

## Non-Governmental Organizations and the Management of Internally Displaced Persons in Benue State

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**ABSTRACT:** The main objective of the study is to examine the role of non-governmental organizations in the management of Internally Displaced Persons in Benue State. The study is anchored on Structural Functionalist Theory as the theoretical framework. The study is an action research design. The study is based on qualitative data. It collects data through primary and secondary sources. The primary data was obtained using Key Informant Interview (KII) and Focus Group Discussion (FGD). The KII was used to obtain rich and detailed data from selected participants, while the FGD was used to obtain data based on shared experiences, perspectives and opinions of the vast number of the IDPs and other critical stakeholders. The population of the study include the total number of internally displaced persons in Benue State, which according to IOM (December, 2023) report, stood at 394,567 IDPs. The three LGAs hosting the most significant number of IDPs in north-central and north-west Nigeria were all in Benue State. Guma (105,154 IDPs) remains the LGA hosting the highest number of IDPs within the assessed areas. Guma LGA was followed by Gwer West LGA (63,083 IDPs) and Agatu LGA (46,135 IDPs). The sample size of the study was 15 participants or interviewees (5 IDPs in each of the most badly affected local governments in Benue). The selected local governments include: Guma, Gwer West, and Agatu Local Governments of Benue State. The purposive sampling technique was used to select the participants. The KII, FGD, secondary data, were analysed using qualitative content analysis method. The findings of the study include that non-governmental organizations have made significant efforts in the IDPs tracking, conflict management, poverty reduction, climate change adaptation and food and non-food items' supply relating to IDPs in Benue State.

**KEYWORDS:** NGOs, IDPs, Internal Displacements, Humanitarian Service & Coping Strategies

### INTRODUCTION

States hold the responsibility to foster the development of their citizens. However, states frequently fall short in fulfilling this duty, leading to non-state actors, the private sector, and other institutions devising strategies to assist the impoverished and enhance their capacity for self-help and self-reliance to improve their living conditions. Consequently, the role of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), which constitute the third sector, is being reinforced as an alternative force to cater to the well-being of the population, particularly the most impoverished (Wegner, 1993).

Non-governmental organizations have thus become recognized as groups of individuals dedicated to grassroots initiatives through self-help promotion organizations, farmers' associations, cooperatives, civil rights movements, elitist civic clubs, academic think-tanks, and donor organizations from industrial countries with budgets reaching hundreds of millions of dollars (Sinaga, 1993). The rise of NGOs is primarily a response to the persistent lack of economic growth in many countries, resulting mass poverty, and the failure of governmental decision-makers to provide adequate answers to major social survival issues. In many places, this has been compounded by political factors such as the suppression of ethnic or religious minorities, the systematic disregard of human and civil rights, and the obstruction and banning of opposition parties, driving many reform-minded intellectuals to seek alternative forms of social protest and political participation (Wegner, 1993). According to Wegner, the growth of NGOs has also been influenced by the increasing social involvement of religious organizations, particularly Christian churches. Guided by the reformed social doctrines following the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) and liberation theology, Catholic institutions have notably transformed from defenders of the status quo to advocates of social change and opponents of authoritarian regimes.

As a result, NGOs have addressed various humanitarian needs, including managing internally displaced persons (IDPs). According to the Global Report on Internal Displacement (GRID), 16.5 million people in Africa were forcibly displaced due to armed conflict and natural disasters (GRID, 2019). In Nigeria, from January 2013 to February 2014, approximately 470,565 individuals were displaced by internal conflicts and 143,164 by natural disasters, affecting 24 states across the nation (Osagioduwa & Oluwakorede, 2016). By March 2014, Nigeria had the highest number of IDPs, with around 3.3 million individuals (IDMC, 2014).

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In the North-central region, internal displacement remains significantly high. According to the IOM report from December 2023, Benue State hosted the largest share of IDPs among the eight affected states, with 394,567 IDPs, accounting for 37% of the total internally displaced population. Additionally, 64% of the total IDPs in camps or camp-like settings in North-central and Northwest Nigeria were found in Benue State. The three Local Government Areas (LGAs) with the highest number of IDPs in these regions were all in Benue State: Guma (105,154 IDPs), Gwer West (63,083 IDPs), and Agatu (46,135 IDPs).

As internally displaced persons (IDPs) become a significant global issue, often living in slum conditions (GRID, 2019), the role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) has been amplified to provide relief by mobilizing resources to meet basic and security needs. Another critical humanitarian responsibility for NGOs is the management of conflicts that drive internal displacements. Various conflicts over resource access, control, and use have created conditions that make life extremely challenging. Abbass (2012) asserts that armed non-state actors pose a substantial challenge for security governance, rendering the environment unpredictable and volatile through violence. These conflicts have resulted in the deaths of 1,121; 561; and 590 persons in 2016, 2017, and January to June 2018, respectively (Okoro, 2018). This necessitates the intervention of NGOs to broker peace deals between conflicting parties and negotiate for peace and stability.

Generally speaking, NGO support measures are designed to address the needs of disadvantaged sections of the population—preferably those identified as the poorest of the poor—and to benefit groups that official donor agencies typically cannot reach, partly by bypassing corrupt, bureaucratic governing classes. By doing so, these organizations help the masses improve their living conditions by overcoming everyday challenges such as inadequate nutrition and healthcare, low agricultural productivity, or a lack of income-earning and employment opportunities. Their primary focus is on economic and social activities, such as introducing higher-yielding but appropriate cultivation methods, promoting small businesses, developing producer and marketing cooperatives, small livestock and fish farms, or establishing basic health services. Although short-term material improvements for target groups are indeed a central aim of reformist support organizations, the primary focus is on the socio-psychological dimension, which is crucial for paving the way for long-term self-development (Wegner, 1993).

