

HISTORICIZING INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT IN NIGERIA: STATE RESPONSE AND THE KAMPALA CONVENTION, 1967 – 2020.

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Abstract

Internal displacement in Nigeria can be traced back to the post-independence period. The current phase of displacement began on a large scale in the North East geo-political zone in 2009. To date, it remains one of the most persistent governance and humanitarian challenges confronting Nigeria. This study historicizes internal displacement in Nigeria by examining its patterns, causes, effects, and government efforts. This is done against the backdrop of the African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons (the Kampala Convention), which was recently domesticated in Nigeria. It traces the progression of displacement from post-independence crises to the current situation, which is predominantly driven by security and environmental factors. The paper adopts a qualitative research design within the framework of historical-institutionalism theory. The study relies primarily on documentary sources, including policy documents such as the Kampala Convention, the Nigeria Kampala Domestication Act 2026, and the National IDP Policy; documents from government agencies and humanitarian organizations involved in the management of internal displacement; and peer-reviewed scholarly papers. The Boko Haram insurgency, banditry, herdsman-farmers crisis, and environmental issues are identified as the major drivers of displacement in Nigeria, influenced by governance deficits, implementation gaps, and institutional fragmentation. The study concludes that internal displacement is not just a humanitarian concern but largely a governance issue. The following recommendations were made: For the strengthening of inter-agency coordination, the government should ensure the quick implementation of the Kampala Convention Act 2026; funding should be prioritised by the government, priority should also be given to enforcing early warning mechanisms, and institutional capacity-building should be carried out by all actors, both governmental and non-governmental.

Key Words: Armed Conflict, Communal Conflicts, Displacement, Humanitarian Assistance.

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Introduction

Internal displacement has become one of Nigeria's defining features, especially in terms of security and humanitarian actions. Nigeria currently hosts about 3.5 million displaced persons (IDMC, 2025), making it one of the largest in Africa and globally. While many are quick to associate internal displacement with the Boko Haram insurgency, the fact remains that internal displacement in Nigeria did not start from the time of the displacement caused by the Boko Haram insurgency. Rather, internal displacement in Nigeria can be traced as far back as the Nigerian Civil War (James, 2021)

Despite the growing attention given to this area by scholars and policy makers, most of the literature treats internal displacement as a new phenomenon that started with the Boko haram insurgency in the north-eastern region of Nigeria. This study seeks to provide a deeper historical understanding of how contemporary patterns of displacement have evolved and why the government's responses remain inadequate. The paper seeks to critically examine displacement in Nigeria across historical timelines, focusing on patterns, causes, effects, and the government's response, against the framework of the African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa, (otherwise known as the Kampala Convention). By adopting the historical institutionalism theory, the study contributes to understanding displacement as a governance issue rather than solely a humanitarian one.

The study addresses three research questions: What historical factors contributed to internal displacement in Nigeria? How have patterns of displacement evolved across different historical periods? How effective has the Nigerian government been in responding to the internal displacement crisis within the Kampala Convention framework?

Conceptual Clarifications

Internally Displaced Persons / Internal Displacement Management

Internal displacement is as old as human conflict can be traced. By the 1990s, the issue was recognized as a global concern; at this point, internal displacement lacked clear definitions and a normative framework to guide states and international humanitarian actors (IDMC, 2013). Technically, what distinguishes an Internally Displaced Person from a refugee is that he has not crossed a recognized State border. In other words, they are simply "refugees" within their own state. According to the UNHCR (2021), "IDPs stay within their country and remain under the protection of its government, even if that government is the reason for their displacement. They often move to areas where it is difficult for us to deliver humanitarian assistance, and as a result, these people are among the most vulnerable in the world".

Some arguments led to the encompassing definition as stipulated in the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement. According to the Principles, an Internally Displaced Person is:

Persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized State border.

(Guiding Principles of Internal Displacement, 1999)

Mooney (2005) postulates that, despite the various arguments over the definition of internally displaced persons, there remain two distinct features: involuntary movement and being within one's own state borders. According to him, to qualify as an IDP, one needs to have experienced reactive involuntary migration.

Historicization

Historicization refers to the systemic analysis of events, processes, and institutions within their historical context. In displacement studies, historicization enables scholars to examine how past political and institutional developments shape contemporary displacement patterns.

Applying historicization to internal displacement allows this study to trace displacement trends in Nigeria across the post-independence and contemporary periods. This approach reveals structural continuities rather than isolated crises.

Theoretical Framework.

The theory adopted for this study is historical institutionalism, which serves as the framework for explaining the persistence of internal displacement in Nigeria and the inadequacy of government responses over time. Historical institutionalism provides a lens for understanding how institutional structures evolve, how policies are shaped by past decisions, and how governance failures become embedded within political systems. The framework is highly relevant to this study, as it accounts for patterns of displacement over time and ingrained institutional weaknesses in the long term, rather than treating it as an isolated case of governance failure.

