



## PROVIDING EDUCATIONAL NEEDS FOR THE CHILDREN OF THE INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS (IDPs) IN BENUE STATE, NIGERIA

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### Abstract

*The study investigated how best to provide educational needs for the children of the internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Benue State, Nigeria. The study adopted qualitative research design. The researchers used secondary data collected by other researchers. Thematic method was used for data analysis to answer research questions. The study found that IDPs is a global phenomenon that is found in many countries such as Sudan, South Sudan, Somalia, Sahel region, Afghanistan, Ukraine, Nigeria, especially in Borno, Adamawa and Yobe in the North-East, and Benue State in the North-Central region. The investigation further revealed that the main cause of the IDPs is due to displacement of people from their habitual homes because of wars, conflicts, emergencies, natural and human-made disasters. The investigation also showed that in Benue State, the main cause of displacement is herders – farmers conflict which has displaced thousands of people from their ancestral homes. Thus providing quality education for the children of the IDPs in Benue State has become increasingly difficult. Nonetheless, the investigation found that providing educational needs for the IDPs' children in Benue State is the best option. These include: security, water, shelter, electricity, standard schools, standard infrastructures, and facilities amongst others.*

**Key words:** Internally displaced persons (IDPs), Conflict, displacement, educational needs, data.

## Introduction

The number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) seems to be increasing everyday worldwide due to wars, armed conflicts, emergencies, epidemics, and natural disasters. This is negatively affecting the education of the school-age children living in IDP camps. Thus, the number of children in IDP camps is also contributing to increase in out-of-school age children. According to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR, 2023), IDPs are persons or group 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 conflicts, situation of generalized violence, violation of human rights, or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognised state border. But an internally displaced person (IDP), according to UNHCR (2017), is someone who is forced to leave their home but who remains within their country's border. On the other hand, an IDP camp is a safe shelter provided for displaced persons, protected and taken care of before they eventually move back to their homes (Odebiyi & Elegbe, 2020).

The data of the IDPs across the world is intimidating and alarming. For example, according to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC, 2024), the total population of the internally displaced people was estimated at 70.9 million in 2023. Relatedly, Save the Children (2020) reported that at the end of 2019, it was estimated that 45.7 million people who were internally displaced by conflict and violence, were children. Similarly, in Nigeria, Benue State (2024) reported that there are 500, 182 number of IDPs in Benue State as a result of herders–farmers conflict which has been ongoing for decades. This has negative effects on education of the IDPs. For example, Save the Children (2020) stated that the vast majority of internally displaced children are deprived of save inclusive and quality education and the multitude of short-and-long term advantages it offers. Save the children further stated that around the world, boys and girls in regions affected by conflict and violence, experience attacks on their education

through bombing, torching, and the occupation of schools by the military, and that military groups routinely kill, maim, rape, recruit, abduct, and traumatize school children and their teachers with impunity.

Additionally, Nextier SPD (2022) lamented that across Nigeria, violent conflict and socio-economic issues prevent and limit children's access to education. Nextier SPD further lamented that accessing education in Nigeria has become increasingly difficult, for many schools have been either shutdown or turned into piles of rubbles due to activities of armed actors. In these circumstances, education plays a significant role as a building block of recovery, resilience and long term development (IDMC, 2020). Following this trend, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the United Nations (UN) Compact for Refugees and Migrants, and UN Secretary General's goal of cutting protracted displacement in half by the year 2030, all call for providing educational needs of the children of the IDPs (Cardon-Fax, 2020).

## Theoretical Framework

### Conflict Theory (Karl Marx, 1818–1883)

This paper is hinged on Karl Marx's theory of conflict. Marx was born in Trier in Rhineland District of Germany in 1818 (Okeibunor & Anugwon, 2003). According to Hayes (2024), conflict theory as associated with Marx, is a social theory which posits that society is in a state of perpetual conflict because of competition for limited resources. According to conflict theory, social order is maintained by domination and power, rather than by consensus and conformity. The theory states that those with wealth and power try to hold on to it by any means possible, chiefly by suppressing the poor and powerless.

