

29 October 2007

Nigeria: Institutional mechanisms fail to address recurrent violence and displacement

Outbreaks of violence leading to significant situations of internal displacement are frequent in Nigeria, with at least 14,000 people killed and hundreds of thousands displaced since military rule ended in 1999. Complex displacement patterns and the marked lack of detailed and consistent data on the scope of the problem consistently aggravate the already poorly coordinated humanitarian response. With no reliable statistics on IDPs available and no agreement on IDP numbers in the absence of any comprehensive survey, humanitarian actors are faced with serious challenges and IDP needs often tend to go undetected.

While violence often breaks out in Nigeria along religious or ethnic lines, poverty and unequal access to power and resources – be they land or oil wealth – often constitute the root causes of the conflict. The scope of these crises is often also shaped by social and environmental factors, and underlying tensions may have been encouraged by politicians seeking to gain from social divisions. Violence has increased since 2006 in the oil-rich Niger Delta over the control of oil revenues and organised crime, resulting in ongoing low-level displacement. Conflicts linked with secessionist demands in Nigeria's south-east, as well as local land disputes between indigenous groups and settlers, have also raised concerns of resulting displacement.

The April 2007 general and presidential elections represented an opportunity to address the many internal conflicts. However, the failure to hold democratic elections according to basic international and regional standards, and legal challenges to the election of a number of governors, have hampered the legitimacy of the newly-constituted government to heal Nigeria's structural conflicts. Unless the government focuses on strengthening the country's governance, and developing and reinforcing institutional conflict prevention and resolution mechanisms, repeated eruptions of violent conflicts will continue to create situations of internal displacement.



Source: UN Cartographic Section, October 2004

More maps are available on <http://www.internal-displacement.org/>

Background and causes of displacement

Since the end of military rule in 1999 and the return to democratic rule with the election of Olusegun Obasanjo as president, Nigeria has witnessed recurrent outbreaks of violence along a multitude of religious, ethnic and political fault lines. As a result, the country is faced with the continuous challenge of providing assistance to a fluctuating but always sizeable internally displaced population.

For decades now, Nigeria has been trying to resolve its “national question”, in an attempt to bring together its extremely complex web of ethnic, linguistic and religious identities. With an estimated population of 130 million people and more than 250 ethnic groups, Nigeria is Africa’s most populous nation. The Hausa-Fulani, the Yoruba and the Igbo account for almost half of the country’s population, and many smaller groups tend to cluster around these three, creating a tripolar ethnic structure around which competition strategies intensify (CRISE Working Paper 44, March 2007). A religious divide runs through the country, dividing the mainly Muslim north and the richer and more powerful mainly-Christian south. A history of predominantly military rule has left the country with little political dialogue between state and civil society (U. Idemudia and U. Ite, September 2006) and endemic corruption. Eight years after the return to democracy, transparent management behaviour and equitable resource distribution are still rare and the legitimacy of the state still questioned (HRW, October 2007). Nigeria is ranked alongside conflict countries as the 124th of 146 countries on the 2006 Failed States Index (The

Fund for Peace, 2007) and is in the bottom quartile of countries on a 2007 index of perceived corruption (Transparency International, 26 September 2007).

The turning point in Nigeria’s fall into internecine conflict is identified by some analysts as the 1987 Kafanchan-Kaduna ethno-religious riots, from which old tensions between Muslim Hausa-Fulani and non-Muslim communities gradually spread throughout the north and the “Middle Belt” of the country (CRISE, January 2005). 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 in recent years of Islamic Sharia law in 12 of Nigeria’s 36 states has caused additional tensions, but clashes between Muslim and Christian groups have usually been caused by other factors, such as pressure on land or unequal access to social services.

The potential for conflict was amply demonstrated when in February 2006 about 150 people were killed and as many as 50,000 displaced in an explosion of sectarian violence sparked by protests over caricatures of the prophet Mohammed (NRCS, February 2006). The majority of deaths occurred in the mainly Christian south-eastern city of Onitsha, where groups of armed youths attacked Muslim Hausa-speakers from the north in revenge for the earlier killing of Christian Igbos in the north of the country. Spiralling violence spread across at least six states, with thousands of people forced to take refuge – mainly in police and army barracks or churches – although many later returned to their homes (BBC, 24 February 2006). The mobilisation that followed was often along religious lines,

and the conflict was easily stereotyped as a “religious crisis”. The same dynamic has often been observed with regard to “ethnic conflicts”. Ethnic identity and mobilisation play a prominent role in the political landscape, and impact frequently on political stability, but they are mostly created to access spoils of a different nature, as described in the following sections.