There are many proponents of historical institutionalism. The theory emerged from the broader institutional governance theory, which emphasizes the role of institutions in shaping political and socio-economic outcomes. According to North (1990), institutions shape interactions among individuals and organizations. He argues that economic and political outcomes are influenced by arrangements within and by institutions through the "path -dependent" processes. Invariably, decisions made by institutions at the early stages determine and constrain future choices. In Nigeria, for instance, decisions taken by the British regime still determine the outcomes of governance to date.

One of the proponents of the theory, Paul Pierson (2004), opined that most policy decisions made at critical historical junctures create long-term institutional consequences that are difficult to reverse. He argued that early institutional choices generate self-reinforcing mechanisms, including bureaucratic routines and political interests that sustain existing governance patterns.

According to Collier and Collier (1991), critical junctures occur when political actors make decisions that fundamentally alter institutional arrangements. In Nigeria, critical junctures such as the Nigerian Civil War, military rule, and the return to democracy have affected the government's management of displacement.

Applying this theory to the study enables it to examine displacement as a governance outcome rather than merely a humanitarian occurrence. It places displacement within a broader governance

framework characterized by institutional fragmentation, policy incoherence, and implementation gaps. It also provides analytical tools to examine the relationship between governance deficits and displacement patterns. Institutional fragmentation, weak accountability structures, and limited inter-agency coordination have contributed to ineffective displacement governance in Nigeria. Most importantly, this theoretical framework enabled the study to establish a direct link between historical governance processes and present-day displacement challenges.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design using a historical – institutional approach combining historical evaluation with policy evaluation to examine how historical developments have shaped displacement patterns and institutional responses. This approach is considered suitable because the study seeks to explore historical patterns and outcomes, governance structures, institutional processes, and policy implementation rather than measure numerical relationships.

The study relies primarily on documentary sources. This allows for a systematic examination of historical patterns of displacement, the legal and policy frameworks governing internally displaced persons, and institutional responses to displacement crises. Some of the sources included policy documents such as the Kampala Convention, the Nigeria Kampala Domestication Act 2026, and the National IDP Policy; documents from government agencies and humanitarian organizations involved in the management of internal displacement; and peer-reviewed scholarly sources.

The documents were, thereafter, analysed using content and historical trend analysis and policy evaluation. This involves reading and reviewing policy documents, institutional reports, and scholarly materials to identify recurring themes related to the study. Coding, categorization, and interpretation of textual data to identify historical and governance-related themes that explain the trajectory of displacement in Nigeria, outcomes of policy implementation, and institutional performance.

Historical Origins Of Displacement In Nigeria Upto 2009

Internal displacement is as old as man; from displacement due to natural disasters to displacement resulting from conflicts, it has always been there. Colonial Nigeria had its fair share of displacement, but in post-independence era, the first major displacement which the young nation faced was caused by the Nigerian Biafra War of 1967- 1970. According to the global IDP database in 2002, internal displacement already occurred in Nigeria 30 years ago, when, during the Nigeria - Biafra War (1967-1970), an estimated two million people died, and ten million people became internally displaced. Eventually, the nation was able to overcome the challenge. One cannot necessarily point to how the government managed the crisis, but surely the problem was solved over time.

One of the first major crises that led to internal displacement in post-independence era was the 1962 crisis between Obafemi Awolowo and Chief Ladoke Akintola. According to Balogun (2013), the crisis was largely partisan, rooted in a conflict within the Action Group leadership between the Premier Awolowo and Akintola, his deputy. This conflict was significant enough for the ruling

party at the centre to seize the opportunity to declare a state of emergency in the Western region. The next displacement was as a result of the crisis that arose from the January 15, 1966 Putsch, led by Kaduna Nzeogwu. From this point, things went downhill, culminating in the 1967 – 1970 war.

The Nigerian - Biafra War, which mostly took place in the former Eastern region of the country, is also known as the Biafran War. As stated above, the leader of the coup that assassinated Sir Ahmadu Bello was Kaduna Nzeogwu, an Igbo. It also did not help that top Igbo political leaders were not killed in this coup. The aftermath was the outbreak of the anti-Easterners pogroms in 1966 (May – October) civil unrest, which eventually metamorphosed into a full-blown war in 1967. According to Reliefweb (2002), over 2million people died and over 10 million people were displaced during the war. This has remained the largest number of internally displaced persons the country has recorded.

The next major displacement was in the Niger Delta region as a result of unrest from the indigenous population who rose up against unfair treatments and inadequate compensation from both the federal government and the international oil companies operating in the area, who they also alleged had degraded their environment through their activities. The major issues in contention were indigenous rights to oil resources in their region and environmental protection. On November 20, 1999, the Nigerian government sent troops to Odi to “curb the civil unrest”. This led to the death of over 900 persons, as estimated, which gave it the name “the Odi massacre”. Many scholars, such as Sawyer (2010), argue that the Federal Government has a long history of protecting and siding with transnational oil companies operating in the area. According to Sawyer, people fled from the nine villages in the area, and the government forces did not stop until the area was subdued.

