Innovations

Ethno-religious Conflicts and Socioeconomic Well-being of Internally Displaced persons in North Central Nigeria

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Abstract

This work x-rayed ethno-religious conflicts and socioeconomic well-being of internally displaced persons in North Central Nigeria and examines the negative effect associated with these conflicts. The broad objective was to assess the effect of ethno-religious conflict on socioeconomic well-being of internally displaced persons in North central Nigeria. Its specific objectives were to assess the effect of incessant attacks on food security of internally displaced persons and to ascertain the effect of forced displacement on decent shelter for internally displaced persons. The methodology adopted for the study was survey method on a population of 122,000 internally displaced persons, a sample of 360 was obtained using Bill Gordon sample size determination formula where a structured questionnaire was administered on the sample. Data analysis reveals that, incessant attacks significantly affected food security of internally displaced persons (p = 0.01<0.05) and that forced displacement significantly affected decent shelter of internally displaced persons (p = 0.01<0.05). the study recommended that: Government should as a matter of necessity, introduce ranching for herders in order to avoid herds encroaching on farm lands, thereby causing conflicts between herders and farmers that do result to food insecurity and the use of information and communication technology gadgets by security operatives is paramount, government should provide and train security personnel in information gathering such that intending conflicts can be nipped in the bud to avoid its escalation and consequent population displacement associated with it.

Keywords: Ethno-religious Conflicts, Socioeconomic-Well-being and Internally Displaced Persons

Introduction

Before the 1940s, citizens of the Nigerian polity were more inclined to think and act nationally. However, with the emergence of socio-cultural organizations such as the *Oduduwa peoples' Congress (OPC),Arewa Consultative Forum*, *OhanazeNdi Igbo*, *Middle Belt Forum,* and others, people began to identify with ethnic rather than national identity. This later evolved into politics and, more recently, religion. In particular, the recent escalation of ethno-religious hostilities in a more aggravated approach following the restoration of democratic governance in 1999 has been a major contributing factor. Ethno-religious conflicts have been a reoccurring phenomenon since independence in 1960 (Ozden & Ousmane, 2020).

Researchers such as Alagbeleye, (2014); Owede and Rasheed, (2016); Ozodi and Oyelere, (2019); Ozden and Ousman, (2021) are drawn to the subject due to the swift rise of ethno-religious violence in Nigeria since the 1960s, particularly during the Fourth Republic. With the remarkable resurgence of such conflicts nationwide, causing heightened insecurity in affected regions and promoting bias, favouritism, and discrimination in governance, the discourse on ethno-religious strife has become imperative. This shift has resulted in many Nigerians embracing ethnic prejudice over national cohesion, jeopardizing democratic stability, national integration, economic development, governance, and human progress.

Nigeria has recently experienced numerous violent outbursts and widespread insecurity in almost all federation states. Attacks by herders, kidnapping, and other types of disruption exist in all geopolitical zones, as do militia groups. As a result, there have been innumerable bloodbaths, senseless killings, property destruction, social and economic upheaval, and the accompanying poverty, insecurity, unemployment, economic stagnation, and other vices that are too numerous to list (Alegbeleye, 2014). The economic, political and social predicaments in the region have shattered both the urban and rural poor, as no country can boast of having achieved socio-economic development if a more significant percentage of its population is still wallowing in object poverty, Akhakpe, Fatile and Igbokwe-Ibeto (2012) and Alegbeleye (2014).

However, putting together such diverse people by administrative decree of British colonialists with their many cultural and political systems, languages, religions, etc., was always inherently unstable and conflict-prone. The nation has since battled to create unity in diversity, but all the efforts seem not to be working. However, pursuing people's liberty and wellbeing is the universal sustainable development goal, which has remained elusive despite the necessity for national unity. Because of these developments and the irregular occurrence of episodic social interpretation of intergroup relations, persons of various ethnic nationalities have learned to recognize and cleave to their distinct identities (Sanda,1999 in Alegbeleye, 2014).

