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## A STUDY OF THE MANAGEMENT OF THE HERDERS-FARMERS CONFLICT-INDUCED INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT IN NIGERIA

### Abstract

The management of the herdsmen-farmers conflict-induced internal displacement in Nigeria was characterised by remote factors that affected the protection and assistance of internally displaced persons (IDPs). This qualitative study was conducted on 12 participants comprising humanitarian workers, IDPs, and lawmakers who were conversant with the persistent herdsmen-farmers conflict-induced internal displacement. The study explored the inter-connected relationship among stakeholders within the humanitarian ecosystem. It found that though the herdsmen-farmers conflict led to mass displacement, remote factors such as unwillingness of government, data challenges, the undiplomatic approach of government in the management of the displacement failed to win support of other stakeholders and therefore, escalated the displacement crisis. The study concluded that while the conflict led to mass displacement of crop farmers, its poor management and poor interconnected relationship between stakeholders led to protracted displacement and lack of sustainable measures for the protection and assistance of the displaced persons. The paper recommends political will, collaboration and humanitarian diplomacy in managing conflict and assisting IDPs.

**Keywords:** *Herdsmen-farmers conflict. Internally displaced persons (IDPs). Benue State-Nigeria. Conflict management.*

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Existing studies on conflict-induced internal displacement often focus on the protection and assistance measures provided to the internally displaced persons (IDPs) by government and international humanitarian agencies (IHAs). These studies highlight the adequacy, or inadequacy, of what has been done and by who as well as what more needs to be done for the protection and assistance of IDPs (Inyang & Effiong, 2022; Yikwab & Tade, 2021;). These accounts demonstrate that direct measures, or the absence of them, have a direct impact on displacements and the lives of the displaced persons. Moreover, they suggest that protection and assistance measures revolve around the material assistance availed by humanitarian actors.

What is missing in empirical studies, however, are accounts of the remote factors influencing the protection and assistance of IDPs by actors within the humanitarian ecosystem. That is, the interconnected relationship between the different levels of government, their interests and how this relationship informs the actions of humanitarian actors. Such perspectives are rarely represented in literature on conflict-induced internal displacement and, thereby, create the impression that only protracted conflict and lack of durable solutions account for persistent and protracted internal displacement.

This current study contributes to the body of literature by providing empirical evidence of the interconnected relationship between stakeholders within the humanitarian ecosystem and how this relationship affects IDPs. The study explores the remote factors that are of interest to humanitarian actors. The study was guided by the following research questions: (1) Why has the herdsman-farmers conflict-induced internal displacement in Nigeria persisted? and, (2) What is the interconnected relationship between governments and IHAs in managing the internal displacement? Drawing on a relatively small study sample comprising humanitarian workers, Nigerian Parliamentarians and IDPs who were resident in two displacement camps in the Middle Belt region of Nigeria, this current study brings to the fore empirical evidence on the following thematic topics: (1) unwillingness of government; (2) intra-government conflicts and lack of synergy; (3) data disagreement and misapplication of concepts; and (4) Inadequate Protection and Assistance.

The rest of this paper is divided into five major sections. Section one provides a summary introduction of the study. The second section reviews the existing literature on the subject while the third section is the methodology, which gives an account of the study method and materials. The fourth section presents study findings from participants who comprised humanitarian actors—Nigerian Parliamentarians as well as internally displaced

persons. Finally, the fifth section is the discussion of the findings, which also concludes the paper and makes recommendations.

