

JOINT PROTECTION ASSESSMENT MISSION TO NORTHWEST NIGERIA

25 JULY - 4 AUGUST 2019



Table of Contents

Introduction.....	2
Mission Objectives	2
Methodology	3
Limitations	3
Overview of Findings	4
Security Assessment of the affected States	6
Key Protection Findings	7
Other Protection Findings	9
Nigerian Refugees in Niger	14
Conclusion	14
Recommendations	15

Introduction

Following reports of influx of Nigerian refugees from Sokoto, Zamfara and Katsina States into Niger Republic, a joint UNHCR/NCFRMI protection assessment mission was deployed from 25 July to 4 August 2019.

The struggle for control of water resources and pasture pitting the cattle-keepers against the agriculturist in the three states of North-West Nigeria dates back to 2011. The continuing attacks and counter-attacks between herdsmen and a vigilante group known as "Yan sa kai" in Zamfara State, quickly spilled-over into neighboring Sokoto and Katsina states, metamorphosing into a low-intensity conflict in 2018. Armed Fulani bandits operate camps around Rayya and Dan Sadau Forests stretching through Sokoto, Zamfara, Katsina and Kaduna states. The assessment took place against the backdrop that the situation in these states has led to the deaths of 436 person; and both internal displacement and the influx of Nigerian refugees into Niger Republic. The living conditions of condition of the IDPs were reported to be appalling, with serious protection issues compromised by the absence of humanitarian actors in most of the LGAs. Attacks on rural communities also persists with atrocious human rights violations on civilians and violent reprisal attacks against the civilian population within the vicinity of the attack once the security forces leave.

Farmers were increasingly threatened by the bandits to pay large amounts of money, or leave their farmlands, and as a result, many farmers have abandoned their farms, resulting in disruption of farming activities in the affected areas. Therefore, it is expected that farming will be severely hampered this year, leading to food insecurity and desperation. Many Nigerians have abandoned their homes and villages due to the incessant attacks, to find refuge in urban towns in the states, and across the borders into Niger republic. The Nigerian refugee population in Niger, is scattered in nearly 40 villages along the border, in Guidam Roumji and Madarounfa.

Mission Objectives

To assess the current situation of internal displacement and reasons for flight of refugees to Republic of Niger; conditions of IDPs and ongoing activities of government and partners to inform decision making on support to addressing protection gaps; identify urgent protection concerns requiring advocacy/response of protection actors including by NCFRMI, UNHCR and other humanitarian actors; and make recommendations on humanitarian and protection challenges.

The assessment targeted Local Governments (LGA) severely affected by the activities of bandits including: five LGAs in Katsina; four LGAs in Sokoto; five LGAs in Zamfara.

Methodology

Information was gathered through a combination of Key Informant Interviews (KII), group interviews, questionnaires administered during group discussions, and general observation. The Key Informants included State and Local government officials, traditional rulers, the State Emergency Management Agency (SEMA) and security agents in each state. The group interview questionnaires were administered