Following the Odi crisis, the next crisis to lead to major displacement broke out in Kaduna in 2000. The Kaduna crisis was mostly an ethno-religious crisis. Prior to the 2000 crisis, Kaduna State had experienced the 1987 Kafanchan crisis, a religious conflict that eventually spread throughout the state. Many people were displaced, especially those from the southern parts of the country, who were forced to flee. The 2000 crisis had its roots in the introduction of Sharia law in the state (Human Rights Watch, 2023).

By 2009, the country began to experience a new wave of displacements due to the increasing nature of violence by the Boko Haram insurgents. In 2009, the religious sect began a series of violent attacks on civilians and the armed forces in North-Eastern Nigeria, starting in Maidugri and spreading to other areas of the North-East. The following year, attacks in the North East and other parts of the country, including bombings, mass shootings, and executions, began to rise. In May 2013, the President declared a state of emergency in the states of Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa (Reinert & Garcon, 2014).

By 2013, there were about 300,000 displaced persons, mostly from Adamawa, Yobe, and Borno. In the same year (2013), another 470,500 people were displaced due to the insurgency and other humanitarian crises (Itumo & Nwefuru, 2016). According to Oduwole and Fadeyis (2016), by 2014, Nigeria had a total of 3.3 million internally displaced persons; which now, included those displaced by the Boko Haram insurgency, communal clashes, natural disasters, and the farmer–herdsmen clashes.

Nigeria had, by 2016, ranked behind Syria and Colombia as countries with the highest number of IDPs. Syria had about 6.5 million IDPs while Colombia had about 5.7million IDPs (Itumo & Nwefuru, 2016). In 2013, it was clear that this humanitarian crisis had escalated to the point where it could no longer be managed solely by the national government. Nigeria called for help and international support to manage this rapidly escalating humanitarian disaster.

Causes And Patterns Of Internal Displacement In Nigeria

The recent IDP crisis can easily be traced to a few different causes, which include the Boko Haram insurgency, the cases of natural disasters, the farmer – herdsman crisis, inter – communal clashes, and banditry which are economic, social, political, man-made and natural causes

Boko Haram Insurgency

The major cause of the current internal displacement crisis is the Boko Haram, an Islamic sect, which simply translates to “no to Western education”. The rejection of Western education and Westernization were the twin pillars that defined the movement (Kyari, 2014). Prior to 2009, the sect was led by Mallam Mohammed Yusuf, who was quite fiery and feisty in his approach but had not committed to violence. Following Yusuf’s killing by security forces on July 30, 2009 in Maiduguri and attempted suppression by the Nigerian government, the sect went underground for a while, and by the time they re-emerged in 2013 with the Bauchi jailbreak, their tactic had changed and turned to open conflict with the government, with many of the attacks directed against unarmed civilians. One of the most notorious attacks of the sect was the attack and abduction of about 270 school girls from a Girls’ Secondary School’s boarding facility in Chibok, on the night of April 14 -15, 2014 (GCT, 2021) and more than 100 girls are still in captivity.

After the conquest of each town, the sect usually hoists its flag in the town and occupies it. Though the Nigerian military has tried to recover some of those seized territories, the condition can be said to be deteriorating. Initially, the activities of the Boko Haram were concentrated in the North East, but as of April, 2021 they had started to make inroads closer to the nation’s capital as towns in neighbouring Niger state have been seized and their flags hoisted (Olarenwaju, 2021). Over time, the sect took control of the Gwoza Hills in Borno State and established its headquarters there. Since the death of Mallam Yusuf in 2009, the sect has become more violent and determined in its agenda of Islamising Nigeria, hence the occupation of towns and hoisting of flags.

As of November 2021, nearly 350,000 people have been killed in North East Nigeria since 2009, while an estimated 3 million persons have been displaced from the Lake Chad Basin as a result of the conflict initiated by the Boko Haram (GCT, 2021). The Boko Haram insurgency has been identified as the major cause for internal displacement in Nigeria (Ogburu, 2024).

Natural and Man-made Disasters

Natural disasters, such as flooding, have contributed immensely to the Internal Displacement crisis plaguing Nigeria. Due to climate change and development projects, the natural order has been disrupted, and nature, in turn, tries to push back to regain its natural state. For years now, Nigeria has suffered from an immense flood crisis that has contributed to the country's internal displacement crisis. In the BBC's 2018 report “Why does Nigeria Keep flooding?” some factors were isolated as responsible for the repeated flooding. First, it is worth noting that two of Africa’s

major rivers (the River Niger and the River Benue) flow into the country, meeting midway and then flowing as one into the Atlantic Ocean. Over the years, floods have mostly affected the communities along the riverbanks. This has mostly been the result of the steady increase in rainfall volumes. According to the Nigeria Meteorological Agency (NIMET), the volume of rain in thirteen communities that were studied has shown a significant increase in rainfall. More over, the heavy culmination of water from upstream on the Niger and Benue Rivers in Cameroun, Mali, and Niger, continue to empty into the Nigerian space thereby leading to flooding especially for communities along the path of the rivers (Magami et al, 2014). Kogi State has been among the worst hit by the repeated flooding in Lokoja.

