


Chapter 28

Conflict-Induced Displacement and Women's Political Representation in Benue State, Nigeria

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Abstract

From a gender and women's lens, this study examines the nexus between displacement and women's political representation in Benue State. The central argument of the chapter is that humanitarian emergencies contribute to weaken women's agency for political mobilisation and participation by creating conditions that socially decapitate women as a viable political agency. The study further investigates: (a) the relationship between internally displaced women and political representation; (b) how displacements and their associated vulnerabilities impinge on women's political mobilisation, (c) roles of the state and CSOs in advancing socio-economic justice for women in IDP camps and (d) feasible strategies for women's political empowerment in IDPs for sustainable democratic consolidation. Primary and secondary sources of data were both adopted. The purposive sampling method was employed to include displaced women in seven IDP camps across the three senatorial zones of Benue State. The Human Needs Theory was adopted to elucidate the unmet needs of women IDPs. Collected data was content and descriptively analysed. The findings reveal that the humanitarian crisis and its resultant sufferings have weakened and shifted the attention and focus of women in IDP camps from seeking political inclusion to struggling for survival. Also, the findings further disclosed that the displacement of women from different villages into several IDP camps constitute short- and long-term albatrosses to building sustainable women's political representation; thereby widening the gender gap in political representation. The study recommends that even in the midst of displacement and the need for IDPs to

return home or be resettled, a women's political empowerment programme should be encouraged.

Keywords: Conflict, Displacement, Governance, Representation, Women

Introduction

Human displacement generally is a growing global problem. The affected persons can be categorised in several ways. Those displaced across international borders are technically labelled as 'refugees' and those still circulating within their countries of origin are known as 'internally displaced persons' (IDPs). This study is about IDPs, and amongst the IDPs, the focus is further narrowed down to the women. Research has shown that in 2022, internal displacement reached an all-time high of nearly 60 million people world-wide, while it was about 59.1 million at the end of 2021. Of the figure for 2021, 53.2 million were as a result of conflict and violence, and 5.9 million were because of disasters (IDMC, 2022).

While the rate of displacement continues to rise at an exponential rate, discrimination on the basis of sex and inequality globally has become an issue of concern especially as the lack of women's political representatives continues to interfere with the enjoyment of rights and the full advancement of women and girls worldwide (UNDOC, 2006). Displacement arising from armed conflict, persecution and other forms of human rights violations can intensify this discrimination and inequality. Discrimination against women can be the cause - or a contributing cause - of displacement, and it can occur at all stages in the displacement cycle: during flight, settlement or return. Although all forcibly displaced persons face protection problems, "women and girls can be exposed to particular protection problems related to their gender, their cultural and socio-economic position, and their legal status" (Jeremy & Mooney, 2007).

In Nigeria, women have the legal and socio-political rights to be represented in all spheres of government in accordance with the affirmative action which reserves 35% of political elective positions, and political appointments for women, minorities and individuals with disabilities; this was meant to eliminate gender discrimination, ensure equality and human dignity to all, men and women (Ejekwonyilo, 2022). However, the escalating dimensions of displacement because of farmers-herders, communal and inter-intra ethnic conflicts have contributed in no small measure to demobilising and ostracising women as a viable political agency.

It is on record that since 2010 herders have resorted to the use of arms, and other resources that are best known to them to launch ferocious attacks on the people of Benue to gain access to grazing lands by force. Between 2010

and 2020 the group has rapaciously attacked, maimed, killed and displaced millions of people in Benue. The devastating nature of attacks seems to make Benue State the epicentre of the herder-farmer conflicts in Nigeria (Wegh, 2018). One of the most devastating effects of this war of attrition is that it has led to the loss of lives and properties. One of the sad incidences took place on 1 January 2018, when the herders, during a night raid, killed over 70 people in Guma Local Government Area in the State (Ukase & Jatto, 2020). These heinous acts have led to the rising profile of the herdsmen as one of the most dangerous and most dreaded terrorist groups globally (Iyang & Effiong, 2022). In addition to these attacks, communal and ethnic clashes continue to threaten peaceful co-existence (Ajiye, 2018; Bello & Olutola, 2016; Oravee, 2015).

These consistent and well-coordinated attacks by herdsmen, continual communal and inter-communal crises have led to displacement of villages across Benue State, the emergence of IDPs and the creation of official and unofficial IDP camps in selected locations in Benue State to cater for the IDPs. By April 2022, Benue had become a home to 27 IDP camps, comprising official camps created by the government, and unofficial camps created by the people affected to create shelter and security for themselves. A preliminary survey further revealed that the IDP crisis is under-reported, as there are at least fifty IDP camps across Benue.¹ In 2022, the Ortom-led government reported that the IDP camps in Benue have become shelter to over two million IDPs and the number of those coming into the camps has continued to increase exponentially (Vanguard 1 April, 2022).