Although non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are recognized for their positive impact on the socio-economic well-being of the masses, much of the existing research has concentrated on the experiences of internally displaced persons (IDPs) (Durosaro & Ajiboye, 2011); the consequences of armed conflict and internal displacement (Ogwo, 2013); the causes and remedies of internal displacement (Admasu et al., 2021; Klugman, 2021); the economic crises of NGO interventions (Helgason, 2020; Owain & Maslin, 2018); natural disasters and internal displacements (Adeola, 2020; Martin et al., 2013; Olukolajo et al., 2014); and political violence and armed conflict (Adewale, 2016; Dirikgil, 2022; Okeke-Ihejirika et al., 2020; Proukaki, 2018). Additionally, some studies have focused exclusively on analyzing NGOs' activities in reducing poverty (Garba, 2013; Forkuor & Agyemang, 2018; Mhaka, 2014). However, no research has specifically examined the role of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) as an NGO in providing humanitarian services in Katsina State. This study aims to fill this gap by focusing on the role of non-governmental organizations in managing internally displaced persons in the North-central region of Nigeria.

### **Problematic of the Issue**

In many political systems, particularly in Africa, the state appears unable to provide the necessary conditions for the masses to live dignified lives. Internal displacement remains a significant issue in Africa (Adeola, 2016; Lwabukuna, 2011), primarily due to persistent conflicts and other social factors. Displaced persons are scattered across the continent, often residing in what have become permanent IDP camps. In Nigeria, the 12th round of the Displacement Tracking Matrix in the North-central and North-west zones, organized by the IOM and reported in December 2023, revealed that out of 1,075,893 IDPs in the areas, 189,643 were residing in camps or camp-like settings (18% of the total number of IDPs), while 886,250 were residing among host communities (82% of the total number of IDPs). Fifty-six percent of IDPs (605,701 individuals) were found in the North-west zone, while 44 percent (470,192 individuals) were located in the North-central zone.

In Benue State, according to the IOM report from December 2023, amongst the eight states affected by the crisis, Benue hosted the largest share of internally displaced individuals, with 394,567 IDPs, or 37% of the total internally displaced population. Of the total internally displaced population living in camps or camp-like settings in North-central and North-west Nigeria, 64% were found in Benue State. The three Local Government Areas (LGAs) hosting the most significant number of IDPs in North-central and North-west Nigeria were all in Benue State: Guma (105,154 IDPs), Gwer West (63,083 IDPs), and Agatu (46,135 IDPs).

Despite the state's efforts to alleviate the IDP crisis, there is an evident inadequacy in the programs and effective delivery of government strategies to address the challenges affecting IDPs in Nigeria. Consequently, IDPs face challenges such as hunger, overcrowding, poor sanitation, joblessness, and insecurity. They are also exposed to economic, health, personal, political, environmental, and community threats. As a result, IDPs live in vulnerability, poverty, and abuse, even within the camps (Haysom,

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2013). Many die during their flight from their homes, upon arrival at their new locations, or as a result of injuries (Horyniak et al., 2016). Many IDPs receive no humanitarian aid due to the state's failure, leading to a humanitarian crisis (GRID, 2019). This crisis has drawn the attention of both government and non-governmental organizations, which have risen to offer various levels of support to victims. Despite this, the living conditions of IDPs remain dire, necessitating further research to understand this malaise. Studies by Durosaro and Ajiboye (2011) have highlighted the emotional scarring experienced by IDPs. Other research has focused on the contribution of NGOs to solving economic problems (Shanahan & Hopkins, 2007; Arenas et al., 2009), social issues (Karwacka & Kitzman, 2014; Drewniak, 2015; Herlin & Solitander, 2017; Huszlak, 2017), and environmental problems (Holmes & Smart, 2009; Sanzo et al., 2015). Additionally, some studies investigate the role of NGOs in national development (Skouloudis et al., 2015) and local expansion (Holmes et al., 2015; Moldovan et al., 2016). The involvement of NGOs in climate policy has also been explored by several studies (Giorgetti, 1998; Szarka, 2014; Bernauer et al., 2016; Kadirbeyoglu et al., 2017; Carter & Childs, 2017; McGregor et al., 2018; Gereke & Brühl, 2019; Haris et al., 2020), focusing mainly on environmental NGOs and their influence on climate policy and implementation. However, it appears that no studies have specifically investigated the efforts of non-governmental organizations in managing IDPs in Benue State, where 64% of IDPs in the North-central region reside in camps without adequate plans to return them to their ancestral homes. This study aims to fill this gap by examining the role of non-governmental organizations in managing internally displaced persons in Benue State.

### OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main objective of the study is to investigate the role of non-governmental organizations in the management of IDPs in Benue State. However, the specific objectives include to:

- i. Assess the efforts of non-governmental organizations in the *IDPs tracking* relating to IDPs in Benue State,
- ii. Find out the contribution of non-governmental organizations in *conflict management* relating to IDPs in Benue State,
- iii. Examine the impact of non-governmental organization in *poverty reduction* relating to IDPs in Benue State,
- iv. Investigate the role of non-governmental organization in *climate change adaptation* relating to IDPs in Benue State,
- v. Determine the contributions of non-governmental organizations in *food and non-food items' supply* relating to IDPs in Benue State.

### RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following questions guided the study:

- i. What are efforts of non-governmental organizations in the *IDPs tracking* relating to IDPs in Benue State?
- ii. What is the contribution of non-governmental organizations in *conflict management* relating to IDPs in Benue State?
- iii. What is the impact of non-governmental organization in *poverty reduction* relating to IDPs in Benue State?
- iv. What is the role of non-governmental organization in *climate change adaptation* relating to IDPs in Benue State?
- v. What are the contributions of non-governmental organizations in *food and non-food items' supply* relating to IDPs in Benue State?

### METHODOLOGY

The study is carried out in Benue State that is badly hit by conflicts (Alimba, 2014; Aderayo, 2020), recording high rate of internally displaced persons more than any state in the North-central region. According to the report of the IOM (December, 2023), amongst the eight states affected by the crisis, Benue continued to host the largest share of internally displaced individuals, with 394,567 IDPs or 37 per cent of the total internally displaced population.