## **Review Of Literature**

### **Internally Displaced Persons**

The global growth of populations displaced within state borders following the end of the cold war without an international instrument for the protection and assistance of IDPs exposed a global gap in the international frameworks for the protection and assistance of displaced persons. To fill this gap, the United Nations (UN) provided a draft definition of IDPs as “persons who have been forced to flee their homes suddenly or unexpectedly in large numbers as a result of armed conflicts, internal strife, systematic violations of Human Rights or natural or man-made disasters; and who are within the territory of their own country.” (Task Force on Internally Displaced Persons, 1994, para. 17). In 1998, the UN issued the first international instrument on internal displacement—the United Nations Guiding Principles (UNGPs). They provide normative guidelines for national and international actors to collaboratively protect and assist IDPs and find lasting solutions to the root cause of internal displacement. The UNGPs modified the initial definition of IDPs and expunged “large numbers” but included “generalized violence” to focus on the fact of displacement and de-emphasize population size and the cause of displacement. Accordingly, the UNGPs defined IDPs as:

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.” (OCHA, 1998, para. 2)

This definition highlights that displacement could be because of, and/or in order to avoid the effects of conflict/disasters. It also provides guidelines for stakeholders within the humanitarian ecosystem to channel protection and assistance measures to persons who have been forced to flee without emphasis on the cause of displacement or population size of the displaced. Building upon the UNGPs, Article V(1) of the Kampala Convention prohibits discrimination against IDPs and vests the primary responsibility for their protection and assistance with States. It highlights that while States have the primary responsibility to protect, international humanitarian agencies also share in this responsibility. Article V(4) of the Kampala Convention resonates with the UN definition of IDPs and stipulates that protection and assistance shall be for all persons displaced by whatever cause, including

natural and human made disasters. While Article VI(1) obligates international organizations and humanitarian agencies to respect national laws of states, Article XI(3) mandates states to collaborate with them in protecting and assisting IDPs and creating conditions for durable solutions.

Nigeria is a UN member and a State Party to the Kampala Convention, which she ratified in 2012. Nigeria's National Policy on Internal Displacement adopts both the UNGPs and Kampala Convention definitions and stipulations, recognises the fact of displacement as a basis for protection and assistance and accepts the international humanitarian agencies as partners (National Policy, 2021). By these recognitions, the Nigerian Government commits to prioritizing the protection and assistance of displaced persons wherever they are in Nigeria irrespective of their numbers or the cause of their displacement.

### **Internal Displacement induced by the Herdsmen-Farmers Conflict**

The herdsmen-farmers conflict has led to the internal displacement of millions of people across different states in Nigeria who live in displacement camps without adequate protection and assistance. In Nasarawa State Nigeria, Yikwab and Tade (2021) explored coping strategies of farming communities displaced by this conflict. They found that owing to inadequate government support, most of the displaced persons live without any form of assistance. In Benue State, Abuja, Kogi and plateau, IDPs face numerous humanitarian challenges including lack of standard housing, inadequate water, food, continuous education, healthcare, exposure to many diseases, rape and abuse, and face risks of secondary displacement and other protection risks (Ekoh, et al, 2022; Gotip & Akosu 2024 and Inyang & Effiong, 2022).

Moreover, IDPs suffer enormous loss of lives, property, means of livelihoods and continue to face security challenges in displacement camps (Ojo & Fanto, 2017; Ukase & Jato, 2022). Haaga et al. (2025) noted that the phenomenon of internal displacement and its fear has significantly reduced food production and rendered affected populations and displacement-affected communities food insecure. Despite these enormous losses and challenges, Aondover et al. (2025) report that the media were under-reporting IDPs' predicament throughout camp period. These studies show that internal displacement has significant effects on material, economic and social life of internally displaced persons. Yet, there is little to no sustainable protection and solutions to assist the affected populations and their communities. Moreover, despite living without sustainable protection measures, there are no available studies on the inter-connected relationship between stakeholders in managing this population. This gap forms the basis for interrogating what is happening within the

humanitarian ecosystem for the management of the people displaced by the herders-farmers conflict in Nigeria.

### **Theoretical Perspective: Structural Functionalism**

This study is based on the tenets of the structural functionalist theory by famous sociologists Emile Durkheim and Talcott Parsons (Haralambus & Holborn, 2000) who see society as a complex organism with interconnected and interdependent parts that work collaboratively to ensure stability, functionality and wellbeing of society. The theory argues that each of the component parts of society has a function or role to play to guarantee stability. However, when there is no harmony or synergy between these component parts, there tends to be dysfunction in society.