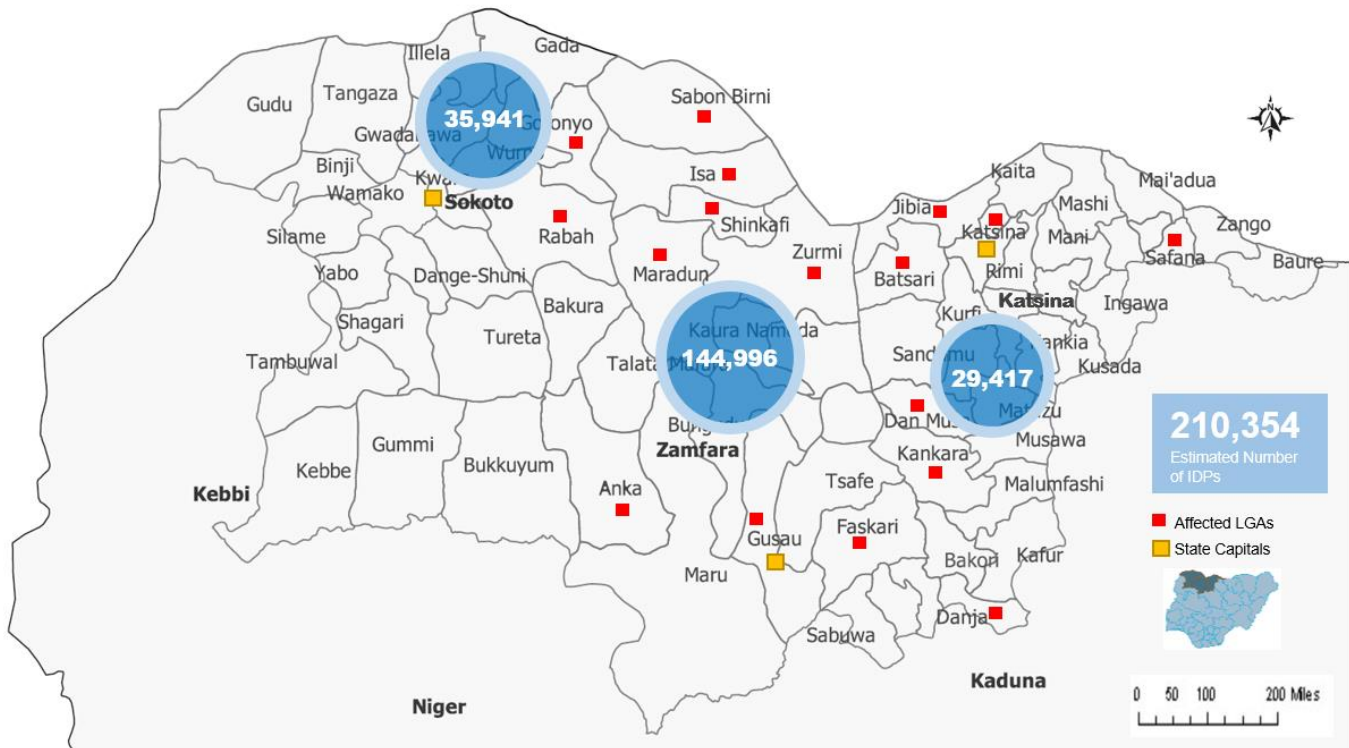
in groups of males and females, with representatives of the different age groups. The questions were broken into various sections to include; general protection, security, Sexual and Gender based Violence (SGBV), Child protection, livelihood and education. The assessment was conducted in IDP camps in the 3 states. In LGAs where the IDPs reside in host communities, the IDPs assembled in the LGA headquarters or the palace of the traditional ruler, for the assessment.

Limitations:

The precarious security situation limited the time that could be spent in sites as well as the

number of LGA/communities that could be assessed.

Nigeria – North West (Sokoto, Zamfara & Katsina): Reference Map



Sources of Data: UNHCR, SEMA Creation Date: August 2019. Feedback: nigibim@unhcr.org Disclaimer: The boundaries and names shown, and the designation used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.

Security Assessment of the Affected States:

- While Zamfara State remains the epicentre of the violent conflict, there are ongoing joint military operations in: Katsina (Operation HARBIN KUNANA II); Sokoto (Operation HARBIN KUNANA III); and Zamfara (Operation SHARAN DAGI). In Sokoto state, political differences among state leadership structure affect overall political response to the crisis;
- Security situation in the state remains fluid and unpredictable with movements within the state capital, assessed to be relatively safe. However movements to the affected areas are of high risk and require additional security measures with closure of the road between Marinona, Shinkafi LGA of Zamfara State to Isa LGA in Sokoto State due to insecurity. All roads are paved and in good condition.
- Ongoing peace talks between the Government and the bandits was reported to have a positive effect in Sokoto and Zamfara states, but there were still pockets of attacks in these states, as the bandits were yet to be disarmed. In Katsina state, the local government officials informed that they had experienced more attacks since the peace talks. They explained that the peace process which restricts the bandits from perpetuating further criminalities in Zamfara state, does not extend to Katsina state. They disclosed that the bandits come in from Zamfara state to commit atrocities in Katsina state and return;
- The Federal and North-West state governments plan towards dialogue with parties to the conflict and subsequently, implement an amnesty programme. The plan, which is aimed at the establishment of livestock grazing reserve areas with necessary infrastructures such as schools, health facilities, boreholes and demarcation of the grazing lands, which will contribute to overall peace. However, the situation is expected to remain the same in short to mid-term due to lack of adequate security, necessitating the need for humanitarian assistance. There have not been indicators of hostility towards humanitarian actors as evidenced by the presence of Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) in Anka LGA.

