

## A Forgotten Population: Review of Issues and Challenges of Prolonged Displacement in Plateau State, Nigeria

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### ABSTRACT

Prolonged internal displacement is becoming normalised, diminishing empathy for affected populations. This study examined the challenges and issues of protracted internal displacement in Plateau State, Nigeria, focusing on the factors that led to a forgotten population and proposing sustainable solutions. The objectives were to identify the causes and contributing factors of prolonged displacement and to recommend strategies to address the challenges faced by internally displaced persons (IDPs) while facilitating durable solutions to improve their well-being. The study utilised documentary analysis of journal articles, reports, and newspapers from various commissions that documented violent conflicts in Plateau State, resulting in long-term displacement. Content and thematic analysis revealed that successive governments have failed to implement the recommendations of these commissions or address the root causes of displacement, resulting in continued displacement, unsafe living conditions, and a lack of resettlement plans. Displaced individuals face prolonged livelihood disruptions, and their aspirations for return, reintegration, or resettlement are often ignored. As conflicts persist without resolution, the situation of displaced persons worsens and remains invisible. The study concluded that prolonged displacement hinders progress toward achieving the Sustainable Development Goals agenda, specifically, zero hunger, poverty reduction, universal education, and justice for marginalised groups. It calls for urgent actions, such as mapping affected communities, implementing past commission recommendations, and establishing a policy framework to ensure durable solutions that improve the livelihoods and rights of internally displaced persons.

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**Contribution/Originality:** This study contributes to the existing literature on prolonged displacement. Utilising documentary analysis from journal articles and reports of various commissions that documented conflicts and displacement, it

reiterates the urgent need to implement recommendations to address the factors and causes of prolonged displacement that have resulted in a forgotten population.

## 1. Introduction

Globally, the situation of internally displaced persons (IDPs) is becoming increasingly dire. In the last decade, the displaced population has recently surpassed 100 million for the first time according to the [United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees \(UNHCR\) \(2022\)](#). These displaced populations reside mostly in host communities rather than in designated camps, often on a protracted basis ([Lowe et al., 2022](#)). The rise in internally displaced people and the plight of those neglected for decades are more worrisome and distressing. What is more worrisome and distressing is not just the rise in the number of internally displaced but the plight of those neglected, who have been displaced for decades. As displacement persists, IDPs' living conditions and mental well-being can be threatened and worsen. This is because the disruption in livelihood, loss of access to land resources, social protection, health-related risks, and the difficulty to access any benefits easily in host communities among others are critical to human development ([Human Rights Watch, 2022](#); [Vaz-Jones, 2018](#); [Kumswa & Best, 2022](#); [Lowe et al., 2022](#); [Khai, 2023](#)).

The international community's main focus is still thought to be on refugee protection and solutions. However, there is growing recognition that more resources and attention need to be directed at people who are displaced within their own countries but uprooted in such large numbers and for so long that most do not seek or find asylum in a foreign country ([Bloch & Donà, 2018](#)). This is because legal tools make it clear that IDP protection and welfare remain the main responsibility of the national government, especially when intergovernmental organisations fail to protect the displaced during episodes of genocides ([Benjamin, 2010](#)).

IDPs are struggling to find sanctuary and seek security in informal settlements or services in regions that are overburdened and strained. As their struggle for a better life is prolonged, it could deplete the community's human development both mentally and physically. Having been forced to leave their homes and cut off from their belongings, livelihoods, and networks, their living ability may be compromised ([Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, 2022](#)), and the combined effect makes prolonged displacement a perpetual cycle of poverty and underdevelopment.

Yet, the episodes of prolonged displacement provide limited information on the IDPs' experience and the likely future trends and responses to these neglected communities, which are constantly on the increase but sadly abandoned and eventually forgotten. Difficult as the present humanitarian situation may be, it is also, in many ways, a trailing early warning of a much more intractable longer-term development problem.

### 1.1. Research Objectives

The study examined the challenges and issues of protracted internal displacement in Plateau State, Nigeria, focusing on the factors that led to a forgotten population. The main objectives were to identify the causes and contributing factors of prolonged displacement and to recommend strategies to address the challenges faced by internally displaced persons (IDPs) while facilitating durable solutions to improve their well-being.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Issues and Challenges

Internally displaced persons (IDPs) are individuals who, despite having fled their habitual place of residence, remain within the boundaries of their country or region. Such displacement typically arises from armed conflict, widespread violence, violations human rights, natural disasters, and other related factors as contained in the 1998 United Nations Guiding Principles. IDPs suffer a wide array of human rights violations, such as the right to life, the right to freedom of movement, and the right to necessities of life such as food, shelter, among others (Betts, Loescher, & Milner, 2012; International Organisation for Migration, 2024). Their numbers continue to grow annually, with increased complexity and vulnerability in terms of targeted and need-sensitive consequences. Few people recognise their preferences, nor do they understand their experiences in prolonged displacement. Such development gradually leads to limbo and forgetfulness.