Marx conflict model can be used to explain herder's – farmer's conflict in Benue State where the herders are the migrant minority group but powerful because they use guns to attack, main, rape, kidnap, and displace farmers from their farms. Though farmers are the majority group, they lack guns to resist attacks. The herders always want to forcibly take away the land belonging to farmers in order to graze and feed

their animals. But the farmers always want to prevent herders from taking away their land. This brings about conflict resulting in loss of many lives, properties, farm, destruction of schools, and displacement of farmers with their school – age children. Though governments and nongovernmental organisations are making frenzy efforts to provide camps for the displaced people and schools for the children of the displaced persons, the efforts have not been achieved.

### **The Statement of the Problem**

Conflicts, wars, national disasters, epidemics, crises and emergencies have resulted in the establishment of many IDP camps across the world. In many cases schools are shut down and the empty classrooms sometimes serve as temporary shelter for people affected by the crisis or as camps for the military or militia group. Existing schools which are not attacked are overcrowded, teachers leave conflict-prone areas, and school children are kidnapped, or conscripted as child soldiers. Consequently, accessing quality education for the children living in IDP camps in Benue State is becoming increasingly difficult. Though governments and nongovernmental organizations are making efforts in providing the educational needs of the children of the IDPs in Benue State, the efforts have not been achieved. In view of this, the authors are motivated to investigate how best to provide educational needs for the children of the IDPs in Benue State.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The general purpose of this paper is to investigate how best to provide educational needs for the children of the IDPs in Benue State. Specifically, the objectives of the paper are to:

- 1 . State the number of the IDPs in Nigeria and in Benue State.
- 2 . Ascertain the effects of conflicts on education of the children of the IDPs in Benue State.
- 3 . Discuss why quality education is essential for the children of the IDPs in Benue State.
- 4 . Recommend the best ways of providing educational needs for the children of the IDPs in Benue State.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions were raised to guide the study:

1. What are the estimated numbers of the displaced persons in Nigeria?
2. What effects do conflicts have on education of the children of the IDPs?
3. Why quality education is essential for the children of the IDPs in Benue State?
4. What are the best ways of providing educational needs for the children of the IDPs in Benue State?

### **Methodology**

The study adopted qualitative research design. The researchers used secondary data, that is, data collected by other researchers. The study was conducted in Benue State, Nigeria, where the herders–farmers conflicts have been going on for decades, and a large number of internally displaced farmers deserted their original homes. The study is therefore hinged on conflict model to explain why there is conflict between herders and farmers in Benue State in particular, resulting in displacement in large numbers of farmers and their children, making the provision of quality education for the children of internally displaced farmers increasingly difficult. Thematic method was used for data analysis to answer four research questions.

### **Answers to Research Questions**

#### **1. What are the Estimated Numbers of the IDPs Across the World and Nigeria?**

The number of IDPs across the world and Benue State is alarming. According to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC, 2024), the total population of the internally displaced people is estimated at 70.9 million in 2023. According to Wikipedia ([https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/internally\\_displaced-person](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/internally_displaced-person)), regions with significant population are:

- |                                |              |
|--------------------------------|--------------|
| • Sub-Saharan Africa           | 34.8 million |
| • North Africa and Middle-East | 15.3 million |
| • South Asia                   | 8.2 million  |
| • Europe and Central Asia      | 7.2 million  |
| • North and South America      | 6.3 million  |
| • East Asia and Pacific        | 4.2 million  |

Wikipedia further revealed that as of 3<sup>rd</sup> May 2022, the countries with the largest IDP populations were:

- Ukraine has 8 million (UNHCR, Ukraine; “Needs Growing;” ReliefWeb, 2022)
- Syria 7.6 million
- Ethiopia 5.5 million (ReliefWeb, 2022)
- The Democratic Republic of Congo 5.2 million
- Colombia 4.9 million (Norwegian Refugee Council, 2021)
- Yemen 4.3 million (UNHCR, 2022)
- Afghanistan 3.8 million (UNHCR, 2022)
- Iraq 3.6 million
- Sudan 2.2 million
- South Sudan, 1.9 million
- Pakistan, 1.4 million
- Nigeria, 1.2 million
- Somalia 1.1 million (UNHCR, 2015).