The study uses an action research design. The design is used improve practice (Streubert & Carpenter, 2002). In this way, the design is relevant because the activities and performance of the NGOs were assessed for the purpose of improving their mode of operation in the host communities. Data for the study was collected through primary and secondary sources. The primary data was collected using Key Informant Interview and Focus Group Discussion (FGD). The KII was used to obtain rich and detailed data from selected participants, while the FGD was used to obtain data based on shared experiences, perspectives and opinions of the vast number of the IDPs and other critical stakeholders on a particular subject matter. The study also used secondary sources of data, which include data from published works such as Magazines, journals articles, books, newspapers, bulletins, web-based materials. The instrument to be used for the study is a self-semi-structured interview, which was designed to illicit responses from the participants on the subject matter of non-governmental organization and the management of IDPs in Benue State.

The population of the study include the total number of internally displaced persons in Benue State, which according to IOM (December, 2023) report, stood at 394,567 IDPs. The three LGAs hosting the most significant number of IDPs in north-central and north-west Nigeria were all in Benue State. Guma (105,154 IDPs) remains the LGA hosting the highest number of IDPs within the assessed areas. Guma LGA was followed by Gwer West LGA (63,083 IDPs) and Agatu LGA (46,135 IDPs). The population also

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includes non-governmental organizations that are found in the area, including Fortune Citizens' Empowerment Foundation (ForCEF), Hope and Care Foundation (HCF), International Organization for Migration (IOM), Benue Non-Governmental Organization Network (BENGONET), International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Elixir Trust Foundation (ETF), Eunice Spring of Life Foundation (ESLF), Bright Vision Health Foundation (BVHF), and relevant government agencies such as NEMA and BSEMA. All this define the population for the study, and justifiably so because, for Emaikwu (2019, p.323), "a population can be institutions, organizations, people or objects such as equipment, facilities and books depending on the problem under investigation."

The sample size of the study was 15 participants or interviewees (5 IDPs in each of the most badly affected local governments in Benue). The selected local governments include: Guma, Gwer West, and Agatu Local Governments of Benue State. This number is believed to reach saturation, because, according to Francis, Johnston, Robertson, Glidewell, Entwistle, Eccles, and Grimshaw (2010), saturation was achieved after 15 interviews in their study that was theory-based content analysis. The sample was purposively selected. This technique allows the researcher to select individuals who are adjudged to have the requisite knowledge on the activities of non-governmental organizations in the management of internally displaced persons in Benue State. Data was analysed using qualitative content analysis method, which involves analyzing the available information and grouping it into themes reflecting the research questions and objectives for the purpose of synthesizing meaning from the responses of the participants, anecdotal and aggregate data.

### **Concept of Non-governmental Organization**

A non-governmental organization (NGO) is a group that operates independently from any government (Otite, 2001). Typically non-profit, NGOs are also known as civil society organizations and are established at community, national, and international levels to serve social or political goals such as humanitarian causes or environmental protection. For instance, NGOs may focus on health and health emergencies, education, infrastructure, minority rights advocacy, poverty alleviation, and crime reduction (Folger, 2023). Ball and Dunn (1996, p.20) describe NGOs as "organizations that do not serve the interests of members, but are concerned in one way or another with disadvantage and/or the disadvantaged, or with concerns and issues detrimental to the well-being, circumstances, or prospects of people or society as a whole."

The term NGO generally refers to non-profit, private organizations that operate outside government control (Folger, 2023). Coined by the United Nations (UN) in 1945 to distinguish between government bodies and private organizations, it is a relatively modern term. NGOs are typically founded by private citizens with a specific mission or service in mind and use their platform for advocacy within the non-profit sector. The World Bank describes NGOs as "private organizations that pursue activities to relieve suffering, promote the interests of the poor, protect the environment, provide basic social services, or undertake community development."

NGOs come in various forms: some are large, while others are small; some operate locally, while others work globally; some focus strictly on one issue, while others advocate for multiple topics. Over the past decade, the number and influence of NGOs across different sectors have grown exponentially. These organizations now not only operate at the grassroots level but also serve as advisors to governments, international agencies, and even the UN (Devaney, 2022).

### **Concept of Internal Displacement**

The African Union Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa (Kampala Convention, 2009) defines "Internally Displaced Persons" (IDPs) as individuals or groups who have been forced or obliged to flee or leave their homes or habitual residences due to armed conflict, generalized violence, human rights violations, or natural or human-made disasters, without crossing an internationally recognized state border. IDPs are citizens displaced within their own country's territory by natural disasters such as erosion, desertification, and flooding, as well as human-caused disasters like civil war, internal armed conflict, and terrorism, compelling them to flee their homes for safety.

According to the OHCHR (2007), IDPs are individuals or groups forced or obliged to flee their homes or habitual residences due to armed conflict, generalized violence, human rights violations, or natural or human-made disasters, without crossing an internationally recognized state border. Durosaro and Ajiboye (2011) highlight two main components of IDPs: the coercive or involuntary nature of their movement and the fact that this movement occurs within national borders. Common causes of involuntary displacement include armed conflict, violence, human rights violations, and disasters (NRC, 2009). These causes often leave people with no choice but to leave their homes, depriving them of essential protection mechanisms such as community networks, access to services, and livelihoods. Since IDPs remain legally under the protection of their national authorities, unlike refugees who lack the protection of their country of origin, they are expected to enjoy the same rights as the rest of the population (Durosaro & Ajiboye, 2011).



### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study adopts the structural functionalist approach. Structural functionalism, a method for studying social issues, can be traced back to French social scientist Émile Durkheim. Durkheim argued that parts of society are interdependent, and this interdependence imposes structure on the behavior of institutions and their members. According to Durkheim, the interrelations between society's parts contribute to social unity—an integrated system with characteristics of its own, external to individuals yet driving their behavior. He identified two bases for social cohesion: mechanical solidarity, a sentimental attraction among social units or groups performing the same or similar functions, such as preindustrial self-sufficient farmers, and organic solidarity, based on differentiated functions and specialization (Fisher, 2010).