It is ten years since the Special Rapporteurs on Human Rights Council, of United Nations, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (2014), drew the attention of Nigeria's government and the international community for a swift response to the plight of 3.3 million displaced persons. The situation was described as "a forgotten tragedy" in the country due to violence since 2010, as one of the highest numbers of IDPs in the world (United Nations, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2014). These figures are significantly increasing, especially in Plateau State and the Middle Belt region, which has a history of forced displacement over decades (International Crisis Group, 2018).

Prolonged displacement is not just a misery to the IDPs alone, but to the host communities, in terms of resource sharing. Most of the assistance provided through government, NGOs, and international agencies largely focuses more on the displaced persons living in camps and less on those displaced outside the camps and the host communities themselves. These newcomers (IDPs), whether in camps or outside the camps, require healthcare, education, food security, social protection, and infrastructure within the host communities (Center on International Cooperation, 2015).

According to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (2024) global report and that of the Amnesty International (2018), violent conflict is the main driving factor of displacement in developing countries and Nigeria in particular, which invariably kept increasing the length of displacement. This is because conflicts usually last for long periods, and even when they become less intense or are resolved, the instability, insecurity, infrastructure damage, and institutional disruption they have caused can leave people displaced for years (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, 2023). Conflict often disrupts the normal functioning of a system (upon which those affected depend) and destroys the capacity of a population to survive under the prevailing conditions (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, 2018; United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction [UNDRR], 2009). The disruptions in livelihood occasioned by violent conflict are typical phenomena in most low-income countries. This phenomenon has delayed development, eroded and reversed gains made through long-term investments, affecting even the unborn generations (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, 2022).

Prolonged displacement increases the possibility of abandonment. These displaced populations are usually the *invisible majority*, whose stories have not been told, and their plight is often forgotten by both the authorities and international humanitarian agencies

(Emergency Relief Coordinator & Co-Signatories, 2016). This is because they are mostly no longer in the camp, nor have they reintegrated or returned home. The vast majority of the conflict-displaced individuals remain in their home country, where they struggle to survive, rebuild their lives, and have the freedom and same rights as any other citizen, yet such expectations and opportunities hardly come by (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, 2024).

To build a peaceful and inclusive societies free from fear and violence, the Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations strongly advocate the eradication of poverty and hunger, fighting inequality, and protecting human rights among others as critical aspect of human development (United Nations, 2015). Nigeria is not only a signatory member but has further approved a new National Policy for Internally Displaced Persons in September 2021. The policy is meant to protect the rights, dignity, and well-being of vulnerable groups by reducing the effects of internal displacement in Nigeria and finding long-term solutions to the problem (Choji, 2021). However, the policy implementations seem to concentrate more on the Northeast IDPs and neglect some communities that have experienced displacement in the North Central long before the Boko Haram intrusion.

The Plateau crisis began way back in 1994 when the Fibberesima Commission was set up, and since then, a series of violent crises have resulted in many communities being displaced, with no single effort to resettle or return the affected populations to their habitual residences. The event is gradually constituting a considerable hindrance to realising the objectives of the 2030 agenda, particularly in fragile regions and states like Plateau.

The humanitarian concern over the years has been the growing and spread of terrorist groups. In a study of the Boko-Haram induced IDPs, Amina and Ibrahim (2019) confirmed that there are about 81% more IDPs living in host communities than in camps, which puts a lot of pressure on the limited resources in the place of destination. Millions remain deeply impoverished and vulnerable, and this agrees with the World Bank (2017) that IDPs plight often fades easily from the world's media, left to lead a precarious existence, hosted predominantly by states and host communities with limited resources, stark poverty that condemns a generation of primarily women and children to life on the margins.

The commitment to 'leave no one behind' of the Sustainable Development agenda adopted by the UN General Assembly in September 2015, provide a robust basis for the inclusion of the vulnerable in economic development planning, as well as measures taken by states to achieve their sustainable reintegration or return (United Nations, 2015). However, there is a lot of worry about how the SDGs will be met, especially SDGs 1, 2, 3, 4, 11, and 16 (no poverty, zero hunger, good health and wellbeing, sustainable communities, reducing inequality, and peace, justice, and strong institutions). This is because of the long-term displacement and the lack of political will to end the menace in Plateau State and the surrounding states.

Prolonged displacement usually affects the disadvantaged minorities. These neglected populations according to United Nations, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (2014) often experience greater food insecurity, lack adequate water, affordable energy, and may be more deeply affected because they have weaker coping strategies that are sometimes been neglected from humanitarian responses. The consequences of such constraints opportunities are higher rates of infant mortalities, diseases, and the struggle

to access health services compared to the rest of the population (United Nations, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2014). This affirms the fact that peace and development are inseparable as opined by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2019) that there can be no sustainable development without peace and no peace without sustainable development. Additionally, humanitarian crises are increasing, resulting in protracted and repeated cycles of violence, producing a conflict trap to communities trying to escape are condemned to repetitive displacement, return, and re-displacement (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2022).

