



Not Ready to Return: IDP Movement Intentions in North-Eastern Nigeria

BORNO STATE, NIGERIA

SUMMARY REPORT OF KEY FINDINGS

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About REACH

REACH is a joint initiative of two international non-governmental organizations - ACTED and IMPACT Initiatives - and the UN Operational Satellite Applications Programme (UNOSAT). REACH's mission is to strengthen evidence-based decision making by aid actors through efficient data collection, management and analysis before, during and after an emergency. By doing so, REACH contributes to ensuring that communities affected by emergencies receive the support they need. All REACH activities are conducted in support to and within the framework of inter-agency aid coordination mechanisms. For more information please visit our website: www.reach-initiative.org.

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SUMMARY

Conflict between the Nigerian government and armed opposition groups intensified in May 2013, when a state of emergency was declared across the states of Adamawa, Borno and Yobe in north-eastern Nigeria and armed groups took effective control of numerous local government areas (LGAs).¹ Since then, the region has seen increased levels of destruction of infrastructure, a dramatic erosion of livelihoods and the displacement of over 2 million people at the height of the conflict.² Most of the internally displaced persons in north-eastern Nigeria fled their homes in 2014 and 2015,³ following further escalation of the conflict in mid-2014. As of July 2017, some 1.4 million are displaced in Borno state.⁴

In a highly dynamic context characterised by severe restrictions on access, and amidst limited evidence available to humanitarian partners for aid planning and delivery in north-eastern Nigeria, there is a need to understand if and where IDPs intend to move, what factors may contribute to their decision, what information they have about their areas of return or potential relocation and how they obtain it, and what support they may need upon their return or relocation.

In order to better understand future displacement dynamics and to provide an evidence base to facilitate planning by humanitarian actors, REACH, in partnership with the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) and the Danish Refugee Council (DRC), as well as the Protection Sector, conducted an assessment of IDPs' intentions to return to their homes, relocate or integrate in their current place of displacement. The assessment covered 12 LGAs in Borno state hosting large numbers of IDPs and which had not been the subject of a large-scale intentions assessment before. NRC and DRC, as well as the Protection Sector, were closely consulted on the design of the assessment methodology and data collection tools. Primary data was collected through a total of 3,455 household surveys and 46 focus group discussions (FGDs) between 12 July and 9 September 2017.

Key findings

1. Displacement is likely to continue in the medium to long term

- **A significant proportion of IDP households can be expected to remain at their current locations in the near future**, as 23% of IDPs reported an intention to integrate in their current place of displacement and 63%, although intending to leave, did not have concrete plans nor a timeframe for their departure. Only 14% reported actively planning to leave.
- **IDPs perceived their current living conditions at IDP sites to be worse than prior to displacement.** This was largely due to the reportedly **worse conditions in the sectors IDPs conferred more importance to**, namely **access to shelter, land and cash and/or employment**. The prioritisation of these long-term needs reflects a displacement of protracted nature.

2. Response planning in support of IDPs needs to be adapted to the situation of protracted displacement

- **Protracted displacement has compounded vulnerabilities and increased dependence on aid from government and humanitarian actors to meet basic needs across most sectors.** IDPs themselves reported perceiving this aid dependency as a negative aspect of their displacement.
- Most of the IDP population was made up of **arable farmers and pastoralists**, with 59% reporting crop cultivation and 23% reporting livestock as main sources of livelihood. However, **43% reported lacking the means to ensure access to land**, which limits their livelihoods and **reinforces aid dependency in**

¹ UN Human Rights Council, *Report of the Special Rapporteur on the human rights of internally displaced persons on his mission to Nigeria*, 12 April 2017, A/HRC/35/27/Add.1, para. 9, available at <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/G1709125.pdf>.

² OCHA (2017). *About the crisis [in Nigeria]*, available at <http://www.unocha.org/nigeria/about-ocha-nigeria/about-crisis>.

³ OCHA (2016). *Humanitarian Needs Overview 2017 – Nigeria*, p. 10, available at https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/ocha_nga_2017_hno_13012017.pdf.

