

8 June 2012

## NIGERIA

# Increasing violence continues to cause internal displacement

Internal displacement is a common consequence across Nigeria of inter-communal and political violence, flooding and forced evictions. While some of the conflicts appear to be caused by overlapping and mutually reinforcing regional, religious and ethnic divisions, but violence often stems from competition for scarce opportunities and communal resources.

Current levels of displacement are deemed particularly high by a number of organisations, but in the absence of a functioning monitoring mechanism, no accurate figures are available. Ad-hoc local registration exercises have hinted at the scale of the phenomenon, but those who seek shelter and support from family and friends - and who make up the majority of internally displaced people (IDPs) - tend not to be counted.

The government has not yet adopted a national IDP policy, leaving national, international and local agencies to assist IDPs in an uncoordinated way and on a sometimes selective basis. Ratification of the legally-binding Kampala Convention, which Nigeria signed on 23 October 2009, is expected to be completed shortly. This may signal the government's intention to address internal displacement in a more consistent and coherent manner.



## Background

Since Nigeria's return to civilian rule in 1999, thousands of people have been killed in recurring inter-communal conflicts and politically motivated violence that have also led to consistently large waves of internal displacement. Flooding and forced evictions have caused further, significant population movements. In April 2012, the Armed Conflict Location & Event Dataset (associated with the Oslo International Peace Research Institute) reported that the level of violence had increased drastically over the last few months, putting Nigeria on a par with Somalia in terms of the high number of conflict events it experiences.

A number of organisations suggest that current levels of internal displacement are particularly high, but in the absence of a functioning monitoring mechanism, in-depth data is, however, extremely hard to come by. Local media tend to be the main source of information on population movements, but while they cover crises they do not necessarily report on longer-term trends and developments.

The process of democratisation and decentralisation after 16 years of military regime through the creation of new local governance structures has allowed the expression of grievances. It has also fuelled overlapping and mutually reinforcing regional, religious and ethnic rivalries between northerners and southerners, Muslims and Christians and the three main ethnic groups, the Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo (Amundsen, 2010: 9; Best, 2011: 1, 21 and 35; Diprose, 2008: 4, 6 and 27; ICG, 2010: 9 and 12; Ibeanu, 2001 and 1999: 161 and 174; Meredith, 2005: 194 and 582). In response to the inequalities and injustices brought about by failures of governance, and the government's inability to provide even basic services, ethnic and religious groups have resorted to primary loyalty to their kinsmen for aid and protection. Competition for scarce opportunities and communal resources such as farmland, pastures, fishing waters and oil-rich land have intensified.

Outbreaks of identity-based communal violence rooted in pervasive poverty, systemic social-economic inequality and discriminatory policies and practices, have become increasingly common, occurring in virtually all of Nigeria's 36 states (CERD, 2010; Enweremadu, 2009: 2; Diprose, 2008: 27; HRW, 2006: 47; Ibeanu, 2001; Mberu, 2010; Meredith 2005: 582 and 585; Mustapha, 2007: 5; Okpeh, 2008: 53; USDoS, 2011: 35). Most conflicts have been small-scale, but some have led to the destruction of entire communities (HRW, 2006: 32). It is estimated that more than 13,500 people have been killed in several hundred separate clashes since 1999 (CERD, 2010).

The latest episodes of inter-communal violence include election-related clashes that forced more than 65,000 people to flee their homes in April 2011 (HRW, 16 May 2011). The January 2012 national strike called by labour organisations to protest the withdrawal of fuel subsidies led to communal tensions and resulted in the displacement of more than 4,000 people in Edo state (ICRC, 13 Jan. 2012). Renewed clashes over land between ethnic Tivs and Fulanis in the central state of Benue also displaced up to 15,000 people in March 2012 (African Herald Express, 11 March 2012; NRC, 7 May 2012).