Overview of Findings

- The violence in the North-West states of Zamfara, Sokoto and Katsina have evolved to a low-intensity conflict resulting in population displacement within the state and spilling into Niger Republic. Most of the affected population are predominantly farmers with impact on food security.
- According to local government authorities' estimates, **210,354 persons are internally displaced from 171 town and villages across the three states.** While statistics provided by the authorities are not disaggregated by age or gender, observations by assessors indicate a majority of displaced are women, children and the elderly with fewer men in the sites visited. IDPs report that a lot of the **men have either been killed or kidnapped by the bandits.**
- **IDPs reside in host communities and informal sites** (schools, uncompleted and unallocated buildings) remotely managed by the local government authorities. Living conditions at the sites are very poor and characterized by lack of privacy, insecurity, poor hygiene and sanitary conditions, limited healthcare services, poor management.
- IDPs and key informants (traditional ruler and local government officials) report that **serious human rights violations** were perpetuated by the bandits during attacks, **including killings, kidnappings, rapes, forced marriages of women and girls to bandits and destruction of property.** There are presently no mechanisms to respond to the trauma or tracing/register of missing persons. Meanwhile there are significant number of vulnerable IDPs (female-headed households, orphans, elderly men and women and the physically and mentally challenged).
- IDPs report a **lack of humanitarian assistance** and are desperate for intervention as they only receive some occasional assistance from state and local Governments, NCFRMI and charitable individuals/organizations. Reports from focus groups discussions with IDPs report **severe lack of food; little or no privacy; lack of beddings, cooking utensils, shelter, portable water and medical care.** In Goronyo LGA, Sokoto state, for example, serious health issues among children, including cases of severe malnutrition and skin infections reported by health workers. While local Nigerian Red Cross volunteers, engaged by the local governments, provide some humanitarian assistance in the camps, there is a clear absence of humanitarian/protection actors.
- Critical concerns were expressed about the **limited presence of Police and other security agencies** around the sites leading to **IDPs living in fear of repeat attacks.** In Katsina state, assessors observed the presence of state sanctioned religious enforcement groups such as HISBAH,

JIBWIS and FITYANU to maintain law and order in the sites hosting IDPs

- IDPs and Key informants reported incidence of rape, kidnapping and forced marriage of women and girls during raids. Specific risk factors identified in some locations include: women and girls reported to walk 3-4 kilometres to collect firewood or fetch water; makeshift toilets without doors and lighting shared by male and females; and lack of basic hygiene needs notably sanitary towels and dignity kits to manage to manage personal and menstrual hygiene. Sector specific assessment is however required to determine the scale of other threats to ensure early action.
- High numbers of out of school children, with many children found begging for money within the sites and in host communities. This places them at serious risks of exploitation and violence.
- Local government officials in Gusau LGA, (Mada District) Zamfara state, reported growing tension between the host community and the IDPs, fuelled by perception within the host community that the IDP are complicit in the recent attacks on the community.
- Across the 3 states, majority of the IDPs have their permanent voter's card as the only means of identification except in Goronyo LGA (Sokoto state), where the IDPs had fled their villages with nothing.
- At the time of the assessment, there were no reported restrictions of movement in and out of the sites. Some of the few remaining men in the sites can return to their villages to attend to their farmlands during the day and return to the camps at night.

Key Protection Findings

1. Human Rights Violations

During interviews with local government officials, traditional rulers and IDPs across the states, it was gathered that various serious human rights violations were being committed by the bandits. There were testimonies of women being raped, sets of young girls being kidnapped as brides, and later returned to their villages, and another set of young girls abducted in their place. The IDPs also informed of forced marriages by the bandits. They revealed that in some cases, the bandits would force fathers/mothers to give away their girls in marriage, on the spot, when attacked. The men were mostly killed or kidnapped and their cattle stolen. An IDP mother in Katsina state, while informing on the horrors being perpetuated by the bandits in her village, stated “I am not ready to go back to our village, because I have daughters”.