The data further showed that more than 85 percent of Palestinians in Gaza are internally displaced. Similarly, Save the Children (2020) stated that at the end of 2019, it was estimated that 45.7 million people who were internally displaced by conflict and violence were children. The data further showed that in many displacement contexts, children represent more than half of the displaced population. In Nigeria, Benue State (2024) reported that there are 500, 182 numbers of IDPs as a result of herder’s – farmer’s conflict which has been ongoing for decades. Based on Displacement Tracking Matric (DTM) Round II, six LGAs have been mapped as locations with IDPs in Benue State. So far, the biometrically registered IDPs have covered the location of Makurdi LGA (16 camps), Guma LGA (8 camps) Gwer-West LGA (4 camps), Logo LGA (2 camps), Kwande LGA (1 camp), and Agatu LGA has three community host sites. Among the six LGAs, the data have shown that Guma LGA has the highest number of IDPs with 60, 445 individuals and 17, 636 households.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that the data collected for the IDPs in Benue State is not complete. There are many displaced persons who are not registered and are not staying in camps and they are not known. The victims are staying with the host communities who are not displaced by the conflict. For example, in Kwande LGA, the host

communities include: Abande, Anwase, and Nyihemba in Mbaikyor Council Ward, Yaav, Mbadura, and Moon Council Wards all in Turan District, and part of Liev I Council Ward in Ikyurav-Ya District. These unregistered IDPs do not receive any form of aids neither from governments nor from non-governmental organisations (NGOs). This further compound the education of the IDPs’ children.

## **2. What Effects do Conflicts have on Education of the Children of the IDPs?**

Generally, the displaced people do suffer from many problems. Psychologically, they are prone to develop mental health problems due to resettlement in new environments, traumatic events, and forced migration (Asres & Bereket, 2022). In addition, Asres and Bereket (2022) reported that depression is a mental health problem observed among displaced people such as refugees, migrants, asylum seekers and the internally displaced persons.

According to Save the Children (2020), the vast majority of internally displaced children are deprived of save, inclusive and quality education and the multitude of short – and – long term advantages it offers. Other effects on the IDPs, according to Save the Children, include barriers such as a lack of good teaching capacity, limited funding, ongoing insecurity, social tensions and discrimination compound with education system in low-income and fragile contents which are already overstretched. Furthermore, Save the Children stated that during displacement schools that remain open may become further overcrowded, while other schools may be occupied by armed groups and displaced communities. In a situation like this, teachers may leave conflict-affected areas or seek transfer to other schools in areas which are not affected by the conflict. As a result, lack of education services can increase children’s vulnerability to abuse, children marriage, child labour and recruitment into armed groups (Save the Children 2020). Again, Save the Children (2020) further added that around the world, boys and girls in regions affected by conflict and violence experience attacks on their education through bombing, torching, and the temporary occupation of schools



by the military, and that military groups routinely kill, maim, rape, recruit, abduct and traumatize school children and teachers with impunity, that those fleeing hostilities may find themselves in new conflict zones as factions and frontlines shift.

This is not all, across Nigeria, violent conflict and socio-economic issues prevent and limit children's access to education (Nextier SPD, 2022). Nextier SPD further stated that in north-east riddled by over twelve years of Jihadist warfare, children are kidnapped, and forced to join terrorist cells or early marriage, and some are fatally used as human bombs, where the necessity of life, including access to education are profoundly scarce. According to Nextier SPD, similar situations exist in some parts of north-west and north-central Nigeria ravaged with bandits' menace. Again, Nextier SPD stated that attacks have moved from rural communities to include large scale of ransom kidnaps in schools, and that in 2021, about 800 students were abducted by bandits and a cumulative of over N800 million was demanded as ransom.