In the context of structural functionalism, society functions at its best when its component parts interact with and are dependent on each other for stability. From this perspective, addressing the herders-farmers conflict and the internal displacement that it has induced requires the harmony and synergy of stakeholders within the humanitarian ecosystem. Additionally, the resolution of the herders-farmers conflict and the actualization of durable solutions for the internally displaced are dependent on the function or role played by each sector-governments and non-governmental humanitarian agencies within the humanitarian ecosystem. Where one of the parts (or parties) in the system is not in harmony with the rest, there is bound to be a dysfunction or failure to achieve positive outcomes.

### **Method**

The study was conducted in Benue State, Nigeria. A total of 12 female and male adult participants took part in the study. They included: staff of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), Federal Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs, Federal Parliamentarians, Benue State Emergency Management Agency, civil society organizations, and internally displaced persons. The IDPs were selected from two displacement camps—one of which was a government owned camp called official camp, or Daudu II, situated in the Guma Local Government Area; and the second camp was a non-government (unofficial) camp known as Yandev/Federal Housing Authority in Makurdi Local Government Area, all in Benue State, Nigeria.

Participants were purposively selected and, subsequently, a snowball approach was used. Data were collected using in-depth interviews. Prior to the interviews, a research approval was obtained from the University's research and ethics board. Before the interviews, a signed consent form and oral consent were obtained from participants for the interviews and for digital recording of the interviews. Participants were informed of the research objectives

and the questions they had regarding the study were all answered. Participants were also assured of their right to free participation as well as their right to withdraw from participation without any legal implication nor harm. Participant verbatim quotes were anonymously presented to conceal identities of participants.

Interview sessions lasted between 45 to 60 minutes. The recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim and read through to establish a flow of pattern. Thematic analysis was employed for data analysis, which is useful in generating themes, identifying and grouping patterns of significance to answer the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The generated themes and sub-themes were supported with participants' verbatim quotes and presented as findings.

### **Findings**

Four themes were generated from the study which provide understanding to the interconnected relationship between humanitarian actors as well as the persistent internal displacement crisis in Nigeria. These include unwillingness of government, intra-government conflicts and lack of synergy, data disagreement and misapplication of concepts, and inadequate social and economic access.

#### **Unwillingness Of Government**

Seeking understanding of persistent conflict-induced internal displacement comes with multi-dimensional perspectives. While the Guiding Principles (OCHA, 1998) and Nigeria's policy on internal displacement (National Policy, 2021) identify immediate to long-term approaches for addressing internal displacement, evidence suggests that there was unwillingness of government to address root causes of the herdsman-farmers induced displacement,

The unwillingness of government to address the root causes of conflict is another reason for the displacement situation. The root causes for the situation in Benue is the fight over dwindling resources. Since no solution has been taken to address the dwindling resources, you can only expect the escalation of the displacement situation. (Humanitarian Worker-01)

Participants also identified inadequate collaboration within the humanitarian ecosystem as a factor signaling the unwillingness of actors to collaborate. According to them, state actors had political differences which led to their not being able to come together, resolve the conflict and provide durable solutions of return to enable the resettlement of IDPs in their communities:

As Representatives of the people, we have on several occasions moved motions that Government should resolve the conflicts, and these people should be resettled back to their ancestral homes with enough security, rebuild destroyed infrastructure but the Federal Government is unwilling to do this and just gives a deaf ear. (Nigerian Parliamentarian)

Participants also indicated that, besides the lack of durable solutions, government and humanitarian agencies had not prioritized the issues of the displaced population. Instead, they had prioritized humanitarian aid of spoon feeding the population without offering the options of return, integration or resettlement, hence, the persistent displacement:

Durable solutions are not humanitarian aid that NEMA offers. Durable solutions are helping IDPs to go back and regain their agency. Government is not willing to take responsibility and not willing to prioritize conditions necessary for return, integration or resettlement. (Humanitarian Worker-02).