The concern here is, what happens to those who have been “forgotten in forgotten places” and “ignored” in prolonged displacement (Blum, 2023)? Their experiences of homelessness, lack of livelihood, shocks, and data about such a vulnerable category are unavailable. How they cope with life in raising their family for such a longer time in displacement is sometimes not explored.

When people flee their homes, they often hope to return within days or weeks but the reality for most of them, it usually takes years or even decades as conflict, destruction, lack of economic opportunity, or when occupation drags on (Schimmel, 2022; United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Agency, 2016). No nation can be regarded as developed if it cannot provide basic needs, and being developed meant not being exploited or controlled by others and as well, the freedom to determine one's destiny from servitude to enjoying real choices (Adeniran, 2017).

## 2.2. Prolonged Displacement and Its Challenges

Prolonged (or protracted) displacement has been termed as “an intractable state of limbo” and “a waste of humanity”; and the persons affected by it, are often called ‘forgotten populations’; “forgotten tragedy”, “ignored and invisible”; and the “majority invisible” (Tete, 2011; United Nations Human Rights Council, 2014; Emergency Relief Coordinator and Co-Signatories, 2016; Orendain & Djalante, 2021, Blums, 2023; Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, 2024). These grim and ugly descriptions of persons in prolonged displacement situations are gradually becoming a common fare in our era (Tete, 2011). Most media outlets are often carried away with breaking the news at the peak of the displacement and forget to report IDPs' experiences while in displacement, especially when it lingers.

Ferris (2014) sees prolonged displacement as a “humanitarian caseload”, which consists of people living in prolonged displacement, either as refugees or IDPs, who have been uprooted for more than five years. An example is Colombia's 40 years of humanitarian assistance. However, something is wrong when humanitarian aid is provided, decade after decade, and vulnerability remains on the rise, as in the case of 20 years of international humanitarian intervention to IDPs in the Democratic Republic of Congo (Ferris, 2014). These “forgotten populations,” by the state authority, remain invisible to the international humanitarian actors. Their experiences and development needs are not understood.

Etzold et al. (2019) sees prolonged displacement as a social condition of insecurity, vulnerability, and dependency in which people who have fled might find themselves for prolonged periods. This situation severely limits the capabilities and opportunities of displaced people for extended periods. In other words, they cannot use their skills and make free choices because of several structural forces that push people away, or keep

them from integrating in their new community or stop them from moving on to find a better future.

This unfortunate development is partly due to a prompt attention to permanent solutions to nip in the bud the causes of displacement in the first place, which has gradually increased the propensity of displacement to become intractable and excessively prolonged. These displaced, are persons belonging to ethnic and religious minorities who are not only victims of violations, but have lost any means to provide for themselves, including their families, and they need urgent assistance ([Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, 2014](#)). The [Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre \(2014\)](#) report further asserts that IDPs situation becomes dire because the host communities, too, have also exhausted their support capacity.

Neglect becomes normal when displacement is prolonged, with adverse social, cultural, economic, and health related impacts ([Siriwardhana & Stewart, 2013](#)). As conflict persists in habitual places or massive destruction of infrastructure and landmines, prolonged displacement becomes intractable. In such situations of constrained livelihoods and opportunities, their mental health becomes poorer, and thus it is very difficult to come out of poverty. In Africa, Somalia, South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Ethiopia, Uganda, Kenya, and, recently, Nigeria are among the countries with prolonged internally displaced persons, mainly driven by conflict ([Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, 2014](#)). Some of these affected populations are unaccounted for and undocumented. They become forgotten emergencies where masses of people are left to spend their lives in limbo and to pick up whatever pieces are left, if any.

Prolonged displacement especially those occasioned by conflicts, continues to be issues of grave concern and has become a spectre of our times, and the search for solutions to it, is a major preoccupation of the international community. [United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees \(2004\)](#) noted that some IDPs who have been forced to move for a long time, may not be at risk of losing their lives, but their basic rights and essential economic, social, and psychological needs remain unfulfilled after years in exile, unable to break free from enforced reliance on external assistance. This explains a similar trend in some communities in Plateau State who remain unknown after a decades of conflict.

### **2.3. Causes and the driving factors of displacement and why it prolonged**

Scarcity theory explains how several human behaviours and decisions in life and how they go about resolving them are, in most cases, laced with struggles and conflicts. Recent studies on displacement in Nigeria revealed that farmers-herders clash over the scarcity of land resources such as water, minerals, and vegetal resources as the main causes of conflict-induced displacement ([Akanle, et al, 2021](#); [Amnesty International, 2018](#)). Additionally, the combination of environmental degradation and violence has pushed herders from the north of the country southward in search of pasture and water, resulting in almost daily clashes with farming communities being displaced ([International Crisis Group, 2018](#)). It's clear that scarcity theory is at work in the way that developed countries are capitalist and neocolonising in their quest for resources in developing countries which has led to land grabbing of rural communities in Africa ([Stenberg & Rafiee, 2018](#)).