Furthermore, Nextier SPD (2022) lamented that accessing education in Nigeria has become increasingly difficult. For many schools have been either shut down or turned into piles of rubbles due to activities of armed actors, and this also includes the total loss of lives of children and teachers due to violent attacks. According to Nextier SPD, as a result of bandit and terrorist attacks, resulting in displacement, Nigeria's out-of-school children were estimated at 18.5 million. Besides, UNICEF (Education in Emergencies) stated that wars, epidemics and natural disasters spare no children, that more countries are gripped by conflict today than at any time in the past thirty years, and many of these crises span entire childhoods. UNICEF added that in countries affected by conflicts, children lose their loved ones and homes. They also lose access to safe drinking water, health care and food, and that between 2015 and 2019, attacks on education in 93 countries were reported, and an estimated 35 million children around the world have been forcibly displaced, resulting in nearly half of school age children out of school.

Between 2017 and 2019, according to Save the Children (2020), the countries of the Central

Sahel, Burkina-Faso, Mali and Niger witnessed a six-fold increase in school closures due to violent attacks, from 512 to 3005. This affected the learning of over 610, 000 children and 15, 000 teachers, many of whom have been internally displaced as a result of insecurity. According to UNESCO (2024), in 2019, 127 million primary and secondary school-age children and people living in crisis affected countries were out of school, which is equivalent to almost half of the global out-of-school population. Globally, UNESCO (2024) further stated that conflicts and crises not only result in school closure and attacks on facilities but also lead to cutting of education funding, which eventually impacts the quality of education. Besides, UNESCO noted that at the regional and national levels, conflicts and crises exacerbate pre-existing inequalities and further reduce access to education for the most marginalized groups. In these circumstances, education plays a significant role as a building block of recovery, resilience and long term development (IDMC, 2020).

### **3. Why Quality Education is Essential for the Children of the IDPs in Benue State?**

Education is seen as the most powerful instrument to address the needs of the IDPs' children. According to Cardon-Fax (2020), the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the United Nations (UN) Compact for Refugees and Migrants, and UN Secretary General's goal of cutting protracted displacement in half by the year 2030, all call for providing educational needs of the IDPs' children. Hence, the occasion of 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Guiding Principles has called for a re-assessment of the collection, diffusion and the use of IDP data with contribution from academic, humanitarian and monitoring organizations as well as other stakeholders. Besides, according to UNICEF (2018), every child has the right to go to school and learn regardless of their legal status, nationality or citizenship. Corroborating, UNESCO (2024) emphasised that education is a fundamental right, and for children and youth caught up in emergency situations, education not only means the continuity of learning, but it also provides sense of normalcy and the key to a different future.

Furthermore, UNESCO (2024) stated that with the skills, knowledge and support gained through education, generations survive crises and lead the world towards a sustainable future, and this is particularly true for vulnerable groups like girls, migrants, refugees and people with disabilities among others. Consequently, a study by Save the Children (2020) revealed that children in conflicts and protracted crises are more than twice as likely to rank going to school as their top concern, compared with immediate needs like food, water or money. The study further revealed that in the DRC, education emerged as the number one priority in 112 of the 205 focus group discussion. According to the study, missing out on formal education generated anxiety among children of all ages who were concerned about the impact on their future and employability. In addition, internally displaced children view education as an important factor and acts as a building block of recovery, resilience and long term development (IDMC, 2020).

