



No space to live

The consequences of congestion at IDP sites in North-East Nigeria

More than 600,000 people are staying in highly congested displacement camps across North-East Nigeria. Consequences include lack of access to basic services, aid dependency, cyclical cholera outbreaks, rampant fires and deep protection concerns.

Obliged to take steps

The Sphere Handbook's Minimum Standards in Humanitarian Responseⁱ requires at least 45 square meters of usable surface area per person in displacement camps, or 30 square meters per person if basic services, such as schools, gardens and hospitals are accessible outside the settlement. If this area cannot be secured, steps must be taken "to address the consequences of higher-density occupation"ⁱⁱ.

According to recent figures, 604,000 people, or more than a third of the total displaced population in North-East Nigeria, are staying in formal or informal settlements with a congestion of people far exceeding this minimum standardⁱⁱⁱ. Many camps are characterised as *highly* congested, meaning that surface area available per person is less than 15 square meters. **160,000 people are living on as little as 5 square meters per person.**

There is an acute need to decongest. At the same time, the detrimental effects of limited living space must be responded to. A study conducted on the effects of high-density occupation among Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh concludes that: "[b]esides

the aggravating circumstances of topography and climate, refugees living in close proximity are at heightened risk of communicable diseases, fires, community tensions, and domestic and sexual violence"^{iv}. The level of congestion is the same in North-East Nigeria.

Knowing this, it is worrying that Nigeria's Humanitarian Response Plan is only 15% met for Emergency Shelter so far in 2018^v. The equivalent for Sanitation and Hygiene is 20.3%, and Livelihood 3.2%. While half a million people are living in severely congested sites, there is a tendency that lifesaving infrastructure is not provided – due in part to the very same problem: There is not enough space to build the critical infrastructure needed.

A place to call 'home': Shelter and settlements

Protected and safe environment

A shelter is someone's home, and is a core human right. The Sphere Handbook requires that shelters have appropriate walls, lifted floors and secured roofing that protect against the rains, winds and

floods. Living space covered by a roofed shelter should be at least 3.5 square metres per person, not including area for cooking, bathing or sanitation. For a family of seven, this means a at least 24 square meters of shelter “to dwell, feel safe and perform a variety of essential domestic activities”^{vi}. A safe shelter should also have its entrance facing public areas and a door to close.

In Ngurno, one of Monguno’s spontaneous displacement sites, a wife and mother to five small children is living with her husband^{vii}. The inside of her hut is approximately four square meters. The entrance to her home is a gaping hole, covered by a piece of cloth, but not enough to prevent outsiders from looking in. There are no windows in her hut. The only light that enters come from the door or through a myriad of small cracks in the thin layer of straw that make up the walls. The thatched roof has a mosquito net tucked into it. It is low, and one cannot stand up straight. “There are no place to rest, children are continuously shouting, and it is difficult to maintain a clean environment”, she explains. On average, her family members have only 0.6 square meters of private, indoor shelter space. That is less than five times the minimum standard. The hut lacks basic measures, such as a door, or decent protection again fire, rain and spread of disease.

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The Sphere Handbook does not only require certain standards for the interior of shelters. External living environment is also critical. To mitigate risks of violence and abuse, all camps should be equipped with night lighting. However, recent assessments identify that only 1% of camps or camp-like settlements in North-East Nigeria have adequate lighting, while 82% has no lighting at all^{viii}. Further, “[w]omen, men and children felt unsafe in 99 per cent of sites”^{ix}, while referral mechanisms for incidents is lacking in more than 60% of camps overall. Partly due to stigma leading to probable underreporting, and partly due to lack of analysis, data on protection concerns in the most congested sites are missing.



Protection against floods and fires

Poor drainage limits living space, stagnates living conditions and poses general risks to health and well-being. Flood prone areas should be avoided, as it compromises safety, “particularly in congested or confined spaces”^x. Poor drainage around sanitation facilities increases risk of diarrhoeal diseases and poses a threat to public health. In North-East Nigeria today, at least 19 displacement sites are located in areas that face high risk of flooding, and of these, at least 13 also face high level of congestion^{xi}. According to a recent analysis of sites across the region, proper drainage is only observed in 8% of camps^{xii}.

