

## Policy pointers

**Nigeria's national** humanitarian agencies need to reform both their philosophy and practice on urban displacement crises.

**Documented and** needs-based assessments and demographic profiling are crucial in meeting displaced people's needs. Direct monetary assistance is also an effective way to deliver aid.

**National and** international humanitarian practitioners need to work with civil society groups to tackle stigmatisation of displaced people in urban areas. Creating safe and inclusive spaces for displaced people in urban areas requires a proactive approach.

**International** organisations and local civil society groups should continue to lobby to get legislation protecting displaced people fully implemented.

## Women and children fleeing Boko Haram: their experiences in Nigerian cities

The Boko Haram insurgency has engulfed many parts of Northern Nigeria since 2010. About two million people have fled into urban areas around crisis zones. However, barely ten per cent of these internally displaced people (IDPs) are sheltered in formal humanitarian camps. The vast majority live on their own, facing difficulties in accessing food, education, healthcare and shelter. Harassment and stigmatisation exacerbate their suffering in urban areas. This study explored IDPs' desperate situations in the major urban areas of Kano and Maiduguri, focusing on women and children. Fragmentation and inter-agency rivalry has crippled local intervention programmes, and protection for displaced people urgently needs to be strengthened through institutional reforms and collaborative problem solving.

The Boko Haram crisis engulfs four African countries: the Republic of Cameroon, Chad, the Republic of Niger and Nigeria. Frequent acts of terror take place within the Lake Chad basin — an area where people are already facing significant climate-related challenges. The insurgency has spread across Northern Nigeria since 2010, and about two million Nigerians have fled their homes and ended up in urban areas around the main crisis zones. However, barely ten per cent of these people, formally termed 'internally displaced people' (IDPs), are sheltered in official humanitarian camps.<sup>1</sup> The vast majority live without support. Difficulties in accessing food, education, healthcare and shelter are added to the harassment and stigmatisation they often experience in urban areas. Women and children in particular face desperate situations, and their protection needs urgent reform.

### Legal protection

The United Nations' Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement<sup>2</sup> support protection for people forced to flee their normal homes. The instrument encompasses many issues, including protection from physical attack and sexual assault, as well as access to shelter, food and healthcare services. In spite of the many armed conflicts, droughts and other environmental crises in Africa, it was only in 2009 that the continent developed its own instruments to guide protection for IDPs, via the African Union's Kampala Convention. Article 9 stressed the need for all countries to protect IDPs from all forms of exploitation, abuses, harassment and starvation.<sup>3</sup> Nigeria, the focus of this briefing, drafted a national IDPs policy in 2013, but this has not been passed into law in spite of several appeals by international humanitarian institutions.<sup>4,5</sup>

## *Humanitarian assistance needs to ask women and children what they actually need*

### Studying Northern Nigeria

The Boko Haram insurgency has displaced many women and children to areas in and around the cities of Kano and Maiduguri in Northern

Nigeria. This briefing reports a study into the challenges they face.

In each city, 350 IDPs were engaged in focus group discussions. About 150 in each location were children aged 7–15 (male

and female) and about 65 were adult men who had fled with their female relatives. The rest were women, including young women aged 17–20 years. We paid all participants a small stipend for participating in the study in order to compensate for lost earnings. In addition, we interviewed 35 other stakeholders in each city, mainly members of host communities, civil society groups or public organisations. These interviews let us investigate conditions for IDPs as seen from external viewpoints.

### Shared and contrasting challenges

IDPs living without humanitarian support in these two cities face both shared and contrasting challenges. For instance, IDPs often face malnutrition, and over 80 per cent of focus group participants in both cities said food shortages were among the most serious problems they faced (see Figure 1). Similarly, IDPs in both cities said lack of access to shelter and education were major concerns for them.

However, overall IDPs seemed to be facing worse situations in Maiduguri than in Kano. Far more IDPs in Maiduguri said they experienced water scarcity, insecurity, lack of privacy, poor healthcare, harassment and poor access to amenities than in Kano.

But situations were not universally better in Kano. More women here, for example, found it difficult to pay their housing rents. Notably, although Figure 1 suggests women and children felt more secure in Kano than in Maiduguri, less than ten per cent who said they had experienced sexual harassment or bullying also said they had reported it to anyone at all. In Maiduguri, about 20 per cent said they reported harassment at least to family members. Clearly, in both cities, the overwhelming majority suffer in silence. They lack access to justice and their abusers go unpunished.