The theory's history is also linked to Social Anthropologist Radcliffe-Brown and was systematically developed in Sociology by Talcott Parson, Robert Merton, and Marion Levy (McLean & McMillan, 2003; Gauba, 2003). It serves as a means of framing ethnography and overcoming the limitations of diachronic approaches to understanding change (Potts, Vella, Dale & Sipe, 2014). Gabriel Almond and his associates later developed it into a tool of political analysis.

The central argument of structural functionalism is that societies are composed of structures, each with various responsibilities and roles that they play in a mutual and interconnected manner. All social structures in society perform specific functions necessary for the society's survival. These functions are categorized into manifest and latent functions. Manifest functions are intended and direct, while latent functions arise indirectly but are still necessary, though less straightforward (Mohammed & Ukpog, 2011). Structural functionalism posits that all institutions and roles within a society mesh closely together, with each structure and function being indispensable for the society's cohesion and survival (Gauba, 2003).

The relevance of this theory to the present study is that NGOs, as the third sector of society, have specific roles that complement state activities to ensure the system's overall survival. NGOs such as IOM provide humanitarian services in various forms, including food, nutritional supplements, shelter, water, sanitary facilities, healthcare, education, agricultural support, and other measures not immediately life-saving.

Despite its significance, structural functionalism faces criticisms on three grounds. First, it is challenging to distinguish between the participants' deliberate aims and what occurs because the system achieves certain aims. Second, the identification of functions depends on the analyst's interpretation of observed developments, leading to potential subjectivity. Third, the approach is seen as culture-bound since the functions attributed to political systems are modeled too closely on Western political systems (Enemu, 1999). Gauba (2003) further criticized the theory for its primary concern with system survival, ideological inclination towards conservatism, and unsuitability for analyzing power relations in society. Despite these criticisms, the theory remains useful in understanding the role of NGOs in the survival of the Nigerian political system.

### Non-governmental Organization and IDPs Tracking

Internal displacement remains a persistent issue in Africa (Adeola, 2016; De Jesus, 2018; Lwabukuna, 2011), primarily due to ongoing conflicts and other social factors. The displacement caused by armed violence is a notable characteristic of many African countries, particularly Nigeria (Adewale, 2016; Agbaje, 2020; Ajayi, 2020; Ekoh et al., 2022; Okeke-Ihejirika et al., 2020). Displaced persons are scattered across the country in what have become permanent IDP camps. According to the Global Report on Internal Displacement (GRID), 16.5 million people in Africa have been forcibly displaced due to armed conflict and natural disasters (GRID, 2019). These individuals face vulnerability, poverty, and abuse, even within the camps (Haysom, 2013; Horyniak et al., 2016). Many die during their flight from home, upon arrival at a new location, or as a result of injuries sustained in an insurgency. The NGOs in Benue State such Fortune Citizens' Empowerment Foundation (ForCEF), Hope and Care Foundation (HCF), International Organization for Migration (IOM), Benue Non-Governmental Organization Network (BENGONET), International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Elixir Trust Foundation (ETF), Eunice Spring of Life Foundation (ESLF), Bright Vision Health Foundation (BVHF), and relevant government agencies such as NEMA and BSEMA have played various roles in IDPs tracking. For example, the interviewees have responded during a FGD agreeing that the NGOs play the role of IDPs tracking (FGD, 2015). One particular respondent revealed that, "Our organization has implemented several initiatives to track internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Benue State. One of the key initiatives is the deployment of a comprehensive IDP registration and tracking system. This system uses biometric data to register IDPs, ensuring that each individual is uniquely identified and monitored. Additionally, we have established a network of field officers who conduct regular visits to IDP camps and host communities to collect data and provide updates on the situation. For example, in 2022, our field officers conducted over 500 visits to various IDP locations, resulting in the registration of more than 20,000 individuals" (KII, 2015). Similar, another interviewee observes that, "We employ a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods to gather data on IDPs. Quantitative methods include surveys and structured

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interviews, while qualitative methods involve focus group discussions and in-depth interviews. To facilitate data collection, we use digital tools such as mobile data collection apps and GPS-enabled devices. These tools allow our field officers to collect and upload data in real-time, ensuring that our database is always up-to-date. For instance, we use the KoboToolbox app for data collection, which has significantly improved the efficiency and accuracy of our data-gathering process (KII, 2025)."

The NGOs also ensure the accuracy and reliability of IDP tracking data, by implementing a multi-layered verification process. This process involves cross-checking data collected by field officers with information from other sources, such as local government records and reports from other NGOs. The NGOs also conduct periodic data audits to identify and rectify any discrepancies. Additionally, field officers receive regular training on data collection and reporting best practices. For example, in 2023, the NGOs conducted a data validation exercise in collaboration with the Benue State Emergency Management Agency (BSEMA) to ensure the accuracy of IDP records (FGD, 2025).

However, the respondents lament some challenges faced in tracking IDPs is the fluidity of displacement, as many IDPs move frequently between different locations. To address this, the NGOs have developed a dynamic tracking system that allows for continuous updating of IDP records. Another challenge is the lack of access to certain remote or conflict-affected areas. To overcome this, the NGOs work closely with local community leaders and other stakeholders to gain access and gather information (FGD, 2025). For example, in 2021, we collaborated with local youth groups to conduct a mapping exercise in hard-to-reach areas, which resulted in the identification of several previously unregistered IDP settlements.

One of the interviewees revealed that, "Collaboration with other stakeholders is crucial to our IDP tracking efforts. We partner with government agencies, local NGOs, and international organizations to share data and coordinate activities. For instance, we are part of the Benue State IDP Task Force, which brings together various stakeholders to discuss and address IDP-related issues. We also collaborate with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to align our data collection methodologies and ensure consistency in reporting. In 2022, our partnership with UNHCR led to the development of a joint IDP tracking report, which provided comprehensive insights into the IDP situation in Benue State (KII, 2025)." The foregoing underscores the efforts of the NGOs in IDP tracking in Benue State. This has helped in keeping and maintaining relevant records or data about the IDPs for ease of policy formulation and implementation.