Another notable factor contributing to recurrent flooding in Nigeria is the overflow or mismanagement of the numerous dams in the country. Nigeria currently has about 323 large, medium, and small dams (Isaiah, 2013). These dams and their management have also contributed to the internal displacement crisis with the displacement of communities caused by the collapse of dams as seen in Maiduguri in 10th September, 2024.

Flooding in Nigeria is also caused by poor town planning, which is especially evident in places like Lokoja, where houses are built on the riverbanks. This factor has also contributed immensely to the flooding in Abuja. The nation's capital, where houses and estates are built on floodplains and green areas (Omoera & Seigha, 2022). Justin (2021), Head of Operations at NEMA, in an interview with Daily Trust, disclosed that until estate developers and Nigerians in general change their attitude towards the indiscriminate construction of houses on floodplains, flooding will continue to ravage communities.

Farmer – Herdsmen Conflict

The crisis between the farmers and herdsmen is most popularly known as the Fulani herdsmen – farmers crisis. The Fulani ethnic group is mostly made up of nomadic cattle breeders, rearers and herders and they have maintained the vocation for decades. They own over 90% of the livestock population in Nigeria which accounts for one-third of agricultural GDP and 3.2% of the entire GDP in the country (Fabiya & Otunuga, 2016). Due to the open grazing method of cattle breeding and rearing that they commonly adopt, they are therefore nomadic as they take their cattle to wherever grasses for grazing can be found.

Though this tension has been on for a time, it took on a different dimension with the return to democracy in 1999. Many believe that the tyrannical nature of military rule did not allow for people to express their grievances and people were also deterred by the penalty that was swift and gruesome. Due to desertification and other environmental issues, the Fulani herdsmen have moved further to the Middle Belt and Southern parts of Nigeria to fertile grounds for grazing. These fertile grounds on the other hand are the areas that the farmers rely on for livelihood as most of the communities are agrarian. The common scenario that plays out in these instances is that the cattle eat up the crops that belong to the indigenous farmers. The farmers on their own cannot understand while a passing visitor on their land feels entitled to let his cattle to eat up their means of livelihood.

Tensions subsequently escalate and in turn leads to conflicts with each party defending their rights and privileges.

The insecurity in the North has also pushed herders to move towards the North-Central and the South. Meanwhile, the rising population and the high rate of unemployment in the country have, in turn, put more pressure on farmland. In simple terms, both parties are desperate. However, one must not lose sight of the fact that Nigeria is a federal state where each state is responsible for managing its economy, and, as such, anything that affects the state's livelihood and economy, as well as lives and property, is usually not welcomed.

While the Fulani herdsmen continue to insist on the international grazing routes identified before independence, the affected states, especially those in the North Central and the South, insist that times have changed and that, with that, should come international best practices that the Federal government should adopt to solve the problem. They are advocating for ranching, or, better still, for states to keep the cattle within their states. Iorbo et al (2024) opined that the farmer – herdsmen crisis has the likelihood to cause more harm than the Boko haram insurgency if left unchecked.

Banditry / Communal Clashes

Scrupulous elements in society have taken advantage of the heightening insecurity to engage in banditry. Communal clashes have contributed much to the displacement crisis. Most of these communal clashes have a religious or ethnic undertone. One of the states worst hit by banditry is Zamfara state. According Altine (2024), Zamfara State had 102 communities deserted by residents.

It has been argued that there is a relationship between the banditry going on in the North West and terrorism. In other words, it is believed that in actuality, north-western Nigeria has become safe haven of increasingly active terrorist groups, including the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS); Jama'at Nusrat al Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM); Al Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb; a splinter of Boko Haram popularly referred to as the Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP); and the Fulani herdsmen of West Africa, now rated as the fourth-deadliest terror group in the world. Due to the high level of violence and loss of lives, many people have fled the affected areas. Over 200,000 persons have fled the communities, while some are internally displaced, others have fled across the border (Oluwole, 2021).

Electoral Violence

Nigeria has a history of electoral violence dating back to its early years as an independent nation. Factors such as ethnic and religious tensions, political rivalries, and socio-economic issues have contributed to the recurring incidents. The 1964 and 1983 general elections witnessed significant violence, and this trend persisted in subsequent years. The return to civilian rule in 1999 also faced challenges, with instances of violence during elections. Factors like corruption, inadequate security measures, and a lack of trust in the electoral process have played vital roles in sustaining electoral violence in Nigeria. Efforts have been made to address these issues, but the challenge persists, impacting the country's democratic development negatively.

The April 2011 elections also led to a lot of violence, especially in the North where about 800 persons were said to have been killed, with about 65,000 displaced over a 3-day period (USIP, 2011). An IDP camp was set up in the Hajj camp in Kaduna to manage the thousands of people

who had been displaced. Ibeanu (2023) is of the opinion that electoral violence in Nigeria continues because of the inability of the government to implement the recommendations of the different committees on electoral reforms. He also maintains that voter suppression, logistic failure, fake news and hate speech, loss of confidence in the judiciary, impunity and failure to bring culprits to book, rising expectations from the electorates, among others, are some of the reasons for election violence.

