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“Who Hears the Cry of the Wailing Women?”: Discourses on Livelihood Activities and the Challenges of Internally Displaced Women in Nigeria

By Seun Bamidele¹ and Innocent Pikirayi²

Abstract

In this paper, we examine the livelihoods and daily challenges of internally displaced women (IDW) in the New Kuchingoro Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) camp in Abuja, Nigeria. We discuss strategies that have the potential to help create successful livelihoods, and we listen to the views of displaced women on how effective they think these strategies might be. We also examine the social and economic factors forcing IDW to develop resilience and highlight the dire social burdens which these women carry with them. Previous studies concerning livelihood activities of IDW in IDPs camps have emphasized distress, hardship, neediness, deprivation, and general inability to cope with prevailing conditions. Although we stress the resilience of these women, our research reveals failure by the government and other agencies to adequately support strategies employed by IDW to support themselves and their families.

Keywords: Livelihood, Internally Displaced Women (IDW), Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), New Kuchingoro camp, Nigeria

Introduction

The Internally Displaced Women (IDW) discussed in this paper are women residing in the New Kuchingoro camp, in the Nigerian capital of Abuja. These women arrived in the camp following displacement by the Boko Haram insurgency. Before the insurgency, they were members of families and communities, which provided networks of support. In the camp, they found themselves unemployed, unwaged, without land for agricultural subsistence and with no assets, and consequently highly vulnerable. Following relocation, the threat of famine and starvation is now a constant reality. Women constitute the bulk of the poor (see e.g., Abdulazeez & Oriola 2017; Olanrewaju et al., 2018a, 2018b; Alli et al., 2019; Olokor 2019; and Ajayi 2020). According to Alli et al. (2019) and Ajayi (2020), 70% of women in Nigeria between the ages of 15 and 40 live below the poverty line, and this includes thousands of IDW. Despite this grim picture, coping and livelihood activities are successfully used by IDW to rise above hopelessness to change their lives. We argue that the coping and livelihood activities used by IDW should inform the relevant government agencies to build upon the activities already undertaken by the women. Agencies could help the IDW to find a wider range of livelihood activities so they can become more profitable in their endeavors.

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Even before the Boko Haram insurgency, the socio-economic circumstances of some of the women were already dire. Upon entering the camp, women received cash from non-government organizations and philanthropists to meet their needs. Many women in this camp experience difficulties including malnourishment. Even under normal circumstances, while living in their communities, female children in rural Nigeria often receive less food than their male siblings because they are viewed as economic liabilities to the household.³ Their marriages cost dowries, and traditionally they are not expected to support their parents in old age.⁴ Despite their “cost” to the family, women contribute as much if not more labor to the household than men. As married women, they are often forced to live with their children, waiting for remuneration from their husbands or relatives working elsewhere.⁵ Given these challenging circumstances in their lives before the camps, many IDW had already developed some levels of resilience that became more developed once they entered the camps.

We interviewed 30 (thirty) IDW and examined their backgrounds. We discovered that many IDW’s families and communities perceive them as liabilities. Because of this, young women are often married off so that their husbands can take responsibility for them.⁶ In exchange for becoming a burden to someone else, they are provided with dowries (some gifts or money brought by a bride to her husband upon their marriage, which is similar but slightly different from *lobola* among the Southern African people). This view of themselves as liabilities shaped their lives before displacement. Nigerian married rural women live in patriarchal homes and often endure polygamy, heavy workloads, and mental and physical abuse. It is against this background that we evaluate their stay in the New Kuchingoro camp. These women often come from backgrounds filled with stress, neglect, deprivation, and sometimes even starvation, especially when their families fail to produce the promised dowries. In cases where husbands are wounded, killed, exiled or incapacitated by war, women are often forced to become the breadwinners of their families. Due to the Boko Haram insurgency, women were forced to leave their husbands, or their husbands become separated from them.⁷ When this happens, they acquire the additional burden of widowhood, further depriving them of respect in Nigerian society.

We posit that the strategies and mechanisms employed by IDW to confront adverse conditions in the New Kuchingoro camp are largely due to their background experiences in their home lives before the camps. A major motivating factor for coping and survival in the camp is the need for basic amenities like food, shelter, and clothing. In this paper, we adopt the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (Chambers & Conway 1991, Serrat 2017) to examine strategies they used to acquire these necessities. We also evaluate how lack of access to natural resources, and to the physical, human, and financial capital needed to sustain a livelihood (see e.g., Putman 2001, Woolcock 2001), has further worsened their conditions.

Method and Theory

Data for this paper was gathered through three months of fieldwork (May - July 2021). We make no claim that this constitutes an in-depth ethnographical study, yet the researchers have extensive research experience on IDPs camps in Nigeria and Africa including the New Kuchingoro camp. In total, 30 interviews were conducted. The interviews targeted displaced women, camp

³ Interview with IDW#18, June 13, 2021.

⁴ Interview with IDW#21, May 04, 2021.