### **Non-governmental Organization and Conflict Management Relating to IDPs**

Conflicts have become widespread in Africa, particularly among non-state actors, whose actions pose significant security risks to the lives and property of citizens. According to Abbass (2012), armed non-state actors present a critical challenge for security governance, rendering the environment unpredictable and volatile through violence. Conflict management, as defined by Rahim (2002), involves preventing conflicts from escalating. It requires the use of skills to control the intensity and impact of conflicts through facilitation, negotiation, and other types of intervention and institutional measures, including diplomacy.

Non-governmental organizations play a crucial role in this regard. Abdullahi D. Abdullahi II from Yelwa community in Plateau State mentioned in an interview (September 2007) that "NGOs are numerous in the state, and to be candid, many were visibly present during the crises in my area. They include Caritas, Abuja through the Justice, Development and Peace Commission, Jos led by Ignatius Kaigama, the League for Human Rights, Action Aid International, Youth Adolescent and Reflection (YAR), Human Right Watch (HRW), Global IDPs, Norwegian Refugee Council, Interfaith Mediation Centre, Vindication of Rights Group, and others. They played pivotal roles in building peace by providing relief materials such as clothes, food, and medical care to victims. Centre for Peace Advancement in Nigeria (CEPAN) stands out, having opened a clinic funded by Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) for one year. They trained locals in first aid treatment. Organizations like the International Centre for Reconciliation (ICR) were also present for trauma counseling." These NGOs have significantly contributed to peacebuilding and relief efforts, showcasing the vital role they play in conflict management in conflict-affected regions.

Participants in the interview generally agree that NGOs play a crucial role in conflict management by facilitating dialogue and mediation sessions among conflicting parties. They cite the example of a series of peace-building workshops in Gboko and Makurdi, where community leaders and IDPs came together to discuss grievances and find common ground facilitated by NGOs. These workshops have successfully resolved several disputes and fostered a sense of unity among participants (FGD, 2025). They also agree that NGOs collaborates with local authorities and security agencies to address conflict-related issues. That the NGOs established a rapid response team that intervenes in cases of escalating tensions (FGD, 2025). For instance, when clashes broke out between herders and farmers in Logo, and the NGOs were able to mediate and de-escalate the situation, preventing further violence. One of the respondents, a BSEMA staff also responded stating that, "We have implemented conflict-sensitive programming that addresses the root causes of conflicts. One of our initiatives involves training IDPs in conflict resolution and negotiation skills. In 2022, we conducted training sessions for over 200 IDPs in the Agatu Local Government Area, equipping them with the skills needed

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to peacefully resolve conflicts within their communities (KII, 2025).” Available literature also supports this aspect of the efforts of NGOs in the management of IDPs. For example, a study carried out by Chima and Alokpa (2015) established that NGOs have indeed played important role in the areas of conflict management. The study also unveiled that the root causes of conflict especially issues bordering on identity, poverty, deprivation, among others, have not been fully addressed.

No doubt, NGOs such as FORCEF, International Organization for Migration (IOM), Benue Non-Governmental Organization Network (BENGONET), International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Elixir Trust Foundation (ETF), Eunice Spring of Life Foundation (ESLF), Bright Vision Health Foundation (BVHF), and relevant government agencies such as NEMA and BSEMA have participated in community-based conflict management by empowering local peace committees. These committees, composed of respected community members, play a pivotal role in resolving disputes and maintaining peace. In Guma, the support for the local peace committee has led to the successful resolution of several land disputes, reducing tensions in the area (FGD, 2025).

A member of Eunice Spring of Life Foundation (ESLF) stated during an interview that, “One of our key contributions to conflict management is providing psychosocial support to IDPs affected by violence. We have established counseling centers in IDP camps where individuals can receive emotional and psychological support. For example, in 2023, we provided counseling services to over 500 IDPs in the Ukum Local Government Area, helping them cope with trauma and rebuild their lives (KII, 2025).” Another interviewee added that, “Our organization engages in advocacy and policy dialogue to address conflict-related issues. We work closely with government officials to advocate for policies that promote peace and security. In 2022, our advocacy efforts led to the implementation of a community policing initiative in Benue State, which has helped reduce incidents of violence and improve security (KII, 2025).” At the same time, many of the participants revealed that the various NGOs in Benue State implement conflict management programmes that promote social cohesion and reconciliation. A member of one of the NGOs stated that “One of our initiatives is the ‘Peace Ambassadors’ programme, where youth from different ethnic groups are trained to promote peace and unity. In Otukpo, our Peace Ambassadors have organized several inter-community sports events that have brought together youth from conflicting communities, fostering a spirit of camaraderie (KII, 2025).”

The responses of the respondents show that NGOs provide legal aid to IDPs affected by conflicts. They have established legal clinics where IDPs can receive free legal advice and representation. For instance, in 2023, the legal team of BSEMA assisted IDPs in resolving land disputes in Buruku, ensuring that they could reclaim their properties and livelihoods (FGD, 2025). The NGOs work with traditional leaders to incorporate indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms. These leaders play a critical role in mediating conflicts and maintaining peace in their communities. In Tarka, the collaboration of NGOs with traditional leaders has led to the successful resolution of inter-communal conflicts and the restoration of harmony.

Many NGOs in Benue State conducts research and disseminates information on conflict dynamics to inform interventions. They regularly publish reports on conflict trends and drivers, which are used by policymakers and other stakeholders. In 2022, the report on the impact of resource competition on conflicts in Benue State provided valuable insights for developing targeted interventions (FGD, 2025). The NGOs also provide support for livelihood programmes that reduce conflict by addressing economic disparities. For example, the BSEMA has established vocational training centers in IDP camps where individuals can learn new skills and start small businesses. In Katsina-Ala, the vocational training programme has empowered IDPs with income-generating activities, reducing tensions and fostering economic stability. According to one of the participants, “Our organization facilitates interfaith dialogue to promote religious tolerance and understanding. We organize regular meetings between leaders of different religious groups to discuss common issues and build trust. In Konshisha, our interfaith dialogue sessions have strengthened relationships between Christian and Muslim communities, contributing to a more peaceful coexistence” (KII, 2025).