In a reported case of rape, the survivor was said to have been hospitalized upon arrival in the IDP camp in Danmusa LGA, Katsina state. The team was unable to gain access to her.

2. Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV)

There were no reported cases of SGBV occurring in the camps during the assessment, which could be because such incidents are generally underreported due to cultural stigmatization which has social implications against survivors.

In Goronyo LGA, Sokoto state, the women and girls walk 3-4kilometers along bush paths to get water and firewood. This presents serious protection risks that could result in sexual violence, if prevention measures are not effected. There are a significant number of female headed households in the IDP camps and host communities, across the states. The women whose husbands were either killed, kidnapped or cannot be located, often have to fend for large families, with little or no means of income. Some IDP women living in host communities in Isa and Sabon Birni LGAs, Sokoto state, reported that they have to take up any available jobs in the struggle to feed their families. IDP women in camps and host communities, repudiated the notion of survival sex, when asked, stating that their village heads will not deal kindly with such practices. In some camps, the women have little or no privacy. They sleep in rooms



Shelter for women and children in an IDP camp in Zamfara State.
© UNHCR/Joan Ogu

without doors or locks, use shared latrines without lightings, doors or windows, making them vulnerable to harassment and assault, especially at night.

3. Child Protection Issues

Across the states, the team observed younger IDP children with bowls, begging, and older children, especially girls, hawking wares within and outside the camps.



Children hawking wares in the IDP camp in Faskari LGA, Katsina State.
© UNHCR/Yakubu Musa

During group interviews with the women, they explained that the children are sent out to beg for money, because that is one way they get money to feed, as the food distributions are not enough. They also reported that some children are orphans, having lost their relatives as a result of the attacks. They also informed on unaccompanied/separated children being catered for by relatives or good Samaritans in the camps and host communities. Efforts are yet to be taken to reunite families.

4. Persons with Specific Needs

- Vulnerable elderly



Physically challenged elderly woman in an IDP camp in Zamfara State.
© UNHCR/Joan Ogu

The team identified elderly male and female heads of households. They reported that as a result of the crisis, they had lost their children and have become primary caregivers of their grandchildren. They lamented that they find it difficult to feed and cater for them. The team also identified elderlies that are physically challenged, some are without support, and depend on the goodwill of other IDPs.

- **Persons with Disabilities**

Persons with physical and mental disabilities were identified in camps across the states. Many of whom were observed begging for hand-outs.

5. Physical and psychological security and safety

The group discussions across the states revealed safety protection risks. Some of the camps/sites are without gates or fences, with easy access in and out of the camps. There is very limited presence of armed security agents around the camps and the IDPs divulged that they feel unsafe and live in fear of further attacks. The women, particularly the female heads of household, reported that they are unable to sleep at night for fear of being attacked. In Katsina and Zamfara states, the women informed that the children showed signs of PTSD, reacting to loud noises by running into hiding and are afraid of strangers as a result of their experiences during attacks in their villages. It is recommended that further assessment be conducted by professionals.

6. Tension between IDPs and Host Communities

Local government officials in Gusau LGA, (Mada district) Zamfara state, reported growing tension among the host community and the IDPs. In Mada, in spite of the presence of security forces in the state, kidnappings, thefts and cattle rustling had been rampant. The host community presumes that the IDPs are informants to bandits and complicit in the attacks. The tension had not resulted in any form of violence or retaliation during the period of the assessment.

Other Protection Findings

7. Community Structure in the IDP Camps

The camps across the 3 states are mostly made up of women and children, the elderly and fewer men. The women informed that some of their husbands had been killed during the attacks, as the bandits mainly targets the men. Some IDP women reported that they could not locate their husbands as they were separated during their flight from the bandits. In Katsina state, in a site that held only women and children, it was reported that the men live within the community.