Since 2009, the Islamist group Boko Haram has been responsible for the majority of violence carried out in the name of political objectives in northern and central Nigeria, leading to significant displacement. Prior to 2009, political violence was mostly in the form of fighting between government forces protecting oil installations in the Niger Delta and militants demanding more local control over resources. The level of such violence has decreased, but fighting still occurs periodically in Delta state.

## Displacement figures and patterns

The full scope of displacement in Nigeria is unknown (Egwu, 2011: 2). There is no reliable

information on the number and the situation of internally displaced people (IDPs), in part because of the complex displacement patterns, but also because of the limited capacity of federal and state governments to collect data (Blench 2003: 8; Mberu, 2010; USDoS, 2011: 35).

Estimates provided by the government and NGOs are inconsistent, generally not disaggregated by cause, age and sex, and often include only people who have sought refuge in temporary camps or shelters such as schools, churches, police and army barracks (Best, 2011: 72 and 99; CISLAC / IDMC, 2011; NRC, 7 May 2012). Most IDPs, however, are hosted by relatives (Best, 2011: 65; Blench, 2003: 9; Ibeanu 1999: 162). There are no permanent IDP camps in the country and makeshift settlements often lack basic sanitation and health facilities (Orji, 2011: 479). According to provisional data collected by the Nigerian Red Cross, almost 50,000 IDPs sought refuge in temporary settlements and shelters between January and May 2012 (NRC, 17 May 2012).

In figures supplied to the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, the Federal Ministry of Justice put the overall number of people displaced by conflict and flooding at more than 1.3 million as of January 2011 (GoN, 2011: 75). In contrast, a year-long survey by the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) suggested that fewer than 400,000 people were displaced as of October 2011, with some 74,000 living in camps (NEMA, 2011). In March 2012, the chairman of the board of the National Commission for Refugees (NCFR) estimated that a million people were internally displaced (The Punch, 23 March 2012). No information on the methodology used was provided for any of these estimates.

In urban areas, institutional policies of forced evictions leading to intra-urban displacement have affected more than two million people since 2000, in violation of their right to adequate housing (AI, 2011, Agenda: 38).

Flooding and soil erosion also cause regular, large-scale internal displacement. Around a million people living on the low-lying plains of the Niger river are considered at risk (Chinedu, 2008: 37; USDoS, 2011: 35). According to NEMA, floods displaced thousands of people in 2011 and at least 500,000 in 2010 (BBC, 31 Aug. 2011; Sunday Tribune, 15 May 2011; Vanguard, 7 April 2012).

In the absence of a functioning monitoring mechanism, data on the duration of displacements, IDPs' protection problems and the achievement of durable solutions is extremely scarce. The demolition of houses has, however, been a common practice during inter-communal conflicts, which is likely to prevent return and points towards lasting displacement (Je'adayibe, 2010). A May 2012 newspaper article reported that, a year after the post-electoral violence, camps set up to host IDPs temporarily were still in use in Kaduna state (Leadership, 5 May 2012).

## Causes of displacement

### *1. Displacement caused by inter-communal conflict*

The April 2011 presidential elections that led to the re-election of incumbent Goodluck Jonathan, a southerner from the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP), were among the bloodiest ever.

"Zoning", an unwritten internal PDP power-sharing rule that envisages the swapping of presidential power between the north and the south every two terms, should have led to the election of a northerner (HRW, 16 May 2011).

Protests by supporters of the main opposition candidate, Muhammadu Buhari, a northerner from the Congress for Progressive Change, degenerated into riots and sectarian clashes in a third of Nigeria's 36 states. More than 1,000 people were killed and more than 65,000 displaced in the northern states of Bauchi, Kaduna, Kano, Niger, Gombe and Sokoto (Albert, 2011: 113; Chouin,



2011: 63; HRW, 16 May 2011; ICG, 2011: 1). In spite of attempts to prevent tensions through zoning, elections have regularly been marred by widespread inter-communal violence (AI, 2011, Agenda: 32; Enweremadu, 2011: 121-22; ICG, 2011: 1 and 7; Meredith 2005: 194).