⁵ Interview with IDW#23, May 23, 2021.

⁶ Interview with IDW#13, July 01, 2021

⁷ Interview with IDW#11, May 23, 2021.

administrators, government officials involved in policy formulation around the camp, security operatives, and members of non-governmental organizations working in the camp. Researchers also interviewed informants from the National Commission for Refugees, Migrants, and Internally Displaced Persons (NCFRMI), and the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) in Abuja, the federal capital of Nigeria. Field data was triangulated with relevant scholarly literature, media articles, and reports from non-governmental organizations.

The data was evaluated using the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework approach (Chambers & Conway 1991, Serrat 2017). This tool must be unpacked to understand its usefulness in explaining prevailing livelihood problems in the camp, especially how IDW access systems of social support to improve their quality of life and to endure trauma. In this regard, there are different approaches to understanding the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework. Social capital is the basic component of the framework (see Bourdieu 1986, Putnam 2001, Woolcock 2001). Social capital comprises "social obligations or connections" because "economic capital is at the root of all the other types of capital" and "every type of capital is reducible in the last analysis to economic capital" (Bourdieu, 1986, 44). Bourdieu's analysis provides a lens to examine the extent to which social capital among IDW enables them to form networks and connections (see Serrat 2017) and hence access better livelihoods, either individually or collectively. Putnam's (2001) theory of social capital examines the rallying power of social networks as agents of coordinated action that facilitate the achievement of certain ends. Since individuals make up groups and networks, they utilize social capital in three ways; for bonding, bridging, and linking to capital (Putnam 2001, Woolcock 2001).

In this study, we examine the extent to which IDW, particularly the widows, have used social networks as a means for individual and communal support to access state and non-state benefits from the government and other groups. The response of state agencies is embedded within well-organized bureaucratic structures meant to provide the financial and non-financial needs of IDW in the camp, yet these agencies do not effectively attend to the humanitarian needs of these women. According to Serrat (2017, 21), livelihoods comprise the capabilities, assets, and activities required for a means of living. Capital assets are categorized as natural, physical, social, financial, and human property. Examples of natural capital are water and land. Physical capital covers basic infrastructure like sanitation, housing, energy, and communication. Human capital refers to health, the ability to work, and skills. Financial capital covers savings, credit, and debt, while social capital refers to networking, relationships, and membership in groups (Serrat 2017). This framework highlights some livelihood strategies of the poor and vulnerable women in the New Kuchingoro camp. The theory takes into account the needs and social welfare factors that play a critical role in family functioning, especially when the family is challenged by risk factors emanating from trauma, misfortune, or a transitional event that causes a change in its pattern of livelihood. The Boko Haram insurgency and death of or separation from their husbands can be described as the loss of social capital (relationships). Loss of farmland due to displacement represents a loss of natural capital, which leads to a further loss of human capital because they can no longer work on the land.

The displaced women's ability to withstand stressful events rests heavily on their livelihood resilience. This position forms the basis for this research on coping strategies concerning the livelihood activities that women in the camp engage in. When the Sustainable Livelihood Framework is applied to the situation of displaced women, it illuminates specific needs that are important for the attainment of welfare, comfort, and safety. These needs extend beyond the necessities of life, like food, clothing, and shelter. They include many tangible and intangible

needs, such as emotional and social support, for the women to cope with stressful circumstances. The efficacy of the Sustainable Livelihood Framework makes it suitable as a tool for understanding the plight of the women, because it provides valuable insight into the livelihood strategies they have adopted. It also sheds light on the ability of the women to withstand and rebound from stressful life challenges, overcome war-related trauma and disabling physical and psychological wounds, and return to productive roles in the camp. The framework also offers a means of holistic analysis of the place of IDW in the camp and the reasons they find it difficult to return home, including the inconsistent state policies and fragmented external support provided to cater for their needs. The adoption of this theory is predicated on the fact that it helps to answer questions about the humanitarian support available to IDW and their management of everyday life, both in the presence and the absence of official and non-official support structures.

Results

Diet and Nutrition

In discussing the coping mechanisms of the IDW in the New Kuchingoro IDPs camp, it is useful to understand their dietary and nutritional needs, which are at the forefront of any set of coping and survival strategies. Since 2013, the IDW in the camp have been living on the support of humanitarian aid and, in some cases, small incomes generated from their own efforts.

Women and children in New Kuchingoro IDC camp experience hunger and malnutrition, and there is pressing need for basic amenities such as clean water, hygiene, medical facilities, food, decent shelter, and clothing (all aspects of physical capital).⁸ This also points to the absence of functioning policies on the part of government, NCFRMI, and NEMA (the human capital). Life histories and interview records abound with questions and comments such as: “How will I feed my household as a result of the death of my husband and the insurgency-induced displacement?”, “From where will we get basic amenities?”, and “How do we get food for our households?”⁹ This also points to a lack of social and financial resources.