It is usually impossible to avoid displacement when the government fails in its constitutional responsibility to protect and ensure the safety of lives, when it is unable to or unwilling to defend its people, or where there is a collusion between agents of the state

and those responsible for crimes against the population (Benjamin, 2010). So, when non-state actors keep up a steady pattern of violent and economically oppressive behaviour without the government taking any action to stop it, certain groups are forced to move and are left out of society, which results in them being stuck in poverty. This was evident in the emergency rule imposed on Plateau State by the federal government in 2004 without implementing the various reports of commissions of inquiry, which later resulted in a series of bloody killings and displacement. To date, recommendations are unattended, and displacement keeps reoccurring (see Table 1).

Table 1: Commissions of Inquiry and Committees Investigating Violence in Plateau State

Year	Commission	Authority responsible	Period of Report Released	Report & recommendation submitted	Action taken (Resettle or Return IDPs)
1994	Justice Aribiton Fiberesima Commission	State	Report released 1994, White paper released 2004	Yes	None
2001	Justice Nikki Tobi Commission	State	White paper released 2010	Yes	None
2001	Justice Suleiman Galadima Commission	Federal	Report submitted, no white paper	Yes	None
2002	Justice Jummai Sankey Judicial	State	Report submitted, no white paper	Yes	None
2002	Justice Felicia Dusu Judicial Commission	State	Report submitted, no white paper	Yes	None
2002	Justice Okpene Commission	Federal	Report submitted in 2002.	Yes	None
2002	Rev. Dr Padang Yamsat High Powered Committee on Peace and Security in Plateau State	State	Report submitted in 2002	Yes	None
2004	Presidential Peace Initiative Committee	Federal	No information	No information	None
2005	Mr Musa Izam Administrative Committee	State	Report submitted in 2005	Yes	None
2005	Justice Constance Momoh Judicial Commission of Inquiry to look into conflicts in Quanpan LGA	State	Report submitted 2005; not released	Yes	None
2009	Major General Emmanuel Abisoye Federal administrative panel	Federal	The Commission did not carry out the inquiry	Not applicable	None

2009	Justice Bola Ajibola Commission	State	Report released 2009. White paper not released	Yes	None
2010	Chief Solomon Lar and Amb. Yahaya Kwande Advisory Committee	Federal	Report released in May 2010. White paper not released	Yes	
2011	Shikh Ahmed Lemu Committee	Federal	No information	No information	

Source: adapted from [Oosterom et al. \(2021\)](#)

The empirical evidence in [Overbeek and Scholten's \(2020\)](#) study, revealed that when justice is administered impartially and without undue delay or bias, it fosters social trust, minimizes crime, and cultivates a more harmonious society. Conversely, when justice is delayed, selectively applied, or influenced by prejudice and misrepresentation of facts, it not only undermines public confidence but also increases the likelihood of social unrest and rebellion. Prolonged matters of justice have encouraged cruelty, and the cruelty stricken are discouraged; and this creates a problem for the maintenance of law and order in society. Similarly, the lack of implementing the various judicial recommendations could probably deepens injustice that will eventually result in rebellion, restlessness, and agitations which thus explains the theory that no society develops in the face of cyclical violence ([Erondu & Nwakanma, 2018](#)). This is a typical scenario of a repeated cycle of violence in Plateau State that has resulted in mass killings and displacement unabated for decades.

[Godfrey and Tafida's \(2022\)](#) study on "Determining the Causes of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and Counselling for Social and Psychological Adjustment in Plateau State", revealed that herdsmen/farmers' conflict (95%), top as the major cause of internal displacement in Plateau state, followed by Boko Haram activities. When such causes persist, the likelihood of prolonged displacement becomes unavoidable, especially where there is no political will to guarantee safety and security to its citizens. From 2001 and 2010 violent conflict in the Jos urban of Plateau State, led to severe mass violence in the rural areas but took on a different dynamic, with the pattern of armed conflict shaped by the social and ecological conditions there ([Higazi, 2016](#)).

[Imoisi et al. \(2023\)](#) assert that the lack of implementation of the legal framework on the plight of IDPs remains weak, leaving many without basic rights and necessities, resulting in prolonged displacement. The assertion gained support as reported by [Ochonu \(2016\)](#), that the attacks on the Plateau and, by extension, the Middle Belt are neither random nor spontaneous but predictable. The report goes on to say that after every massacre, two things happen: the survivors leave the villages and towns, and then the attackers move in ([Erondu & Nwakanma, 2018](#)). In summary, there seems to be a deeper motive beyond the farmers-herders clash as occupation by dispossession of rural communities rapidly increases.