Because of the complexity of the crisis, there has been a corresponding rise in the number of women IDPs in Benue State, thereby dislocating them from their social networks - family relationships, husbands, sons and others. While there has been difficulty in gathering data as to the exact number of displaced people, evidence from the field during this study reveals that of the over two million people displaced in Benue State, women and girls form at least 65%, while men and boys form the remaining 35%.² This disconnection contributes in no small way to weakening their economic livelihood and desire for political participation and representations. The central argument of the study is that humanitarian emergencies contribute to weaken women's agency for political mobilisation and participation by creating conditions that ostracise and socially decapitate them as a viable political agency.

1 Survey of IDPs camps, and personal communications with Moses Timothy 35, one of BSEMA IDP Camp Managers: 20 April 2023.

2 Interview and personal communications with David Azenda, 55+ Senior Special Assistance to the Governor of Benue State on Humanitarian Affairs, at BSEMA office, 21 April 2023.

Although a lot of empirical scholarly works have been carried out by reputable scholars across numerous disciplines on internally displaced persons, none, to the best knowledge of the researcher, has tackled the gap between conflict-induced displacements and the political representation of women. From a gender and women's lens, therefore, this study examines the nexus between conflict-induced displacement and women's political representation in Benue State, Nigeria. The specific objectives are: (a) to examine the causes of displacement; (b) to examine the relationship between internally displaced women and political representation; (c) to interrogate how displacements and their associated vulnerabilities impinge on women's political mobilisation; (d) to explore the roles of the state and CSOs in advancing socio-economic justice for women in IDP camps; and (e) to proffer feasible strategies for political empowerment of women IDPs.

Research methodology

Primary and secondary sources of data were both adopted for this study. Primary data include 40 oral KIIs with internally displaced women, 7 IDP camp managers, and 12 KIIs with six civil society organisations. Secondary sources like books, journal publications, newspapers and relevant Internet materials were employed. The purposive sampling method was employed to include displaced women in the IDP camps. Seven IDP camps were selected to include official and unofficial camps across the three senatorial zones of Benue State. They include a sample of three official camps: Abagena (Makurdi), Daudu Camp (Guma LGA) and Anyinn Camp (Logo) and three unofficial camps: Agatu LGA, Agagbe at Gwer-West LGA, and Ichwa (Makurdi). The justification for the selection of these zones is hinged on the fact that the areas give robust data regarding IDPs across Benue State.

Theoretical perspective

This section of the study will succinctly and briefly discuss the theoretical underpinnings of this study.

The Human Needs Theory (Coate & Rosati, 1988): The assumption of the theory is that human needs are a powerful source of explanation of human behaviour and social interactions. The theory in this study establishes the various needs of the internally displaced persons, which have distracted them from political participation. The unmet needs have led to the channelling of their energies to fighting for food, relief materials and other needs that guarantee survival. The relevance of the Human Needs Theory to this study is further corroborated by the fact that when the needs of the internally displaced persons are not met, it could lead to increasing the level

of insecurity in the region. A preliminary field survey reveals that some IDPs become involved in anti-social or deviant activities because of lack or inadequacy of basic needs in camps.³ All of these are distractions from relevant political engagements.

a. Causes of displacement

Benue is largely an agrarian society; meaning that they depend largely on agricultural produce for survival. However, consistent conflicts between the nomadic Fulani pastoralists, who need a large amount of land for their cattle grazing have fuelled an unending crisis between them and the farmers, which has contributed largely to the decimation of several villages and towns across Benue State. Although, hitherto, the nomadic Fulani herdsmen have maintained a relationship of conviviality from the precolonial era, sadly, that is not the story anymore, as the Benue inhabitants are dissatisfied with the habitual nature of the Fulani herdsmen, who constantly encroach into their farms and destroy crops and farmlands. These crises have led to a series of attacks, leading to thousands of deaths and displacement. The following is a summation of the factors causing displacement in Benue State, Nigeria.