Ethno – Religious Conflicts

Ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria have been a persistent challenge, marked by tensions between different ethnic and religious groups. These conflicts have roots in historical, social, economic, and political factors, creating a complex web of issues that continue to impact the nation. Nigeria is a diverse nation with over 250 ethnic groups and a significant divide between the predominantly Muslim North and predominantly Christian South. The British colonial regime's amalgamation of Northern and Southern Nigeria in 1914 laid the foundation for some of the tensions still being witnessed today. The imposition of colonial structures and policies exacerbated pre-existing ethnic and religious differences. Historical injustices, real or perceived, have fuelled resentment among various ethnic and religious groups. These grievances often date back to the colonial era and have been passed down through generations.

Another pertinent issue is that of resource competition/control. Nigeria's diverse regions are rich in natural resources, and competition for control over these resources, including land and oil, has heightened tensions. Economic disparities have fuelled ethno-religious conflicts. Furthermore, political manipulation has played a significant role in fuelling the outbreaks of these crises; politicians have exploited ethnic and religious sentiments for their own gain. In a bid to secure votes, some leaders have played on these divisions, contributing to a polarized political landscape. The issue of Identity Politics also comes to the fore; the strong identification of individuals with their ethnic or religious groups has led to a sense of "us versus them," thereby deepening divisions and making conflict resolution more challenging (Suberu, 2001).

Effects of Internal Displacement

Internal displacement has effects that are visible to anyone. By seeing the deplorable conditions these people are subjected to confirms that there are indeed negative effects of displacement.

The effects on the individual are:

- i. **Loss of Livelihood:** One of the major problems IDPs face is the loss of livelihood. Internal displacement separates people from their ancestral land, assets, belongings, workplace, social networks, service providers, and consumers. In their host communities, IDPs often compete with local workers for employment, and their arrival also increases demand for goods and services, which may push up prices. (IDMC, 2018).
- ii. **Loss of Shelter (Housing and Infrastructure):** The first and most glaring of all the effects is that there is a complete loss of shelter which is a basic human need. When people flee their homes, one of their first needs is decent shelter where they can be protected, access water, sanitation, and energy, and begin rebuilding a sense of home and

- community. In many cases, however, the urgency of the situation, the lack of suitable infrastructure in host areas, and IDPs' loss of livelihoods mean that their housing conditions are inadequate (IDMC, 2008).
- iii. Health: Access to healthcare becomes a very major challenge to the displaced, and due to the deplorable nature of the camps and pressure on the host community, healthcare is severely compromised. Organizations such as the International Community of the Red Cross and Médecins Sans Frontières primarily focus on providing health care. Children are usually the most vulnerable.
 - iv. Education: Both children and young adults are cut off from access to education. UNICEF, among other agencies, does its best to ensure that children, return to school. Given the nature of the IDP camps, this is often not very successful. Nearly every country affected by displacement yields evidence of lower enrolment and achievement rates and higher drop-out rates among displaced children (IDMC, 2018).
 - v. Security: One of the major effects of internal displacement is a breakdown in security. The IDPs become most vulnerable and open to attacks. In Nigeria, there have been instances where, despite the laws that should protect civilians, the laws are flouted, and the actors go as far as launching attacks on the displaced in the camps and host communities. Women, children, older people, and those with disabilities and other vulnerable persons are particularly at risk. Men may be targeted by armed groups for recruitment, and they may also suffer greater animosity in their host areas (IDMC, 2018).
 - vi. Social Life: Internal displacement has a direct impact on social life by breaking up communities and families. When it endures, it may permanently damage relationships that existed in areas of origin but also create new networks in the places that IDPs move to.
 - vii. Gender Based Violence: there are high incidences of gender based violence amongst the displaced especially as women are left very vulnerable. The breakdown of family and community structures leaves many women vulnerable and open to all forms of exploitation and violence (Maichibi, 2024).

There are also effects on the country, which include:

- i. Unemployment: Nigeria is currently battling unemployment. The IDP crisis, which has led to the loss of livelihoods of millions of people, has still further added to the problem of the nation. The unemployment rate in the country as of September 2022 was 33.3%, meaning that for every three Nigerians, 1 is unemployed (NBS, 2023).
- ii. Security: The IDP crisis further compromises the security structure of the nation. The United States of America has marked the IDP situation as a threat to peace. With so many people living together in a very deplorable state, it can only be a time bomb waiting to tick.

- iii. Impact on the economy: The country that otherwise had a working population of citizens who have become displaced is now forced to find resources to take care of them. Rather than contribute to the economy as they usually do, the nation, instead, alongside its partners, now spends billions of dollars per annum to manage the crisis.

The African Union And The Kampala Convention

The African Union was the first continental body to have a legal framework for managing its internally displaced persons crisis which in the African context has some peculiar features. One, it is increasing geometrically, according to the 2019 IDMC report; Africa has about 40% of internally displaced persons globally. The second feature is that the displacement crisis is protracted. Most displaced persons have remained in camps for more than five years, thereby classifying their cases as protracted. This, in turn, has posed a major problem for their states. It is estimated that Africa spends about \$ 4 billion a year on managing IDP situations (IDMC, 2019). This heavy burden, with a broad humanitarian dimension, prompted the AU to look inward to find a solution to its problem. Following a series of meetings and consultations, the Convention was finally signed in Kampala, Uganda, in October 2009, hence the name "The Kampala Convention".