Another reason for the persistent displacement, according to participants, is that while IDPs are primarily under the protection of government, government has not prioritized solutions for addressing internal displacement:

So apart from lack of moral and political will is the lack of prioritization of the issue of the IDPs. That is, they don't consider it as important. (Humanitarian Worker-05)

Participants added that,

If IDPs were a priority of government..., policies on internal displacement would capture clear cut funding for additional infrastructure in the host communities to help IDPs have access to education, healthcare, standard living and employment opportunities. (Humanitarian Worker-02)

Owing to lack of prioritization, there was lack of funding of solutions that would have more effectively, provide long-term durable solutions and assist IDPs to pick up and restart their lives:

Government is also unwilling to provide funding for long-term solutions...  
(Humanitarian Worker-10)

Lack of funding of durable solutions contributes to keeping IDPs in displacement without sustainable solutions. The lack of funding was in part linked to the failure of the federal government to redeem its pledge of funding durable solutions to facilitate the rebuilding of the conflict affected communities:

The Vice President of Nigeria had promised that the Federal Government was going to provide financial support to enable affected states to rebuild communities to

facilitate the return of victims to their places. However, after several years, government is unwilling to redeem this pledge. (Humanitarian Worker-07)

Participants also noted that at the State level, Benue State government was also unwilling to take responsibility for IDPs' protection and assistance. Rather than come up with solutions, they found that the governor was playing politics with the displacement situation:

The Benue State government is unwilling to take responsibility. The governor is also playing politics instead of devising creative ways of supporting the displaced population to get them back to their homes and to give them protection.

(Humanitarian Worker-05)

Some of the participants simply described the unwillingness of government to address the root cause of this conflict as lack of political will.

So, it is important we realize that the Nigerian Government has not shown the political will to handle some of the issues that cause the origin of internal displacement to put a lasting solution. (Nigerian Parliamentarian)

### **Intra-Government Conflict and Lack of Synergy**

This theme answers the research question, what is the inter-connected relationship between government and international humanitarian agencies. International and national policies on internal displacement stipulate that State and non-state actors should collaboratively address internal displacement, and that government should recognize international agencies' support as friendly. However, participants averred that the interconnected relationship between stakeholders was marred by political differences. They gave examples of how the relationship between the Federal and the Benue State governments was tensed and eventually marred the possibilities for synergy and collaboration. Participants saw this marred relationship as a major impediment to federal government and foreign humanitarian agencies, and defined it in terms of the conflictual and confrontational approach by the Benue State government towards other stakeholders:

Political differences, fights at the Federal and State levels, the conflictual and confrontational approach of the State Governor have contributed to why Benue State is not being funded by the federal government and international humanitarian actors to address the IDP situation and help the affected population in Benue State.

(Humanitarian Worker-01)

Participants added that stakeholders in the humanitarian sector have not been able to collaboratively address the displacement crisis in Benue State. They link this gap to lack of

synergy and the inability of actors to resolve their political differences in order to work in synergy and find solutions to the conflict and displacement crisis:

State actors have not been able to put aside political differences to synergize, analyze the challenge and seek solutions to the herdsmen-farmers conflict and displacement. (Humanitarian Worker-04)

The intra-government conflict was also described in terms of a seeming cold war between the federal government and the Benue State government over a state law that prohibits open grazing. In their words:

There seems to be a cold war between the federal government and the Benue State governor over certain issues including the anti-open grazing and prohibition law of the state. Benue state is suffering from the cold war in terms of lack of federal presence in that not much attention is given to the conflicts and displacements in Benue State. (Humanitarian Worker-03)

A disturbing outcome of the intra-government conflict and political differences was the influence wielded by the federal government, resulting in its push back against international agencies who had shown interest to support the Benue State government to address the displacement crisis:

There was a push back because the Resident Coordinator said the Federal Government was unhappy that UN agencies went to Benue State to assess the displacement crisis. In the end, UN agencies stepped down interest because they didn't want to expend themselves and their credibility with the Federal Government had to be protected. The approach of the international community needed to be different from the one adopted by the Benue State Governor. (Humanitarian Worker-01)

As a result of the push back against international organizations looking to intervene in Benue State, the displacement crisis was given limited attention, especially by international humanitarian agencies who did not want to be caught up in the intra-government conflict:

The challenge is the limited international humanitarian partners to assist the vast number of IDPs in Benue State. Though other partners provide one time assistance. (Humanitarian Worker-09)

Despite the limited support from the international organizations, participants said most of the support provided for the displaced population comes from the international organizations:

I am not saying Government has not done anything for IDPs but most of the support comes from international donors. (Humanitarian Worker-11)

Other participants, however, interpreted the limited support of international organizations as a motivation to be politically correct with the government whose interest was to protect people displaced by the Boko Haram insurgency. According to them...

One critical issue that I almost forgot is the suspicious tendency as to why some international agencies focus only on intervening in the northeast. You would see that a lot of them are only in the northeast where the government is fighting the Boko Haram insurgency. That is why I say it seems like a political motivation where they think the Boko Haram issue is more popular... (Nigerian Parliamentarian)

Participants added that the scaling down of support was not limited to international organizations alone but even government agencies with the mandate to protect affected citizens within the country became biased in the distribution of humanitarian items:

It will amaze you to know that in Borno State, NEMA provides monthly relief items while in the North Central where Benue IDPs are, even when NEMA provides assistance, it is a one-time scenario and it is totally inadequate and is forgotten. (Nigerian Parliamentarian)

Throughout this study, findings show that diplomacy is critical to inter-connected relationships between stakeholders in the humanitarian ecosystem while the lack of it can potentially mar collaborations. Participants were of the view that the Benue State government was undiplomatic in its approach regarding the IDP challenge that faced Benue State. They added that the undiplomatic approach adopted by the Benue government failed to win a wide range stakeholder support especially as the international humanitarian agencies did not want to be caught up in the conflicts between State actors:

The purpose of government is to use diplomatic measures and bring almost all the groups to the benefit of the population. But the Benue State Government was undiplomatic in its approach. The governor should have come up with a strategy that is more diplomatic and endearing in order to win a broad base support. In my view, Benue State Government should be less cantankerous, less political and focus on working collaboratively to find peaceful solutions. (Humanitarian worker-02)

## **Data Disagreement and Misapplication of Concepts**

While the UNGPs' definition of IDPs places emphasis on the fact of displacement as a basis for protection and assistance, participants suggested that IDP population size and cause of displacement were used as determinants of protection and assistance of IDPs. They added that among the reasons for the persistent displacement crisis was the disagreement between stakeholders over IDP data accuracy:

Benue State Government generates data that are contested, unconvincing and challenging to verify. They present data that even when international partners wish to support with interventions, it is difficult to back up these data with verifiable facts. (Humanitarian worker-04)

Participants also raised issues of data mistrust between government and international organizations. They opined that while data are collected by international organizations, state actors often contest data collected by international organizations on account that such data may not represent the position of government. In their words:

Data on internally displaced persons are usually collected by NGOs, by international humanitarian organizations like IOM and UNHCR and governments often do not trust those data because they feel that all these foreigners are telling us that we are doing bad. (Humanitarian worker-08)

There was also evidence of the misapplication of the definition of internal displacement as part of the strategy within the humanitarian ecosystem to step down support for the Benue displacement crisis. Incidences of government humanitarian agencies providing assistance based on the way the Nigerian State had defined the root causes of internal displacement, instead of by the fact of displacement were found:

The way the conflict that drives internal displacement has been defined is another factor. Government has defined the Boko Haram situation in the northeast as insurgency. The herdsman-farmers conflict in Benue State and other parts of the country is not clearly defined by the Nigerian State. (Humanitarian worker-03)