On the whole, protracted inter-communal conflicts fuelled by religious, regional or ethnic divisions regularly lead to death and displacement throughout Nigeria, a country made up of a complex web of ethnic groups. The three main groups, the Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo, represent more than half of the population, but they coexist with as many as 400 other groups (Alulaigba, 2009: 5; HRW, 2009: 3; Ibeanu, 2001; Mustapha, 2007: 3-4).

The rough overlap of ethnic, religious and regional divisions has allowed the reinterpretation of inter-communal violence along religious lines. According to the Nigerian academic Gwamna Dogara Je'adayibe (2008: 156), crises caused by religious tensions have produced the highest numbers of IDPs. In 1999, Zamfara state adopted sharia law as its only legal system. Several other northern states voiced their will to follow suit, and 11 had done so by 2002. This led to a series of uprisings and violent clashes in February 2000 between Christians and Muslims in the city of Kaduna. Many Igbo, who are generally Christian, were killed. For safety reasons, Christians and Muslims moved to areas dominated by people of their own faith, and as thousands fled the far north, religious tensions increased in other areas. In reprisal for the Kaduna violence, Igbo groups in the south killed hundreds of generally Muslim Hausa migrants from the north (HRW, 2003: 5; Meredith 2005: 586-87).

In 2001, religious clashes erupted in Jos, the capital of Plateau state, which sits on the dividing line between the largely Muslim north and Christian south. More than 1,000 people were killed and thousands more displaced (Best, 2011:

19; HRW, 2006: 43). Many settled in temporary camps or permanently in neighbouring Bauchi state (Blench, 2003: 10). Since then, deadly clashes leading to displacement have flared up regularly in and around Jos as a result of the authorities' failure to take adequate measures to prevent violence and protect people (AI, 2011, Agenda: 30; Orji, 2011: 479; The Economist, 13 April 2010). In 2010, as many as 30,000 people fled fighting in the area (USDoS, 2011: 35).

Tensions between communities have been aggravated by prejudicial government policies that relegate millions of Nigerians to second-class citizens by discriminating against "non-indigenes" or "settlers" who cannot prove roots linking them to the original inhabitants of an area (CERD, 2010; HRW, 2006: 2 and 2009: 3). The principle behind the concept of "indigenisation" was to protect the identity, rights and interests of the country's numerous minority groups. It has turned, however, into a powerful means of exclusion under which non-indigenes are denied access to already limited resources and opportunities in terms of education, land ownership, participation in political affairs and public sector jobs, the state being a key employer (AI, 2011, Agenda: 31; HRW 2006: 10 and 2009: 3).

Article 42 of Nigeria's 1999 Constitution prohibits discrimination based on ethnicity or place of origin, but non-indigenes are, in many respects, treated like citizens of a foreign country, which erodes the value of national citizenship (Alulaigba, 2009: 11; HRW, 2006: 1-2). More than a million Nigerians are labelled non-indigenes, and growing numbers of people are unable to prove that they are indigenous to a particular state. This increase has been caused by the proliferation of states and local government areas under various decentralisation processes since the mid-1970s (AI, 2011, Agenda: 31; HRW 2006: 10). Some of the bloodiest conflicts in recent years have pitted non-indigenes against "host" communities (Egwu, 2011: 8; HRW, 2006: 33; Ladan, 2011: 8).

*2. 1. Displacement caused by political violence  
Northern and central Nigeria: Boko Haram attacks  
and counterinsurgency operations*

Since 2009, increasingly frequent and sophisticated attacks and bombings attributed to Boko Haram and ensuing heavy-handed counterinsurgency operations have caused death, destruction of property and significant displacement (AI, 24 Jan. 2012; IRIN, 18 July 2011; SERAC, 12 Aug. 2011). According to Human Rights Watch, Boko Haram has killed more than 1,000 people since 2010 (HRW, 7 March 2012).