1. Recurrent Challenges of Itinerant Grazing: Intergroup relations between farmers and pastoralists have become strained, because of the destruction of crops in recent times and the conflict has been greeted with more conflict and intermittent attacks than dialogue. Encroachments into farmlands and destruction of crops either deliberately or accidentally has been one of the major challenges of the skirmishes between the farmers and the herders, escalating to armed confrontation, leading to massive displacement (FJDP & CPDS, 2020).
2. Acquisition of Grazing Space: Oral interviews have revealed that the improper acquisition of grazing space is one of the most prominent causes of conflict between farmers and pastoralists in Nigeria. Some traditional rulers and other highly placed persons in the state have struck secret deals with pastoralists through their representatives or leaders - a 'deal' which grants pastoralists the right to graze in such communities.
3. Criminality and Desperation: Because of desperation, farmers and pastoralists have engaged themselves in various forms of criminality to the detriment of each other, which includes cattle rustling, over-charging for destroyed crops, and indiscriminate killing of cattle for sale and consumption, intimidation and advance fee fraud. Conversely, a network of cattle rustlers believed to be sponsored in Nigeria by abattoir owners has been using people, especially the youths, to operate it. It has been

3 Oral Interviews with an IDP Camp Manger Mr Chia. S. (S.A on IDPs) on 19 April 2023 at BSEMA Office, Benue State.

estimated that Fulani pastoralists have been losing at least eighty cows annually to cattle rustlers in the state. Meanwhile, even though the Fulani pastoralists state that their relatives have spearheaded this criminality, they do not deny the fact that they do it in connivance with the youths of their host communities. This alone has been generating tensions and the urge for revenge on the parts of the herdsmen (Iorwuese, 2013; FJDP & CPDS, 2020).

4. **Climate Change:** This has been causing the aridisation of the far north, thereby forcing southward migration of herdsmen. It was revealed that the states of Katsina, Zamfara, Sokoto, Kebbi, Kano, Jigawa, Yobe, Adamawa and Borno are regarded as the frontier states and majorly impacted by the desert-like conditions, affecting an area of about 580,841 km² or 63.8% of Nigeria's landmass, thereby forcing southward migration of pastoralists and their cattle (Falaki et al., 2020). Because of the growing population, there has been an attendant shortage of arable land for farming activities. Even the existing portions have become infertile because of continuous usage (FJDP & CPDS, 2020).
5. **Activities of Criminal Groups:** Pastoralists have been using youths in their host communities as spies for financial and other benefits. This has contributed in no small measure to heightening tensions between the two groups because such spies leak damaging pieces of information to pastoralists such as: the level of preparedness of their communities for defence or attack; names of strong opinion leaders or warriors who pastoralists should bribe for support or kill to achieve their aims; the kinds of charms they possess; time and place of attacks or reprisal attacks, and so on (FJDP & CPDS, 2020).
6. **Communal and Ethnic Clashes:** Another worrisome cause of displacement in Benue is the nature of inter- and intra-communal clashes (Gabtse, 2022). These crises and their manifestations have contributed in no small measure to the increasing displacement and its harmful outcomes on women.

b. The nexus between internally displaced women and political representation

Firstly, female IDPs have the right to political participation, including the right to vote and be elected as well as to participate on governmental and public affairs. This right is expressly affirmed in the Guiding Principles of Internal Displacement (UNDOC, 1998). This is the internationally recognised framework setting forth the rights and guarantees of IDPs, and it is rooted in well-established standards of international human rights law (Grace & Mooney, 2007).

Guiding Principle 22(1) (d) expressly affirms that these tenets apply to the right to political participation. It specifies:

Internally displaced persons, whether or not they are living in camps, shall not be discriminated against as a result of their displacement in the enjoyment of ... (1) the right to vote and participate in government and public affairs, including the right to have access to the means necessary to exercise this right. (Emphasis added).

To give effect to this right, Guiding Principle 22(1) (a) affirms for IDPs “the rights to freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief, opinion and expression” and Principle 22(1) (c) providing the “right to associate freely and participate equally in community affairs”.

The Convention on the Political Rights affirms that women shall be entitled to vote in all elections and shall be eligible for elections to all publicly elected bodies on equal terms with men, without any discrimination (UN, 1954). The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) (UN, 1979) requires state parties to:

Take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the political and public life of the country and, in particular, shall ensure to women, on equal terms with men, the right... to vote in all elections and public referenda and to be eligible for election to all publicly elected bodies (UN, 1979).

Amongst regional instruments affirming this right is the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People’s Rights of Women in Africa (AU, 2003). Article 9, titled the Right to Participation in the Political and Decision-Making Process, requires state parties to:

Take specific positive action to promote participative governance and the equal participation of women in the political life of their countries through affirmative action, enabling national legislation and other measures to ensure that: a) women participate without any discrimination in all elections; b) women are represented equally at all levels with men in electoral processes; c) women are equal partners with men at all levels of development and implementation of state policies and development programmes.