Some participants defended the actions of the federal government agencies saying that the provision of assistance based on how government defined the root cause of displacement was due to the dynamics of the conflict. They stated that while the Boko Haram terrorism in northeast Nigeria is defined as a more challenging crisis with a clearer response strategy, the herdsman-farmers' conflict in Benue State is peculiar because it is defined as an occasional challenge, which is difficult to provide permanent interventions:

The issue in Benue State is kind of a peculiar one. The displacement in Benue has been on and off. Sometimes IDPs can go back home, other times the trouble starts, and they have to move back to the displacement camps. In that instance, it's a bit difficult to say you are going to resettle people or provide other long-term interventions. That is where the problem has been for the federal government to be able to provide durable solutions. Though government is dealing with both the banditry and insurgency displacement situations but the approach in dealing with them is different because one of insurgency is defined as more permanent.

(Humanitarian worker-05)

### **Inadequate Protection and Assistance**

The conflictual interconnected relationship and lack of stakeholder synergy within the humanitarian ecosystem had adverse effects on the displaced population. While the Kampala Convention and Nigeria's national policy have stipulated that all displaced persons should be provided opportunities to enjoy basic protection rights, implementation of these stipulations have been marred by the happenings within the humanitarian ecosystem. In the two camps covered in this study, IDPs gave accounts of lack of basic amenities such as lack of access to healthcare services, education, shelters, and opportunities for durable solutions. With respect to healthcare for instance, IDPs indicated that international humanitarian agencies like Doctors Without Borders provide skeletal services within the camps but also refer them to government hospitals in the city outside the camps. However, IDPs informed the researcher that they are not provided mobility assistance to access these services outside the camps where they are referred to government hospitals. As such, IDPs in official camps reported being constrained by lack of finances to avail these services:

There is a camp clinic here. It is Doctors without Borders that treat us. They treat only minor sicknesses like headache and fever and pain. They always refer people to government hospitals when it is something very serious. But we cannot go to government hospital because it is far from here and we do not have transport money.

(IDP-03)

IDPs in unofficial camps corroborated the views of those in official camps on lack of sustainable healthcare interventions saying:

We have access to healthcare through Doctors without Borders. It is a clinic at the Daudu IDP camp. We have been told to go there whenever we have need to. It is difficult for us to go there since Daudu is not close by here and there is no transport to take us there. (IDP-10)

IDPs also indicated the lack of access to basic education. Parents lamented how displaced children are assembled under the trees in the camps and taught by volunteers under extremely poor conditions just to keep the children engaged. Moreover, while opportunities for education exist in the host communities, parents pointed that they are constrained by the financial implications for school enrollment and acquisition of other school requirements such as uniforms, sandals and books. In official government camps, participants held that:

My younger children attend school in this camp. However, as you can see the trees in this camp; those are the classrooms where children are taught. The teachers are fellow IDPs who volunteer to teach the children. Sometimes, individuals come around and volunteer too. We know it is not a school, but that is what is available here. There are schools in the host community, but we cannot afford to enroll the children in those schools. We will have to buy uniforms, sandals, books and other things but I don't have the money. (IDP-02)

Participants in unofficial (non-government) camps also shared similar sentiments about lack of access to continuous education for IDP children in their camps. They hinted that:

Our children do not have access to education through government but there are university students who come here to teach them sometimes. There are other people, too, who come from far places to volunteer... The primary schools in this community are free but the school is far from here and we need money for dossier, uniform and other school things. Since we cannot afford it, our children have not been enrolled in formal schools. (IDP-10)

IDPs of secondary age also decried lack of support for education. They express grave concerns and fears over inability to continue with education owing to lack of resources and support saying:

If I don't work hard, my dreams of going to the university will die. And I dread the idea that someday, I may drop out of school because I do not have money... It gets bad when they send me away from school because I have not paid school fees and I don't know where to get money. Most times even when I am in school, I lose concentration during classes and even at home; I cannot study when I am hungry. (IDP-11)