Most probably, the further away from the conflict zone the IDPs are, the safer they feel, and this may explain why IDPs felt safer in

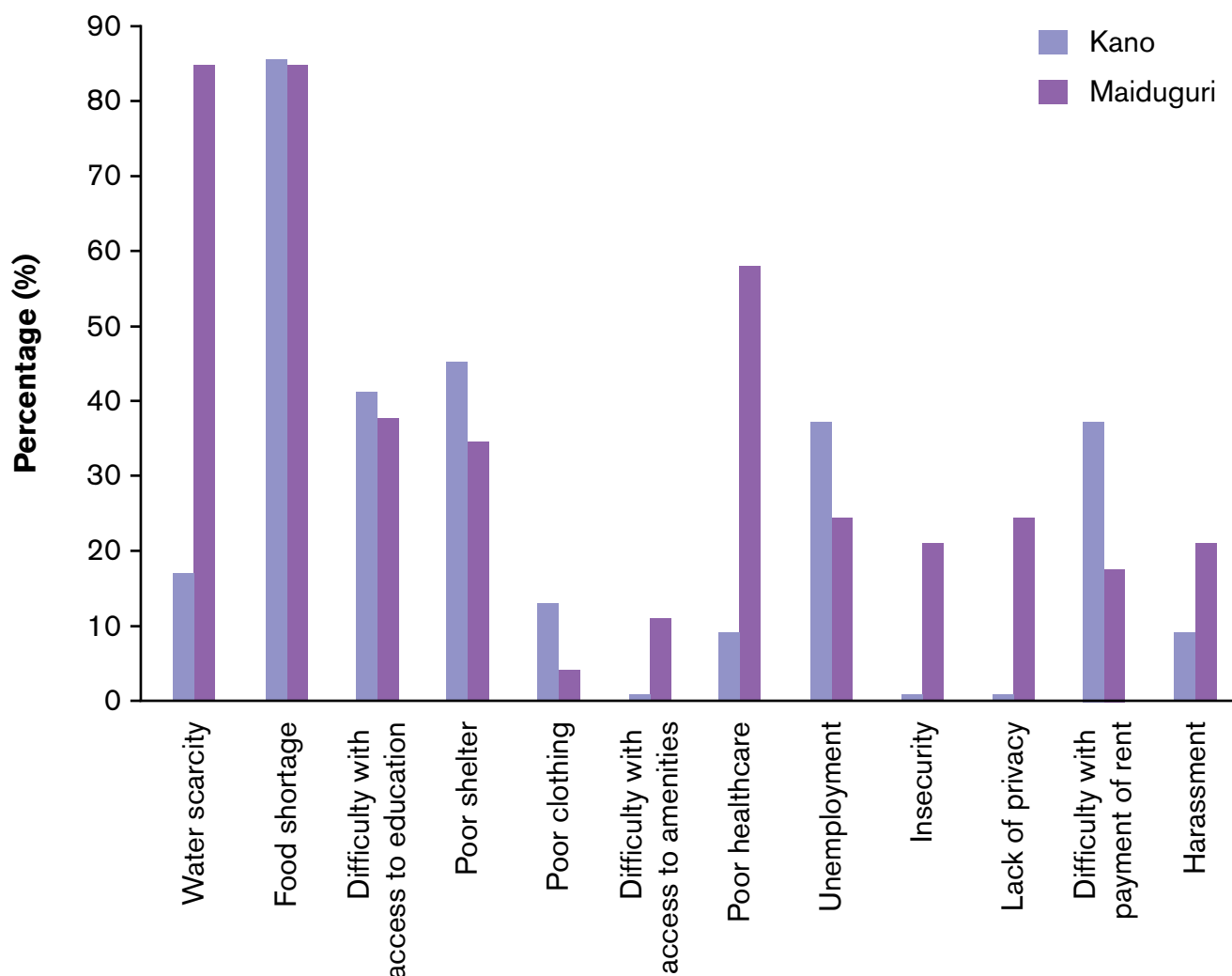
Kano. But there is a trade-off. Most women and children who had fled to Maiduguri from rural areas of Borno State were moving to their state capital city. That will have made it easier for them to uphold their basic rights as state indigenes, and find accommodation and jobs. On the other hand, fleeing to Kano State means the IDPs had crossed at least two states before reaching Kano City. While some were hosted by their friends and relations in Kano, many were not so fortunate. Many women and children try hard to integrate into Kano's urban society, but with varying degrees of success. We came across three girls who moved to Kano after witnessing Boko Haram murder their father. These young women no longer went to school and worried that people in their host community were sceptical of their situation. Some people even label them as members of Boko Haram. Such stigmatisation is not untypical, and violates women's and children's rights. In Kano, our research team also came across cases where landlords had refused to rent homes to an NGO that intended to settle women and orphans. Individual IDPs told of similar situations. This chronic discrimination, and lack of institutional support to tackle it, underlines the need for urgent actions to protect women and children displaced to urban areas.

### Fragmented responsibilities

None of our study respondents in either cities were familiar with any of Nigeria's state-run humanitarian organisations. Instead, they mentioned names of several international humanitarian organisations that offer some assistance. This prompted us to examine the philosophy and operations of humanitarian agencies in urban Kano. We were told that at the peak of the Boko Haram crisis and influx of IDPs around 2012/2013, Kano State Government maintained a formal camp for only two months. A Red Cross official informed us that, even within the two month period, 80 per cent of the IDPs left the camp because of poor care.