Electoral participation by women IDPs promotes engagement, reintegration, reconciliation in divided societies, and prevents marginalisation. The political voice of IDPs is needed for dialogue and for making governments more

accountable, which can be particularly important for IDPs' services and provisions. Securing electoral rights in their area of origin, current location or future settlement site is a key component of a durable solution for IDPs themselves and often the crisis that created the displacement. In cases of protracted displacement, as it is with the context of this study, it can be argued that fully meaningful enfranchisement requires that IDPs have a choice over where to vote and where to stand as a candidate. This choice may be seen as fostering IDPs' political engagement and increasing the possibility of durable solutions. When women IDPs obtain the security to be able to fight for the political opportunity they deserve, it goes a long way to securing all-inclusive help for all IDPs. It is a good practice in the development of policies as well as the implementation of the affirmative action, and laws related to vulnerable groups' electoral participation; to consult with broadly representative groups, regarding the case of IDPs to explore possible solutions (IFES, 2013).

In a nutshell, the principle of universal and equal suffrage, by definition, encompasses IDPs, extending to all internally displaced citizens who are eligible to vote and to stand for election. In other words, for individuals meeting the eligibility requirements specified in national electoral legislation (for instance, having attained the age of majority), the right to vote and the right to be elected remain untrammelled by displacement. These rights extend to all citizens, without distinction of any kind, including on the grounds of being displaced. Whereas residency requirements often apply, it is well established that these cannot exclude the internally displaced from being able to exercise their rights to political participation and representation. A number of normative statements expressly affirm that the right to political participation continues to apply in situations of internal displacement (Jeremy & Mooney, 2007).

The above argument puts an end to the question of the nexus between women IDPs and political representation, being first of all humans, they have equal political rights with every other human legally recognised in any and every political sphere. This therefore bestows responsibility on government to ensure that women are provided with all they need to be part of all electoral processes as stipulated by law.

c. How displacements and their associated vulnerabilities impinge on women's political mobilisation

The framing of displacement within a crisis framework draws attention to immediate survival, relief and protection at the expense of the very socio-political effects of displacement and how these effects change over time. Internal displacement is approached primarily as a geographical

displacement and the material effects of that. Evidence gathered in this research indicates that displacement needs to be understood as a socio-political displacement, such that dislocates women from representation in the governance of their constituencies. The process of displacement involves disruption, and often severance of important social bonds, networks and relationships, with profound effects. A geographical focus on displacement encourages a focus on how many people have been forced out of place. A socio-political lens enables a clearer view of the effects of displacement on social relations and structures, thereby drawing greater attention to the impacts on gender roles and relations. The dislocation of women from social relations and structures makes them irrelevant in political mobilisation and participation.

Shackel and Fiske (2016) argue that these socio-political effects are especially important to consider in societies with relatively weak formal citizenship, and amongst populations within societies that have normatively weak citizenship (women, ethnic minorities, children) who, despite formally holding full citizenship, realise their 'rights' through social relationships (Shackel & Fiske, 2016). In many highly patriarchal societies, including the current focus of this study, regardless of the legal citizenship status, women realise their rights through social relationships, primarily male relationships (fathers, husbands, and sons). This scenario too has been captured by Fiske and Shackel in their research in the DRC, Kenya and Uganda (Fiske & Shackel, 2016; Yuval-Davis, 1993). The evidence from Fiske and Shackel's research is further proof that across Africa, women go through very horrible conditions during humanitarian emergencies.

Fiske and Shackel further argue in their studies that while fracturing of formal citizenship rights entailed in internal displacement affects men, women and children, women's access to rights is doubly impaired; not only are any formal rights previously held effectively suspended by a neglectful or persecutory state, the relationship through which they accessed these rights may be additionally ruptured or distorted. This has multiple flow-on effects on gender relations amongst internally displaced populations including causing greater imbalance in power relations between men and women within many groups, forcing women into exploitative and/or abusive relationships, and leaving women with little or no social support network and at greater risk of the harms associated with internal displacement. These relational effects of displacement extend to intergenerational effects with both immediate and lasting impacts on displaced children. Needless to say, these dislocations place women in a state of trauma, hunger, illnesses, such that instead of serving as a viable political agency; they are out, struggling to receive relief materials in order to take care of themselves (Fiske & Shackel, 2016).