The group, which has been growing in ambition and capability, initially targeted the northern states of Bauchi, Borno, Yobe and Kano. It began to operate beyond its home grounds in late 2010, when it bombed buildings in Jos, and has since pushed further south, bombing the police and UN headquarters in Abuja in June and August 2011 respectively (Shaka, 2011: 3; The Economist, 27 Aug. 2011, 8 Nov. 2011, 23 and 28 Jan. 2012). It initially targeted police and government facilities and churches, but began attacking bars and beer gardens in June 2011 and schools in February 2012 (AI, 24 Jan. 2012; HRW, March 2012).

Boko Haram, which in Hausa means “western education is forbidden”, was founded a decade ago in the north-eastern city of Maiduguri. It rose to prominence in 2009 after launching an insurgency against the government in several northern states in which more than 800 people were killed (Danjibo, 2009: 10; HRW, March 2012; Je’adayibe, 2010; Reuters, 9 April 2012). It campaigns for the strict implementation of sharia law, an ideology that is not widely supported in a country where Muslims tend to be moderate (IRIN, 20 Jan. 2012; The Economist, 27 Aug. 2011).

In late December 2011, a series of attacks in which more than 100 people were killed and some 90,000 displaced led the president to declare a state of emergency in large parts of the north and to send thousands of troops to fight the group (ICG, 2 Jan.

2012; The Economist, 14 and 23 Jan. 2012; Reuters, 9 April 2012). In January 2012, after Boko Haram issued a warning to Christians living in the Hausa-dominated north to leave or face retribution, Igbo leaders in the south-east called on Igbo families to head for safety in the south and offered a free shuttle bus service (BBC, 15 March 2012).

Since then, thousands of people have reportedly moved and families split up to send women and children to safer areas in the south-east, a situation reminiscent of the population movements from northern states provoked by the religious clashes in 2000 (AP, 19 March 2012; BBC, 15 March 2012; Business Day, 18 April 2012; The Economist, 14 and 23 Jan. 2012; VOA, 30 Jan. 2012). NEMA has warned that the displacement of some 17,000 farmers from the north could cause a significant fall in agricultural production and lead to a food crisis in the region (Africa Review, 1 April 2012; The Guardian, 27 March 2012). Thousands of migrants from Chad and Niger have also fled northern Nigeria for their countries of origin in recent months because of the violence (IRIN, 6 March 2012).

In a context of mass poverty, unemployment and inadequate law enforcement, Boko Haram has gained support by playing on people’s frustrations and using religion to further its ends. Northern Nigeria is generally poorer than the rest of the country and residents complain of corruption, inequality and the government’s failure to address problems. Muslims have also accused predominantly Christian southerners of monopolising oil revenues and government posts (Danjibo, 2009: 3; Ibeanu, 1999: 172; ICG, 2010: 10; Meredith, 2005: 586; Mustapha, 2007: 5; The Economist, 27 August 2011).

In March 2012, the International Committee of the Red Cross noted that although there is a situation of violence provoking casualties and displacement in Nigeria, it does not meet the criteria of an internal conflict (National Mirror, 22 March 2012). Article 3 of the 1949 Geneva Conventions and its commentary state that an armed conflict exists

when the situation can be defined as “protracted armed violence”, which can be assessed using two criteria - the organisation of the parties and the intensity of the violence (ICRC, 2008: 5; Vité, 2009: 76). The latter must have reached a level that distinguishes it from internal disturbances and tensions, such as riots or isolated and sporadic acts of violence (Vité, 2009: 76).

#### *Niger Delta: A lull in the fighting between the government and MEND*

Until 2009, most political violence in Nigeria occurred in the south, in the densely populated Niger Delta region which is the home of the country's oil and gas industry. Fighting between insurgents and government forces deployed to protect oil installations and personnel led to the death or forced displacement of thousands of civilians between 2004 and 2009 (IRIN, 22 May 2009). Militants claimed to be fighting for increased control of oil wealth by the local community, whose lands had been polluted and whose region remained one of the poorest and least developed parts of the country, despite its resources. Their campaign was directed against both the oil companies and the government (Falola, 2008: 235; Ibaba, 2011: 252 and 258; Ibeanu, 2006: 7 and 11; Madubuiké, 2009: 3 and 11; Meredith 2005: 576; The Economist, 12 Nov. 2009).