Kano State Government has also allowed unnecessary competition and rivalry to creep in between its own agencies. The State Emergency Management Agency (SEMA) is the government's main humanitarian player, while the Hisbah Board is a moral police aligned with Islamic institutions. The Hisbah Board's mandate is to support implementation of Shariah law. Initially, the Hisbah Board helped IDPs by sourcing assistance from members of the public and disbursing it to individual women, children and families. But Hisbah has no professional training in dealing with IDPs, and no formal

Figure 1. Internally displaced people in focus group discussions were asked to identify which challenges were serious problems for them. Kano (N=350) and Maiduguri (N=350).



mandate for humanitarian assistance. SEMA officials felt Hisbah was encroaching on their work, and undermined their actions to help IDPs.

A senior official of SEMA we interviewed defined IDPs as “stranded people who left their place of residence and have nobody to take care of them and are outside their home town due to conflict and other calamities and have to be registered with SEMA.” In other words, IDPs who are not registered are not supported. But many people, including women and children, do not know how to register with SEMA — an agency that is unfamiliar even to the local residents. Some civil society organisations told us that IDPs who did not qualify under such a definition, risk arrest by the police or harassment by Hisbah. Allowing such a situation amounts to Nigeria evading its responsibility to IDPs as specified under international and regional conventions.

## Recommendations

Violent conflicts are creating urban humanitarian crises around the world — in 2015 alone, conflicts displaced 24 people every minute.<sup>6</sup> From our research, we recommend changes that can improve protection and rights for displaced women and children, and ensure that urban areas in Nigeria become more inclusive. However, these recommendations will also apply more widely in similar situations elsewhere.

**Nigeria’s national humanitarian agencies need to reform both their philosophy and practice on urban displacement crises.** Such reforms should include training for staff on how best to understand and assist women and child IDPs, as stipulated within international and regional laws and conventions. Reforms should also fight corruption as this will earn the confidence of displaced people and their helpers.

**Needs-based assessments are crucial.**

Individuals and institutional benefactors need to assess displaced people's needs before offering them supplies. For example, many of the IDPs in Kano did not like receiving cooked foods, preferring to receive raw food and cook it themselves. Helpers and contributors need to develop strategies that make aid delivery participatory. Put simply, humanitarian assistance needs to ask women and children what they actually need and not just provide what others think they need.

**Direct monetary assistance is an effective way to help displaced people.** It lets people meet their basic needs as defined by themselves, whether this is to buy equipment for livelihood opportunities (such as a sewing machine) or medicine.

**Documenting people's needs and demographic profiling are essential.**

Authorities in host cities, civil society groups and international humanitarian organisations need to record IDPs' places of origin and new places of residence, as well as their needs. Such information will help agencies design effective ways to support vulnerable people. Creating a database that documents reports of abuse

could also go a long way in helping victims, and possibly in tracking perpetrators.

**National and international humanitarian practitioners need to work hand in hand to tackle stigmatisation of displaced people in urban areas.** One of the best ways to achieve this is through civil society groups' programmes that work to change perceptions among host communities and municipal authorities. Creating safe and inclusive spaces for IDPs in urban areas requires a proactive approach.

**International organisations and local civil society groups should continue to lobby to get legislation protecting displaced people fully implemented.** They should exert pressure on the Nigerian executive and parliament to speed up action on domesticating IDPs' rights. Nigeria, with its 36 states and many cities and towns spread across 774 local government areas, needs to take urgent action on the urban displacement crises that are affecting so many vulnerable women and children.

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**Knowledge Products**

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Bayero University Kano is a public university located in Kano, Northern Nigeria, with a wide range of research and teaching in humanities, social sciences, natural sciences and engineering.

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**Notes**

<sup>1</sup> Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre. [www.internal-displacement.org/countries/nigeria](http://www.internal-displacement.org/countries/nigeria) / <sup>2</sup> United Nations (1998) OCHA - Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement. / <sup>3</sup> African Union (2009) African union convention for the protection and assistance of internally displaced persons in Africa (Kampala Convention). [www.ifrc.org/docs/IDRL/-%20To%20add/AUConventionProtectionIDPs2009.pdf](http://www.ifrc.org/docs/IDRL/-%20To%20add/AUConventionProtectionIDPs2009.pdf) / <sup>4</sup> Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) (2013) IDP Laws and Policies – A Mapping Tool. [www.internal-displacement.org/law-and-policy/country/NG](http://www.internal-displacement.org/law-and-policy/country/NG) / <sup>5</sup> Jimoh, A (9 February 2017) UN urges Nigeria to pass IDP policy into law. *Daily Trust*. [www.dailytrust.com.ng/news/general/un-urges-nigeria-to-pass-idp-policy-into-law/184668.html](http://www.dailytrust.com.ng/news/general/un-urges-nigeria-to-pass-idp-policy-into-law/184668.html) / <sup>6</sup> Obani, P (2017) Inclusiveness in humanitarian action—access to water, sanitation & hygiene in focus. *Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability* 24, 24–29.