Dynamics of gender roles in displacement

Research demonstrates that gender relations or roles are often impacted and may be reconfigured by displacement, injury, incapacitation, or death of young men and husbands in conflicts and will shift the burden of providing for the entire households, in terms of food, care of children and their education, to a much greater extent, and sometimes exclusively, unto women (Lwambo, 2013; Kesmaecker-Wissing & Pagot, 2015; Shackel & Fiske, 2016; El-Bushra, 2003). Women who have lost their husbands to conflict face additional challenges and responsibilities as heads of households, and have to rely on basic survival skills (Ferris, 2014).

Many of the women in the IDP camps recounted how their lives and roles have changed completely as they had to cater for their children and their entire household; in some cases, while they cannot give accounts of where their husbands are, some mentioned that their husbands were killed by the Fulani herdsmen, or that during the attacks, their husbands and children took to different routes; they do not know if their husband is still alive or dead. A 45-year old respondent at one of the IDP camps explains her concerns:

... Before the attack that night, I was into petty trading and my husband was a farmer, we had five children, suddenly at night, we heard the sound of very many people, speaking strange languages, somehow, we observed it was the herdsmen, I and my five children managed to escaped narrowly, my husband left us and said he will join us at the IDPs camp, we never saw him again, we do not know if he is alive or dead; the children have now become my total responsibility, no home, nowhere to go.

Another respondent, Mary, 37 years old recounts her ordeal:

... I travelled to see my parents with my two children, upon my return, our house has been burnt down, with my husband and two children killed, I and my children had nothing left except the clothes on our body, dealing with the grief is the most traumatic experience of my life; now, life has been unbearable here with I and my children after my husband and other children were brutally killed that day, I am now their father and at same time mother (paraphrased).

In another sad story, a 27-year-old woman lost her husband to the Fulani herdsmen attack at Logo LGA, where 70 people alongside her husband were killed, leaving behind two children; because of the suffering, she and her children moved into the IDP camp in Makurdi. In a similar attack, Mrs Anyamve narrated how the herdsmen killed her husband and 17 others in

Chembe in 2015. She said she is now left with seven children to care for alone (Adams, 2020).

The above assertions were captured from many other similar responses; it was clear that the change of gender roles and the burden it brings, as well as coping with the sufferings in the IDPs camps are enough distraction to deter the women from political participation or representation. Conflict-induced displacement therefore places more burden and responsibilities on women.

Sexual and gender-based violence: Stigmatisation, rejections, shame and guilt

Internally displaced women face a range of protection issues on a daily basis. Most notably, sexual and gender-based violence is an unfortunate reality for many. Often without the protection of family and communities that they had before displacement, internally displaced women can be vulnerable to rape, domestic violence, forced prostitution, trafficking and any number of other violent situations (Ferris, 2014). It has been discovered that in a classical patriarchy, women's social status and value are derived primarily from their roles as daughters, wives and mothers, roles that fundamentally rest on chastity, fidelity and honour (Brownmiller, 1993). Sexual violence is not only an assault and offence against a woman's physical and psychological well-being, but it often precipitates a catastrophic loss of social status and expulsion from social networks (Shackel & Fiske, 2016).

In Benue state IDP camps, a number of women who have been victims of rape and all forms of sexual assaults are afraid of speaking out for fear of rejection by their social networks - husbands, communities, churches and even mosques. These attacks on women continually keep them in different kind of cages. After a lot of persuasions, a few of the female IDPs opened up on being rape victims even before they arrived at the IDP camps. They noted that the painful incidence led to the breakdown of family and societal love towards them:

According to one of the women at Naka IDP camp on 28 April, 2023 (name hidden)

... I was gang raped in the presence of my husband, by some men I suspected to be Fulani herdsmen; since then, my husband never looked at me anymore, nor spoke to me, I felt horrible, eventually when he mustered courage to speak, he said he can no longer continue in the marriage, because he has lost his affection for me.

In another interview, my respondent at *Ichwa* IDP camp, 29 April 2023, narrated her ordeal in the Nigerian *pidgin* English (name hidden):

... one night, whether na Fulani oo, I no know, them enter our house, them say them wan sleep (sex) with me, say if me and my husband no gree, them go kill two of us, after we drag, drag, sake of say make them no touch my husband, na so I come gree, since that time, na wahala every day, sotey, him come say him no fit marry me again, na so the marriage end ooo.

Translation:

...One night, we were invaded by strange men, whether Fulani, I do not know, they insisted they must have carnal knowledge of me, and if I resist, my husband will be killed, after a lot of struggle, I let them have their way to save my husband, ever since that incident, I and my husband have lost peace in our marriage, until he told me that the marriage was over.