Accommodation and shelter arrangements for IDPs in all camps remain a dent on their human dignity as governments fall short of meeting these needs especially in unofficial camps. IDPs in unofficial camps lack absolute shelters. They sleep in tiny tents made of mosquito nets without protection against the rains, sunshine, and all kinds of environmental and weather-related hazards:

We sleep in tents made of mosquito nets and grass that we made. They are very uncomfortable to sleep in. We don't have sleeping mats. We sleep on sacks and cartons on the floor. During the rainy season, we stand up in the rain until it stops because it rains inside the mosquito net tents. The ground also gets wet and infested with bugs when it rains. My little son has sores all over his body because of bugs.

(IDP-12)

In official camps, IDPs reported being offered free shared accommodation. However, they also indicated being challenged by inadequate shelters where they are paired with other displaced families in overcrowded rooms without consideration for their privacy, hygiene nor dignity:

The accommodation that I have here was provided free of charge by the State Government. We are a family of six and all of us stay in the same room with our families, so I stay with my four children. It is not convenient to stay with other families because of different health challenges and even we cannot have privacy in that condition. (IDP-02)

Humanitarian workers working directly with this population also agreed that IDPs in official camps face challenges of inadequate shelters where multiple families are paired in tiny rooms without adequate protection and safety measures:

Government and UNHCR provide shelter for them which is shared amongst families and are overcrowded. (Humanitarian worker-12)

While Article XI of the Kampala Convention mandates governments to seek durable solutions to displacement in consultation with the displaced population, IDPs avowed that government keeps them in camp incommunicado regarding the possibility of integration or resettlement:

We have been here since 2018 and nobody has told us anything about resettlement or integration. (IDP-05)

And,

No news of government trying to integrate us in this community or settle us in other communities. (IDP-07)

## Discussion

This paper contributes to the literature on internal displacement. It explored the interconnected relationship between stakeholders in the management of the herders-farmers conflict-induced internal displacement and the effects on internally displaced persons. It provides understanding of how remote causes like poor interconnected relationship or lack of diplomacy between stakeholders can have adverse effects on IDPs and lead to protracted internal displacement. Although several studies have explored various aspects of the herders-farmers-induced internal displacement (Ifedayo, 2023; Yikwab & Tade, 2021), and the causes of this displacement (Egbule & Okonta, 2024), none had explored the remote causes of persistent displacement such as the interconnected relationship of stakeholders in managing this displacement crisis. This study took that opportunity and provided empirical evidence on the persistent herders-farmers conflict-induced displacement and the effects it has on displaced persons.

The evidence suggests that the conflict and protracted displacement are consequences of a conflictual interconnected relationship between state and non-state humanitarian actors whose inability to resolve their political differences affected durable solutions. Moreover, while the study found no incidence of refusal by any humanitarian actors to comply with existing policies and frameworks for the protection and assistance of IDPs and for solutions, strategic actions such as unwillingness of government, provision of assistance based on how government defined the cause of displacement and IDPs population size deprived displaced persons of assistance. This finding demonstrates that protracted displacement can arise from the actions and approach of those with the responsibility to protect and assist, and not only from violent conflicts.

The findings further show that the interconnected relationship of stakeholders within the humanitarian ecosystem must be diplomatic, synergised and collaborative to attain stability, peace and harmony. Structural functionalists warn that where disharmony exists among the different parts of the structure, it will lead to its dysfunction (Haralambos & Holborn, 2000). Therefore, for effective management of internal displacement, concerned governments at all levels must work collaboratively, using diplomacy as a tool to communicate the facts of the displacement and challenges faced in assisting the IDPs and resolving its root causes.

Findings on humanitarian actors' non-adherence to the existing definition of IDPs as provided by the UN Guiding Principles and accepted by the Nigerian government highlights the challenge at the intersection between policy and practice, where there is disregard for

implementation of the UNGP and by extension, policy implementation. These Principles emphasize that the protection and assistance of IDPs should be based on the fact of displacement and not on data size (population) or cause of displacement (Task Force on Internally Displaced Persons, 1994). In practice however, IDPs are assisted based on the cause of their displacement and population size rather than by the fact of their displacement.