Displacement due to electoral violence

The April 2007 general elections were seen as an opportunity to strengthen the country’s democratic institutions and “facilitate the peaceful resolution of its many internal conflicts” (ICG, 30 May 2007; Reuters, 14 April 2007). Instead, the elections followed the path of the two previous polls of 1999 and 2003, and were marked by widespread violence, intimidation, bribery and corruption. Fears that Nigeria’s disputable human rights record and the serious shortcomings in voter registration would prevent free and fair elections (IRI, February 2007; ICG, 28 March 2007; HRW, 4 April 2007) were realised in what have been defined as “disastrous” polls (HRW, 17 April 2007). The elections were conducted in a highly contentious environment in which serious logistical flaws added to grave security shortcomings which led to intimidation, violence and extensive falsification of results (ICG, 30 May 2007). In its final report, the European Union’s Election Observation Mission declared that the “2007 state and federal elections fell far short of basic international and regional standards for democratic elections” (EU, 21 August 2007). The result has been a state legitimacy crisis in a country where “the char-

acter of elections provides a key catalyst for the intensity of ethnic identification, the strength of political ethnicity and attitudes toward democracy” (Afrobarometer, March 2007). Following widespread criticism, the newly-elected president, Umaru Yar’Adua, set up in August an electoral reform committee charged with reviewing electoral processes and proposing possible changes to the constitution (BBC News, 23 August 2007) while the judiciary has issued rulings nullifying the elections of a number of governors in a string of “major legal indictments” of the April polls (Reuters, 25 October 2007).

The elections generated violence in certain parts of the country (CEHRD, May 2007), and, although no situations of widespread internal displacement were recorded, the Nigerian Red Cross reported that violence in Ihima local government area of Kogi State, Ukwale local government area of Delta State, and Asakio local government area of Nasarawa State caused the displacement of around 4,500 people. The IDPs temporarily found shelter in public buildings. Where violent incidents occurred, and people were displaced because of the destruction of their homes, they mostly found shelter with their relatives (NRCS, August 2007). Displacement was also recorded ahead of the elections, in particular in the Kano area, as people left their homes fearing upcoming violence (IRIN, 28 March 2007).

The phenomenon of electoral violence compounds the general security crisis in the country and not only undermines Nigeria’s quest for democratic development, but also has human rights implications. Actual or perceived violence restricts the ability of ordinary vot-

ers to form and express opinions freely and without coercion (AFSTRAG-Nigeria, 2005; HRW, 4 April 2007) and make displaced people less likely to express their political ideas, vote or participate in their country's political life out of fear or disillusionment.

Localised displacement

Violence leading to displacement has also been sparked in other areas of local conflict, particularly in south-eastern Nigeria where growing demands for secession by the Movement for the Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) have resulted in hundreds of deaths in recent years (IRIN, 4 September 2006), and on the disputed Bakassi peninsula, sovereignty of which was awarded to Cameroon by the International Court of Justice in 2002, but where the local population has been resisting the handover (NRCS, 5 July 2006) and threatening secession from Cameroon should Nigeria ratify the ICJ decision.

In addition, forced evictions by state governments and local authorities are reported to have affected more than one million people in the commercial capital Lagos in the last five years (AI, 24 January 2006), as well as hundreds of thousands in the federal capital Abuja (HIC, 1 June 2006).

Spasmodic crises often break out between communities. Perhaps the most significant cause of communal violence in Nigeria is the entrenched division throughout the country between people considered indigenous to an area, and those regarded as settlers. Indigenous groups have routinely prevented settlers from owning land or businesses, or ac-

cessing jobs and education, inevitably causing tensions. One of the most recent outbreaks of violence resulting from these tensions occurred in July 2007, when fighting over a protracted land dispute between people considered as indigenous and settlers in the border area between Benue, Taraba and Cross River States left possibly more than 3,000 people temporarily displaced (Daily Champion, 5 July 2007; IRIN, 25 July 2007; NRCS, August 2007).