### 3. Study Approach

The study uses documentary analysis and reviewed relevant literature to assess the experiences of internally displaced persons in prolonged displacement. A systematic search of 26 peer-reviewed journals, 10 books/chapters, 35 policy/commissions reports, 1 conference, 3 working papers, 5 newspapers, 3 theses (2 doctoral and 1 master's) and

7 grey literature (press release of Government, World Bank and United Nations). These 90 materials were retrieved from Google Scholar, a general internet search, and a search of government agencies' websites in Nigeria. The criterion for inclusion was purely based on the relevance of the materials to the study with keywords such as "forgotten population", "prolonged displacement", "internally displaced persons," "review", "challenges, rights and freedom", "marginalised population" and "Plateau State, Nigeria" were included in the search, but limited to publications from 2000 to 2024 to maintain relevance. These procedures conform to content analysis standards, using a systematic method to review the literature and explore the experiences of internally displaced persons who have been forgotten while in prolonged displacement without reintegration or returning to their habitual residence in Plateau State as a case study.

#### **4. Discussion and Findings:**

##### **4.1. Profile of the History of Internally Displaced Persons in Plateau State**

Plateau State, home to diverse ethnic and religious groups, has a history of inter-communal tensions driven by competition over land, resources, and religious differences (Akinyemi & Ogunsanwo, 2021). These tensions date back to pre-colonial times, with the 18th-century jihad of Shehu Dan Fodio failing to conquer the region, excluding it from the Sokoto Caliphate system. The arrival of Europeans in the 19th century and the discovery of tin ore in Jos attracted migrants from within and outside Nigeria, leading to friction between the natives (Berom, Afizere, and Anaguta) and settlers, escalated tensions when the Hausa/Fulani elected a "Sarkin Jos" (ruler of Jos) between 1914 and 1952 (Dung-Gwom & Rikko, 2009; Danfulani, 2006). Ethnic and religious identities have intensified conflicts, fostering an "us versus them" mentality, historical grievances, discrimination, and social fragmentation have restricted dialogue and prolonged conflicts in Plateau State (Best & Rakodi, 2011; Dung-Gwom & Rikko, 2009; Danfulani, 2006; Nwankwo, 2020).

In the 1940s, over 200 mining camps with 40,000 migrant miners operated on the Jos Plateau, but indigenous people resisted foreign mining and did not join the camps (Dung-Gwom & Rikko, 2009). Colonial authorities created separate administrative systems for "natives" and "settlers," fueling rivalries and eventual violence. This resulted in conflicts over mining operations, market shop allocation, and control of the Jos Native Authority. In 1947, the appointment of a Berom as the Gbong Gwom Jos shifted political power, creating tensions with the Anaguta, Afizere, and Hausa, coupled with the unresolved agitation, which later resulted in the 1972 crisis that many of the Hausa Fulani migrated to Narabi, Bauchi State (Dung-Gwom & Rikko, 2009).

The 1991 creation of Jos North LGA was perceived by the Berom, Anaguta, and Afizere as a subtle attempt to give complete control of the city centre, which houses the commercial hub, higher institutions, and traditional offices, such as the palace of the indigene traditional leader, the Gbong Gwom of Jos, to the Hausa/Fulani minorities in the city (Nwaka, 2021; Nnabuihe, 2020; Dung-Gwom & Rikko, 2009). Tensions escalated in 1994 when Aminu Mato was appointed caretaker chairman, triggering violence, displacement, and property destruction (Fiberesima Commission of Inquiry, 1994; Plateau State Government, 2004). Political rivalries and economic inequality exacerbated the eventual displacement (Madueke, 2018).

Plateau State, Nigeria, has experienced recurrent violent conflicts over the years. Tensions between the Mangu (Mwaghavul) and the Bokkos (Ron/Mushere) over boundary

disputes escalated into war by 1995, leading to property destruction and displacement. In 1997, a clash in Gyero, Jos South LGA, between Berom and Fulani dry-season farmers resulted in six deaths and significant losses ([Plateau State Government, n.d.](#)).

By 2001, tensions had reached a breaking point, particularly after the appointment of Alhaji Muktar as the local government chairman of the National Poverty Programme. On September 7, 2001, violent clashes erupted in Jos and continued until September 13. The conflict, characterised by religious and ethnic confrontations, caused an estimated 1,000 deaths, the destruction of millions in property, and mass displacement ([Human Rights Watch, 2001](#); [International Crisis Group, 2012](#); [Madueke, 2018](#)), until military intervention quelled the violence.

Between 2002 and 2003, further crises displaced 300,827 people and resulted in 400 deaths ([Sani, 2007](#)). These included electoral registration violence, the Jos Main Market fire, twin bomb blasts, the Yelwa-Shendam crisis, the Hausa-Taroh clashes in Yelwa, the Nshar-Yelwa Shendam church attack, the Fulani-Berom land dispute in Barkin-Ladi, attacks on CAN leaders from the Emir of Wase LGA, religious tensions over Juma'at prayers, and the 2003 invasion of Kadarko and Wase ([Sani, 2007](#); [Nwogbaga et al., 2015](#); [Madueke, 2018](#)). These events culminated in the 2004 Yelwa-Shendam, Langtang, and Wase massacres, further deepening Plateau State's history of violence and mass displacement.

