# Prevalence of Displaced Persons in Nigeria: Insecurity Threats and Counselling Implications

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**A b s t r a c t**

This paper endorses that, displaced persons are physically, psychologically and socially marginalized because they have to relocate to refugees' camp. Statistics on internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Nigeria revealed that overwhelming majority of women and children constitute these groups of persons. IDPs and host communities are affected by violence, lack of access to adequate basic and essential amenities like; food, water, heath care, education, security, closing and information. They are also victims of various kind of injustices or violence confrontations, perpetrated by either their own government against them or by others, such as, communal clashes, terrorism, riots, religious conflicts, natural disasters and so on. Therefore, counselling these groups would not only bring succor but would also empower them to discover, develop and direct their energies, interests and talents towards making constructive contribution to the society It is against this backdrop that this paper examines the counselling needs for the displaced persons, need for special intervention for them to be fully integrated into the larger society for effective sustainable development. Recommendations offered include; stakeholders should emphasize the need for putting in place counselling services in both school and non-school settings, so as to facilitate their effective participation in nation building.

**Keywords:** *Internally displaced persons, Guidance and Counselling*

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**Background to the Study**

In this paper, displaced persons or internally displaced persons also known as IDP's are mostly victims of the inhumanity of man against man. They are victims of various kind of injustices or violence confrontations, perpetrated by either their own government against them or by others, such as, communal clashes, terrorism, riots, religious conflicts, natural disasters and so on. IDPs is defined as persons who have been displaced by natural disaster or conflicts from their homes and traditional support structure and have not crossed the border of their countries. They are victims of various kinds of injustices, violent confrontations perpetrated by their own government or others against them. Internally Displaced persons also known as IDP's are mostly victims of the inhumanity of man against man. They are victims of various kind of injustices or violence confrontations, perpetrated by either their own government against them or by others, such as, communal clashes, terrorism, riots, religious conflicts, natural disasters and so on.

According to Hamzat (2016), as cited by 2017 displacement across the country in Nigeria is as a result of communal violence, internal armed conflicts and natural disasters such as flood. In any conflict situation and particularly those with ethnic or religious underpinnings, the humanitarian needs are immense and the means to satisfy those needs within the conflict area are severely limited. Internally displaced civilian populations move from one place to another seeking safety and protection inside their own country. Forced population movements resulting in mass exoduses constitute by their very nature infringements on international human rights and humanitarian law. In Nigeria, conflicts arising from the activities of Boko Haram in the North East and Fulani herdsmen have resulted in high threats to lives and properties, death of thousands displacements of millions of people.

Ladan (2006), further discloses that, displaced persons under international law are persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obligated to flee or to have cause to leave their homes or place of habitual residence in particular, as a result of or in order to avoid the effect of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and they must have either remain within their own national borders (as internally displaced persons) or they must have crossed an internationally recognized state border (as refugees),. Hence displaced persons are of two categories: Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). They tend to be forgotten or overlooked as they do not encroach on the 'space' of the privileged and rich. Problems include housing needs, security, access to safe, clean water and basic sanitation and schooling for the children of IDPs. These problems of IDPs create a situation whereby they can be easily recruited as agents of terrorism and insurgency. It is to be noted that IDPs do not emerge overnight but slowly, and the problems are often ignored or unnoticed by national governments. Azam, (2009) in Akuto (2017) lists the following as some of the challenges faced by IDPs in Nigeria

**Insecurity**: Women and girls are been raped on daily basis as a result of insecurity in the camps. Youths indulge in hard drugs, smoking and other criminal activities.

**Trauma and Bitterness**: The IDPs are traumatized and frustrated because of the situation they find themselves. Most of these IDPs live in bitterness due to painful separation from their spouses, families and loved ones.

**Hunger and Starvation**: It is said that a hungry man is an angry man and because of the level of hunger and starvation faced by the IDPs you see them protesting and demonstrating with their children at the camps.

**Acute Malnutrition**: When one is not feeding well, it has an effect on one's health such as changing the colour of one's hair, eyes and teeth which may result to death. It is discovered that people give them only one type of food item i.e. carbohydrate which affects them not to have a balanced diet.

**Sexually Transmitted Diseases**: This is also another challenge that the IDPs are facing, they have unprotected sex which result to all kinds of STDs like HIV/Aids, gonorrhoea, syphilis etc. They also suffer from hypertension, diabetes and other diseases due to lack of medical health facilities.

**Education**: The IDPs are facing the challenge of educating their children or family members because they are always in transit or floating. More to that there are no provisions by government in this regard.

**Rights of IDPs:** There is insufficient understanding of the rights of IDPs as set out in the UN guiding principles on Internal Displacement and the Kampala Convention. These rights include the right to life, freedom of movement, association, dignity of human person, personal liberty, right to private and family life etc.

When people are displaced, they move with their culture and health vulnerabilities, are frequently not welcomed by unwilling hosts (largely in part due to the limitation of resources) and are exposed to other health problems. The health of refugees tends to receive more attention than IDPs because many conventions, treaties and obligations of nations to treat the former well and the many international and multilateral agencies are concerned with the care of refugees. IDPs can often transmit diseases to hitherto areas that were free of such or had potent vectors to transmit such. They are also vulnerable to all kinds of challenges both health and non-health. Health problems may be communicable including epidemics of measles, malaria and cerebrospinal meningitis; malnutrition; mental health such as anxiety, depression and post-traumatic disorders; reproductive health, for example, sexual harassment, rape, unwanted pregnancies and abortions. Access to healthcare and organizing health services for them are challenging.