Of the fifty five AU members, forty have adopted the Convention, twenty seven have ratified it, and only one has domesticated it (AU, 2019). Though the convention was expedient and widely welcomed, it is obvious that, judging by its level of implementation after seventeen years, the states have not shown as much commitment to solving their lingering displacement crisis. The AU, on her part, has tried to keep projecting the benefits of the Convention. On the 10th Anniversary of the Convention in 2019, the AU themed the year "The Year of Internally Displaced Persons". While one can say that there is evidence of an average success in ratification, implementation performance is extremely poor and discouraging.

Many member states have established committees, ministries, agencies, and similar bodies to address the needs of IDPs (this alone is a step in the right direction). There is, however, a need to show a higher level of commitment. Sub-regional economic organizations have also joined efforts to ensure the implementation of the Kampala Convention. Such organizations are: the Integration Authority for Development (IGAD), the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), and the Southern African Development Community (SADC).

Some countries, on their own, have taken major initiatives to move towards implementing the Convention. While Ethiopia and Niger Republic developed National policies on Internally Displaced Persons, Nigeria took an exemplary role and fully domesticated the Convention in February, 2026.

The African Union, on its part, created a model law for states to adopt in 2018. In conclusion, the AU has taken a step in the right direction. Though the Convention may not automatically solve the problem of internally displaced persons, its implementation will go a very long way in ameliorating this crisis.

State Response Under The Auspices Of The Kampala Convention

It is the responsibility of any governments in Africa to manage any cases of displacement within their territories because, unlike refugees, these persons have not crossed any international border

and, as such, remain the responsibility of their home states. Unfortunately, the majority of countries in Africa, including Nigeria, faced with the challenges of IDPs, have not shown much commitment, sometimes due to the lack of the needed resources to achieve the basic goals on IDPs as enshrined in the United Nations Charter and Kampala Convention on the protection of the IDPs (Lenshie, 2016). For a country that has helped restore peace and normalcy through the peacekeeping operations in which it has participated, especially in West Africa, it is, therefore, baffling how Nigeria has not been able to manage its own crisis, but rather allowed it to escalate to the point that there are now over three million displaced persons in Nigeria, a situation which has been declared a humanitarian emergency.

The Nigerian government, thinking that it would be a very brief crisis, co-opted the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) to manage the displacement crisis from 2009 (NEMA, 2018). The State Emergency Management Agencies (SEMA) were initiated. By 2012, the federal government called on the international community to assist it in managing the crisis. The UN Resident Coordinator led the response, which comprised all UN agencies and international and national NGOs. By 2014, there were about 647,000 displaced persons in the north-eastern part of the country. The team works in close coordination with the federal government of Nigeria through the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) and is assisted at the technical level by the Emergency Preparedness and Response Working Group (EPRWG). In June 2014, the United Nations System in Nigeria set up a Task Team to develop an Integrated Support Package (ISP) for the north east, including interventions focusing mainly on the Chibok community, but it was also designed to cater for the immediate and long-term needs of the affected populations in North East Nigeria. The Task Team's priorities in Nigeria are the provision of food and non-food items, the strengthening of health services, and early recovery support. The HCT has established nine sector working groups, of which the Protection Sector Working Group (PSWG) is chaired by the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) and co-led by UNHCR (UNHCR, 2014).

The NEMA and SEMA were tasked with managing the displacement crisis. The Agency (NEMA) has established Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps across the country and provided relief materials to disaster victims. For instance, in 2006, NEMA evacuated about 1,700 Nigerians who had fled the Mambilla Plateau and adjoining areas due to communal clashes and sought refuge in Cameroun (NEMA Report, 2006). NEMA got to work, setting up camps for the displaced. This was to build a structure that would protect such persons and enhance coordination of the response. In Maiduguri, by 2016, NEMA had set up a local cell to coordinate government affairs in Borno, the worst-hit state in the crisis. This still exists till date.

The Federal government began reaching out to the international community, Nigerian corporate entities, and local businesspeople to contribute financially to the management of the crisis.

Aside from these individual donations and involvement, the government has also funded crisis management, though much of the funding has come from international partners. The UN in its Nigeria Strategic Response Plan (SRP) said

“ The Government of Nigeria, at federal and state levels, is providing the majority of humanitarian assistance in response to the IDP crisis in the North-East. In recognition of the Government's capability and commitment to providing leadership, activities identified in this SRP will concentrate mainly on areas where the Government has limited capacity but where

implementation is possible. Humanitarian actors will continue to work with the Government at the federal and state levels to strengthen its capacities in key areas.