In October 2009, the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), an umbrella group formed in 2005 to represent a number of militant factions, declared an indefinite ceasefire that brought relative peace to the region following a presidential amnesty. By the end of 2010, however, fighting had resumed, causing the destruction of at least 120 homes and the deaths of several civilians. In January 2011, MEND called off its ceasefire (AI, Annual Report 2011; IRIN, 25 Nov. 2011; The Economist, 12 Nov. 2009 and 14 Jan. 2012). The amnesty programme has been described as inadequate in addressing the roots of the problem, namely under-development and poor governance (Ibaba, 2011: 64).

It is not known whether IDPs have achieved durable solutions. A government report noted that Edo state was hosting some 250,000 people displaced from the Niger Delta as of January 2011 (GoN, 2011: 74).

#### *3. Displacement caused by forced evictions*

More than two million urban Nigerians, particularly slum-dwellers and other marginalised people, have been forcibly evicted from their homes since 2000, most notably in Lagos, Abuja and Port Harcourt. Government-sanctioned evictions carried out in the name of security and urban renewal programmes have taken place without adequate consultation, notice, compensation or offers of alternative accommodation. In addition to breaching victims' right to adequate housing, forced evictions, amounting to arbitrary displacement, and often lead to violations of other human rights, such as the right to health care, education and livelihood opportunities (AI, 2011, Agenda: 39). Forced evictions have led to intra-urban displacement and left thousands of people homeless (AI, 26 Aug. 2011; AI, 2011, Agenda: 38; Mberu, 2010; USDoS, 2011: 35-36).

## **National and international response**

The national and international response to internal displacement in Nigeria has generally been inadequate. There has, however, been increased interest on various levels since mid-2011 which could stimulate the development of a suitable and comprehensive approach.

At the national level, steps have been taken to finalise a national IDP policy, in the planning since 2003, as well as a draft law to amend the NCFR mandate for approval by the Federal Executive Council. Nigeria ratified the legally-binding Kampala Convention in April 2012, signed on 23 October 2009, and was expected to deposit its ratification instrument at the African Union in the

following weeks (IRIN, 26 October 2009; NCFR, 2012).

In July 2011, Abuja hosted the first Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) ministerial conference on humanitarian assistance and internal displacement. Participants committed to the adoption of adequate measures to prevent forced displacement, and to formulating coherent national IDP policies and legal and institutional frameworks which fully reflect the content and spirit of the Kampala Convention (ECOWAS, 2011).

International humanitarian organisations have had limited presence in the country, but in recent months the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) has established a presence in Abuja and the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) has shown increased concern about internal displacement in Nigeria.

#### *National response*

In the absence of a clear policy, legal framework or comprehensive approach, efforts to prevent displacement, mitigate its effects and minimise its duration have been insufficient.

The response to displacement, generally included under disaster management mechanisms, has varied from state to state and has been uncoordinated and ad-hoc, leading to both shortfalls and duplication (USDoS, 2011: 35; CISLAC/IDMC, 2011). When support is provided, the tendency has been to focus on the provision of assistance and to neglect protection needs. Weaknesses exist in the operations of NEMA and NCFR, the two main government bodies responsible for the response to internal displacement, in part because their budgets are too small (Egwu, 2011: 3; USDoS, 2011: 35).