Documents from NCFRMI and NEMA indicate that food allocated per day in the camp, in the form of cereals such as sorghum, equates to between 2,010 and 2,400 calories.¹⁰ In contrast, interviews with staff of NCFRMI showed that the more realistic figure is between 1,230 and 1,400 calories, and usually closer to 1,300, which is far less than the 2,010 as documented.¹¹ Protein intake is deficient among the women, ranging from 25.4 to 30.4g a day, if they are lucky. Sorghum, rice, and millet are available most of the time, leading to a starch-heavy diet which is deficient in protein, vitamins, and minerals.¹²

Residents in New Kuchingoro camp eat two meals per day, when they can get them, and often rely on leftovers from the previous day as breakfast.¹³ However, this varies considerably, with some women living on only one meal a day. The staple food is cereals otherwise acquired by household members, then sold or consumed; vegetables are also used when available. However, these are usually acquired from neighbors, NGOs, or by begging outside the camp.¹⁴ Cereals such as rice and wheat are associated with high income-elasticity, as daily per capita consumption

⁸ Interview with IDW#15, May 16, 2021.

⁹ Interview with IDW#22, June 14, 2021.

¹⁰ Interview with IDW#10, May 20, 2021

¹¹ Interview with NCFRMI#06, May 27, 2021

¹² Interview with NCFRMI#06, June 01, 2021

¹³ Interview with IDW#14, June 08, 2021

¹⁴ Interview with IDW#17, June 03, 2021

ranges from 922g for a better-off household, to 212g for poorer households.¹⁵ During about 25% of our time in the camp, millet and sorghum were replaced with rice and wheat, which are less expensive staples.¹⁶ Cereal consumption is very high among IDW; some would rather go hungry than consume beans, which are unfamiliar to them. Groundnuts and other nuts are also consumed in small quantities by IDW.¹⁷ We discovered that pregnant or lactating women were especially poorly nourished.¹⁸ Infant mortality and miscarriages are also high. This pattern results in a vicious cycle of nutritional deprivation, with infants receiving their most adequate nourishment in their first year of life while being breastfed, which places great demands on nursing mothers who are, for the most part, emaciated.¹⁹ IDW's health status is very likely the cause of the many miscarriages, which exacerbate anemia and emaciation among women.

According to Akombi-Inyang (2021), malnutrition, which is on the rise, is highly endemic in Nigeria, and she identified a close association with poverty. A major consequence of poverty, she says, is the lack of access to nutritious food, which predisposes people to poor nutrition, with poverty increasing the chances of malnutrition. It is evident that women and children in the camp are trapped in poverty as a result. Akombi-Inyang cites the Multidimensional Poverty Measure, which says 47% of Nigerians (98 million people) live in multidimensional poverty,²⁰ including various forms of deprivation experienced by the poor, such as inadequate health, poor living standards, polluted environments, and threat of violence. The women in the camp come from the northern part of the country where they have been displaced by the insurgency, and this is where high levels of malnutrition have been recorded (Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey, 2018). The low-income levels in the camp make the problem worse.²¹

We also observed during fieldwork that other basic needs such as clothing and shelter are neglected because earning income is prioritized. Attention to healthcare and purchasing medication are also not as prioritized in comparison to earning income. The women attempt to provide income for their households at considerable sacrifice to their health and living conditions.²² Households' livelihoods also appear to take precedence over the improvement of dwelling conditions.²³ Thus the need to acquire financial capital for food and meeting the health and education needs of their children supersedes their pursuit of physical capital (adequate clothing and shelter) and human capital (adequate health for themselves).

Livelihood Mechanisms

Due to inconsistent humanitarian intervention, some women in the camp have created means of generating income from basic skills, requiring little or no formal education or training. Some of this training was acquired previously or received informally during their household chores.²⁴ Many who engage in bartering and selling manage small businesses profitably, without any formal training on sustaining their livelihood, for example, by selling groundnuts, salt, or sugar. Their ability to work and relate with others is key. Thus, the displaced women utilize their

¹⁵ Interview with NEMA#05, May 14, 2021.

¹⁶ Interview with NEMA#05, May 19, 2021.

¹⁷ Interview with IDW#16, July 02, 2021.

¹⁸ Interview with IDW#11, May 07, 2021.

¹⁹ Interview with IDW#09, May 21, 2021.

²⁰ <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/poverty/brief/multidimensional-poverty-measure> (Accessed 23 July 2021).

²¹ Interview with NEMA#05, May 07, 2021.

²² Interview with IDW#04, May 12, 2021.

²³ Interview with IDW#15, June 01, 2021.

²⁴ Interview with NCFRMI#06, June 19, 2021.

human and social capital to acquire the financial capital needed to meet their needs. Moreover, since their income barely meets the food, educational, and health needs of their children, their livelihoods are not sustainable. Because their financial capital cannot withstand stress, the women cannot contribute net benefits to other aspects of their lives. Indeed, none of the women interviewed have recovered from stress arising from the insurgency.

