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# **Internal displacement in Nigeria: a hidden crisis**

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# MAP OF NIGERIA



Map No. 4231: NIGERIA  
October 2004

Department of Peacekeeping Operations  
Cartographic Section

## Executive summary

*While ethno-religious conflict is endemic in Nigeria – with at least 10,000 people killed and an estimated 800,000 internally displaced since military rule ended in 1999 – the past year has witnessed an alarming upsurge in the level of violence and its impact on civilians. Almost one year after spiralling violence between mainly Muslim cattle herders and Christian farmers in central Plateau state left possibly more than 1,000 people dead and 258,000 temporarily displaced, many of those who fled are still too scared to return. Although a six-month state of emergency in Plateau – imposed by President Olusegun Obasanjo in May 2004 to stem the “near mutual genocide” between Muslims and Christians – was lifted in November, many fear this might still foreshadow a return to the cycle of revenge attacks that previously spread to other areas of the country, including the northern city of Kano.*

*Some 3,000 IDPs remain in camps in neighbouring Bauchi and Nassarawa states, and many more are effectively hidden within host communities. The issue of data is extremely problematic, as there has been no systematic registration or verification of numbers of internally displaced and the Nigerian government itself admits that figures are often “grossly misleading”. Estimates of the number of people internally displaced by the 2004 Plateau state crisis range from 40,000 to 258,000. Some of those displaced have integrated into local communities; some have joined relatives in other states, while others are being officially resettled, particularly in Bauchi state. Although some have returned to try to salvage what they can of their homes, few have the means to start rebuilding. Lack of shelter is a major obstacle to return.*

*The immediate humanitarian needs of IDPs from Plateau state – principally medical treatment, shelter, food and water/sanitation – were adequately addressed through a combination of humanitarian stakeholders, albeit in a rather ad hoc and uncoordinated fashion. But as in previous displacement crises in Nigeria, the longer term needs of IDPs have been given scant attention. Since the immediate crisis in the Yelwa area of Plateau state died down after May 2004, humanitarian assistance has been virtually non-existent. Médecins Sans Frontières is the only relief agency present in the area, providing basic health services as well as trauma counselling. Many people witnessed relatives being mutilated and killed, and hundreds of mainly women and girls were abducted. Some were raped, although this has not been well documented. Many are visibly suffering from post-traumatic stress syndrome.*

*Assistance for return and reintegration is the most pressing need of IDPs in Nigeria. This should include not only physical rehabilitation of homes, public buildings and infrastructure, but also support for peace and reconciliation initiatives, especially at the grass-roots level. Sustained, coordinated support is essential to allow IDPs to return home in “safety and dignity” as required by the UN Guiding Principles, and to make their return durable. Although the Nigerian government may have the financial capacity to respond to emergencies, it lacks the necessary institutional capacity and expertise to deal effectively with*

*acute situations of internal displacement. The area of training for improved emergency response is therefore crucial, and should be a priority for donors.*

*Although the current situation of internal displacement in Nigeria may not amount to an “emergency”, especially when compared to other conflict-induced displacement crises in the West African sub-region, there is real potential for renewed violence that could quickly spread and cause major population movements. Quite apart from the endemic ethno-religious conflict in various parts of the country, there is also serious potential for increased conflict-induced displacement in the oil-rich Niger delta and possibly in the Bakassi area, which is in the process of being handed over to Cameroon following a decision of the International Court of Justice. Yet the main overriding cause of conflict is poverty and unequal access to resources. Despite its oil wealth, at least two thirds of Nigerians live on less than \$1 per day. Many people believe that conflicts are created and fanned by scheming politicians, particularly elites of the former military regime, relying on the huge pools of destitute and frustrated youths to create social division. The violence can then quickly spread and take on a momentum of its own. The level of conflict, and with it the level of internal displacement, is expected to increase as the 2007 presidential elections draw nearer.*

*Addressing the root causes of conflict-induced displacement, and thereby trying to avoid the types of humanitarian crises currently plaguing several of its neighbours, must be a key priority for the Nigerian government. And should such a crisis occur, it is essential for the humanitarian community at all levels in Nigeria to be in a position to respond better to both immediate and long term needs of IDPs. As observed by one senior UN official in the country, “The issue of internal displacement in Nigeria has been largely ignored – one, because the country is so large and two, since Nigeria is not considered an emergency country the problem of displacement doesn’t make the news. As a result IDPs here have been suffering unnoticed.”*