Nevertheless, political developments since Nigeria's independence in 1960 have led some critical-minded individuals and groups to doubt whether Nigeria can continue to exist as an unbreakable and indissoluble state. Paden, (2005) opines thatracial and religious tensions brought on an

estimated 54,000 fatalities from communal violence between 1999 and 2004 alone. Similar to Salawu (2010), Fawole and Bello (2010), Ibenwa and Ngele (2010), and others have linked ethnic and religious issues to crises in locations like Kaduna, Benue, Plateau, Nassarawa, Taraba, Maiduguri and Owerri, to name a few (Owede& Rasheed, 2016). However, it has been shown that in many cases, the way that farmers and pastoralists used land was complementary rather than competitive. Awogbade (1983) is of the opinion that despite the intense rivalry for natural resources placing pressure on the interaction between farmers and pastoralists, farmers in the Jos region of central Nigeria have remained welcoming to pastoralists (Ortindi, 2021).

Closely related with the problem of ethnicity is the issue of religion being misused by misguided followers of the two faiths (Christianity and Islam) to instigate chaos and instability within the country. This misuse of religion has rendered peace and unity increasingly fragile in recent times, as minor disagreements between members of different faiths are exploited by extremists, resulting in widespread loss of life and property. Dowd (2014) states thatzealous proponents of well-established religions have harnessed the nation's diverse religious beliefs to ignite socio-political conflicts. These conflicts have tragically shortened the lives of numerous individuals and destroyed valuable properties amounting to billions of naira.

Socioeconomic well-being of people is one of the sustainable development goals, to comprehend the notion of socio-economic well-being, it is crucial to define well-being. Generally, well-being refers to a state of health, contentment, and potential prosperity, where individuals transition from unfavourable circumstances to favourable ones. Well-being also encompasses enhancements in people's way of life, including better education, increased incomes, improved nutrition, enhanced access to healthcare, and harmonious coexistence (Ortindi, 2021). This advancement stems from societal and economic shifts influenced by environmental and cultural factors. Thus, the process of attaining equilibrium between social and economic aspects within a society is termed socio-economic well-being. Evaluation involves life expectancy, literacy, and satisfactory housing (Okonjo-Iweala & Osafo-Kwaako, 2008).

The country's socioeconomic health depends on the tolerance of its various religious believers, and this need is still present now. Since there can be no genuine progress without peace, all levels of government should work together to reduce ethnic and religious tensions in the nation to the absolute minimum. The fact is that effective governance and accountability are sacred due to their positive effects on citizens' socioeconomic well-being.To comprehend the situation of internally displaced individuals in North Central Nigeria, it is widely acknowledged that socio-economic well-being is a multidimensional concept demanding evaluation across various indicators.

Internally displaced persons as a concept is all encompassing as it includes displacedpeople from all works of life such as agro-entrepreneurs, priest and religious leaders, medical practitioners, patients, teachers, students, businessmen, farmers, politicians, traders, aged people and children.

Whenever attacks take place all the afore mentioned categories of people are affected in one way or the other as, they are victims who are displaced at homes, religious centres, businesses, workplaces and farms.

As rightly observed by UN, (1998) individuals or groups compelled to leave their usual residences because of conflict, violence, natural disasters, or human rights violations are referred to as internally displaced persons (IDPs). IDPs are defined as "persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence as well as workplaces, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized border" by the United Nations Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement. However, this is only a descriptive definition and does not grant IDPs a specific legal status. The definition of IDPs is widely recognized and guided by the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, established by the United Nations (UN) in 1998.

The indiscriminate attacks that have caused unrest in the North Central States of Nigeria have had far-reaching psychological and economic repercussions on internally displaced persons. For instance, the recent decrease in farm production has led to food security crises, increased numbers of internally displaced people in the area, decreased business activity in the area, and made life inhospitable for those who survived the attacks regarding nutrition, means of livelihood, healthcare, and education (Daniel, 2013). The majority of this violence is attributed to the government's inability to protect people and their property, unemployment, poverty, corruption, a significant income disparity between the rich and the poor, and social injustice, among other things. The persistent level of social unrest and ethno-religious conflict are all recent problems that North Central people face which has increased number of IDPs in the region.

1.2 Statement of the problem

In the past 65 years, several forms of conflict have occurred in West African countries. Ethno-religious conflicts have led to various negative consequences for the displaced population anywhere they occurred, resulting in the displacement of a significant portion of the population. This reoccurring problem has raised concerns about the overall socioeconomic well-being of internally displaced persons (IDPs) who are often forced to leave their homes, workplaces, businesses and communities due to these conflicts that pose a multifaceted challenge that directly impacts the livelihoods, social cohesion, and overall well-being of the affected individuals and communities.