Our interviews identified at least 100 potential means of income-generation for the women in the camp, which may be categorized broadly as follows: trading, shopkeeping, livestock management, agriculture, and collective enterprises.²⁵ However, women's households spend considerably more than they earn in the camp.²⁶ Their households need access to non-earned funds that enable them to function. As we will discuss later, earning income through trade appears to be only one of many strategies employed by the women in the camp. Most women are excluded from a system of patronage where some depend on well-to-do members inside and outside the camp for labor, credit, and opportunities. This exclusion is attributable, partly, to the fact that IDW lack stable residences and stable income-generating potential. Residing in the camp is a disadvantage. This further points to the unsustainability of their livelihoods due to the lack of assets, the basis for other forms of capital. However, women have advantage in that they control their income-generating potential and do not sell their labor to employers as men do. This gives the women the means of control of production, especially when it comes to credit, as some of the restrictions slapped on men are not applicable to them.²⁷ The only setback is the inability to engage in large-scale trading due to insufficient capital, forcing them to peddle the goods from one shelter to the other, as well as in proximity to religious gatherings.

In subsequent sections, we discuss some of the livelihood mechanisms employed by these women. These include gaining access to government agencies, networking with non-government agencies and philanthropists, selling and buying goods, micro money lending, bartering, sourcing fuel, and sending children out hawking.²⁸ To build resilience, the women use several livelihood mechanisms, often simultaneously. We observed that some would buy and sell food items, work one or two days per week in wage employment, have one of their children receive money in exchange for labor, and collect and sell firewood. One woman recounted that she allows her children to hawk goods, vegetables, and roasted fish, and receives support from government and non-government agencies or neighbors.²⁹

Assistance from the Government

During fieldwork, the women explained their income-generating activities but complained about lack of financial capital needed to expand their businesses and become financially independent. They cannot manage their livelihoods without some help from government and non-government agencies, but the benefits are often not fairly distributed.³⁰ The benefits may include low-cost or free food, skills training, basic medicine, credit, and educational support. We discovered that government agencies, politicians, and various charitable organizations provide large portions of the cash relief that the women receive.³¹ However, this is either inadequate or

²⁵ Interview with IDWA#03, June 05, 2021.

²⁶ Interview with IDW#14, June 21, 2021.

²⁷ Interview with IDWA#03, June 03, 2021.

²⁸ Interview with IDW#19, July 02, 2021.

²⁹ Interview with IDW#22, May 20, 2021.

³⁰ Interview with NEMA#23, June 28, 2021.

³¹ Interview with IDW#24, May 04, 2021.

portions of the relief are sometimes embezzled by camp officials.³² In some instances, relief from government either fails to arrive or is not delivered in a timely manner.³³ This reflects poorly on the government since it negatively impacts the wellbeing of women. Women's frustrations are worsened by expectations that the government ought to look after them, facilitate their return home, and reintegrate them into their communities. Such expectations are higher among those who were employed before the insurgency displaced them and are now struggling to feed themselves and must rely on humanitarian assistance.

Camp officials often practice favoritism and preferential treatment which hinders the financial and social capital to reduce poverty amongst women. Though women can sign up for government and non-government assistance, camp officials still decide who qualifies to receive aid and who does not. This supposed "qualification" for relief is often premised on favoritism. Where women can participate in government-sponsored programs, they benefit from entrepreneurial training and form vital social networks. However, these programs remain available only to a few, which cannot lead towards a viable livelihood strategy. The attainment of a viable livelihood strategy is dependent on the availability of social, natural, financial, and human capital.

Social Networking

To manage these diverse sources of stress and hardship, women in the New Kuchingoro camp engage with one another in social networking and with different agencies, employing a support system which they build and maintain at great cost, both in terms of time and goods, but which they consider essential. Social networking in the camp involves providing goods, favors, and services for others, so that these individuals will owe the provider goods and favors in return. When IDW have extra food, they share it with other members of their network, and the recipients, in turn, share additional goods with them whenever they have them.³⁴ IDW usually create reciprocal relationships with other women, although camp officials and other individuals with power are included. It is necessary to note that neither status nor wealth is necessary for successful social networking. The responses from the respondents are evidence that IDW combine social, human, and financial capital to create a means of living, even though their efforts are not sustainable and are usually short-lived.

The significance of accessing social networking to buttress their livelihoods cannot be overemphasized. For instance, some IDW often do not have even a single outfit to wear and must borrow clothes to leave their compounds. In addition, those who work on construction sites or in agriculture around the camp discover when and where workers are required through social networking, although these jobs are seasonal and few. Since there is a surplus of IDW seeking employment, good relationships with foremen on building sites or smallholdings are essential.³⁵ Relatives are also involved in social networking since household members may not always supply help when needed. Women with children often settle near their relatives to receive both moral and financial support from members of their social networks. All these factors underscore the necessity of networking, with the membership of the IDW Association providing crucial social capital needed to boost the livelihood strategies of the women. From these networks, they receive material and non-material basic needs such as of food, labor, shelter, and financial support.³⁶ To qualify for

³² Interview with IDW#29, May 18, 2021.