In 2004, violent clashes erupted between Muslim cattle herders and Christian farmers over land resources, lasting four months (February–May) ([Nwogbaga et al., 2015](#)). The conflict left over 1,000 dead, displaced 258,000 people, and destroyed property worth billions ([Norwegian Refugee Council, 2005](#); [Nwogbaga et al., 2015](#)). The [International Crisis Group \(2012\)](#) reported that 700 deaths occurred within two days. Between September 2001 and May 2004, about 5,000 people perished, and hundreds of thousands were displaced.

The crisis led to a state of emergency declared by President Olusegun Obasanjo on May 18, 2004, as it posed threats to Plateau State, neighbouring states, and national unity. The unrest triggered retaliatory attacks in Kano, Kaduna, and Bauchi States. However, the emergency rule was seen as repressive, offering only a temporary halt without addressing root causes ([Nwogbaga et al., 2015](#)). This is true because the conflict reignited four years later, precisely on November 27, 2008, another violent crisis erupted, linked to the aftermath of a local government election ([Madueke, 2018](#); [Gwamna & Amango, 2010](#)). The [International Crisis Group \(2012\)](#) identified political motives behind the violence, though rioters framed it along religious and ethnic lines. The attacks, reportedly coordinated by men in fake military uniforms, occurred in six locations. Violence broke out in Angwan Dalyop Pam-Osumenyi while awaiting election results, spreading to Ali Kazaure and Gangare. The four-day conflict left over 700 dead and displaced thousands.

The crisis led to widespread displacement and the segregation of Jos along religious lines, permanently altering communal coexistence ([Lohor, Dung-Gwom & Laka, 2015](#)). Communities that once lived harmoniously were now sharply divided.

The 2010 conflict in Plateau State was perceived as a continuation of the 2008 crisis, fueled by mistrust and poor communication between indigenous groups and the Hausa-Fulani. The rejection of the Justice Ajibola Commission report in October 2009 ([International Crisis Group, 2012](#)) escalated tensions. On January 17, Muslim youths

allegedly attacked St. Michael's Catholic Church in Nasarawa Gwon during a service, triggering widespread violence that resulted in 326 to 362 deaths, with 150 bodies recovered from a well in Kuru Karama, and 8,000 displaced to Toro LGA in Bauchi State (Nwogbaga et al., 2015).

On March 7, 2010, Fulani herdsmen reportedly attacked Dogo Nahawa, a Berom village in Jos South LGA, resulting in over 500 deaths (Dickson, 2024; International Crisis Group, 2012). This provoked reprisal attacks in Barkin Ladi, Jos South, and Riyom LGAs, leading to mass displacement (Higazi, 2016). The violence extended beyond Plateau to Bauchi, Kano, Kaduna, Nasarawa, and Gombe states (Nwogbaga et al., 2015; Gwamna & Amango, 2010). On December 25, 2011, a bomb attack killed around 50 people, primarily in churches. A blast at the Mount of Fire and Miracles Church was followed by shootings by suspected terrorists the then President to declared a state of emergency on December 30 in four Plateau LGAs (Jos North, Jos South, Barkin Ladi, and Riyom) and eleven others across Borno, Niger, and Yobe states (International Crisis Group, 2012).

On July 7, 2012, suspected herdsmen attacked villages in Barkin Ladi and Riyom LGAs, killing 63 people, mostly women and children, who had sought refuge in a preacher's house (International Crisis Group, 2012). The following day, as mass burials were conducted, gunmen returned, killing more individuals, including a senator and a House of Assembly member, and raising the death toll to 200. On October 11, suspected herdsmen killed 14 people and destroyed property in Riyom LGA. Retaliation occurred on November 19 when gunmen injured twelve Fulani herdsmen and killed their cattle in Bisichi village, Barkin Ladi (International Crisis Group, 2012).

A week later, on November 26, eight people were shot dead at a drinking spot in Heipang, Barkin Ladi, by assailants dressed in military attire (British Broadcasting Corporation News, 2012). Higazi (2016) observed that the Fulani displaced natives from Mahanga and Luggere, rendering them inaccessible. The persistent violence spilled over to Sho village, where both sides engaged in killings along the laterite road to Barkin Ladi. The Berom in Sho suffered multiple attacks, including the July 7, 2015, ambush of villagers travelling for a bank verification exercise, resulting in 14 fatalities. According to Higazi (2016), Fulani representatives claimed the attack was a retaliation for the earlier killing of three Fulanis, which invariably has hindered access to farmlands and grazing areas. Thus, some of the Berom communities and other indigenous tribes across the Plateau have lost irrigated farmlands and homes due to ongoing attacks and forced occupations (Higazi, 2016; Lipdo, 2015). The crisis has now extended beyond Berom lands to Bokkos, Bassa, and Mangu LGAs, where coordinated attacks on rural settlements have displaced thousands.