Earlier in this study, the author had corroborated the view of Brownmiller (1993), that in classical patriarchal societies, women's social status and value are derived primarily through their roles as daughters, wives and mothers; roles that fundamentally rest on chastity, fidelity and honour. If a woman is termed as a victim of rape or sexual violence, there will be automatic loss of her social networks - husband, fiancé, brothers, and other family relatives because of stigmatisation, which further reduces the value that society places on her and further de-markets her in political spheres. In addition, women who are active in politics face stigmatisation; in other times they may be regarded as prostitutes (Ogunyemi, 2019). In the 2023 polls in Nigeria, it was further observed that the travails of women seeking elective positions had worsened because of discrimination (Anthony, 2023).

All of these variables contribute disadvantageously to the loss of a woman's self-confidence, worth, value and the continual feelings of guilt and shame that society continues to place on her. With the way the woman battles for relevance, it therefore becomes difficult for those around her to market her for a political office or see her worthy to represent them in a political office or for her to even market herself. Despite the affirmative action of Nigeria, this issue continues to threaten women's representation in governance.

Disconnections from family and means of livelihood

Despite the fact that the affirmative action clause makes provision for women to pick up forms for elective positions at a lower cost, it is important

to note that politics, especially the mobilisation of electorates to vote for their preferred candidates require money. This is because anyone vying for any political position will need to travel to meet electorates, such as youths, women, elders and community leaders from various communities and constituencies to make known their manifestoes and intentions, as well as make consultations with other relevant stakeholders. Displacement disconnects women from managing their businesses, farming investments, jobs, and so on, which makes it almost impossible for them to make the money required to provide logistics to be able to contest for elective positions.

According to one of the respondents at Abegeni camp, 30 April 2023:

I have political intentions, but where is the money, I am inspired by the sufferings in the IDPs camps, I am also an IDP, regrettably. If I am able to get a political office, I will be able to press on to pass policies that will favour and resettle the IDPs.

In another vein, a respondent at Agatu camp, 16 April 2023 noted that:

I will love to represent women in governance, but I have lost everything, my husband, my three children, here, we are victims of hunger, illness, mal-nourishment; mentally too, a lot of us are ill, whether we will ever heal, we do not know. Our focus now is not politics, but survival, you must be well to be able to help others.

Many other respondents mentioned that poverty, hunger, illness, malnourishment and general lack are major obstacles to representation in governance. This is because of the loss of all means of livelihood, business and social networks as a result of displacement.

Illiteracy and poor political education

One of the fundamental problems encountered in the course of this study was that most of the female IDPs could not speak English; however, I had carried with me a member of staff of the Benue State Emergency Management Agency (BSEMA), as well as the resident camp managers of the various camps that we visited for field work. Illiteracy and poor political education are a major plague that women's organisations and CSOs must deal with in order to achieve the affirmative action goal.

While internal displacements affect the quality, cost and access to educational opportunities, the vital role of education as a response to emergencies has been recognised by the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) – a global network of around 1,400 individual and

organisational members who work together within a humanitarian network and develop a minimum standards framework to ensure the right to education in emergencies and post-crisis reconstruction:

Education is not only a right, but in the situation of emergencies, chronic crisis and early reconstruction, it provides physical, psychological and cognitive protection, which can be both life-saving and life-sustaining. Education sustains life by offering safe places for learning, as well as the ability to identify and provide support for affected individuals, particularly children and adolescents. Education mitigates the psychosocial impact of conflict and disasters by giving a sense of normalcy, stability, structure and hope for the future during a time of crisis, and provides essential building blocks for economic stability... it can also save lives by protecting against exploitation and harm, including abduction, recruitment of children into armed groups and sexual and gender-based violence. Lastly, education provides the knowledge and skills to survive in a crisis through the dissemination of life-saving information and landmine safety, HIV/AIDS prevention, conflict resolution and peace-building (INEE, 2004).

The above revelation by INEE (2004) explicitly captures the indispensable relevance of adult education for women in IDP camps, who must make their voices heard through political inclusion and representation. Despite the relevance of education for IDPs, no serious NGOs, or CSOs have been involved in providing adult or even children's education in the IDP camps visited.

According to a respondent at Daudu camp, 15 April 2023:

We have been here for 7 years now, our children are out of school, is it adult or girl education you are talking about when even our children are out of school? Many of the women have not been to school and that contributes to hampering our capacity for political activities.