Local governments have prime responsibility for ensuring an adequate response to IDPs' needs, with State Emergency Management Agencies

(SEMAs) – which have varying capacity - expected to step in when local authorities are unable to cope. Assistance from the federal government, through NEMA, is only requested, and is subject to presidential approval, when the required response is beyond the capacity of both local and state authorities. NEMA is mandated to coordinate disaster management throughout the country and to respond to the immediate needs of displaced populations as necessary, but it has no specific policy on IDPs. It operates offices in the six geopolitical zones of the country, for implementation of policy, coordination and communication purposes (NEMA, June 2009; NEMA, 30 July 2009; Economic Confidential, 2010; News Agency of Nigeria, 16 April 2012). IDP camps, described as a last and temporary resort, are usually run by NEMA or SEMAs and the Nigerian Red Cross, in conjunction with relevant agencies (News Agency of Nigeria, 15 April 2012; NEMA, National Contingency Plan 2011-2012; e-mail exchange NRC, May 2012).

NCFR has been mandated to manage internal displacement since 2002, but has no field presence. It focuses on post-emergency situations and long-term programmes aimed at achieving durable solutions for IDPs. If necessary, it assists NEMA with camp management, and has a dedicated unit working on internal displacement. It has developed a comprehensive action plan for resettlement, reconciliation, reconstruction and reintegration, but still needs to apply it on the ground.

The National Human Rights Commission and the Institute of Peace and Conflict Resolution also have responsibilities with respect to the protection of IDPs' rights and the prevention and resolution of conflict. Other government agencies and the military are brought in on a case-by-case basis.

Given that the response from government agencies is insufficient and slow as a result of bureaucracy or the competing interests of ruling elites, the Nigerian Red Cross, civil society organisations



and faith-based groups have been providing immediate relief and assistance on an ad-hoc basis in the aftermath of violence (Okpeh, 2008: p. 63-64). Assistance provided by faith-based groups is, however, often determined by IDPs' religion, and this may actually make religious tensions worse. Assistance also tends to be short-term and does not necessarily contribute to the longer-term reconstruction of lives and livelihoods (Best, 2011: 99; Orji, 2011: 474 and 486).

Overall, the response tends to target people in camps, even though the majority of IDPs are hosted by relatives or local communities, who bear most of the burden of assisting them (Ibeanu, 1999: 176; Best, 2011: 65).

In some cases, authorities have supported the resettlement of IDPs. In July 2010 the governor of Bauchi state announced that more than 30,000 IDPs displaced from Plateau state some six months earlier had been resettled with financial assistance from the state (Nigerian Tribune, 2 July 2010). In January 2011, the same authorities reported that they had allocated 748 plots of land to IDPs (Leadership, 24 Jan. 2011).

#### *International response*

Nigeria's donors have generally favoured development assistance over humanitarian programmes. The US Agency for International Development (USAID) is the largest and most influential bilateral donor, followed by Britain's Department for International Development (DfID). Most multilateral funding has been channelled through the UN Development Programme, the World Bank and the European Union. Donors' focus has been largely on providing support to tackle poverty through promoting good governance, democratisation, rule of law and human rights (Amundsen, 2010: xii and 36). The cluster approach has not been adopted in Nigeria. The UN Country Team coordinates the inter-agency response through its Emergency Preparedness Working Group.

**Note:** This is a summary of IDMC's internal displacement profile on Nigeria. The full profile is available online [here](#).

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## About the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre

The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) was established by the Norwegian Refugee Council in 1998, upon the request of the United Nations, to set up a global database on internal displacement. A decade later, IDMC remains the leading source of information and analysis on internal displacement caused by conflict and violence worldwide.

IDMC aims to support better international and national responses to situations of internal displacement and respect for the rights of internally displaced people (IDPs), who are often among the world's most vulnerable people. It also aims to promote durable solutions for IDPs, through return, local integration or settlement elsewhere in the country.

IDMC's main activities include:

- Monitoring and reporting on internal displacement caused by conflict, generalised violence and violations of human rights;
- Researching, analysing and advocating for the rights of IDPs;
- Training and strengthening capacities on the protection of IDPs;
- Contributing to the development of standards and guidance on protecting and assisting IDPs.

For more information, visit the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre website and the database at [www.internal-displacement.org](http://www.internal-displacement.org)

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