³³ Interview with IDW#30, June 06, 2021.

³⁴ Interview with IDW#21, July 13, 2021.

³⁵ Interview with IDW#26, July 01, 2021.

³⁶ Interview with IDW#28, June 26, 2021.

humanitarian assistance from government and non-government agencies, social networking in the camp is crucial since relief is provided based on shared responsibility and group membership. It is usually the non-government agencies, philanthropists, and faith-based organizations that are more responsive to women's needs, in comparison to the government.

Subsistence

Given the abovementioned mechanisms for support, women in the camp are involved in a range of subsistence activities to build their resilience in the camp and hopefully improve their quality of life. Women make little money through buying and selling goods in and around the camp and further afield. Since the women cannot buy or sell in regular markets because of insufficient capital and poverty, they rely primarily on humanitarian agencies for their supplies. Some can sell produce like vegetables, groundnuts, and chicken in small quantities as they are mostly produced near their dwellings in the camp. One interviewee stated:

Look at me, I am 35 and not lazy. Before the Boko Haram insurgency, I was into farming in our village and doing well, as I could feed myself and my household. When Boko Haram arrived in Gwoza, I gave up everything.... Government assistance is not enough. I am now engaging in small-scale business, selling coconut and sugar cane in the camp.³⁷

The women also prepare food for sale. Food preparation is a major source of income, as demand is constant and involves cooking millet and sorghum and baking biscuits and other goods. A camp resident said: "I sell rice and beans for other people in the camp...to generate more income that will support my family."³⁸

The women barter for food, offering their children's and their labor in return for a meal. Bartering is a very old custom and is prevalent in the camp. They also barter specific types of food for other goods. They get involved in menial labor, such as doing laundry, agriculture, and construction, and working as domestic servants for the rich in Abuja.³⁹ Many also beg.⁴⁰ With their children, they gather firewood and wild leafy green vegetables for consumption. The involvement of children means the women are exploiting the few forms of human social capital available.

Some women lend small amounts of money to others from their savings at a high interest,⁴¹ temporarily contributing to the livelihoods of those who borrow money from them. On many occasions, there is borrowing for necessities like food and other articles for the maintenance of their shelters.⁴² Borrowing, in fact, is a common occurrence in the camp, given unforeseen expenses that can occur upon raising children in makeshift shelters. Borrowing, however, is not a sign that one has recovered from previous stresses, and this is not a sustainable means of living. It cannot stabilize assets that they have or expect to have. To achieve an improved livelihood through economic self-sufficiency, women need access to all forms of capital. Since they live on extremely precarious income levels, they are continuously in debt, forcing them to borrow from relatives, friends, and state micro-finance banks.

³⁷ Interview with IDW#02, May 19, 2021.

³⁸ Interview with IDW#09, July 22, 2021.

³⁹ Interview with IDW#11, May 05, 2021.

⁴⁰ Interview with IDW#08, June 14, 2021.

⁴¹ Interview with IDW#13, June 09, 2021.

⁴² Interview with IDW#27, June 16, 2021.

To IDW in the New Kuchingoro camp, credit appears to be the single most important financial resource.⁴³ It is in two kinds: 1) credit for immediate consumption and emergencies such as illness or death, and 2) credit for capital.⁴⁴ The latter allows engaging in some productive, income-generating activity. The livelihood strategies in which they engage are aimed at meeting immediate household needs, since many have no sense of what their future would be in the camp. Only a few women spoke about the future, and it was evident none could plan for it. Goods and income are usually dispensed the day they are acquired. Interest rates are minimal if non-existent when borrowing from relatives or others with whom they have close ties, which is preferable. Without such networks, they are forced to borrow at high interest rates. Credit for capital is usually managed well because of the women's entrepreneurial skills. They use their social networks for this purpose. The value of access to credit emphasizes the relevance of social relationships as channels for reducing poverty, as well as assets that could act as security for loans and could also provide a sustainable livelihood, if well exploited. For instance, those who peddle goods often borrow from neighbors, and subsequently repay in cash or kind. They mostly buy goods to sell on consignment or credit, but rarely for cash.

Discussion

General Livelihood Challenges

The themes that emerged from the IDW under livelihood challenges were loss of independence, lack of and/or insufficient access to humanitarian assistance, and concern about their continued dependence on government and non-government agencies. Other issues were personal, including inability to access basic hygiene and sanitation, the well-being of pregnant and breastfeeding mothers, and inadequate education for the children. Individual challenges also included corruption amongst camp administrators and personal trauma among the women in the camp.