The dry Harmattan season also poses risks. To mitigate against fire, the Sphere Handbook requires a minimum of 2 meters of distance between shelters, and use of fire resistant materials when possible. In North-East Nigeria, many rely on self-made shelters, often using straw and wood. During the rainy season, the thatched roofs are leaking and the ground becomes mud, easily spreading disease. During the Harmattan, a spark from a nearby cooking stove is all it takes to set a hut on fire. At the most congested sites, the risk of fire spreading is also severely high. Monguno is one of the areas that faces severely high congestion of people in several of its IDP settlements. Water buckets are placed at regular intervals throughout the camps, but are not necessarily functioning^{xiii}. In 2018, strong winds, rains or fires have destroyed at least 230 shelters within the various camps and camp-like settlements^{xiv}. Six fire outbreaks have been reported this year to date in Monguno alone, including one in the GSSSS camp where 97 shelters

were destroyed, one in Kuya where 94 shelters were destroyed, and another in Ngurno, where 7 shelters were destroyed. All the incidences occurred during the dry season. “We don’t know how or where to begin from again”, one man living in the GSSSS camp expressed in November after his family lost everything in a fire outbreak^{xv}. **The GSSSS camp is a school ground with space to accommodate 3,700 people. It now hosts more than 28,000.**

Preventing deadly disease: Water, sanitation and hygiene



The right to access clean water

Water is vital to “sustain life, health and dignity; and reduce the risk of water-, sanitation- and hygiene-related diseases”^{xvi}. Every person has a right to access at 15 litres of clean water every day to cover all needs. The absolute minimum is 7.5 litres, every day, and no one should be queuing for water for more than 30 minutes.

A women in one of Monguno’s spontaneous IDP settlements explains that her children fetch water, normally queuing for three hours daily^{xvii}. Her three cans can carry approximately 40-60 litres of water when filled, providing them 6 to 8.5 litres of water per person, but that is only best case scenario. They rarely manage to fill all the cans.

High concern over water was emphasised by several individuals in Monguno^{xviii}. One women reported having to queue for hours during the night. A wife and mother of six, explained that her family usually collects 40 litres of water daily, less than 6 litres per

person a day. Another mentioned that her hope now was to access water by begging for it from others in the queue. People that cannot access water, are desperate to earn money to buy it. Some sell their food distributions and Non-Food Items in order to buy water^{xix}. Others risk venturing into the bush outside, fetching firewood to sell for a scant income.

Sufficient hygiene facilities

The Sphere Handbook requires a maximum of 50 people to share one bathing facility, and no more than 20 individuals to share one toilet. Toilets should also be lit and provided with internal locks, and be separated for men and women. A recent assessment uncovers that 94% of toilets in camps across Borno state was reported as “not hygienic”^{xx}. Separate toilets were only available in 41% of camps, while more than 50% of toilets could not be locked from the inside. Open defecation was witnessed at 35% of the assessed sites. None of these assessments, however, pay particular attention to conditions in the most congested sites.

El Miskin camp, in Jere, is one of the highly congested sites. Regular flooding makes large areas unsuitable for the construction of latrines. In a small hut, a mother is living with her nine children explains: “My daughter and I came to the camp”, face in agony, “but she died from cholera”. That was in August 2018. After one of her neighbours got infected with the disease, it spread. Soon she had to watch life ebb out of her four-year-old child. A camp leader point to the fact that the site only has 16 blocks of functional latrines, or a total of 64 toilets, serving the whole population. “The latrines are filled up very quickly”, he explains. “We use them like that until NGOs come and help us dislodge them”.

The increasing level of congestion at some sites, due to lack of space, makes it difficult to construct adequate sanitation and hygiene facilities. **Lack of facilities, coupled with the proximity of living, has a detrimental effect on peoples’ ability to resist water-borne diseases such as cholera.** The insufficiency in infrastructure forces people to defecate in the open and exasperates an already vulnerable situation. By the onset of the rainy season, cases and casualties start raising. In 2018, registered cholera cases in North-East Nigeria tipped more than 10,000, due in

part by a critical lack of latrines. In Kagoni Sangaya displacement camp in Maiduguri, at the height of the cholera outbreak in September, eight latrines were shared by 500 peoples. That is three times as many as the minimum standard dictate.

Securing durable solutions: Food and livelihood opportunities

Every human being has a right to feed themselves in dignity, implying that sufficient food is available, that people have the means to access it, and that it adequately meets the individual's dietary needs. When food is secured, affected populations significantly reduce their dependence on harmful coping mechanisms such as “transactional or ‘survival’ sex, marrying daughters for bride price”^{xxi}, or child labour.

In Monguno, a mother of seven live in her small makeshift shelter made of straw and wood, enclosed by rows of similar homes in one of the town's more congested sites^{xxii}. They arrived two years ago, after fleeing violence in neighbouring Kukawa. She explains that it was the community leader who offered them shelter, while materials for construction was provided by their neighbours. She was not always alone with her kids, she says. “When will baba return home?” is the question she dreads hearing from her children. “My husband joined others to fetch firewood from the bush and has not returned” she says. That is more than a year ago. Residents in congested camps and host communities continue to look for ways of coping, and many risk their lives going beyond the cities' borders to farm or collect firewood, despite the dangers^{xxiii}.

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The Sphere Handbook's minimum standard of 45 square meters per person include sufficient garden area, as well as other basic amenities. For any one's house, an adjoining household yard should allow for essential household activities. It is crucial to ensure ability to farm and plant crops to supplement aid,

and to increase households' resilience and ability to cope, particularly with regards to market price volatility. Increasingly and over time, systems recovery and rehabilitation of skills and capacities is vital to help people recover from the relative vulnerability they face due to their displacement situation.