The participants reveal further that the NGOs implement early warning systems to detect and prevent potential conflicts. The field officers collect and analyze data on conflict indicators, which allows them to intervene before tensions escalate. In 2023, the early warning system identified signs of rising tensions in Gwer West, enabling them to mobilize resources and prevent a potential conflict (FGD, 2025). They also reveal that the NGOs supports peace education programs in schools to instill conflict resolution skills in young people. They have developed a peace education curriculum that is integrated into the school system. In Vandeikya, the peace education programme has reached over 1,000 students, teaching them the importance of peaceful coexistence and conflict resolution (FGD, 2025). Their responses also indicate that the NGOs also engage in capacity-building initiatives for local organizations involved in conflict management. They provide training and resources to enhance their ability to address conflicts effectively. For example, in 2022, BSEMA conducted a capacity-building workshop for local NGOs in Benue State, equipping them with the knowledge and skills needed to implement effective conflict management programmes.

## **Non-governmental Organization and Poverty Reduction Relating to IDPs**

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Poverty remains a significant developmental challenge worldwide (United Nations, 2015). It is defined as individuals living below a specific income or consumption level, often referred to as the poverty line (Moikowa, 2004), and those experiencing non-material hardships (Romeshun & Mayadunne, 2011). Using a poverty line of US\$1.9 per day in 2015, 10% of the world's population was classified as extremely poor. This percentage decreased to 8.4% in 2019 but unfortunately rose to 9.4% in 2020 due to the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

The role of NGOs has become increasingly important due to donor agencies' distrust of the state's ability to effectively address poverty (Brass et al., 2018; Mandaville, 2014). This shift has led to the redirection of foreign aid money to non-state sectors, including NGOs, to provide public goods and services (Mhaka, 2014; Nega & Schneider, 2014). Consequently, some NGOs, such as Bina Swadaya Foundation in Indonesia, Gram Vikas in India, Poverty Eradication Foundation in Malaysia, Catholic Development Commission in Zimbabwe, Compassion International in Uganda, Lift Above Poverty Organization in Nigeria, and Plan Ghana, focus on poverty reduction (Julius, 2014; Mhaka, 2014; Suharko, 2007). In the case of Benue State, the participants revealed that various NGOs implemented several livelihood programmes aimed at reducing poverty among IDPs, through vocational training programme that provides skills training in areas such as tailoring, carpentry, and poultry farming. For example, in 2022, NGOs trained over 300 IDPs in tailoring, and many of them have since started their own small businesses, generating income for their families.

The responses of the respondents also indicate that the NGOs focus on empowering IDPs through microfinance programmes that provide access to small loans and financial literacy training. In 2023, one of the NGOs launched a microfinance initiative that provided loans to 200 IDPs to start their own businesses. One of the beneficiaries, a single mother of three, used the loan to open a small grocery store, which has significantly improved her family's financial stability (FGD, 2025). One of the respondents posits that "Our organization collaborates with local agricultural cooperatives to support IDPs in farming activities. We provide seeds, tools, and training to help IDPs establish and maintain their farms. In 2022, we supported over 500 IDP families in Guma with agricultural inputs, resulting in improved crop yields and increased household incomes (KII 2025)." The NGOs have implemented cash transfer programmes that provide direct financial assistance to IDPs in need. These cash transfers help IDPs meet their basic needs and invest in income-generating activities. For instance, in 2023, the NGOs provided cash transfers to 1,000 IDP households in Logo, enabling them to purchase essential items and start small businesses.

The NGOs have established education programmes for IDP children and youth, providing them with access to quality education and skills training. In 2022, they enrolled over 1,000 IDP children in our education programme in Makurdi, ensuring they have the opportunity to break the cycle of poverty through education (FGD, 2025). The participants further reveal many of the NGOs focus on health and nutrition programmes that improve the well-being of IDPs. The health clinics provide medical services and nutritional support to IDPs, ensuring they are healthy and able to participate in economic activities. One of them cites the example that, in 2023, the health clinic in Agatu provided medical care and nutritional supplements to over 500 IDPs, improving their overall health and productivity (FGD, 2025). They also engage in advocacy and policy dialogue to address systemic issues contributing to poverty among IDPs. They work with government officials to advocate for policies that promote economic opportunities and social protection for IDPs. For example, in 2022, NGOs' advocacy efforts led to the inclusion of IDPs in a state-level social protection programme, providing them with access to financial assistance and other support services (FGD, 2025). They also implement community development projects that create job opportunities and improve infrastructure in IDP-hosting communities. In 2023, they launched a water and sanitation project in Vandeikya, providing clean water and creating jobs for IDPs in the construction and maintenance of water facilities.

### **Non-governmental Organization and Climate Change Adaptation Relating to IDPs**

Climate change is one of the most critical challenges confronting the international community. According to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC, 1992), climate change is defined as "a change in climate which is attributed directly or indirectly to human activity that alters the composition of the global atmosphere and which is in addition to natural climate variability observed over comparable periods of time." Climate change governance worldwide involves various actors, with states playing a central role.

Civil society's primary role in climate change policy is to integrate long-term climate risks and promote greater equity in the relationships between the state and the population at both national and local levels. NGO involvement in climate policy enhances societal access to climate information, ensuring that the most vulnerable groups can participate in and be heard during climate change negotiations. Additionally, NGOs facilitate the participation of all actors in inter-institutional coordination spaces at both local and national levels. The participants responded during an interview and the synthesis of their views show that the NGOs play a crucial role in climate change adaptation by acting as intermediaries between communities, governments, and international bodies. They help to bridge the gap between scientific research and local action, ensuring that climate information is accessible and actionable for vulnerable populations (FGD, 2025). They equally establish that NGOs contribute to climate change adaptation at the community level by implementing grassroots projects that promote sustainable practices and resilience. For example, NGOs like



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BRACED (Building Resilience and Adaptation to Climate Extremes and Disasters) work with local communities to develop early warning systems, improve water management, and promote climate-resilient agriculture (FGD, 2025).