These women testified to the imbalance in their welfare and status, despite the representation of government and non-government agencies. The idea to accommodate the displaced women in such camps was to rehabilitate them by providing much-needed assets to give them a measure of independence and prepare them to return home. To a large extent, this has not been realized, making prospects for their return home unrealistic. Consequently, they have not recovered from the shocks and stress caused by the insurgency, have lost their independence, and have become more vulnerable. However resilient they have become, all the IDW interviewed in the camp reflected fondly on their lives before the insurgency, in contrast with life in the camp, which they described as inferior to their previous lives back home. Of particular concern was the education children were receiving in the camp, as highlighted by a young woman, who said:

If I were in my community, I would be in an Islamic school. The school in the camp here is just minimal because it does not teach anything, located under trees and shelters I also have a two-year old boy who needs special attention... If conditions were better in the camp, I could have figured out how to help my son.⁴⁵

⁴³ Interview with IDW#26, June 10, 2021.

⁴⁴ Interview with IDW#18, June 10, 2021.

⁴⁵ Interview with IDW#10, June 19, 2021.

Another woman explained her circumstances:

My children cannot go to school now because I cannot afford the money they are levying and materials they are using. Before the displacement they used to attend the Quranic school in our community, but now they do not have better access to normal education in the camp.... Although relatively inexpensive, due to our situation, we cannot afford it.⁴⁶

Women recognized the value of education in offering a sustainable future to their children. They view education as a livelihood strategy, as a form of human capital they can combine with other social resources to sustain their families.

Evidently, their social cohesion and a sense of community has been disrupted by the insurgency and exacerbated by hardships in the camp. We realized this during our fieldwork as we recorded women's experiences of losing loved ones and experiencing feelings of disruption and disorder. According to a respondent: "Before displacement, we experienced a better livelihood and peaceful life.... We were satisfied with our needs. Since arriving at the camp, life has not been the same again... We never experienced this before."⁴⁷ The women had not recovered from the effects of the insurgency, and now feeling a sense of shame under current circumstances, were confronted with the challenge of losing an income.⁴⁸

However, while most women were concerned about the loss of their livelihoods, there were some exceptions; some appeared to have built high levels of resilience and coping skills. One woman explained how she had access to land that allowed her to survive: "I can say that until today, I did not even know government agencies were helping the women to survive here. I grew maize, beans and millet around the camp and other agencies like churches and good-natured people always come here to support us in the camp."⁴⁹ The other woman seems to have exploited human capital rather than rely on humanitarian aid:

If you come to my place, we live in peace because we have everything and there is no problem. All I want from the government agencies are good hospitals and medicine for our ... camp. Before arriving here, I never knew that government agencies or non-government agencies were supporting us the way we are today.⁵⁰

The women interviewed had experienced loss of property, including agricultural land. Many of the women in the camp lived in shelters they built themselves, while others lived in government-built houses. Some could not come to terms with losses that negatively impacted on their lives and their future. Loss of property is intertwined with loss of livelihoods:

I had a small store before the insurgency ravaged our community and displaced us, where I sold all kinds of things like groceries for my household sustenance. I intended to get married, but the displacement spoiled all that... I am now depending

⁴⁶ Interview with IDW#02, May 03, 2021.

⁴⁷ Interview with IDW#21, July 07, 2021.

⁴⁸ Interview with IDW#23, May 13, 2021.

⁴⁹ Interview with IDW#19, May 04, 2021

⁵⁰ Interview with IDW#18, May 25, 2021

on government and non-government agencies for shelter and daily living because my source of livelihood was destroyed by the insurgency.⁵¹

These women often lack necessities, including food and non-food items like mattresses, blankets, mosquito nets, clothing, and detergents.⁵² We also realized that women were not receiving sufficient food rations.⁵³ This obviously hampers their ability to feed their children, as well as sustain their livelihoods: "Once a month, or within a space of 50 days, they deliver food. They always give us rice, at times two bags of beans and rice weighing 25kg, for each household. The food runs out within two weeks, and we sometimes sell it to purchase other food we need for survival."⁵⁴

The makeshift shelters were almost bare, devoid of furniture, clothing, and bedding: "Another problem is lack of mattresses. If you visit our shelters, many of the women are sleeping on mats and rags donated to us."⁵⁵ This also impeded their recovery from stress and shocks of the conflict they escaped from. One woman expressed her frustrations about these insufficiencies:

Our only problem is insufficient food and lack of employment in the camp. As you can see, I stay with my household, and I cannot return to my community. Women cannot even leave households due to lack of independence. I need a job to earn money to take care of my children. I should be able to support my household, but I cannot because as a woman I have to wait for NEMA to deliver food once a month. I am not happy with this at all.⁵⁶

The women are unhappy with the health delivery system in the camp. They are often confronted with inadequate medication, lack of ambulances, and for critically ill patients, a referral system requiring treatment in government hospitals outside the camp. Even in government hospitals, they do not receive adequate care and attention, are treated badly, and suffer from social exclusion. Health centers in the camp are either ill-equipped or poorly stocked. Women must purchase some of the medicines and intravenous fluids and affordability is a challenge, considering their dependence on government and non-government agencies for survival. Inadequate health provision negatively affects women's opportunities to create a sustainable livelihood.