## **Key recommendations**

### To the government of Nigeria

- At the national level, clarify the roles, responsibilities and division of labour between the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) and the National Commission for Refugees (NCR) with regard to IDP protection and assistance
- seek technical support and training for improved emergency preparedness and response to conflict-induced displacement at both national and state level
- at state level, set up coordination structures to harmonise both emergency and rehabilitation response to IDPs between the various state authorities involved in a particular crisis (e.g. increased cooperation and coordination between the authorities in Plateau and Bauchi states, particularly with regard to IDP return and resettlement)
- at the state level, develop clear return and resettlement strategies that are in line with the UN Guiding Principles
- improve overall IDP response by working with UN agencies, the Red Cross and NGOs to improve coordination structures at both national and state level (e.g. participate in regular interagency information-sharing meetings)
- allow national and international humanitarian organisations full and unconditional access to IDPs in their places of refuge
- build upon existing peace and reconciliation efforts by promoting awareness campaigns, through local radio and other media, that focus on commonalities rather than differences between ethnic and religious groups
- further aid the reconciliation process by ensuring that perpetrators of the violence are identified, including members of the security forces, and brought to justice

### To the UN

- improve coordination of overall IDP response at the national level by initiating regular interagency information-sharing meetings between UN agencies, relevant government bodies and NGOs, especially at the outset of a crisis
- support training and capacity building of national and state authorities (NEMA and SEMAs)
- through OCHA's Internal Displacement Division, provide technical support for the completion of a National IDP Policy

- build on the National IDP Policy to develop an IDP strategy, clearly identifying roles and responsibilities of the various humanitarian stakeholders in all phases of displacement
- develop awareness campaigns and peace education in schools and among unemployed youth to boost reconciliation efforts
- develop income generation and micro-credit schemes in areas of return and resettlement

To donors

- support training programmes for improved emergency preparedness and response for both government and non-governmental organisations involved in IDP response in Nigeria (e.g. project proposal by Catholic Relief Services, and Save the Children UK's training proposal for child-focused response)
- support projects that cater for the longer term needs of IDPs, such as trauma counselling (MSF), peace building (UNICEF/UNDP) and rehabilitation of facilities in education, health and water/ sanitation (UNICEF)

## **Complex conflicts, complex causes**

With a population of about 130 million and more than 250 ethnic groups, Nigeria is Africa's most populous nation – with a multitude of religious, ethnic and political fault lines that periodically erupt into communal violence. This has created a sizeable, albeit fluctuating, internally displaced population – particularly since the return of democracy in 1999. Conservative estimates put the number of people killed in communal violence across Nigeria since 1999 at around 10,000; some government figures stand at more than 50,000 for central Plateau state alone (BBC, 7 October 2004).

Before then, military regimes – especially the rule of General Sani Abacha (1993-98) – kept the underlying tensions in check. Any separatist aspirations were brutally suppressed since the attempted secession of the eastern Biafra republic in 1967 led to civil war in which up to 1 million people died, mainly as a result of disease and starvation. Almost three decades after the war ended, a return to democratic rule with the election of President Olusegun Obasanjo in 1999 opened up new opportunities for people to express their grievances and new areas of conflict were created by the competition for political spoils. The resulting rise in communal violence can be attributed to various factors, including: ethnic rivalry, religious violence, land conflicts, conflicts related to the demarcation of administrative boundaries and political elections, and conflicts linked to oil production in the Niger delta (Nigeria is Africa's leading oil producer).

While some of these conflicts may appear to be caused by a single factor, such as religion or ethnicity, the reality is usually more complex. The introduction of Islamic Sharia law in a total of 12 of Nigeria's 36 states in recent years has caused tensions, but when Muslim and Christian groups have clashed this has usually been caused by other factors – such as pressure on land or unequal access to social services. However, the polarisation that follows is often along religious lines, and the conflict is easily stereotyped as a “religious war”. The same dynamic is often observed with regard to “ethnic conflicts”.

Perhaps the most significant cause of communal violence in Nigeria is the entrenched divisions throughout the country between people considered indigenous to an area, and those regarded as settlers. Even though settlers may have lived in an area for hundreds of years, they are consistently discriminated against in terms of land ownership, control of commerce, jobs and education. In predominantly Christian Plateau state, for example, the majority of “settlers” belong to the northern Hausa-Fulani ethnic group, nomads who have gradually moved southwards as the expanding Sahara desert has dried up their traditional grazing lands. Hausa-Fulani Muslims have long complained that predominantly Christian farmers steal their cattle and prevent them from grazing, whilst the farmers counter that cattle encroach on their land. At the same time there are indigenous Muslim ethnic groups fiercely opposed to the perceived expansionist tendencies of the Hausa-Fulanis. “The crux of the problem is that a lot of people are coming to this part of the country and trying to stake a claim to land that is not rightfully theirs,” says Sheikh Yusuf Gomwalk, an Islamic scholar of the Jama'atu Nasril Islam organisation in the Plateau state capital Jos. “It is only the politicians who play the religious card” (Interview, Jos, 9 December 2004). This argu-



ment is widely repeated in different areas of the country. “Whatever the historical justifications, the conflict is always and everywhere about access to scarce resources... Many observers in Nigeria believe that the roots of the violence across much of the country are not religious or cultural. They say the conflicts are created and stoked by politicians both at a local and national level who seek to gain advantage from social division...Once triggered, the violence has its own momentum” (BBC, 5 May 2004).