Displacement and oil production

Displacement has also been closely linked to oil production in the Niger Delta region. While the region has been volatile for many years, with impoverished local communities accusing successive governments as well as oil companies of depriving them of their fair share of revenues, tensions escalated dramatically since early 2006. Armed militia groups have used increasingly violent means to gain greater control of oil wealth and criminal rackets, clashing with the Nigerian army, kidnapping numerous foreign oil workers and destroying oil installations to reduce the country's oil output by one fifth (Reuters, 31 July 2007; MSF, 11 May 2007; IRIN, 24 July 2007). Violence between local militia groups and security forces, as well as inter-militia fighting and widespread destruction of property, has frequently forced people to flee their homes (HRW, February 2005; AI, 3 November 2005). Recent heavy fighting between government troops and armed gangs in Port Harcourt caused hundreds of residents to flee (IRIN, 17 August 2007; AI, 22 August 2007). Further displacement is feared in view of the state government's plans to demolish several slums in the

city (BBC News, 4 October 2007; IRIN, 28 August 2007).

The violence in the Niger Delta is due significantly to poverty and unequal access to resources (University of Bradford, March 2005). Despite its oil wealth (Nigeria is Africa's leading oil producer, and the seventh largest in the world), at least two thirds of Nigerians live on less than \$1 per day. The cause of the conflict "rests squarely on oil revenue allocation" and on the sense of relative deprivation that this induces among the huge pools of destitute and frustrated youth (U. Idemudia and U. Ite, September 2006). Many analysts believe that this sense of deprivation is used by politicians, particularly those linked to the former military regime, to create social divisions and violence which can quickly spread and take on a momentum of its own. The region's extensive pollution – due in large part to gas flaring, the process of burning off surplus gases from oil wells – have affected many people's health and limited the access of many more to their traditional livelihoods. A sustainable development programme for the region would therefore have to include economic, social and environmental elements in order to discourage conflict and displacement (UNDP, 2006).

Patterns of displacement

The vast majority of displaced people in Nigeria seek refuge with family, friends or host communities in areas where their ethnic group is in the majority. Others seek shelter in major towns. Many appear to return to their homes or resettle near their home areas soon after the violence which forced them to leave has subsided, but an unknown number also resettle in

other areas of the country. Even where camps for IDPs have been established – as for example following the 2004 violence in Plateau State – camp residents tend to integrate into the local community, join relatives in other states, or return to their villages to try and salvage what they can of their homes. It is therefore difficult to distinguish between movements of people forced to flee by violence and those moving for economic reasons. Additionally, those same regions afflicted by armed violence regularly experience floods, complicating displacement patterns even further (Reuters, 7 August 2007; Action Aid International, August 2007).

Fragmented national response

The National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA), established in 1999, is responsible for overall disaster management in Nigeria, coordinating emergency relief operations as well as assisting in the rehabilitation of the victims where necessary. It is present in most states and often supports IDPs in the emergency phase of a crisis, but it lacks the resources to assist people displaced for a longer period of time or to assist returnees to reintegrate, and it has no age-specific or gender-specific policies. State Emergency Management Agencies (SE-MAs) also exist in some states, but with varying performance levels.

The national response is generally constrained by a lack of experience in dealing with IDP issues. This has resulted in inefficiencies and gaps in support to affected populations, and also in competing mandates between institutions. Confusion exists at the federal level over which body has the mandate to assist IDPs –

especially between NEMA and the National Commission for Refugees (NCR, informally mandated in 2002 to also cover IDPs) – resulting in competition for resources. A conference of disaster management organisations held in Abuja in August 2007 enabled NEMA (as a coordinating agency) to identify and assign roles to agencies involved in disaster risk reduction (DRR), which has been included in the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS 2) blueprint to address Nigeria's development challenges. However, violent conflict as a cause of disaster was not a major issue on the agenda of the conference. The absence of NCR and the Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution (IPCR), agencies that have a mandate for humanitarian response and conflict management, attests to the limited attention given to the need for clear coordination in the national response to internal displacement. Partly due to this situation, a national IDP policy, which has been planned since the creation of the Nigerian Presidential Committee on IDPs in January 2004, has still not been drafted (Brookings, June 2006, p.16).

