement issues should be incorporated into broader national and sub-national development strategies, including poverty reduction programmes, social protection initiatives, infrastructure development, and peacebuilding efforts. Such an approach would address both the immediate needs of displaced populations and the structural factors that contribute to prolonged displacement.

vii. **Enhancing Security and Addressing Root Causes of Displacement:** Sustainable solutions to internal displacement ultimately depend on addressing the underlying causes of forced migration. Government efforts should continue to focus on improving security, strengthening conflict prevention mechanisms, promoting community peacebuilding initiatives, and enhancing climate adaptation strategies in environmentally vulnerable areas. Tackling these root causes will reduce future displacement and create conditions that support voluntary return, local integration, or resettlement.

Conclusion

This study examined the social impacts of internal displacement in Nigeria through a qualitative conceptual review of existing literature, with particular attention to family structures, education, health, livelihoods, identity, and resilience. The findings indicate that internal displacement produces profound social disruptions, including the fragmentation of family systems, limited access to education and healthcare, loss of livelihoods, and weakened social identity. These effects are especially severe for vulnerable groups such as women, children, and older persons, while also placing additional pressure on host communities and local institutions.Despite these challenges, the study highlights that internally displaced persons demonstrate significant adaptive capacity through a range of resilience strategies, including informal economic activities, social networks, religious support systems, and community-based coping mechanisms. However, such resilience remains constrained by structural factors such as insecurity, poverty, and limited institutional support, underscoring the need for stronger policy intervention.Overall, the study concludes that internal displacement in Nigeria should be understood not only as a humanitarian crisis but also as a structural and developmental challenge requiring integrated, long-term responses. Sustainable solutions depend on coordinated efforts that strengthen resilience, restore livelihoods, and promote social inclusion for both displaced and host populations.

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