Conversely, major towns in northern Nigeria – such as Kano and Kaduna – have in recent years been the scene for violent clashes between Muslims (again, mainly Hausa-Fulanis) and Christian minority populations – often considered “settlers” in these areas. The 2004 Plateau state crisis, which culminated in May 2004 in the massacre of several hundred Muslims by Christian militia in the town of Yelwa (see below), in turn sparked deadly reprisals in Kano, where Muslims rampaged against the Christian minority. About 30 people were killed and some 10,000 displaced (IRIN, 12 May 2004). In November 2002, more than 30,000 people may have been temporarily displaced during the “Miss World riots” in Kaduna (IRIN, 28 November 2002).

Communal violence has also forced residents of the commercial capital Lagos to flee. Even though Lagos is not geographically linked to the northern region, these two conflict areas are indirectly related as populations from both areas are involved. There have been several occasions where violence in the north has triggered revenge attacks in the south west (Lagos) and vice versa (HRW, February 2003). While the Hausa-Fulanis have been seen as the main perpetrators of violence in some of the conflicts in the north, the same group has equally been targeted when violence has erupted in Lagos. Clashes in Lagos in October 2000 and February 2002 were both reported to have caused the displacement of some 3,000-5,000 people (ICRC, 18 March 2002).

Displacement has also been closely linked to oil production in the southern Niger Delta. While environmental degradation and lack of benefits from oil revenues appear to have been a catalyst for many of the conflicts during the 1990s, more recently the transfer of money back to local communities has become a reason for violent clashes. One reason for this paradox is that community development programmes funded by the oil companies have made political positions increasingly attractive. Furthermore, the demarcation of new administrative boundaries and the creation of new political constituency areas have in many cases become the focus of violent disputes between communities, between different political parties and even between factions of the same party.

The violence triggered by these disputes has frequently forced people in the oil-producing states to flee their homes and widespread destruction of property has occurred. In September 2004 it was reported that at least 6,000 people had been displaced in several weeks of violence between local militia and security forces, as well as by infighting between militia (IRIN, 10 September 2004). Hundreds of foreign oil workers were evacuated after direct threats by the leader of the Niger Delta People’s Volunteer Force, Dokubo Asari. Amnesty International reported that between January and August 2004, some 670 people had been killed in the Delta region (AI, 9 November 2004).

## Plateau state, epicentre of unrest

Although ethno-religious conflicts have been plaguing Nigeria for decades, there was a worrying upsurge in the level of violence in 2004, particularly in central Plateau state. A bloody cycle of revenge attacks between mainly Muslim cattle herders and Christian farmers – essentially over land and cattle – over a four month period from February to May left more than 1,000 people dead and possibly up to 258,000 others internally displaced (Reuters, 4 August 2004). President Obasanjo tried to stem the “near mutual genocide” by imposing a six-month state of emergency in Plateau in May, removing the state governor Joshua Dariye and replacing him with a former army general, Chris Ali. Although the state of emergency was lifted in November 2004, and governor Dariye reinstated, many people fear this could presage a return to the spiraling violence that previously spread to other areas of the country, sparking revenge attacks against the Christian minority in the northern city of Kano.

Throughout southern Plateau, numerous towns and villages have been almost completely destroyed. In the small town of Yelwa, where a series of clashes culminated in May 2004 in the massacre of at least 600 Muslims (according to the Nigerian Red Cross) by heavily armed Christian militia, the destruction is overwhelming. Several mass graves in both the Muslim and Christian areas of the town attest to heavy losses on both sides over the four-month period. It is estimated that up to 80 per cent of houses in Yelwa were destroyed, forcing much of the 26,000-strong population to flee. While UN OCHA reported that as a result of the attacks an estimated 40,000-60,000 people were displaced inside Plateau state and in the neighbouring states of Bauchi and Nassarawa (GIDPP, 30 June 2004), the Plateau state government gave the total number of IDPs within the state alone at almost 220,000 in September 2004, representing a cumulative total since ethno-religious violence effectively split the state capital Jos in two in September 2001.



Widow with one of her nine children, Yelwa (McGoldrick/Global IDP Project, 2004)

The Plateau state crisis is a prime example of ethno-religious conflict masking the “indigenes” versus “settlers” syndrome, exacerbated and manipulated by political factors.

Both Muslim and Christian groups in the Yelwa area have used inflammatory language against each other. The Muslim Ulama/ Elders Council in Yelwa complained of the “pathological hatred of Muslims generally by some eminent Christians such as the Plateau State CAN [Christian Association of Nigeria] President and the paramount ruler of Shendam [local government area covering Yelwa]” and of the “Christianisation agenda of Plateau State.” The Christian Gamai

Unity and Development Organisation in Shen-

dam, for its part, claimed in July 2004 that there was “systematic killing of Gamai and other non-Muslim returnees and travellers by the Muslim elements in Yelwa.”