Complex patterns of movement combined with the overwhelming lack of data in Nigeria lead to additional confusion in the provision of a humanitarian response. There are no reliable statistics on IDPs in Nigeria and no general agreement on their actual numbers in the absence of any comprehensive survey (UNHCR Country Office in Nigeria, by email 13 September 2007). According to Moremi Soyinka-Onijala, Special Assistant to the Nigerian President on Migration and Humanitarian Affairs, estimates on the number of IDPs in Nigeria have varied from 500,000 to millions (Brookings,

June 2006, p.8). NCR estimated 1,210,000 conflict-induced IDPs in its 2007 Mid-Year Report (NCR, September 2007), which, however, does not clearly differentiate between people still displaced and those who have returned.

Fragmented international response

Coordination between the various humanitarian actors at all levels is at best inconsistent. In the wake of the 2004 communal violence in Plateau state, international donors criticised the overall national response on various grounds: the lack of coordination; the lack of a proper registration system for IDPs; the inefficient use of resources despite adequate financial capacity; the lack of proper planning, monitoring and evaluation; and the politicisation of humanitarian assistance. Neither the UN nor international donors such as the European Commission's Humanitarian Office regarded the situation in Plateau state as a humanitarian emergency, as was reflected by the level of response and funding received. 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 (GIDPP, Special Report, January 2005).

The UN system in Nigeria, headed by a Resident Coordinator who is also UNDP Resident Representative, consists of numerous agencies, and has since 2000 been organised around a Development Assistance Framework. With a firm focus on development needs, UN assistance to

IDPs in Nigeria has been fairly ad hoc. The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement as well as a few international NGOs have also been involved in IDP response (ICRC, 18 December 2006; ICRC, 10 September 2007), albeit in a rather uncoordinated fashion.

Finally, the findings of a research study conducted on the management of internal displacement in Nigeria, with particular reference to the communal conflict in Kaduna in 2000, show that local or international humanitarian NGOs can only operate effectively in the presence of a supportive government. Otherwise, they risk providing only “cosmetic relief” with serious consequences for displaced people (Brandeis University, October 2006). The primary necessity remains therefore a strong reform programme which supports good governance and the development or strengthening of institutions engaged in conflict prevention and resolution and assistance to those affected by ongoing conflicts.

Note: This is a summary of the IDMC's country profile of the situation of internal displacement in Nigeria. The full country profile is available online [here](#).

Sources:

Action Aid International, August 2007, Unjust Waters: Climate Change, Flooding and the Protection of Poor Urban Communities - Experiences from Six African Cities

African Strategic and Peace Research Group (AFSTRAG-Nigeria), 2005, Election violence in Nigeria

Afrobarometer, March 2007, Identity, Institutions and Democracy in Nigeria

Amnesty International (AI), 24 January 2006, Nigeria: Making the destitute homeless – forced evictions in Makoko, Lagos State

Amnesty International (AI), 3 November 2005, Claiming rights and resources: Injustice, oil and violence in Nigeria

Amnesty International (AI), 22 August 2007, Nigeria: Violence in Port Harcourt escalates

BBC News, 4 October 2007, Anger over Nigeria's gang blitz

BBC News, 24 February 2006, Nigerian religious riots continue

BBC News, 23 August 2007, Nigeria to review electoral laws

Brandeis University, October 2006, Management of Internal Displacement in Nigeria

Brookings Institution, 16 June 2006, First Regional Conference on Internal Displacement in West Africa

Center for Environment, Human Rights and Development (CEHRD), May 2007, Bi-monthly report on incidence of election-related violence monitored in the South-South zone by Centre for Environment, Human Rights and Development (CEHRD)

Centre for Research on Inequality, Human Security and Ethnicity (CRISE), University of Oxford, March 2007, Who Joins Ethnic Militias? A Survey of the Oodua People's Congress in South-western Nigeria, Working Paper 44

Centre for Research on Inequality, Human Security and Ethnicity (CRISE), University of Oxford, 2005, A history of identities, violence and stability in Nigeria

Daily Champion (Lagos), 5 July 2007, Nigeria: Benue, Cross River Border Clash Turns Bloody