Despite Boko Haram claiming responsibility for attacks (Lipdo, 2015), the Nigerian military has faced accusations of complicity in the killings of indigenous people. Amnesty International (2018) reported on an attack in Bassa LGA between October 8 and 18, 2017, which affected villages such as Nkiedowro, Hukke, Kpachudu, Nzhweruvo, Taagbe, and Rotsu, resulting in 50 deaths. Even after a curfew was imposed on October 13, suspected Fulani militias killed 27 villagers in Nkiedowro on October 16 inside a school that was used as a military base. These events led to the prolonged displacement and occupation of targeted communities, as noted by Da Dudu Dalyop, president of the Berom Educational and Cultural Organisation. He asserted that many Berom communities remain occupied by Fulani settlers, who have built new structures and cultivated the land. The government's failure to act leaves Indigenous people unable to access their homes and their primary source of livelihood (Stefanos Foundation, 2022).

[Madueke \(2018\)](#) links these attacks to conflicts over land use between farmers and pastoralists, which have escalated into mass killings primarily affecting native populations. According to the [Stefanos Foundation \(2022\)](#), 102 communities in Bassa, Bokkos, Riyom, and Barkin Ladi LGAs have been occupied by Fulani jihadists, leaving many displaced persons scattered across the region. The [United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees \(2019\)](#) highlights the dire conditions in IDP camps, where displaced persons face inadequate facilities, food shortages, and limited healthcare. Since the 2012 attack in Jos, violence and displacements have increasingly targeted rural communities ([Higazi, 2016](#)).

On September 11, 2021, unknown gunmen attacked Yelwa Zangam in Jos North LGA, killing 30 people and displacing many others ([Abraham, 2021](#)). Between August and September 2021, daily acts of arson and killings occurred across Plateau's 17 LGAs, exacerbating internal displacement ([United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2022](#); [National Commission for Refugees, Migrants, and Internally Displaced Persons, 2022](#)).

A significant attack occurred on August 2, 2021, when herdsmen assaulted communities in Tahu Ward, Bassa LGA, over seven days, impacting nine villages and displacing 15,000 people. This assault resulted in 38 deaths, the destruction of 1,250 shelters, and the displacement of entire communities ([International Organisation for Migration, 2021](#)). A rapid assessment by IOM-DTM found that 52% of displaced persons cited food as their primary need, 25% needed shelter, 15% required non-food items, and 8% needed medical care. Despite these dire conditions, the Nigerian government has not taken sufficient measures to address the crisis, compensate victims, or facilitate their return. [Amnesty International \(2018\)](#) accuses the Nigerian government of willful negligence and complicity, failing to tackle the underlying causes of violence. Without guaranteed protection, the prolonged displacement of affected communities remains unresolved.

In May 2023, violent clashes erupted between herders and farmers in Kubwat, Aloghom, and Fungzai communities in Mangu LGA, displacing 3,416 people to Jwakkas in Mangu Ward 1. The violence resulted in 36 deaths and 18 injuries ([Displacement Tracking Matrix \(DTM\), 2023](#)). The crisis escalated between January 1 and February 20, 2024, when armed bandits attacked multiple communities in Ampang, Kombul, Mangu, and Mangu-1 Wards. The affected communities, including Bakin Kasuwa, Anguwan Sarki, and Kofar Fada, saw 2,003 people displaced to various LGAs in Bauchi State, including Dass, Toro, Tafawa Balewa, and Liman Katagum. These attacks resulted in 66 fatalities and 62 injuries ([Displacement Tracking Matrix, 2024b](#)).

On December 24-25, 2023, coordinated assaults in Bokkos, Barkin Ladi, and Mangu LGAs impacted 160 villages: 44 in Bokkos, 11 in Barkin Ladi, and 109 in Mangu; giving a total of 409 houses burnt, 335 killed, and 171 injured ([World Health Organisation \(WHO\), 2024](#); [Al Jazeera, 2023](#)). Furthermore, the [WHO \(2024\)](#) data revealed that approximately 18,275 individuals fled their homes, leading to the establishment of 16 active IDP camps in the affected LGAs, where the displaced families remain unable to afford necessities such as food, clothing, and medicine. [Displacement Tracking Matrix \(2024a\)](#) data for Bokkos LGA alone recorded 1,868 households displaced, 13,310 persons affected, 331 deaths, 153 injuries, and 1,190 shelters destroyed.

Throughout these attacks, both farmers and herdsmen have suffered losses, with livestock and crops destroyed, houses razed, and communities left in ruins. Plateau State

has remained unstable for years. Despite government efforts to provide aid, establish commissions of inquiry, and restore peace, justice has not been served. The authorities have failed to prosecute perpetrators, address poverty and inequality, resolve conflicting claims to citizenship, or establish effective local governance (Best & Rakodi, 2011). The attackers strike both day and night without warning, leaving behind devastation. Many of the perpetrators escape without consequence (Abraham, 2021).

The prolonged displacement continues without a clear solution. Various military and civilian administrations have established Judicial Commissions of Inquiry to resolve the conflict, yet their recommendations remain unimplemented. This failure mirrors the international community's inaction during humanitarian crises, such as the 1994 Rwandan genocide and the ongoing violence in Sudan (Nyinawumuntu, 2009).