Yet the conflict runs deeper than religious tit-for-tat. Some Plateau residents, including prominent community leaders, remain convinced that the state government deliberately initiated the violence in order to rid the area of Muslim settlers. To them the state of emergency was a blessing and helped restore confidence. Others are adamant that the state governor, Joshua Dariye, was made a scapegoat. Nigeria has experienced numerous outbreaks of serious violence since the end of military rule in 1999, yet such emergency powers were never invoked before.

Many Nigerians see this rather as political manoeuvring ahead of 2007 presidential elections. Two main contenders are expected to be Vice President Atiku Abubakar and former military head of state Ibrahim Babangida – both powerful northerners. President Obasanjo, a former military leader himself but a Christian from the southwest, owes allegiance to key northern politicians who helped put him in power – particularly Ibrahim Babangida. One of Atiku Abubakar’s important supporters is said to be Joshua Dariye.

In this context it is therefore widely believed that any purported efforts to bring peace to Plateau state – at least on a government level – are token gestures. This goes for the Plateau state peace conference in September 2004, which President Obasanjo attended, described by Yelwa councillor and adviser to the local rehabilitation committee Abdullahi D. Abdullahi II as “superficially good, but definitely not truly representative of the Plateau state residents and if anything, entrenching divisions even more deeply” (Interview, Yelwa, 8 December 2004).

Questions are also being asked about a proposed Truth and Reconciliation Commission. “This may be just a cover to avoid the issue of prosecuting and bringing to justice the perpetrators of the violence – including the security forces. Until this happens there can be no forgiveness and no chance of peace,” according to one Yelwa resident.

In January 2005 some Yelwa residents were threatening legal action against alleged perpetrators of the violence, including the Long Goemai (traditional ruler) of Shendam – raising fears once again that the fragile peace may not hold.

### **Numbers guesswork**

Complex movement patterns combined with the overwhelming lack of data in Nigeria makes the issue of numbers of IDPs very problematic. There has been no systematic registration or verification of numbers of IDPs and figures are often “grossly misleading,” according to Zanna Muhammed, deputy director of the National Emergency Management Agency (Interview, Abuja, 6 December 2004).

The 2005 Humanitarian Appeal (CAP) for West Africa puts the total number of IDPs in Nigeria at 200,000 (as of November 2004) – although this too must be based on guesswork. The government's National Commission for Refugees said at the beginning of 2004 that some 800,000 people had been displaced over the previous four years, but gave no breakdown of figures by state or region (IRIN, 2 January 2004). The same source also reported in May 2004 that "Nigeria has more than one million internally displaced persons" and in December 2004 stated that the cumulative total of IDPs since 1999 was 3 million (Interview, Abuja, 6 December 2004).

The vast majority of displaced people in Nigeria seek refuge with family, friends or host communities where their ethnic group is in the majority. Others seek shelter in major towns. Many appear to return to their homes or resettle in the proximity of their home areas soon after the violence has subsided, but an unknown number also resettle in other areas of the country. It is therefore difficult to distinguish between movements of people forced to flee by violence and those moving for economic reasons.

### **Lack of protection**

During the 2004 Plateau state crisis there was widespread evidence not only of human rights abuses against fleeing civilians by armed militia, but also of police and military complicity. Victims of the 2-3 May attack on Yelwa, where more than 600 people were massacred, were often severely mutilated before being killed. Several hundred survivors bore machete or gunshot wounds. According to the Yelwa Rehabilitation Committee, about 800 mainly women and girls were abducted during the May attack on the town. By January 2005 all but 43 had been found through discreet community-based initiatives (Yelwa residents were opposed to the idea of international organisations coming in to trace missing people as they feared this would in fact ensure they became still harder to find).

There was anecdotal evidence of women and girls being raped or sexually assaulted, but this was not well documented mainly because of the social stigma. Many women and children were effectively used as slave labour and were frequently humiliated by their captors. Numerous Muslim returnees interviewed claimed they had been forced to break their traditions – for example they were made to go to church, to drink alcohol and to eat pork. In Yelwa, six-year old Abdul Majid haltingly described how his Christian captors forced him to do domestic work and to drink alcohol. Relatives managed to trace him after seven months in captivity. Adama Haruna, aged 19, returned home to Yelwa in December 2004 after managing to flee to Kano during the May attack. "I saw many of my friends and other women taken away. Some were killed and some I don't know where they are," she said.

But the Hausa-Fulani Muslims were by no means the only victims in Yelwa. Esther Joseph and her nine children returned to Yelwa at the end of 2004, and now live in the one small part of her compound that remains relatively intact. She witnessed her husband being hacked to death when gangs of Hausa-Fulani attackers killed some 70 people from the predominantly Christian Tarok tribe as they hid in a church in February 2004. Her house over-

looks both the church, which was razed, and the mass grave where her husband and scores of others are buried.