(United Nations Nigeria Strategic Plan, 2015)

The National Commission for Refugees, Migrants, and Internally Displaced Persons, also worked towards the rehabilitation of IDPs. Through the special intervention of the Federal Government, the Commission embarked on the construction of a massive housing programme under the IDPs Resettlement Cities Project, which commenced in four initial States: Katsina, Borno, Zamfara, and Edo. It consists of 600 furnished Two-bedroom houses in each of the selected States, with provisions for educational facilities, business activities, places of worship, and adjoining farmland (Agbidike, 2021).

In August 2019, the President, President Mohammed Buhari created the Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs, Disaster Management, and Social Development, under whose purview the management of IDPs falls. So far, the Ministry has overseen NEMA's activities and appears committed to rebuilding the North East to facilitate return and resettlement.

An Overview Of The Nigerian Government's Mid-Term And Long- Term Plans On Managing The Idp Crisis In Nigeria.

The federal government of Nigeria has a roadmap for tackling internal displacement in Nigeria, known as the Buhari Plan. Unfortunately, it focuses only on the North East and did not address other affected parts of the country. However, Nigeria has been on the path of managing the crisis. The nation's plan will be studied under two broad themes: Laws and legal framework guiding internal displacement, and plans on managing the present crisis and forestalling future occurrences.

Laws and Legal Framework Guiding Internal Displacement

Nigeria, like most other nations, in the international system previously alike had no laid down rules or framework for internal displacement. While there were laws and frameworks guiding refugees, internal displacement was a new issue in the international space.

The UN quickly rose to the occasion and developed the "Guiding Principles for Internally Displaced Persons". Africa, on her own, was caught up in the crisis as the number of the displaced continued to increase. The AU led the way for all African countries and developed a set of Principles to guide internal displacement. The AU is the first regional body to produce such a document. While the legal lacuna in the protection of IDPs motivated the AU to develop the Kampala Convention, the disastrous impact of internal displacement on peace, security, the environment, and the development of countries was another important justification for such a treaty (Mehari, 2011).

The 1999 Constitution of Nigeria (as amended) provides a legal framework that enables the government to address the human rights needs of the IDPs. The power given to the Federal Executive by section 5(1)(b) of the 1999 Constitution (as amended) includes seeing that the human rights of IDPs, particularly as enshrined in Chapter IV, are protected. It is pursuant to this obligation that the National Policy on Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Nigeria 2012 was

drafted and adopted by the Presidency (NPIDP, 2012). In 2006, the Nigerian government set up a committee to develop a draft policy on internal displacement.

In early 2006, the increasing number of IDPs due to conflict-induced internal displacement prompted the Nigerian Government to consider a National Policy on IDPs, the draft of which was tabled for consideration in 2007. But the Federal Executive Council did not adopt it. The draft was revised twice between 2009 and 2012 to reflect the new realities and framework provided by the Kampala Convention (NPIDP, 2012). The document titled National Policy on Internal Displacement was approved in 2012, with the last paragraph emphasizing that it should be reviewed every five years. According to the policy (NIPD, 2012), the overall goal is to strengthen institutional mechanisms and frameworks to realise the rights, dignity, and well-being of vulnerable populations by preventing root causes, mitigating impacts, and achieving durable solutions to internal displacement in Nigeria.

Following the drafting of the National policy in the same year (2012), Nigeria, alongside other African countries, adopted the Kampala Convention, which it had ratified in 2009. The expectation was that the National Policy, which had been drafted, would then proceed to be passed into Law. However, this was not to be; nine years later, the Federal Executive Council just adopted a New National Policy on IDPs. The overall goal of the policy is to strengthen the institutional mechanisms and frameworks for the realization of the rights, dignity, and well-being of vulnerable populations through mitigation of the impact and achievement of durable solutions to Internal Displacement in Nigeria (Farouq, 2021). One key point of the new policy is the shift of responsibility for the internally displaced to the state government. The Minister of Humanitarian Affairs, rising from the FEC meeting where the draft was adopted, addressed newsmen and said the State Government is responsible for the welfare of its indigenes, while the Federal Government is concerned with the welfare of all Nigerian citizens. In times of humanitarian challenges, the State Government has the primary responsibility, while the Federal Government intervenes as required.” In February 2026, the Nigeria President signed and domesticated the Kampala Convention into law as the National Internal Displacement Act.

Plans On Managing The Present Crisis And Forestalling Future Occurrences

As has been noted, the ultimate management of IDP crisis is the attainment of durable solutions. The government developed a plan to manage the IDP crisis. The plan is tagged “Rebuilding the North East: Buhari Plan”. This plan can already be assessed as faulty or marginal because it focuses only on the North, which, despite being the worst hit, is definitely not the only area grappling with internal displacement.

The first document, known as “Volume 1 (2016)”, focused on Emergency, Humanitarian Assistance, Social Stabilization and Protection, and Early Recovery. If one were to look at the work of all the actors in the crisis, it would clear that these areas have been the focal point. So much emphasis and resources have been channelled to the areas listed above. The summary of the plan was tagged as the First Priority Intervention and grouped under three areas: Immediate Comprehensive, Social Protection, and Cohesion and Early Recovery. The total budget was one hundred and forty eight billion, three hundred and sixty five million, five hundred and fifty seven thousand, and three hundred and eighty two naira (N148,365,557,382) (PCNI, 2016).