New arrivals being registered in an IDP camp in Katsina state.
© UNHCR/Kingsley Adimoha

The local government representatives and SEMA in the states informed that the IDPs are registered according to households. They also register new births and new arrivals. In Batsari LGA, Katsina state, the team observed new arrivals being registered by local government officials.

In Sokoto and Zamfara states, the local government officials informed that the IDPs are beginning to return to their villages, especially the men, therefore, reducing the

number of IDPs in the camps. In Katsina state, the local government officials informed that there had been an increase in the number of IDPs in the camp as many that left the camps to return to their villages, are flooding back to the camps, together with newly displaced persons, due to recent attacks on their villages.

Across the states, IDPs found in the camps are from neighboring towns and villages. Given that the affected LGAs are considerable distances apart, there is no indication that the IDPs move from one LGA to another.

In camps across the states, the team met with the village heads and women leaders of the IDPs that provide leadership structures in the camps. In some LGAs, the women in the camps and in host communities, disclosed that their local financial cooperatives still function, in spite of their displacement. In Gusau (Mada District) Zamfara state, the women revealed that they are able to borrow meager funds, ranging from **50.00 - 100.00 NGN** from their cooperatives. The men do not have such structures in place, across the states.

8. Limited access to livelihood

Most IDPs in camps are reported to be farmers and cattle herders. They informed that their cattle were stolen by the bandits and their farmlands destroyed. Some IDP women disclosed that before the displacement, they were into rice and groundnut oil processing, tailoring, knitting and food vending. Some of the women had taken up food vending in the camps as a means of livelihood, and the men work menial jobs in the communities to earn a living. The IDPs pleaded for some business capital, to enable them start up small businesses with their existing skills, to be able to provide the basic needs of their families.

9. Lack of adequate shelter

In the states visited, the IDPs are provided with temporary accommodations, mainly in the local primary and secondary schools and in host communities with relatives. The living arrangements in the schools are according to gender as opposed to family units. The women and children occupy most of the classrooms. This is because there are more women and children in the camps than men, many of whose husbands/fathers are not present. Across the states, the rooms lack sufficient beddings, only a few have mats, most sleep on bare floors and the men live in tents or classrooms in close proximity to the women. In



Makeshift tent in IDP camp in Rabah LGA, Sokoto State.
© UNHCR/Joan Oau

some local governments: Sabon Birni, Isa (Rabah, Sokoto state) and Shinkafi (Zamfara state), where there are nomadic camps, IDPs reside within the host communities, sharing the limited resources of the communities. The IDPs informed that those that can afford to, rent houses in the communities, while others depend on good Samaritans for shelter. Due to insufficient shelters in the camps and host communities, some IDP men informed that they sleep in the open and under trees, as the women and children are given precedence over the men, with regards to shelter.

10. Insufficient access to food

In Sokoto and Zamfara states, dry rations of food are provided in the camps by the state and local government, with little or no condiments or utensils for cooking.



Communal cooking in an IDP camp in Katsina State. © UNHCR/Joan Ogu

“food is not our problem, we feed better here than at home”.

In Goronyo LGA, Sokoto state, food rations had not been distributed for over a week, when the assessors arrived. Hawkers were observed coming into the camp to sell fruits and food items to the IDPs.

In Katsina state, wet portions of food are provided. The local and state government provide food stuff and condiments, and the IDP women take charge of the cooking. The IDPs in the various camps in Katsina state, confirmed that they are fed thrice daily. According to IDP women in Faskari LGA,

11. Inadequate WASH facilities

The WASH facilities in most camps across the 3 states are appalling. In Faskari LGA, Katsina,



Female toilet camp Faskari LGA in Katsina State. © UNHCR/Joan Ogu

the toilets and bathrooms observed within the camp, are without doors or windows. In Rabah LGA, Sokoto state, the male bathroom was a makeshift structure with mats spread over the entrance for privacy, while the women use the existing facilities in the school. In Goronyo LGA, Sokoto state, with over **3,000** IDPs, the rundown WASH facilities are shared by men and women, with most of them using the surrounding bushes as substitute. Also, in Goronyo, the IDPs complained of limited access to clean water,

as they had to walk 3 kilometers from the camp to get water from a river/stream. It was

reported by health workers in the camp that the water was contaminated and unsafe for consumption. The local government representatives disclosed that there is a bore hole and water pump in the camp, which needs repairs. In camps in Katsina, Sokoto and Zamfara states, the team observed water pumps, where the IDPs queue to get water. Also, in Katsina state, water trucks are stationed in the camps to supply water to the IDPs. There is a significant need for sanitation materials and delivery kits for the women, according to health workers in the camps.