Historically, the unevenness in the distribution of resources, supremacy between groups in a society, whether by nature, human interference or cohesion are some of the major causes of conflicts, violence and destruction of lives and properties between the "haves and have-not" or between the minor and major groups. Most economists agree that, it is the human resources of a nation, nor its capital, nor its materials that ultimately determine the character and pace of its economic and social development. According to Psacharopoulos and Woodhall (1997), human resources constitute the ultimate basis of wealth of nations. Capital and natural resources are passive factors of production, human beings are active agencies who accumulate capital, exploit natural resources, build social, economic and political organization and carry forward national development.

**Causes of Displacement of people**

As a result of many problems confronting the displaced people, feelings of insecurity develops in them and the tendency to react to the insecurity situations often result into conflict. Explaining the theory of conflict, Cole, (2016) averred that conflict arise when resources, status and power are unevenly distributed between groups in a society and that these conflict becomes engines for social change. There are many theories put forward to explain some of the reasons for conflicts, crises and violence;

Psychological/primordial theorists, on the other hand, are of the view that humans have a deep-rooted psychological need to dichotomize and to establish enemies and allies, which leads to the formation of ethnic and national group identities and behaviours. How a group perceives itself and its relationship with those outside the group determines whether their relationship will be based on cooperation, competition or conflict. Usually those within the group are regarded as better than those outside, and this leads to 'me-you', 'we-they' 'insiders-outsiders' and 'minority-majority' sentiments. (Ajodo, 2017)

Another theory, Eco-violence, also known as environmental conflict theory was developed by Homer-Dixon (1999) in his attempt to explain the causal relationship between natural resource endowment and the outbreak of violent conflict. According to him, decrease in the quality and quantity of renewable resources act singly or in various combinations to increase the scarcity, for Certain population groups, of vegetation, farmland, water, forests etc. This scarcity of ecological resources can reduce economic productivity, both for the local groups experiencing the scarcity and for the larger regional and national economies. Consequently, the affected people may migrate or be expelled to new lands … while decreases in wealth can cause deprivation conflicts.

Dy and Ninomiya, (2003), in Temba, Woriba, and Msabila, (2013), reminds us that, education has long been considered as a fundamental human right, as it is a key to sustainable development, peace and stability within and among countries, as an indispensable means for effective participation in the societies and economies of the respective countries. In view of the importance of education, the United Nations Organization General Assembly adopted Article 26th of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1949. As a result of these important developments, Governments and countries all over the world, (developed and developing nations) resolved to accord education the priorities it deserved. In Nigeria, Education has been recognized as one of the formal rights of individuals, particularly at the Primary or the Basic education level. Therefore, significant efforts were made by many countries especially in Africa, to make it (primary education) not only free and universal, but also compulsory.

**Way forward: National integration, peace and stability in Nigeria**

National healing comes after reconciliation and integration and this involves whole communities, if they are to succeed. Reconciliation, integration and national healing comes after crises, violence and conflicts between two or more groups of persons, communities or societies, most especially with the country. Bloomfield in Hapanyengwi (2013), defined

reconciliation as ' an over-arching processes which including the search for truth, justice, forgiveness, healing and so on… it means finding a way to live alongside former enemies… to coexist with them, to develop the degree of cooperation necessary to share our society with them, so that we all have better lives together than we have had separately. Similarly, Mawondo, (2009) sees reconciliation as a process that re-establishes love and understanding between two or more estranged parties. Analyzing the definitions, Hapanyengwi-Chemhuru, (2013) observes that what emerges from these definitions therefore, reconciliation means to re-connect, re-establish the harmony, disturbed or destroyed by the conflict through arriving at a common understanding.

## Role of Counselling

In view of these problems, it has becomes necessary to respond to the challenges, by way of counselling intervention, so that coping skills, training, educational and counselling strategies can be  provided, in order to reduce or solve the problems affecting the displaced persons The objectives are to make them functional, effective education which would facilitates the skills adjustment , self- confident,  etc, so that each and  every citizen can contribute to his/her own personal  and community development, economically, socially and politically. It will also motivate them to overcome self-defeating beliefs, superstitions, insecurities, fears and unlock personal limitations to empower their self-esteem, guide them to pin-point those behaviours and challenges that surround them to clear the path to achieve the highest level of satisfaction in their economic, social and professional endeavours. This is the link between the situation at hand and Guidance and Counselling programme or service is designed for specific duties. It does not aim at solving problem for students, but rather equipping the individuals or group of individuals to solve problems for themselves.

Counselling has been recognized as an aspect of guidance. Although, there are divergent views regarding this issue. However, counselling is considered here, as a person to person encounter which is referred to an individual counselling, while a counsellor and more than two persons is called group counselling. Counselling as a concept has been seen by different people in many ways fromface to face, dialogue, interview, as well as, to other forms of interactions. Counselling generally is  seen as the process by which the counsellor ( a person who is specially trained)assist a client to face, understand and accept information, ideas, skills, about himself/herself  and their interaction with others, so that they can make effective decision about their various life choices. Thus, the counsellor is a helping professional, who is trained in human psychology and exposed to psychological methods which he/she uses to advise clients in their educational, personal-social and vocational needs. Therefore, there are strong links between education, guidance and counselling, as well as, role of the counselors in the delivery of professional counselling services to all stakeholders at various levels.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

The multilateral approach to conflict resolution has been found to be best suited for resolving natural resource conflicts in the 21st century (Mwanika 2010, Pynn 2011). Multilateral non-violent conflict resolution mechanisms have been successfully used in the Liberia peace process, the Philippines–Mindanao talks, the Afghanistan–Pakistan border dispute and the Horn of Africa Piracy (Crocker et al. 2011).In view of this and in consideration of the role of

guidance and counselling in bringing about much needed sustainable development, the target population, who are the minority in any setting, need to be mobilized and integrated into larger community. This possible through behaviour modification and effective group counselling strategies.

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