A woman corroborated the view of the above person at Naka camp, 20 April 2023, although seems educated from her use of English, she noted that:

Politics in Africa is for the strong, educated and powerful, besides, we are only allowed to vote here, we cannot contest for certain political offices as this community is only hosting us, we are not from here.

From the above, we can deduce that poverty, homelessness, illiteracy and poor political education are very strong indices that disenfranchise female IDPs from political representation. The lack of or inadequate prerequisite knowledge needed to consult with relevant bodies, mobilise voters, seek for

votes, present manifestoes; are some of the issues discovered to be plaguing the achievement of affirmative action. These are in addition to the fact that most of the women interviewed knew nothing about the affirmative action, nor the requirements to contest in any type of election in the state. Worse still, many of the women are not card-carrying members of any political party, except that a good number of them have voters' cards.

Roles of the state and CSOs in advancing socio-economic justice for women in IDP camps.

The inclusion of women in political leadership is not only a prerequisite for a functional democracy, but also a matter of efficiency in governance. From different parts of the world, women bring into their leadership unique perspectives, networks, skills and abilities (Kark, 2004). This access to women broadens policy agendas relevant for national transformation and sustainable development. The state and the CSOs are expected to play the roles of complementarity to bring women out of their shells, and ensure that their voices are heard; how well the state and civil society have performed in performing this all-important role is what this section of the study is committed to investigating. While some of the roles towards women IDPs remain the exclusive reserve of the government, others can be acted upon through the collaborative efforts of the government and the CSOs.

In the 2023 polls, Governor Samuel Ortom made it a point of duty, ensuring that across the IDP camps in the state, IDPs voted (Punch, 2022). It was reported that INEC not only ensured that IDPs voted in the last elections, but that two IDPs were recruited as ad-hoc staff for the 2023 general elections; in addition, 60 voting centres were created for the IDPs; 56 in host communities and four in IDP camps across the six Local Government Areas of Benue State. This effort was commended by Community Links and Human Empowerment Initiative, (CHLEI), a non-governmental organisation (Onyeka, 2023).

In another dimension, the state, at all levels, owes the women IDPs security, to ensure that they are protected from rape and all kinds of gender-based violence, that steals their confidence, worth and self-esteem away; ensuring that culprits are adequately prosecuted in the courts of law. However, the disposition of the state towards implementing such laws that will deal with GBV generally has not been very commendable. The Coalition of CSOs-Benue has continued to lament this condition.

For example, on 8 March 2022, civil society organisations, Benue State, in conjunction with the State Ministry of Women Affairs shared how they commemorated world International Women's Day by taking a walk

from Savanna roundabout through Woodland Park to Benue State House of Assembly. With one voice, the women registered their dismay with the rejection of the Bill for inclusive governance by the National Assembly. The Benue State women strongly condemn the discriminative, inequality and inhumane acts carried out by the assembly. The Bill for gender equality was thrown out in 2015, 2019 and 2022. The women further demanded 35% in party leadership and 111 seats for women (Benue State President, CSO-B, 2022; Olafusi 2022). A court sitting in Abuja mandated the government to heed to the National Gender Policy of 35% of public offices for women (Ejekwonyilo, 2022). It is not enough for laws to be passed; all stakeholders must press for the executive arm of government to implement them.

The above experiences and much more from the field, exposes the Nigerian State and the Benue State Government for the poor attention given to the inclusion of women in governance, poor steps towards poverty eradication and women's empowerment as well as the implementation of the GBV laws in the state. Although a cross-section of NGOs and CSOs have continued to raise attention through activism and public lectures concerning these needs for women generally, the condition only continues to worsen; no female IDP contested any elective position in Benue state in the 2023 general elections. While these conditions continue to militate against women generally, internally displaced women are even more vulnerable, as none of them from interviews was interested in political inclusion, but rather, survival.

Feasible strategies for political empowerment of female IDPs for sustainable democratic consolidation.

In this section of the study, a few recommendations will be made to see how the political representation of female IDPs in governance can be enhanced. The points raised here include; strong legal and governance structures, strong socio-economic justice structure, security structure; and electoral and political participation regulations. A detailed explanation of the points above are given below:

Legal and Governance Structure: Women's political representation is a functional aspect of a strong legal system and an efficient democracy. The State at all levels must recognise that the inconsistent disposition of government towards women's political inclusion is a gender-based violence against women, hence the first recommendation here will be that women should be seen as humans, protected by all known international laws and should not be disenfranchised because of their gender. It is therefore left for government to demonstrate legal and good governance commitment to the

IDPs, as well as full implementation of the affirmative action; ensuring that even women from IDP camps are prioritised because of their circumstances.