Personal Livelihood Challenges

Personal hygiene is a challenge to IDW in the New Kuchingoro IDPs camp. The women do their best to keep their environment clean, with some, especially the younger ones, making a special effort to use soap and lotion and to shower frequently. While it is the responsibility of the government to assist with matters of hygiene, including supplying soap and detergents, the supply of such basic hygienic material is non-existent. The women must purchase this from their meagre earnings. This is a serious struggle for the women, who desire to be clean and tidy, and who understand how culturally important it is to serve food and other items in a hygienic manner. Encountering hygienic challenges is so personal, especially when considering that women must

⁵¹ Interview with IDW#25, May 17, 2021

⁵² Interview with NEMA#06 and NCFRMI#05, June 19, 2021.

⁵³ Interview with IDW#23, June 25, 2021

⁵⁴ Interview with IDW#30, June 21, 2021

⁵⁵ Interview with IDW#01, May 30, 2021

⁵⁶ Interview with IDW#02, May 18, 2021

manage their menstrual cycles with insufficient products.⁵⁷ This heavily compromises their well-being and sexual reproductive health.

The camp has a limited number of toilets and bathrooms, which are open space, unisex, and lack privacy.⁵⁸ Such facilities are detrimental to their health, given their gender,⁵⁹ as they are more easily exposed to various forms of diseases than men. We observed that the toilets in the camp are not only dirty, but also deplorable:

The cleanliness of the camp is bad, to be honest. The state of basic hygiene in this camp is unbearable, especially for us women. There is a need to improve those bathrooms because there are few and not well maintained. The bathrooms can make someone sick. The women do not have disinfectants to eliminate germs and odors and if you get sick, you will hardly find the right treatment and medication.⁶⁰

As stated above, the environment represents a failure on the part of government to provide adequate basic health service delivery and to support the necessary human capital.

There is a shortage of non-food items such as mosquito nets, blankets, mattresses, and medicines. Because of this, pregnant and breastfeeding women are forced to live in discomfort. One participant expressed concern regarding the effect of the lack of nutrients on pregnant and breastfeeding mothers and the health of their young children. We also observed that the environment of the camp was replete with mosquitoes and that the likelihood of outbreaks of malaria was high. Officials expressed concern about the poor drainage system, given stagnant water in various parts of the camp especially during the rainy season, further exposing the women to breeding mosquitoes and unhealthy conditions. Against this background of prevailing unsanitary conditions in the camp, an official highlighted that:

The camp health center only received 100 mosquito nets from the NEMA, which is not enough for the women. These nets are not distributed to all pregnant women at once. The nets are given to those that will sell them.... Pregnant women in second trimester are prioritized.⁶¹

Gender sensitivity is lacking among camp management and government agencies. All the women who participated in this research, both inside and outside the camp, spoke about corruption and marginalization as factors which affected their daily lives. Camp administrators are usually men, with only two women found in this position. All of them have been permanent leaders of the camp since 2009. They are also displaced people, appointed as representatives of the IDP by the government agencies and remunerated for their services. They receive humanitarian aid on behalf of all IDW. They are generally well informed about the camp demography and the nature of the various households, as accommodation arrangements are made between them and the government agency in charge of the IDPs, specifically NEMA. All supplies from philanthropists, individuals and organizations are committed to the administrators, who are expected to distribute them amongst the IDW. However, logistical problems creep in, owing to their inability to account for

⁵⁷ Interview with IDW#13, May 20, 2021

⁵⁸ Interview with IDW#11, May 10, 2021

⁵⁹ Interview with IDW#07, May 14, 2021

⁶⁰ Interview with IDW#29, June 14 23, 2021.

⁶¹ Interview with IDW#29, June 08 23, 2021.

all the women in the camp and the many beggars around the camp.⁶² The distribution process is replete with favoritism, elitism, and corrupt practices.⁶³ This situation regarding the conditions in the camp may be attributed to poor governance or low levels of participation in structures involved in managing the facility. This enhances low transparency, which only serves to promote inefficient administrative structures. Given the patriarchal nature of the camp administration, it is not surprising that some women have been sexually exploited for compliance.⁶⁴

Psychological Trauma

The study revealed that all the IDPs, and especially women, experienced psychological trauma following the insurgency-induced displacement. Stress and shock were common, especially among the young women and children. A respondent narrated her pain as follows:

As a result of the insurgency, some of my household [members] have been killed.... I suffered severe pain.... My household is no longer together...my life is nowhere. I lived on petty drugs in the psychiatric health center, but now I have taken to looking after myself in the camp.⁶⁵

Another respondent was reluctant to speak about her pain:

I am so traumatized by the experiences I had during the displacement that I do not want to think or talk about. I arrived here without my household ... now I no longer have my family. None of the organizations in this camp provided me with any special care, treatment, or rehabilitation.⁶⁶