The Second Volume focused on Relocation, Rehabilitation and Resettlement, Peace Building and Security. From the above, it is clear that Volume 2 focuses on restoring normalcy, which inevitably entails finding a durable solution. It is basically divided into two: the relocation and resettlement plan, and the peacebuilding plan. Among the key projects outlined by the Federal Government to achieve the resettlement plan are: standard camps and IDP relocation programme, the demining and security screening programme, the Standardized Resettlement Pack, the Adopt a Village Economic Cluster Programme, and the Adopt a Resettlement Community as an economic cluster.

According to the plan, the total estimated cost of resettlement is three hundred and sixteen billion, thirty five million, and eight thousand naira only (N316,035,008,000). Some of these programmes are ongoing, such as, the resettlement village built by the Dangote Foundation. The Borno state government claims to have prepared the communities for return and was insistent on closing all camps in Borno by December, 2021. To date, those camps are still open as the state is experiencing the 2nd wave of displacement, where former IDPs who were forced to return home are once more forced to flee back to camps.

The Peace Plan has different projects to achieve peace. The idea is to restore peace and forestall future breakdowns. This included conflict sensitivity, conflict early warning and early response systems, post-conflict transitional justice and accountability programme, and reconciliation. The Security Plan has the following programmes: Countering Violent Extremism and the De-radicalisation of Prisoners Programme. The North-East Deradicalisation Initiative, the counter-radicalization program, and the Strategic Communication Training and support for security agencies' PR departments. There were also the Military, Paramilitary, and Other Security Agencies Framework, and the Long-Term Safety and Security Enhancement Initiatives

The total budget for the second-priority projects, which include resettlement, peace, and security, is three hundred and seventy three million, seven hundred and eighty nine thousand and forty eight naira (N373,789,048). From the above, it is obvious that the government has both mid-term and long-term plans; the only question is: ten years from now, what will hinder their full implementation?

Challenges Faced In Managing The Internal Displacement Crisis.

While one cannot outrightly condemn the government for failing to manage the crisis, its actions can be said to be inefficient, as the crisis continues; more people are becoming displaced, and the numbers keep growing. The government and key players have also faced challenges that have hindered their outcomes. Some of these include:

1. Institutional fragmentation: Since the federal government's response was more reactive, there was no proper coordination of the operations of the multiple agencies that were called in or created to manage the crisis.
2. Governance Deficits: Weak accountability mechanisms are undermining policy enforcement. The reality is that the activities on the ground in most of the affected areas are not matching the resources put in. The IDPs are still displaced and residing in camps, children are still out of school, youth are still unemployed and livelihoods are still not reactivated despite the huge resources deployed by both the international donors and the Nigerian government.

3. Resource Constraints: There have been financial constraints, both on the part of the government and the non-governmental sector, in implementing most of their plans due to a paucity of funds.

4. Security Constraints: More than 25 years since the advent of the Boko Haram sect and their incessant attacks, the government has not been able to get the security situation under control. The state is experiencing more security issues across the nation.

These imply and demonstrate the government's weak institutional capacity. The issue of policy incoherence has been a major setback; one can only hope that the new law will provide a coordinated framework for all actors.

Conclusion

Internal displacement in Nigeria has proven to be more than a mere humanitarian crisis, but is obviously a governance challenge with its history from the colonial government, shaped by institutional evolution and governance failure. This study has been able to show that internal displacement was in existence post-independence and had its roots in some of the decisions of the British colonial masters, from the time of Nigeria's early history as a nation to the current security challenges the nation is facing. Initially, issues of internal displacement were allowed to fizzle out on their own over time. But with the magnitude of the crisis as experienced from 2009 and with its global impact, the federal government of Nigeria and other international organizations had to firmly wade into the matter. Globally, at about same period, internal displacement was becoming an issue of global concern which led to the creation of laws and conventions to guide states and parties in the management of the crisis. One of such laws was the African Union's Kampala Convention.

Nigeria domesticated the Kampala Convention into law in February 2026. The essence is to create a solid legal framework for the management of the crisis. One of the key features of the law is the shift from emergency response to durable solutions. The law also spells out the rights and obligations of all the parties involved in the crisis. Moving forward, one can only hope that the crisis will be better managed, given Nigeria's long history of failing to implement laws. The study identified some of the challenges as: institutional fragmentation, governance deficits, resource constraints and security constraints.

At the core of managing internal displacement is the provision of durable solutions. To achieve this, there is a need to strengthen institutional coordination, enhance accountability, and address root causes. The following recommendations are therefore made

1. The government should make concerted effort to see that security is restored especially in heavily affected communities,
2. The government at all levels should strengthen inter-agency coordination mechanisms.
3. The government at all levels should move for the full and immediate implementation of the new Kampala Convention Act 2026.
4. The government at all levels should improve funding for the management of displacement



5. The government, in partnership with all actors, even at the local level, should enhance early warning signals.
6. There is a need for institutional capacity building from the federal to the local government levels, and even to the non-governmental actors.

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