There is a widely-held belief that many of these abuses were sanctioned at a higher level. Human rights organisations have consistently accused the Nigerian security forces of failing to provide security during outbreaks of communal violence, and of using excessive force that has contributed to high death tolls. During the May 2004 clashes in Plateau state, police and army reinforcements were only sent to the town of Yelwa after hundreds of people had already been killed, according to Human Rights Watch (HRW, 11 May 2004). Local media reported that Yelwa residents accused the police and army of assisting the attackers, some of whom were armed with military-issue assault rifles (Vanguard, 8 May 2004). The Muslim Ulama/Elders Council of Plateau state claimed that “the Nigeria police force was a major accomplice before, during and after the attack of 2 and 3 May 2004. The Plateau State Police Command had prior knowledge of the preparation and the date fixed for the attack. The police failed to do anything to forestall it. Instead the police aided and some of them actively participated in the execution of the attack.” Similarly, the Elders Council accused the “military men attached to Yelwa [of] abandoning their duty post on the day of the attack under the guise of clearing the roadblocks and reinforcement.”

During the violence between Muslims and Christians in the northern city of Kano, also in May 2004, police reportedly committed dozens of unlawful killings in the name of restoring law and order. According to Human Rights Watch, this followed a pattern of unlawful, arbitrary and extrajudicial killings by the police following outbreaks of communal violence in Plateau, Kaduna and other states over the previous three years (HRW, 17 May 2004). The proliferation of small arms throughout Nigeria has also contributed to the high casualty figures during attacks (AI, 11 May 2004).

### **Long-term needs**

While immediate humanitarian needs in the wake of communal violence are often adequately addressed through combinations of humanitarian stakeholders (see below), specialist and longer term needs may be neglected.

During the 2004 Plateau state crisis, most of those who fled the violence effectively became hidden in host communities, who in turn shouldered the burden of their needs. The most visible IDPs were the 60,000 or so who took refuge in camps in neighbouring Bauchi and Nassarawa states. Early assessments by Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) in the camps revealed that although the IDPs were in difficult circumstances and many had basic needs that had still to be addressed, the situation was not critical. In early June 2004, about one month after the height of the violence in the Yelwa area, MSF reported that IDPs particularly in camps were living in overcrowded conditions, water and sanitation was poor, and that some IDPs lacked access to free medical treatment. The most common causes of death were malaria and diarrhoeal diseases, as well as gunshot and machete wounds. Although

malnutrition was not a significant problem, the general health and nutritional status of IDPs in camps was worse than that of IDPs living in host communities.

MSF did however emphasise the longer-term needs of the IDPs – including a clear need for trauma counselling. Many people had seen family members badly mutilated and killed, or were seriously wounded themselves. Some women and girls were raped. IDPs, including large numbers of children, were showing signs of post-traumatic stress disorder – including nightmares, insomnia, agitation and aggression. MSF reported, “as many of the IDPs are returning or hoping soon to return to their destroyed town of Yelwa, ongoing support will be especially important to assist the people in picking up their lives and being able to go forward otherwise trauma that is stuck may either debilitate people’s progress or cause intense rage that could easily result in more revenge killings.”

At the end of 2004, more than six months after the height of the violence in the Yelwa area, several thousand IDPs remained in camps – many of them still too afraid to return home.

In Nassarawa state only some 250 people remained in the Shinge IDP camp near the town of Lafia. Some of the displaced had integrated into the local community; some joined relatives in other states, while others returned to the Yelwa area to try to salvage what they could of their homes. Many of those who remained cited lack of shelter as the main obstacle to return.

In nearby Bauchi state – which is predominantly Hausa-Fulani and administered under Islamic Sharia law - about 3,000 people were still living in a variety of public buildings in and around Bauchi city, including two primary schools. In the Muazu House camp, 32 year-old Maimuna Adamu – who lost her husband and five of her seven children in the May 2004 attack on Yelwa – spoke for many: “I definitely don’t want to return there. Ever. This will be my home now. But I need help to get shelter.” In the nearby Women’s Centre, camp leader Husain Mohamed echoed this: “The great majority of people here will never return. In this place our own brethren welcome us. As long as Yelwa is under Shendam [Christian-dominated local government] it won’t be safe for us to live there” (Interviews, Bauchi, 10 December 2004).



Displaced girls, Women's Centre Camp, Bauchi (McGoldrick, Global IDP Project, 2004)

Current conditions in the camps are generally relatively good, with the Bauchi state government providing food and other relief items, as well as allocating some land for resettlement. “It is not our policy to encourage resettlement in Bauchi,” said Mohamed Babayo, director of the Bauchi state Task Force Committee set up for the rehabilitation of people

displaced from Plateau. “But with an estimated total of 24,000 internally displaced people (IDPs) still staying here who may never return to their homes, we have to do something about it. Of course we have to be careful that we’re not inundated with bogus IDPs trying to claim land, so we’re proceeding very slowly and waiting for IDPs themselves to show genuine commitment to staying here and trying to rebuild by themselves” (Interview, Bauchi, 10 December 2004).