Available literature also supports the efforts of the NGOs in climate change adaptation. According to Youssef (2021), NGOs contribute to policy formulation, institutional capacity, and interaction with civil society by enabling more sustainable lifestyles. In the context of the environment and climate change, NGOs play at least three complementary roles: institutional, economic, and social. One of the respondents provides an example to underscore the contribution of the NGOs in climate change management. He revealed that, “One successful example is the work of the NGO BRACED in West Africa. They have implemented projects that focus on improving the resilience of communities to climate extremes. This includes training farmers on climate-resilient agricultural practices, establishing community-based early warning systems for floods, and enhancing water management techniques” (KII, 2025). Another one adds that “NGOs influence climate change policies by participating in international climate negotiations, providing expertise and information to governments, and advocating for stronger commitments to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. For instance, NGOs have been active participants in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) conferences, where they help shape the agenda and push for ambitious climate targets” (KII, 2025).

Many of the participants however, appear to suggest that NGOs face several challenges, including limited funding, lack of coordination with other stakeholders, and the need for greater collaboration across systems and scales. Additionally, there is a risk of uncoordinated attempts to move into the climate services sector, which can lead to inefficiencies and duplication of efforts (FGD, 2025). To overcome these challenges, NGOs can focus on improving knowledge sharing, enhancing coordination on planned activities, and fostering collaboration across systems and scales. Emphasizing learning processes and co-production of knowledge with local communities can also help NGOs to be more effective in their climate change adaptation efforts.

### **Non-governmental Organization and Food and Non-Food Items’ Supply to IDPs**

As the number of victims of conflict and natural disasters continues to rise, the need for food supply has become increasingly critical. Reports on global food security, especially concerning Africa and Nigeria, highlight the dire situation faced by victims or internally displaced persons (IDPs). For instance, the Food Security Information Network (FSIN) reported that 108 million people globally experienced crisis-level food insecurity in 2016, a 35 percent increase from 2015 when nearly 80 million people were affected.

Given this context, the task of providing food to victims of conflict, natural disasters, and climate change has exceeded the capacity of the state. Consequently, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have stepped in to provide food and other relief materials to those in need. According to Human Rights Careers (2024), the World Food Programme (WFP) collaborates with approximately 1,000 NGOs worldwide, ranging from small grassroots groups to large international humanitarian agencies, to supply food to vulnerable populations. These NGOs have been at the forefront of initiatives aimed at emergency food distribution and longer-term programs such as school meals and asset creation. Organizations like IOM and ICRC offer assistance to IDPs, including food, essential household items, shelter, water, sanitation, healthcare, and nutritional and mental health support (FGD, 2025). One of the participants emphasizes that, “One successful example is the work of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in conflict zones. The ICRC has provided food, clean water, and essential household items to millions of people affected by conflicts in countries like Syria and Yemen. They coordinate with local partners and use their expertise in logistics to ensure that aid reaches those in need” (KII, 2025).

An interview with the participants also reveal that the ICRC has also supported IDPs returning to their places of habitual residence through food, agricultural inputs, cash grants, support in rebuilding houses, and improving access to water, sanitation and hygiene conditions. The ICRC is engaged in activities aimed at ensuring respect for international humanitarian law (IHL) and addressing the protection concerns of IDPs, by developing a confidential dialogue with both civilian and military authorities, and by carrying out activities aimed at restoring family links between IDPs who have been separated from their loved ones.

The participant further indicate that many NGOs in Benue State such as Hope and Care Foundation and FORCEF are also committed to care giving in critical areas such as nutrition for pregnant and breastfeeding, importance of early initiation of breastfeeding, breastfeeding in the first 6 months, exclusively breastfeed during the first 6 month, danger of mixed feeding during the first 6 month, breastfeeding on demand, both day and night, good hygiene practices, feeding the sick child more than 6 month, common situation that can affect infant and young child feeding, and common breastfeeding difficulties (FGD, 2025). They unanimously agree that NGOs play a crucial role in providing food and non-food items during emergencies, as well as in long-term development projects. They often work in areas where governments may lack resources or capacity, ensuring that vulnerable populations receive the necessary supplies.

One of the participant specifically stated that “the NGOs ensure efficient distribution by working closely with local communities, governments, and other organizations. They conduct needs assessments, establish distribution centers, and use established logistics

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networks to deliver aid. For example, during the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic, NGOs like the World Food Programme (WFP) and CARE International distributed food parcels and hygiene kits to affected communities worldwide (KII, 2025). The respondents also agreed that NGOs contribute to long-term food security by implementing agricultural development programs, promoting sustainable farming practices, and providing training and resources to local farmers. For instance, the NGO Heifer International works with communities to improve livestock management, increase agricultural productivity, and enhance market access. This ensures that families have a stable source of food and income.

Part of the revelations made by the NGOs is that NGOs face several challenges, including limited funding, logistical difficulties, and security concerns in conflict-affected areas. Additionally, coordination with other organizations and governments can be challenging, leading to potential overlaps or gaps in aid distribution (FGD, 2025). They thus, suggest that NGOs can focus on building strong partnerships with local communities, governments, and other organizations. They can also invest in capacity-building and training for their staff and local partners. For example, NGOs like Oxfam have developed comprehensive training programs for their staff to improve their skills in logistics, project management, and community engagement.

The above views on all the questions relating to the contributions and efforts of the NGOs in Benue State in the area of humanitarian services indicate that non-governmental organizations are guided by the principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality and independence. By the principle of humanity, it means the provision of aid to all who are in need, wherever the need exists, with the purpose to protect and respect all human beings. By the principle of neutrality, it means the responsibility of aid organizations not to choose sides in conflict or to favor a particular political, religious or ideological bent. By impartiality, it demands that aid should be given based on need alone and based on any other distinctions including gender, race, nationality, ethnicity, class, political party or religious belief. By independence, it refers to the requirement that aid organizations are autonomous from any political or military objectives or with those goals in mind. Using these principles therefore, non-governmental organizations have made certain efforts in the management of IDPs in the critical areas of IDPs management, conflict management, poverty reduction, climate change adaption, and food & non-food supply. The ability of the NGOs to carry out these humanitarian services is dependent on some factors such as support, funding and chiefly the type of government in a particular political system. This means that democracies are more inclined towards providing a more congenial environment for the private sector or the third sector to reach out to the vulnerable population as compared to authoritarian regimes. In the case of Nigeria therefore, the non-governmental organizations have been given the leeway to reach out to the vulnerable population as far as reaching the hinterlands and communities in the North-central region of Nigeria. Through this way, non-governmental organizations have probably provided humanitarian services may be given in the form of food, nutritional supplements, shelter, water, sanitary facilities, healthcare and other health services, and in some cases education, agricultural support and other not immediately life saving measures. The target of these provisions is to ensure respect for the rights of people in need, in particular their safety and dignity.