⁴ OCHA (2017). *Nigeria Northeast: Humanitarian Overview (September 2017)*, available at https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/12092017_northeast_nigeria_humanitarian_overview.pdf.

terms of access to food. In a context where access to land can be severely limited due to security conditions, interventions in the areas of shelter and livelihoods should be mindful of the limited land available for shelter construction and crop cultivation.

- Contrary to the overall high levels of aid dependency, the majority of IDPs (51%) reported resorting to their own coping mechanisms to ensure access to cash, mostly through trading. At the same time, **cash was an essential component of IDPs' own coping mechanisms across sectors**, as it was used to ensure access to food, water, health, education and shelter. However, **the reported lack of access to cash by some IDPs could be linked to limited possibilities of using cash** – for example, due to limited or no access to functioning markets.
- **Family separation, which affected 30% of all IDPs**, was also reported to have a negative impact on their livelihoods, as separated family members were also providers to the household before the crisis.
- Furthermore, **IDPs' dependency on armed actors to ensure their security could prompt further protection concerns**, such as attacks on IDP sites by armed groups. Furthermore, qualitative data indicates that at times armed actors could be directly linked to protection challenges, such as arrests, harassment and extortion.

3. The shift to longer-term solutions to support protracted displacement needs to be accompanied by response planning to prepare and accompany returns

- While **security was frequently reported as the main driver of displacement**, either as push or pull factors, a deeper analysis of displacement triggers revealed that shelter conditions and access to food also figure prominently in IDPs' decisions to move, and would be essential to ensuring sustainable, durable return or relocation. A closer consideration of the role of these factors in influencing *temporary returns* reinforces their complementary nature – for example, as improved security in certain areas alone would not suffice to ensure IDPs' return or relocation.
- Even though an overall 45% of IDP households believed they would be able to re-inhabit their homes at their villages of origin, only 27% reported that their previous homes were undamaged. This suggests that **appropriate shelter conditions upon return would require the reparation and reconstruction of homes**.
- IDPs also reported a **need for support to re-establish their livelihoods** upon return or relocation, including through **initial capital** to start businesses, **livestock** for pastoralists and **agricultural inputs and farming tools** for arable farmers.
- Overall, 48% of IDPs have not received information from their villages of origin since their departure, and 71% have not received news on their planned place of relocation, which suggests a **significant information gap, potentially with serious implications on movement intentions**. In addition, 18% of interviewed IDPs, although intending to leave, reported not knowing where to go, and 9% had no information on the physical state of their previous homes. IDPs' reportedly fair levels of trust in information coming from UN agencies and NGOs on their villages of origin and potential places of relocation suggests that the humanitarian sector could play a key role in filling information gaps.

Recommendations

The findings above provide some direction for future engagement by humanitarian actors seeking to respond to the needs and vulnerabilities of IDPs in Borno state:

- The significant caseload of IDPs remaining at current locations indicates a need for a **better understanding of and support to living conditions** at displacement sites, and planning for **local integration**, including through **long-term humanitarian support, especially in terms of shelter conditions and livelihoods**.
- High levels of aid dependency and overall underdeveloped coping mechanisms denote a need for **participation of different and multiple IDP communities at every stage of programming** to develop and implement **resilience-building activities**, based on the acknowledgment of communities' diversity and agency in addressing their own needs and vulnerabilities.
- The importance of cash in ensuring basic needs and access to services, along with a potential increased security in the coming year, points to an **opportunity for greater engagement in cash transfer programming across sectors, taking into consideration availability of services and goods**.
- Overall low levels of access to land, along with a high proportion of arable farmers and pastoralists, calls for a **deeper understanding of livelihood possibilities and tailored economic empowerment programmes, particularly for those intending to integrate in their current place of displacement**.
- Expected challenges upon return and relocation call for **comprehensive support to IDPs' return and relocation**, notably by assisting **reconstruction of homes** and **re-establishment of livelihood activities**.
- Overall lack of information and fairly high levels of trust in UN agencies and NGOs suggest that **the humanitarian sector can play a greater role in facilitating access to information on villages of origin and potential places of relocation**, notably through "go-and-see" visits, in which a group of representatives of IDP communities are taken to areas of origin and potential places of relocation, so that they can assess the situation themselves and relay the information back to their communities.