More than 2,000 plots of land have so far been allocated to displaced families near Bauchi city, but conditions vary greatly. For example, at Baram there is electricity, a newly built primary school and a few houses being built, while at Marrabaran no more than a handful of people have started trying to hew the rocky land that has no infrastructure whatsoever. So far there has been no more than ad hoc assistance with building materials, and nothing at all in terms of income-generation projects. Mohamed Babayo blames this on financial constraints and a lack of donor interest, acknowledging that it could take “a very long time” for people to rebuild their homes and livelihoods.

### **Obstacles to return**

The task of rebuilding homes and livelihoods is equally daunting for those IDPs who decide to return to their areas of origin. Homes and infrastructure have often been systematically destroyed and looted during – and sometimes after – outbreaks of communal violence, in order to deter returning IDPs. There are numerous examples of this in recent Nigerian history. During the 2001 Jos crisis whole villages were razed to the ground (OMCT, 2002, p119), and farmers fleeing the violence in other central region states in 2001 saw their crops ruined and other properties damaged. As part of the strategy to retaliate for the killings of soldiers inside Benue state in 2001, government troops were reported to have “regularly plundered” abandoned farms (HRW, April 2002, p14). In October 2002 it was reported that as many as 90 per cent of the 60,000 inhabitants of Odi town in Bayelsa state were still living in temporary structures, having found their original homes destroyed after being displaced in 1999 (OMCT, 2002, p80).

Following the May 2004 attack on the town of Yelwa, where the devastation was overwhelming, there were also reports that vandalism, burning and looting took place several weeks after the initial violence in order to deter returning IDPs. By the beginning of 2005 thousands of people had in fact returned to Yelwa and were trying to pick up the pieces among the rubble and charred remains of their homes. But most still lack the means to start rebuilding.

“In order to bring people back to Yelwa we need help not only with shelter, but also with water, health facilities and education assistance,” said Yelwa councillor, Rachael Samson (Interview, 8 December 2004). There is a perennial water shortage in the town: by March, at the height of the annual dry season, the wells dry up. Other water sources are unusable because of contamination by corpses. A small clinic run by Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) is the only health facility in the town. If MSF support ends, the nearest clinic is in

the town of Shendam – but most Yelwa residents are still too afraid to go there for treatment because many of the perpetrators of the May 2004 attacks came from that area. And with a total of 10 out of 19 schools in the Yelwa area completely destroyed (most of them private), and those remaining suffering considerable damage and a dire lack of resources, education has still not resumed for many returning IDPs.



Attempts at rebuilding in Yelwa (McGoldrick, Global IDP Project/2004)

At the same time there are people in Yelwa – like prominent community leader Abdullahi D. Abdullahi II – who maintain that psychological fear is a much greater obstacle to rebuilding lives and livelihoods than even the need for material assistance. Like many people in Yelwa who are sceptical of government-led peace initiatives, Abdullahi has more faith in community-based peace and reconciliation efforts. He is part of the Inter-faith Mediation Committee that has brought together Muslim and Christian

representatives of the Shendam local government area of Plateau state to draft the Shendam Peace Declaration, due to be signed in February 2005.

### **Fragmented humanitarian response**

The National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA), established in 1999, is responsible for overall disaster management in Nigeria – including the coordination of emergency relief operations as well as assisting in the rehabilitation of the victims where necessary. It has presence in most states and often supports IDPs in the emergency phase of a crisis, but it does not have the necessary resources to assist people displaced for a longer period of time, or to assist returnees to reintegrate. State Emergency Management Agencies (SEMA) also exist in some states, but with varying performance levels.

As seen in numerous displacement crises across Nigeria in recent years, assistance for return and reintegration is one of the major needs of IDPs, but government assistance rarely extends beyond emergency response. For example, when thousands of IDPs living in camps in Benue state as a result of Tiv-Hausa violence in neighbouring Nassarawa were assisted to return to their home areas in 2002, assistance was in many cases limited to transport only (PFD, 17 June 2002; IRIN, 18 June 2002). On the other hand, for example, efforts by the Bauchi state government to resettle IDPs from Plateau state in 2004 achieved some tangible results, and by the end of the year more than 2,000 displaced families had been allocated land for building new homes.



The national response is generally constrained by lack of experience in dealing with IDP issues, which has resulted in inefficiencies and support gaps to affected populations, but also by competing mandates. Confusion exists at the federal level over who has the mandate to respond to and assist IDPs – especially between NEMA and the National Commission for Refugees (NCR, informally mandated in 2002 to also cover IDPs) – which results in competition for resources. NEMA appears to be more of an operational agency, and a natural partner for operational UN agencies in Nigeria such as UNICEF, while NCR has appeared more occupied with policy issues. For example, in cooperation with the Global IDP Project, the NCR organised a training workshop in 2003 to initiate a national dialogue on how to respond to the IDP problem and how to implement the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement. Following the workshop the government decided to develop a National IDP Policy – but this was still in the draft stage at the beginning of 2005. At the same time NCR has clearly been trying to be seen as an operational agency – evident for example in its “comprehensive plan of action for resettlement, reconciliation, reconstruction and reintegration programmes” for the Plateau state IDPs (NCR, May 2004). But by February 2005 few if any of NCR’s recommendations had been realised.