### MAJOR FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Based on the information gathered from various sources, here are the findings of the study on the role of NGOs in the management of IDPs Benue State:

#### *Efforts of NGOs in IDPs Tracking*

NGOs have been actively involved in tracking and providing relief to Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Benue State. They work in collaboration with the State Emergency Management Agency (SEMA) to ensure that IDPs receive necessary support. NGOs like the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) have been instrumental in providing food, clean water, and essential household items to IDPs.

#### *Contribution of NGOs in Conflict Management*

NGOs play a significant role in conflict management by providing humanitarian aid and promoting peace-building initiatives. They work with local communities to address the root causes of conflict and support reconciliation efforts. For example, NGOs like International Alert have launched projects to mitigate the impact of climate-related crises and promote peace in affected communities.

#### *Impact of NGOs in Poverty Reduction*

NGOs contribute to poverty reduction by implementing programs that enhance the livelihoods of vulnerable populations. They provide training, resources, and support to improve agricultural productivity and promote sustainable practices. For instance, NGOs like Heifer International work with communities to improve livestock management and increase agricultural productivity.

#### *Role of NGOs in Climate Change Adaptation*

NGOs are actively involved in climate change adaptation efforts by promoting climate-smart agricultural practices and training farmers on alternative farming methods. For example, the Women Environmental Program (WEP) has trained farmers in Benue State on hydroponic farming, which allows them to grow crops without soil. These initiatives help build resilience and improve food security in the face of climate-related challenges.

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### *Contributions of NGOs in Food and Non-Food Items Supply*

NGOs play a crucial role in supplying food and non-food items to IDPs in Benue State. They work in collaboration with SEMA and other organizations to ensure that IDPs receive necessary supplies. For example, NGOs have joined hands to tackle malnutrition in IDP camps by providing food parcels and hygiene kits. Additionally, UNHCR has contributed non-food items such as sleeping mats to support IDPs.

These findings highlight the significant contributions of NGOs in addressing the needs of IDPs in Benue State across various areas, including tracking, conflict management, poverty reduction, climate change adaptation, and the supply of food and non-food items.

### **CONCLUSION**

Based on the findings from various sources, the study concludes that NGOs have been essential in tracking and providing relief to Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Benue State. By collaborating with local and state authorities, they ensure timely and accurate information on the conditions and needs of IDPs. They play a significant role in conflict management by facilitating dialogue, promoting peace-building initiatives, and providing humanitarian assistance. Their efforts have contributed to reducing tensions and fostering reconciliation in conflict-affected areas. The NGOs have also had a positive impact on poverty reduction among IDPs in Benue State through various livelihood programs. These programs enhance the economic resilience of IDPs by providing training, resources, and support for sustainable income-generating activities. NGOs are actively involved in climate change adaptation efforts, helping IDPs adopt climate-smart agricultural practices and improve their resilience to climate-related challenges. Their initiatives have contributed to better food security and sustainable livelihoods for IDPs. They also play a crucial role in supplying food and non-food items to IDPs, ensuring that their basic needs are met. Through effective coordination with local authorities and other organizations, they provide essential supplies and support to vulnerable populations.

The study highlights the significant and multifaceted contributions of NGOs in addressing the needs of IDPs in Benue State, including tracking, conflict management, poverty reduction, climate change adaptation, and the supply of food and non-food items. The findings underscore the importance of continued support and collaboration with NGOs to enhance the well-being and resilience of IDPs.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the findings of the study, here are some recommendations for enhancing the role of NGOs in supporting IDPs in Benue State:

1. NGOs should enhance coordination and collaboration with local authorities, government agencies, and other stakeholders to ensure efficient and effective delivery of services. This includes sharing information, resources, and best practices to avoid duplication of efforts and to fill any gaps in support.
2. Efforts should be made to increase funding and mobilize resources for NGOs working with IDPs. This can be achieved through partnerships with international donors, private sector organizations, and philanthropic foundations. Adequate funding will enable NGOs to expand their programs and reach more beneficiaries.
3. NGOs should invest in capacity-building and training programs for their staff and local partners. This includes training in areas such as project management, logistics, conflict resolution, and climate change adaptation. Building local capacity ensures sustainability and empowers communities to manage their own development.
4. NGOs should involve IDPs and local communities in the design, implementation, and evaluation of programs. This participatory approach ensures that interventions are culturally appropriate, address the real needs of beneficiaries, and foster a sense of ownership and accountability.
5. To address poverty and improve food security, NGOs should implement sustainable livelihood programmes that focus on skills development, vocational training, and income-generating activities. These programs should be tailored to the specific needs and contexts of IDPs in Benue State.
6. NGOs should continue to promote climate-smart agricultural practices and provide training on alternative farming methods. They should also advocate for policies and programs that support climate change adaptation and resilience-building for IDPs and vulnerable communities.
7. NGOs should establish robust monitoring and evaluation systems to track the progress and impact of their interventions. Regular assessments and feedback mechanisms will help identify areas for improvement and ensure that programs are delivering the intended outcomes.
8. NGOs should engage in advocacy efforts to influence policies and legislation that support the rights and well-being of IDPs. This includes advocating for the implementation of existing laws and policies, as well as the development of new ones that address the specific needs of IDPs.

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By implementing these recommendations, NGOs can enhance their impact and effectiveness in supporting and providing humanitarian services for the IDPs in Benue State, ensuring that they receive the necessary assistance to rebuild their lives and improve their resilience.

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