A recent analysis of IDP sites in the Northeast Nigeria found that access to land for farming or cultivation was only present in 54 per cent of sites, and there is reason to believe that land holding is much lower for people living in the most congested areas where access to land is considerably lower^{xxiv}.

There are cases where people have space to produce food within the community, but security restrictions prevent them from growing taller crops. As a result, limited access to land to conduct sustainable livelihoods such as backyard vegetable gardens, poultry or aquaculture contributes to or creates conditions where people perpetually depend on aid and handouts for survival.

Support to skills development and education is critical in this regard. However, again using Monguno as an example, **in the GSSSS camp, more than 16,000 children share only one school**^{xxv}. This reflects a recent analysis, identifying that in 20% of sites, less than a quarter of children are attending school^{xxvi}. It is worth noting, however, that analysis is made on camp sites overall, with no particular attention to conditions in the highly congested sites.

Identifying a way forward

The problem with congestion is due in part to land rights, land distribution and ownership. It is rarely the case that all accessible land within an area is full. Often land is available, but due to a number of factors it is not accessible for IDPs to settle. In some cases, private landowners may not allow it. This in turn means that sites that are accessible, often government controlled areas such as school grounds, become increasingly more congested.

In other cases, land is available but gets deserted due to lack physical safety, including safety from flooding during the rainy season, or from attack by armed groups.

The problem with congestion is not only a question of distribution of accessible land. With large areas of land remaining outside government control, this land is also out of reach to a growing population. The non-accessible areas are clearly demarcated, and separated from accessible land with a physical safety perimeter surrounding most or all government controlled towns in Borno State. Although established to increase security, they put an absolute limit on the amount of land available for a community to farm and rebuild their lives.

Despite these and other constraints, all contributing to the critical situation, solutions to decongest must be identified. In this work, the government, together with the humanitarian community and regional and local actors, must work together to identify needs and find solutions, on an area by area basis.

NRC calls on the Government of Nigeria:

- **To develop targeted and area specific decongestion plans, most especially for the 160,000 people living on less than 5 square meters per person.** If security does not permit further expansion of land, alternative solutions to decongest must be identified within security perimeters.

NRC calls on the UN and Humanitarian Agencies:

- **To conduct more targeted and systematic data collection on conditions in the highly congested sites,** to better inform the immediate humanitarian response. This cannot be a substitute for decongestion, but needs to be conducted in conjunction with solutions for decongestion being sought.

ⁱ [The Sphere Handbook \(2018\)](#)

ⁱⁱ The Sphere Handbook (2018): “Shelter and Settlement”

ⁱⁱⁱ Shelter & DMS/CCCM Nigeria (August 2018): “Land requirements for Camp decongestion and camp expansion”.

^{iv} “‘Bangladesh is not my country’. The plight of Rohingya Refugees from Myanmar”, Human Rights Watch (2018)

^v North-East Nigeria Humanitarian Situation Update, November 2018

^{vi} The Sphere Handbook (2018): “Shelter and Settlement”

^{vii} Interview with IDP, Ngurno Camp B, Monguno, 15.11.18

^{viii} IOM DTM Round 25 Report, October 2018 (p. 25)

^{ix} Ibid.

^x The Sphere Handbook (2018): “Shelter and Settlement”

^{xi} Shelter & DMS/CCCM: “Sector Decongestion Plan and Land Requirements per site_Borno” April 2018

^{xii} IOM DTM Round 25 Report, October 2018 (p. 18)

^{xiii} A random check of three buckets in Monguno in November, revealed that one was filled with water, one was empty, and one impossible to open, NRC, Monguno, 15.11.18

^{xiv} Interview with NRC Field officer, Monguno, November 2018

^{xv} Interview with IDP, GSSSS Camp, Monguno, 15.11.18

^{xvi} The Sphere Handbook (2018): “Water Supply, Sanitation and Hygiene Promotion”

^{xvii} Interview with IDP, Ngurno Camp B, Monguno, 15.11.18

^{xviii} Focus group discussion, Ngurno Camp, Monguno, 15.11.18;

Interview with SEMA representative, Monguno, 15.11.18;

Interview with IDP, Monguno, 15.11.18

^{xix} Interview with SEMA representative, Monguno, 15.11.18

^{xx} IOM DTM Round 25 Report, October 2018 (p. 17)

^{xxi} The Sphere Handbook (2018): “Food Security and Nutrition”

^{xxii} Interview with IDP, Monguno, 15.11.18

^{xxiii} [Pressreader](#) 27.11.18; [Vanguard](#) 20.10.18

^{xxiv} IOM DTM Round 25 Report, October 2018 (p. 24)

^{xxv} State Emergency Management Authority, Monguno, November 2018

^{xxvi} IOM DTM Round 25 Report, October 2018 (p. 21)

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