Coordination between the various humanitarian actors at all levels is at best inconsistent. In the wake of the 2004 Plateau state crisis, international donors criticised the overall national response on various grounds, including: a lack of coordination; the lack of a proper registration system for IDPs; inefficient use of resources despite adequate financial capacity; lack of proper planning, monitoring and evaluation; and the politicisation of humanitarian assistance.

The UN system in Nigeria – headed by a Resident Coordinator who is also Resident Representative of the UN Development Programme – consists of numerous agencies, including UNDP, UNICEF, UNHCR, WHO, FAO, UNAIDS, UNFPA and ILO. Since 2000 it has been organised around a Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) – essentially a planning tool designed to enhance the coordination and effectiveness of UN contributions to development in Nigeria. The three broad priority themes of the UNDAF are promoting good governance and human rights; reducing poverty; and reducing the incidence and impact of HIV/AIDS, malaria, tuberculosis and other infectious diseases.

Nigeria is one of 13 countries included in the 2005 Consolidated Appeals Process (CAP) for West Africa, which focuses broadly on “transnational issues that affect the quality of the humanitarian environment in the sub-region.” Despite acknowledging that the level of violence seen in recent ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria “form a new and alarming trend” and that “if the violence persists, cross-border and internal displacement is likely to continue in 2005,” the CAP does not contain any projects directly related to issues of internal displacement in the country (UN, 11 November 2004).

With the focus on development needs, UN assistance to IDPs in Nigeria has been fairly ad hoc. Following the displacement crisis that affected Plateau, Bauchi, Nassarawa and Kano states in May 2004, the UN Emergency Preparedness and Response Working Group together with government and NGO partners helped to identify the immediate humanitarian

needs of the IDPs. The Nigerian government appealed to the UN Secretary-General for \$10 million to respond to the IDP situation. In response to this request, UN OCHA undertook a mission to develop a Common Humanitarian Action Plan to strengthen coordination amongst humanitarian partners and mobilise donors. The OCHA mission organised a donor briefing in the Nigerian capital Abuja which led to pledges by a few donors to support IDPs' immediate needs. OCHA itself donated various relief items to support the response efforts. OCHA's Internal Displacement Division, however, was not in a position to respond to the Nigerian government's request for technical support as Nigeria was not on their priority list.

While UNDP, UNICEF and WHO set up a joint taskforce to work with state governments in responding to IDPs' short-term requirements in the various areas affected by the 2004 crisis, longer term assistance was more elusive. The UN country team did donate various non-food items, including shelter materials, to both Plateau and Bauchi state governments. But at the end of 2004, funding was still being sought for a UNICEF-led proposal to rehabilitate primary schools, basic health services and water in three communities devastated by communal violence: Yelwa, Yamini and Kadarko, all in Plateau state.

A key issue is that even in the wake of the 2004 Plateau state crisis that may have temporarily displaced up to 258,000 people, neither the UN nor international donors regarded the situation as a real humanitarian emergency – with major implications for response and funding. An assessment mission led by the European Commission's Humanitarian Office in July 2004 concluded that the crisis was too small in terms of duration, numbers of affected populations and mortality rates to warrant providing emergency funding to the Nigerian government (which anyway has strong financial capacity). Indeed many donors see Nigeria as well endowed and able to address such situations from its own resources. There is a widely held view that the Nigerian government should focus its efforts on addressing the root causes of the problem – including the equitable distribution of resources – rather than focusing on the symptoms.



IDP resettlement at Baram, Bauchi state  
(McGoldrick, Global IDP Project, 2004)

In terms of rapid and consistent response during internal displacement crises, the Nigerian Red Cross Society (NRCS, with the support of ICRC and IFRC) is unrivalled. The Red Cross has a wide-reaching network in all parts of the country, and is usually first on the scene of a crisis, responding to acute medical and other emergency needs. The 2004 Plateau state crisis was no exception, with the NRCS team the first to gain access to the town of Yelwa (IFRC, 17 May 2004).

Yet there are some within the NRCS who believe this efficient response causes its own problems. They complain that the Nigerian government is generally not supportive of the Red Cross, and that relations particularly with NEMA are less than cordial (even though NRCS is the only non-governmental body given a statutory right to be on NEMA-led State Committees). “NEMA seems to get annoyed that the Red Cross manages to respond quicker than it does, with fewer resources. Government response is ad hoc and usually political,” according to one Red Cross official.

The ICRC works in close cooperation with NRCS, helping it to improve its capability to respond to emergencies. It maintains a regional delegation in Abuja, with the capacity to protect and assist people displaced by violence, often providing emergency medical treatment and equipment. It also supports the ‘Alternative to Violence’ programme, which aims to raise awareness of conflict issues among unemployed youths and ultimately to contribute to peace building.