Makeshift toilet for Men in IDP camp in Rabah LGA, Sokoto State.
© UNHCR/Joan Ogu

12. Limited Access to Primary healthcare

Across the 3 states, the team observed long queues and crowds of IDPs needing medical attention in front of the on-site clinics. The clinics are managed by the local government, with support from the state government and NCFRMI. Health workers are engaged by the local government to provide primary healthcare in the camps.



Child with skin infection in Goronyo LGA, Sokoto State. © UNHCR/Joan Ogu

access to primary healthcare. The clinics lack sufficient drugs and professional health workers. The local government representatives informed that NCFRMI and UNICEF have been instrumental in setting up the clinics and provided some drugs and medication, but they are fast running out of supplies. In Anka LGA, Zamfara state, MSF was on ground, providing medical assistance.

In Goronyo LGA, Sokoto state, the team also observed many children with skin infections due to the consumption of contaminated water, and severe malnutrition. The health workers in the camp informed that the IDPs were commonly diagnosed with diarrhoea, malaria, malnutrition and skin infections like scabies.

In Sokoto and Zamfara states, there is limited



8 Months old triplet suffering from acute Malnutrition in Goronyo LGA, Sokoto state @UNHCR/Joan Ogu

In Katsina state, the team observed mobile clinics with at least 2 health workers, supported by the state and local government, in each camp.

▪ Lack of referral mechanism

In Sokoto and Zamfara states, there are no referral mechanisms in place, the IDPs in camps and host communities, informed that they are required to pay when they visit the hospitals. In Goronyo LGA, Sokoto state, the health workers complained that they cannot effect the transportation of critically sick persons to the General hospital that is 5 minutes away, (by motor bike), due to unavailability of funds. In most LGAs in Katsina state, the state and local government fund referrals of critical cases to hospitals. In Batsari LGA, Katsina state, the health workers managing the mobile clinic, requested for assistance with providing more drugs and support to fund referrals.

13. Limited access to education

Across the 3 states, it was reported that most school age IDP children are not enrolled in school. It was noted that some IDP parents prioritize their children's participation to livelihood activities over education. Some IDPs complained that though education is free, they cannot afford the school materials; uniforms and books required for their children to

attend the local schools in the host community. There were no reported obstacles to the children being enrolled in the local school. In Rabah LGA, Sokoto state, the local government officials, informed that the local school does not have the capacity to enrol IDP children, as the classrooms are few and the available teachers are not enough to cover additional classrooms. He requested that more classroom blocks be constructed to enable the school accommodate more children, and teachers among the IDPs be put to work in the school. In Katsina state, the local Nigerian Red Cross volunteers, informed that some of the children are enrolled in the local schools, but they could not estimate the percentage of children enrolled in school.

Nigerian Refugees in Niger

The sudden rise in fierce violence in Nigeria's North-Western Zamfara, Sokoto and Katsina States has led to a new emergency situation in Maradi Region in Niger. Thousands of people, mainly women and children, have crossed the border into Niger, fleeing extreme violence. They have found refuge in villages in Maradi Region. The entry points are the villages of Bassira, Tankama, Chawagui and Dan Kano. The refugee population is scattered in some 40 villages along the border, in Guidam Roumji, Guidan Sori and Tibiri.¹

35,055 persons have gone through the initial registration process carried out by UNHCR and the Nigerian Government. The Government, UN agencies and NGO partners, have carried out joint multisector evaluations since May 2019. A response plan was set up in June 2019.²

Conclusion

Following the reconciliation and peace agreement with the bandits, put in place by the Zamfara State Government, some IDPs indicated their desire to return to their villages, but they claim to have nothing to return to, as their homes and farmlands have been destroyed. IDPs in Rabah LGA (Sokoto state) emphatically stated that they do not intend to return, but wish to settle and integrate within the host communities. The local government authorities informed that the state government has earmarked land for housing and farming for IDPs, in the event that the IDPs decide not to return to their villages.