Crisis in Nigeria's Middle Belt, particularly in Plateau State, reflects a collapse of governance. Entire communities have been overrun and occupied by attackers, while survivors remain displaced for years. Government policies regarding return, reintegration, and resettlement have largely gone unimplemented. Nigeria, a signatory to the UN Sustainable Development Goals, continues to witness rising inequalities, injustices, and marginalisation of affected populations.

#### **4.2. Government Interventions: Both at the State and Federal Level**

Despite numerous commissions' inquiry and various committees inaugurated to look into the Plateau State conflict from 1994 to date, none of their reports or recommendations were implemented, allowing the violence and displacement to persist. The federal government's deployment of the Security Special Task Force has failed to end the crisis (Akinmuwagun & Vormbaum, 2014). In some cases, security forces have been accused of bias or excessive force against civilians (Amnesty International, 2018). The lack of political will to implement recommendations has hindered the reintegration, resettlement, or return of displaced populations. Successive state and federal administrations have shown little interest in addressing the root causes of the conflict, leaving affected communities in prolonged displacement and insecurity (Oosterom et al., 2021).

#### **4.3. Implications: living conditions, rights, security and development concerns**

IDPs in Plateau State live in deplorable conditions characterised by poverty, food insecurity, inadequate healthcare, and marginalisation. Their temporary shelters lack basic amenities, leaving them vulnerable to hardship. Studies by Kumswa and Best (2022) reveal that many IDPs have lost their livelihoods due to ethnoreligious conflicts, forcing them to rely on charity. Food insecurity is a major issue, alongside limited access to healthcare and sanitation (Achem & Aderinto, 2023). The struggle for food, land for farming, and the continued economic instability characterised the lives of displaced persons (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, 2021).

The psychological toll is severe, with studies by Muhammad, Shamsudeen, and Manni (2023) showing high rates of depression (63.69%), anxiety disorders (63.05%), loneliness (61.14%), suicidal thoughts (60.50%), and fear (60.50%). These mental health challenges lead to poor academic performance, school dropouts, and disruptions to education.

The adoption of the Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other People Working in Rural Areas (UNDROP) was meant to protect the rights, including access to land, food sovereignty, and participation in decision-making (United Nations General Assembly, 2018). However, implementation has been ineffective, leaving many displaced individuals forgotten. This failure hinders progress towards Sustainable Development Goal 2 (zero hunger) and other related SDGs, including poverty eradication, good health, quality education, gender equality, and economic growth (Advocates for International Development, 2022).

Agriculture and mining, the backbone of Plateau State's economy, are land-dependent. The persistent conflict has prevented farming activities, as seen in Barkin-Ladi in 2015, where crops were destroyed before harvest (Higazi, 2016). Farmers, fearing attacks, abandoned their farms and relied on external food supplies. The lack of enforcement of peasant rights further threatens community development, making food security, economic stability, and resilience difficult to achieve (Advocates for International Development, 2022). Urgent policy interventions are required to protect the most vulnerable; women and children, who face the greatest risk of hunger and insecurity.

## 5. Conclusion and Recommendations to Address Prolonged Internal Displacement

Displacement can persist for years, leaving Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in prolonged uncertainty without adequate assistance (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, 2024). Despite numerous commissions of inquiry into conflict and displacement, the root causes remain unresolved, reflecting a lack of political will to address the crisis. Many IDPs, especially those outside formal camps, are largely ignored by humanitarian efforts (Amina & Ibrahim, 2019; Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, 2024). The United Nations Human Settlements Programme (2022) highlights that those in unplanned urban shelters face severe health risks, yet their suffering remains invisible.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) commit to "leave no one behind," recognising IDPs as a vulnerable group requiring economic inclusion (International Peace Institute, 2018). However, support often fades after emergency interventions, with no sustained policies or the political will, despite many legal tools such as the 1998 UN Guiding Principles, the Inter-Agency Standing Committee Framework on Durable Solutions for Internally Displaced Persons among others (Bradley, 2018). A lasting solution requires safety, security, adequate living standards, employment opportunities, housing restoration, and access to legal documentation and justice (Institute of Social Studies and Analysis, 2015). Without these, IDPs face increased risks of crime, banditry, and insurgency. A collaborative effort is urgently needed among governments, NGOs, philanthropists, and international agencies to:

- i. Identify and map communities affected by decades of displacement.
- ii. Document displaced individuals and their locations within host communities.
- iii. Record their experiences, lost assets, and livelihoods.
- iv. Assess their coping mechanisms and propose strategies for improved well-being.
- v. Revisit and implement past commissions of inquiry recommendations.
- vi. Develop short- and long-term policies for durable solutions.

International support, financing, and direct engagement with IDPs are crucial for breaking the cycle of protracted displacement. Increased visibility through strong data and analysis, such as the IDMC's Global Report on Internal Displacement (Internal

[Displacement Monitoring Centre, 2014](#)), is essential for driving solutions. The urgency of this crisis demands immediate and sustained action to restore dignity and security to IDPs.

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Not applicable

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The authors reported no conflicts of interest for this work and declare that there is no potential conflict of interest with respect to the research, authorship, or publication of this article.

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