Also, education is a major driver of migration. According to UNICEF (UNICEF, 2017), families migrate in search of better educational opportunities for their children, but well trained citizens also leave their home countries in pursuit of better job opportunities abroad, and that many children and young people travelling alone also cite education as the primary motivation for their journey they dream of obtaining a University degree and then returning home to share their skills. UNICEF (2017) further stated that access to quality inclusive education brings major economic, social and health benefits to countries of origin and destination. Besides, UNICEF added that education can increase social cohesion and integration, and is a vital tool in fighting prejudice, stereotypes and discrimination. UNICEF stressed that by improving livelihood opportunities and supporting socio-economic development for all migrant and displaced children and their communities, education has the potential to address some of the causes of displacement and prevent future crises.

Additionally, Thomas and Bernett (2013), Patrinos and Psacharopoulos (2013) (as cited in UNICEF, 2015) said that investment in education

brings high economic returns, and that education yields massive return on investment, and each additional year of education is associated with between 13 – 35 percent higher national GDP per capital. Education also yields high and social benefits. For educated people and the children of the educated parents tend to be healthier, more empowered regarding their own lives and society, and socially more tolerant and resolution seeking (UNICEF, 2015).

#### **4. What are the Best Ways of Providing Educational Needs for the Children of the IDPs in Benue State?**

In spite of the ongoing conflict between herders and farmers in Benue State, there are best ways of providing quality education for the children of IDPs in Benue State. This is because education is a fundamental human right of all children irrespective of their social status, sex, nationality or religion (UNESCO, 2024). Based on the literature reviewed, government and non-governmental organisations can achieve this by adopting the following recommendations:

- The Federal and Benue State Governments should provide security for the IDPs school children. The children of the IDPs should be provided with security at their camps and at schools. They should also be provided with security while going and returning from schools.
- UNICEF in collaboration with the Benue State Government should build standard schools for the IDPs' children. The IDPs children should be provided with standard schools. This will motivate them to attend school regularly, avoid truancy and absenteeism.
- The Benue State Government in collaboration with the Universal Basic Education Commission should employ and train teachers for IDPs' schools. Professional and qualified teachers should be employed, trained and retrained frequently to be up-to-date with new teaching methods.
- UNICEF in collaboration with the Benue State Government should equip the Schools of the IDPs' children with good and standard facilities such as instructional materials,

libraries, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) centres, and furniture.

- Organisations like Save the Children and UNESCO in collaboration with the Benue State Government should provide the IDPs' school children textbooks, exercise books, school uniforms and other learning materials.
- The Federal and Benue State Governments should provide water and electricity at all IDPs' schools and at their camps.
- The Federal and Benue State Governments should provide free and compulsory education for the IDPs' children at all levels and all IDPs' children should not pay any form of school levies.
- The Benue State Government should encourage teachers posted to IDPs' schools to stay by motivating them through extra allowances and giving their children scholarships.
- The Benue State Government should ensure that schools for the IDPs are not overcrowded, and should be equipped with games and sporting facilities.
- The Federal and Benue State Governments protect IDPs' children from being recruited into militia groups and child labour. They should be protected against child-marriage and child-trafficking.
- The UNHCR in collaboration with the Benue State Government should provide children of the IDPs with free nutritious food while at schools and at their camps.
- The Federal and Benue State Governments should ensure that all the IDPs are returned to their ancestral homes to prevent them suffering depression and trauma due to staying in camps or new settlements.
- The Federal and Benue State Governments should employ all necessary measures to stop herders-farmers' conflict in Benue State, for example by adopting dialogue for the two parties to prevent any future occurrence.

### Conclusion

Reviewing previous literature on IDPs revealed that conflicts, wars, emergencies and natural disasters as well as human-made disasters are the causes of displacement worldwide. This always

leads to closure of schools, and education of the IDPs' children suffers because providing education in such areas is difficult. In Benue State, the conflict between herders and farmers has displaced many school-age children from their schools due to its closures. This paper has recommended how best quality education can be provided for the IDPs' children in Benue State. This paper, therefore concludes that there should be dialogue between herders and farmers to prevent further conflict.

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