For IDPs that wish to return, the challenges are enormous, as the scale of the damage and destruction to their villages, is extensive. In the meantime, there is urgent need for

¹ UNHCR : Maradi: a concerning new emergency situation on the Niger-Nigerian border, 20 August 2019
<https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/70862>

² Ibid

assistance to IDP-hosting LGAs in securing IDPs access to basic services; healthcare, education, shelter, food and non-food items, in order to support the efforts of the state and local government. Such support should equally be extended to the host communities to alleviate the burden of accommodating the IDPs. Measures should also be taken to reduce to a minimum, the apparent protection risks in the camps across the states.

The security situation in North-West Nigeria has the potential to rapidly increase in the absence of concerted effort from the federal, state governments and community leaders. Ongoing peace talks, increase in presence security forces in the LGAs, provision of necessary infrastructure such as schools, water and a clear plan of demarcation of grazing land, is paramount to resolving the crises.

Recommendations

1. Provision of lighting in the camps, especially in latrines, and providing additional latrines to prevent the protection risks associated with shared facilities;
2. Provision of firewood or alternative sources of energy in IDP sites, and clean water sources where necessary, to reduce protection risks during fire wood and water collection;
3. Protection mechanisms, such as protection desks should be established in the camps, to create and avenue and encourage the reporting of human rights violations. Collaboration with local humanitarian actors, like the Nigerian Red Cross present in the camps, is vital;
4. Economic empowerment through skill acquisition and livelihood interventions should prioritize female-heads of households and girls, to protect from early marriage, domestic violence and survival sex, and men (youth) to prevent/address idleness and criminality;
5. Peaceful co-existence between IDPs and host communities should be encouraged through sensitization and peace programs;
6. Relevant support should be provided to host communities to alleviate the burden of hosting the IDPs;
7. A more in-depth analysis and needs protection/SGBV assessment should be undertaken by the Sectors in order to determine appropriate responses. This should only be done once a clear decision on provision of assistance has been agreed as any other approach will lead to erosion of confidence and unnecessary expectations from the communities.
8. Confidence building of the community to report human rights violations through awareness raising and strengthen existing response systems;

9. Facilitate access to identity documentation (national identity card) particularly in Goronyo LGA, Sokoto state, by collaborating with the relevant government agency, to consider IDP sites in its activities;
10. Urgent attention should be given to the pressing needs of the IDPs in camps and host communities; food, shelter, health, WASH and educational needs. It is fundamental to encourage inter-agency cooperation in addressing these needs;
11. Adequate shelter should be provided for IDPs to prevent any interference with learning when the local schools resume in September;
12. Relevant school materials should be made available in the camps to encourage IDP parents to enrol their children in the local schools;
13. The state government, with the assistance of humanitarian agencies, should facilitate an effective referral system to address critical medical cases;
14. An assessment of the psychological needs of traumatised IDPs, especially the children, is recommended to be carried out by mental health professionals;
15. Strengthening existing IDP leadership structures by educating them on community protection mechanisms;
16. Some IDPs have indicated their desire to locally integrate within the host communities, it is expedient that measures be put in place to enable their integration through livelihood interventions and access to basic services, thereby encouraging self-dependency;
17. Reconstruction of ravaged villages and farmlands, should be considered to enable the sustainable return of the IDPs;
18. Urgent capacity support should be provided to state and local authorities to establish appropriate coordination mechanisms and tools for assessments, data collection/analysis. Specifically agencies managing camps should be trained in protection, coordination and camp management (CCCM) while training is provided to partners working in camps on roles and responsibilities in coordination to avoid duplication and address gaps.
19. Sensitization/training of security agents on basic human rights laws and protection principles, should be considered.
20. The Nigerian Humanitarian Fund and/or CERF Rapid Response window could be used to mobilise resources for an initial response. It is recommended that to avoid assessment fatigue and raising of unrealistic expectations, further assessment should be postponed until after a clear assistance plan is finalised.