Many women are afraid of speaking out when they face rape, and other forms of gender-based violence. Local, state and federal government should strengthen the laws against GBV, ensuring that all culprits are brought to book, and are administered the right punitive measures. All of these will not be possible until there are strong institutions to help achieve justice.

In addition, there should be a review of the impact of national electoral legislation and procedures on the political participation of female IDPs and introduce legislative and procedural reform as required to ensure IDPs' ability to exercise their rights to political participation. Special attention should be paid to residency and documentation requirements and their potential consequences or repercussions for internally displaced electors. INEC, government and relevant stakeholders should prepare for the possibility of displacement, ensuring that electoral residency requirements have built-in safeguards against the disenfranchisement of electorates in the event of displacement and issues such as temporary loss of residence and loss of documentation. Although INEC registers new voters, and do a change of polling units for electorates before every election, new mechanisms should be included to make it better.

Socio-Economic Justice Structure: In addition, it was realised that while it seems like affirmative action is not given the respect it deserves, a cross-section of men from civil society interviewed in this study had mentioned that government tends to forget to implement affirmative action because not many women are interested in politics. While some of them likened this to cultural and religious bias, which is usually found in patriarchal societies, others likened it to political apathy because of trauma, poverty and poor education. Government at all levels and CSOs are hereby encouraged to be part of the transformative process.

While the government should be pressured by the CSOs to draft policies and inaugurate actionable plans towards economic, and socio-political justice and recovery for IDPs women, CSOs should do all they can to complement government in providing political education and other genres of empowerment for women IDPs. There should be mediums to deal with cultural bias through orientation and effective education.

Economic Empowerment: women IDPs with viable business plans should be given small business loans by government or CSOs to be able to kick-start their lives again. This will strengthen them to deal with the trauma and distractions that displacement brings; in addition, there should be financial capacity training to enhance the livelihood for women IDPs. In a nutshell, in

the midst of displacement and the need for IDPs to return home or resettled, women's economic empowerment programmes should be encouraged.

Viable Security Structure: Socially, a woman's social capital and network is usually depleted during displacement. This incidence contributes majorly to diminishing her political relevance across communities and villages. Government is hereby encouraged to further strengthen security across soft spots to negate the well-coordinated and consistent violent attacks meted out to communities. This will in a great way deal with the rising scourge of attacks and its attendant consequences. Consultations should be made with IDPs and grassroots stakeholders in the decision-making process in order to effectively galvanise the right mediums to securing the villages that have been left desolate by the various attacks. Even if the contestant is a woman, and not an IDP, those who are supposed to vote for her have been driven away or displaced by insecurity.

Electoral and Political Participation Regulations: consultations should be held with IDPs, including women, in the formulation, monitoring, review and appraisal of national and local electoral legislation and procedures, so as to ensure that the particular obstacles that women may face in political mobilisation and participation are understood, taken into account and effectively addressed. Electoral officers should be adequately enlightened and trained on the rights of internally displaced women to political participation, the particular types of obstacles that IDPs face in exercising their rights and the national legislative and procedural provisions in place to enable IDPs to exercise their rights.

Enable IDPs to have their electoral districts, with women being prioritised, as either their place of origin or to re-register in another part of the country where they were residing before being displaced, without repercussion, such as loss of assistance or other benefits. Safe access and free logistics and transportation for IDPs to their electoral units should also be provided.

Illiteracy has eaten deep into the lives and fabrics of many of the IDPs. The importance of educating voters on their rights, especially women, can never be overemphasised; INEC and relevant stakeholders must ensure that voters' education campaigns reach IDP communities and provide clear and timely information in a language that they understand, including on the electoral procedures in place to enable IDPs to exercise their rights to political participation.

In conclusion: conflict-induced displacement, and its resultant sufferings have weakened and shifted the attention and focus of women in Benue IDP camps from seeking political inclusion to struggling for survival.

Also, the study's findings further disclosed that the displacement of women from different villages into several IDP camps constitutes short- and long-term albatrosses to building sustainable women's political representation; thereby widening the gender gap in political representation. These inadequacies require multifaceted layers of actions between government at local, state and federal level, as well as civil society organisations; partnering to ensure strong legal institutions, socio-economic justice, recovery pathways, and viable security structures to ameliorate the gaps, as well as deal with the immediate and remote causes of the displacement.

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Women Representation in Governance in Nigeria

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