A few international NGOs have also been involved in IDP response – both on the short and longer term levels. In response to the 2004 Plateau state crisis Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF) provided emergency medical treatment and supplies to around 30,000 IDPs in the Bauchi and Nassarawa camps, as well setting up basic water and sanitation supplies in collaboration with UNICEF and state authorities. MSF has sustained its response through a post-emergency programme in the Yelwa area, providing basic medical services in the Yelwa health centre as well as a professional trauma counselling programme. It is the only international organisation working in the area (despite this, in December 2004 officials of the Plateau state emergency management agency based in the state capital Jos claimed not to know of their existence). However, MSF was unable to respond similarly to the May 2004 displacement situation in the northern city of Kano, which resulted from revenge attacks following the violence in Plateau state earlier the same month, largely because of lack of access to the victims. Repeated obstruction by local authorities and unnecessary bureaucratic obstacles effectively prevented various agencies from providing necessary assistance to IDPs in Kano. Some aid workers believed that the reason for this was that the predominantly non-Muslim IDPs were being intentionally neglected by the authorities.

Catholic Relief Services (CRS) also responded to the May 2004 crisis in Plateau state by providing food and household items to 30,000 IDPs as well as returnees and vulnerable families. CRS and local partners subsequently designed a two-year Emergency Response and Preparedness Training programme for Plateau state aimed at improving future humanitarian response by local organisations – including state authorities, the Nigerian Red Cross and faith-based organisations. The programme aims to cover a range of issues including contingency planning, needs assessments, coordination, camp management (including registration and verification), evaluations and financial accountability. Pending adequate funding, CRS hopes to begin the training programme in early 2005.

One other international NGO involved in IDP response in Nigeria (albeit limited by funding constraints) is Save the Children UK, whose work includes improving the protection of children displaced by conflict. In late 2004 SC UK embarked on a one year training pro-

gramme of Nigerian Red Cross branch staff and identified local NGOs and faith based groups who try to respond to emergency displacement in five high risk states (Plateau, Nassarawa, Bauchi, Kano and Kaduna). The training focuses on raising awareness of issues around the protection of children during times of conflict and displacement - i.e. to help organisations prepare for and respond to emergencies in a child-focused fashion, thereby ensuring improved protection and assistance for children affected by emergencies. This aims to remedy a general lack of awareness among local organisations of the special needs of children during conflict-induced displacement, and of their high vulnerability to abuse and exploitation at such times. Although SC UK planned to run the training programme for a two-year period, and to extend it to other regions of Nigeria, lack of funding curtailed this.

### **Next steps**

Clearly the area of training for improved emergency response in Nigeria is crucial, and should be a priority for donors. Although the current situation of internal displacement in the country may not amount to an “emergency”, especially when compared to other conflict-induced displacement crises in the West African sub-region, there is real potential for renewed violence that could quickly spread and cause major population movements. The overall fragmented response to the 2004 Plateau state crisis demonstrated the need particularly for improved coordination between humanitarian actors at all stages of internal displacement from contingency planning and preparedness right through to post-emergency rehabilitation activities. Although the Nigerian government may have the financial capacity to respond to emergencies, it lacks the necessary institutional capacity and expertise to deal effectively with acute situations of internal displacement.

Another priority area is increased assistance for IDP return and reintegration. This should include not only physical rehabilitation of homes, public buildings and infrastructure, but also support for peace and reconciliation initiatives, especially at the grass-roots level. All too often in Nigeria, once an outbreak of conflict has died down, humanitarian assistance to those displaced becomes virtually non-existent. The situation of IDPs trying to rebuild their homes and livelihoods in the devastated town of Yelwa is just one example of the sad lack of sustained humanitarian assistance in the post-emergency phase. MSF is the only NGO working there, but clearly has limited capacity and resources to deal with the full range of humanitarian needs. UNICEF is also providing some longer term rehabilitation assistance, but is likewise constrained by funding. Sustained, coordinated support is essential to allow IDPs to return home in “safety and dignity” as required by the UN Guiding Principles, and to make their return durable.

*Note: For more detailed information on the internal displacement situation in Nigeria, please visit the [Nigeria country page](#) on the Global IDP Project's online IDP database .*

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Note: All documents used in this profile summary are directly accessible on the [List of Sources](#) page of the Nigeria country page.

## About the Global IDP Project

The Global IDP Project, established by the Norwegian Refugee Council in 1996, is the leading international body monitoring internal displacement worldwide.

Through its work, the Geneva-based Project contributes to protecting and assisting the 25 million people around the globe, who have been displaced within their own country as a result of conflicts or human rights violations.

At the request of the United Nations, the Global IDP Project runs an online database providing comprehensive and frequently updated information and analysis on internal displacement in over 50 countries.

It also carries out training activities to enhance the capacity of local actors to respond to the needs of internally displaced people. In addition, the Project actively advocates for durable solutions to the plight of the internally displaced in line with international standards.

For more information, visit the Global IDP Project website and the database at [www.idpproject.org](http://www.idpproject.org).

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