Although, this is not the first-time government and humanitarian actors in Nigeria are disregarding policy stipulations and depriving IDPs of fundamental protection and assistance (Olanrewaju et. al., 2019), the continuous disregard for policy demonstrates the unwillingness of humanitarian actors to live up to their primary responsibility and proffer lasting solutions to internal displacement. While deprivation of IDPs and policy violation by those with the responsibility to protect and assist are not novel, they demonstrate that persistent internal displacement is made possible not only through direct or physical conflicts that forced the population to flee but also by the actions and inactions of those with the mandate to protect.

Finally, the herdsman-farmers conflict offers a case study on how poorly managed response to violence can lead to large-scale protracted internal displacement. In this case, the poor interconnected relationship between the federal and state governments in the management of this conflict, and the menacing federal influence on international humanitarian organizations have significantly contributed to unresolved conflict and inadequate assistance for the displacement affected populations and their communities. The poor response also shows that violence, when not timely addressed or when looked at as a minor predation, can escalate to a full-blown protracted conflict with far reaching effects on affected population and their communities.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

This study contributes to the existing literature on conflict-induced internal displacement. Conflicts inevitably threaten peace, the safety of the lives of people, and push them to flee to safer areas. However, the actions and failures characterised by the management approach of those with the responsibility to collaboratively address these challenges are no less an impediment to peace processes and durable solutions.

This study concludes that excellent instruments such as the United Nations Guiding Principles on internal displacement, the Kampala Convention for the protection and assistance of internally displaced persons, and national policies on internal displacement, which have laid the foundation for addressing internal displacement, are not sufficient to resolve conflict and meet the needs of internally displaced persons. What is needed in practice, in addition to these instruments, is political will, diplomatic approach and

collaborative relationships among stakeholders in the humanitarian ecosystem to more effectively address internal displacement.

Generating political will entails that stakeholders will more critically, show some level of commitment in resolving the root causes of displacement rather than amplifying political differences that escalate tension. While stakeholders differ on policy implementation and practice, placing at the heart of political will should be the idea of engaging with the wider political institutions and structures, including IDPs, and displacement affected communities to collectively provide long-term solutions to the root causes of displacement.

Based on the foregoing, this study recommends that governments at all levels should show some level of political will to resolve the root causes of internal displacement and collaborate with other stakeholders to protect IDPs and their communities. One of the ways to achieve political will in this regard is to focus on implementation of policies that seek to end the herdsmen-farmers conflict—policies that seek to address the root cause of internal displacement. Regarding the political differences between stakeholders, this study asserts that the road to peace must be less conflictual and therefore, need to be collaborative irrespective of political differences.

Consequently, stakeholders must adopt peaceful and diplomatic means, such as mutual respect, to communicate their differences as a precursor to resolving the root causes of displacement. Resolving the root cause of this displacement will not only prevent protracted internal displacement but also reduce human suffering and contribute to rebuilding the displacement affected communities. As such, government at all levels should employ humanitarian diplomacy to strengthen stakeholder synergy and collaboration in the quest to better protect and assist the displaced population. Managing intra-government and stakeholder relationships requires communicating effectively the fact of the issues, using diplomacy. It is, thus, imperative for government at all levels to focus on winning a broad base support system within the political and humanitarian ecosystem rather than being confrontational and cantankerous.

Moreover, it is important to add that the absence of peaceful and diplomatic relations between humanitarian actors will not only impede humanitarian assistance but also continue to create conditions for protracted internal displacement. As such, stakeholders must realize that one person displaced is one too many. Therefore, irrespective of their position on displacement data discrepancy and the cause of displacement, government agencies and international humanitarian organizations should focus on reducing human suffering. Part of

reducing human suffering should include providing long term sustainable measures to protect and assist IDPs while facilitating the rebuilding of displacement affected communities.

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