Women recount the experiences they underwent during displacement and the fear they had of the future. Some had to hide in the forest for days without food or drink, before arriving at New Kuchingoro. There is fear of being kidnapped, on the knowledge that friends had been captured on a day that felt very normal.⁶⁷ Some fear being sexually assaulted around the camp, as the security provided is apparently inadequate, and there are incidents of attacks in the bush nearby. Some became mentally ill, while others died. A NEMA representative narrated this horrific experience:

A woman was psychologically affected after consuming her own waste. I do not understand why but I think it all started after the death of her household... Some even went crazy because their husbands were murdered in their presence. But they are better now.⁶⁸

Most IDW acknowledge stress as causes of the mental illness and other illnesses they suffer. In sharing their trauma, the women hope to receive assistance. However, a culture of silence prevails since the causes of shock and trauma are considered too sensitive and are not discussed.

⁶²Interview with IDW#12, June 28 23, 2021.

⁶³ Interview with NEMA#06. July07 23, 2021.

⁶⁴ Interview with IDW#18, May 09, 2021

⁶⁵Interview with IDW#25, June 11, 2021

⁶⁶ Interview with NCFRMI#05, May 16, 2021

⁶⁷Interview with IDW#11, July 18, 2021

⁶⁸ Interview with IDW#19, June 13, 2021

It seems that men in the camp feel a responsibility to stay strong, but most of the time, misunderstand what could help them when dealing with their personal and their families' psychological wounds.⁶⁹ The challenge of stress and trauma cuts across all IDPs and is not limited to a specific age or gender. However, there are aspects of stress that are gender specific, along with several other issues discussed above, suggesting that any forms of assistance, be they livelihood-interventions or reintegration interventions, must contain a gender focus to be effective. NEMA has operational capacity constraints to ameliorate the plights of IDPs due to the protracted nature of the insurgency, legal restriction on its operational mandates, corruption, and limited funding (Raji et al. 2021).

Conclusion

Humanitarian relief and support programs in the New Kuchingoro IDPs camp are frequently targeted at IDPs in general and not at women. Prejudices and discriminatory practices that prevail in Nigerian society continue to exist in the management of the camps and the treatment of the displaced women in them. IDW are marginalized by government agencies and thus an easily manipulated sector of the population when it comes to the distribution of supplies, especially given that so many of the women are traumatized and psychologically fragile. Although the number of IDW benefitting from humanitarian interventions and support may appear to be high, the support provided is insufficient, and does not cover even half of the total number of women in the New Kuchingoro IDPs camp. The available help is minuscule compared to their needs. The number of IDW in the New Kuchingoro IDPs camp is likely to increase rather than decrease, thus it is unrealistic to expect humanitarian interventions to reach out to the needy women therein. Urgent attention from the Nigerian government is required.

Humanitarian interventions in the camp take many forms, including training in entrepreneurial skills for the purpose of helping the IDW to develop income-generating abilities and become self-dependent. However, IDW already have skills that could be channeled toward productive employment in the camp if conditions were to be conducive. For example, they are known for trading in small quantities of goods—a common strategy for coping with and increasing their livelihood support. As things stand, IDW use up the small amounts of money they get from non-government agencies and philanthropists to provide for their daily necessities, leaving them with nothing by way of capital to invest in businesses. They are in a constant state of struggle for survival and unable to make any headway with their micro businesses. Due to desperation, IDW often sell their goods at very low prices just to gain sufficient income to provide food for their families and buy small quantities of supplies to sell. When financial support is available through humanitarian agencies, the IDW have learned to manage it well. Humanitarian support programs should remember this and attempt either to provide inexpensive credit or means for transferring goods to capital.

We discovered that most IDW prefer receiving aid in the form of cash for productive livelihood activities. This enables them to generate more income. With available capital to acquire more raw materials, equipment, and domestic tools, the IDW could add value to the products they sell, rather than simply buy, and sell without adding value to the items. They could also buy from wholesalers rather than from other retailers, as do many women who buy poultry, eggs, vegetables, or firewood in the camp and then sell them elsewhere within the camp. The women are also good credit risks, since the little support they get is used for income-generation, rather than squandered.

⁶⁹ Interview with IDW#25, June 20, 2021

The IDW in the New Kuchingoro IDPs camp that can cope are those with multiple livelihood strategies required for survival. These women possess various skills which are critical for confronting the highly adverse situations in the camp. Under more favorable conditions, we argue, these women would succeed because of high levels of resilience, yet the challenging conditions are too extreme for them to succeed. If government agencies can do slightly more than they are doing for the camps, the women could make headway regarding survival strategies, creating more favorable conditions for themselves. If more information is made available about the means through which IDW create livelihoods, humanitarian assistance may be structured in ways that would achieve the desired results. After all, the objective of humanitarian support is to eradicate or alleviate suffering of the women. Traumatized by the insurgency and confronted by poor conditions in the camp, the women prefer working to improve their circumstances but lack the means to do so. It is important that government and non-government agencies consider factors that would help women in the camps to capitalize on their resilience and existing skills.

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