Global IDP Project, 31 January 2005, Internal displacement in Nigeria: a hidden crisis

Habitat International Coalition (HIC), Housing and Land Rights Network, June 2006, Abuja, Nigeria: authorities massively evict communities, rendering up to 800,000 people homeless

Human Rights Watch (HRW), 4 April 2007, Election or "Selection"? Human rights abuse and threats to free and fair election in Nigeria

Human Rights Watch (HRW), 17 April 2007, Nigeria: Polls Marred by Violence, Fraud

Human Rights Watch (HRW), February 2005, Rivers and Blood: Guns, Oil and Power in Nigeria's Rivers State

Human Rights Watch (HRW), October 2007, Violence, "Godfathers" and Corruption in Nigeria

Idemudia, Uwafiokun & Ite, Uwem E., September 2006, Review of African Political Economy, "Demystifying the Niger Delta Conflict: Towards an Integrated Explanation", Volume 33, Number 109, September 2006 , pp. 391-406(16)

Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN), 28 March 2007, Kano residents prepare to flee ahead of the elections

Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN), 4 September 2006, Nigeria: Government cracks down on Biafra separatist resurgence

Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN), 25 July 2007, NIGERIA: Villagers flee communal fighting in central region

Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN), 24 July 2007, NIGERIA: Guns, gangs, drugs feed growing delta violence

Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN), 17 August 2007, NIGERIA: Residents flee heavy fighting in Niger Delta's main city

Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN), 28 August 2007, NIGERIA: Demolition plans bring new ethnic twist to Port Harcourt conflict

International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), 10 September 2007, Nigeria delegation Newsletter: The Humanitarian - June 2007

International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), 18 December 2006, First on the front line

International Crisis Group (ICG), 30 May 2007, Nigeria: Failed Elections, Failing State?

International Crisis Group (ICG), 28 March 2007, Nigeria's Elections: Avoiding a Political Crisis

Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF), 11 May 2007, Providing emergency medical care to victims of violence in the Niger Delta, Nigeria

National Commission for Refugees (NCFR), September 2007, Summary of the IDP's spread in Nigeria

Nigerian Red Cross Society, 24 February 2006, Cartoon Crisis 3rd Update

Nigerian Red Cross Society, August 2007, Information on population movements

Nigerian Red Cross Society, 5 July 2006, Situation Report: Bakassi population movement

Reuters, 14 April 2007, Voters in Nigeria's oil delta shun flawed poll

Reuters, 31 July 2007, ANALYSIS-Nigerian delta peace moves to unlock oil output

Reuters, 7 August 2007, Flash floods kill at least 14 in central Nigeria

The Fund for Peace, 2007, The Failed States Index 2006

The International Republican Institute (IRI), February 2007, 2007 Nigerian National Elections: Pre-Election Assessment Final Report

Transparency International (TI), 26 September 2007, Corruption Perceptions Index 2007

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), 2006, Niger Delta Human Development Report

University of Bradford, March 2005, Armed violence and poverty in Nigeria

Note: All documents used in this overview are directly accessible on the Nigeria [List of Sources](#) page of our website.

About the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre

The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, established in 1998 by the Norwegian Refugee Council, is the leading international body monitoring conflict-induced internal displacement worldwide.

Through its work, the Centre contributes to improving national and international capacities to protect and assist the millions of 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 Geneva-based Centre runs an online database providing comprehensive information and analysis on internal displacement in some 50 countries.

Based on its monitoring and data collection activities, the Centre advocates for durable solutions to the plight of the internally displaced in line with international standards.

The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre also carries out training activities to enhance the capacity of local actors to respond to the needs of internally displaced people. In its work, the Centre cooperates with and provides support to local and national civil society initiatives.

For more information, visit the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre website and the database at www.internal-displacement.org

Media contact:

Jens-Hagen Eschenbächer

Head of Monitoring and Advocacy Department

Tel.: +41 (0)22 799 07 03

Email: jens.eschenbaecher@nrc.ch

IDMC

Norwegian Refugee Council

Chemin de Balexert 7-9

1219 Geneva, Switzerland

www.internal-displacement.org

Tel: +41 22 799 0700

Fax: +41 22 799 0701