More worrisome is the fact that theNorth-Central states of Benue, Plateau and Nasarawa have at present experienced ethno-religious conflicts that led to thousands of deaths as a result of attacks, triggering losses in properties, access to health care facilities, decent shelter, mal-nutrition, low

quality of life and displacements that throw thousands into untold hardship and depression that has reduced their human dignity and socio-economic well- being. Additionally, the trauma and psychological distress experienced by IDPs due to their displacement can hinder their ability to engage in meaningful economic activities.

However, researchers in the past never deemed it fit to examine how these crises affect the socio-economic well-being of internally displaced persons as studies conducted by Alegbeleye, (2014); Hinds & carter, (2015); Owede& Rasheed, (2016); Odozi & Oyelere (2019); Ozden & Ousmane, (2020); Ortindi, (2021) to the best of the researcher's knowledge has, no quantitative or empirical evidence on the subject matter, especially one that deals directly with respondents' perception of socioeconomic well-being. It is against this background that, this study intends to examine the effect of ethnic and religious conflicts as they affect the socio-economic well-being of internally displaced persons in North Central Nigeria and suggest better ways of managing the menace and, if possible, eliminating the research gap by carrying out this study.

1.3 Objectives of the study

This research investigates the relationship between ethno-religious conflicts and the socio-economic well-being of internally displaced persons in the North Central region of Nigeria. The specific objectives of the study are to:

i)   Assess the effect of incessant attacks on the food security of internally displaced persons.
ii)   Ascertain the effect of forced displacement on decent shelter for internally displaced persons.

1.4 Research questions

From the preceding, the study will answer the following questions to enable the researchers to achieve the objectives of the study:

i)   To what extent do incessant attacks affect the food security of internally displaced persons?
ii)   Does forced displacement significantly affect the decent shelter of internally displaced persons?

1.5 Research hypotheses

To achieve this study's objectives and answer the research questions, the following alternate hypotheses were formulated to guide the researcher in making generalisations after being subjected to statistical testing.

i)   Incessant attacks significantly affect the food security of internally displaced persons.

ii)   Forced displacement has a significant effect on decent shelter for internally displaced persons.

2.1conceptual Review

2.1.1 Ethno- religious conflict

Conflict can be examined from two perspectives: macro and micro levels. Macro-level conflict emerges as a reaction to ethnic misunderstandings, while micro-level conflict arises due to animosity between neighbours of diverse ethnic backgrounds (Weidmann, 2012). However, ethnicity, as a social phenomenon, can be perceived as a marker of ethnic identity since both share common cultural and historical origins (Adebayo, 2010). The conflict between ethnic or religious groups signifies a state of disharmony in social interactions, arising when the parties' opposing ideals, viewpoints, and beliefs are not reconciled or agreed upon (Bagaji, 2012).Ethno-religious conflict hampers societal development, leading to enduring high poverty levels and a diminished quality of life despite substantial efforts to enhance growth and socio-economic well-being.

Conflicts between ethnic and religious groups can harm outcomes linked to the economy, health, adequate housing, food security and general well-being. Ethno-religious conflict is a significant factor preventing socioeconomic growth in Nigeria, although there are few empirical assessments of how it affects development and welfare-related outcomes (Odozi&Oyelere, 2019). Conflicts between ethnic groups and religions harm household welfare and cost people and the economy in various ways, such as by wrecking the economy and lowering the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Numerous studies indicate that ethnic and religious strife has a detrimental impact on investment, savings, and economic growth (Venieris& Gupta, 1986; Alsina & Perotti, 1996; Barro, 1991; Mauro, 1995; Odozi&Oyelere, 2019). However, ethnic and religious conflict can directly cost people by limiting their access to health care and other essential services.

Conflict allegedly caused by actual or perceived differences based on ethnic and religious identities is known as ethno-religious conflict. The idea of an ethno-religious identity stems from the similarities and interdependence of ethnic and religious identities in social and economic processes. As the scenario has been well described, religious identification can occasionally merge with ethnic group identity, creating a volatile social environment exacerbated by the influence of the ethnic groups' common ancestry myth (Salomone, 1991). Boundaries result from daily conflict between various groups over resources, power, and even resistance to perceived dominance. Egwu (2022).

For those who were fortunate enough to survive the attacks in north central, these wars have transformed into the destruction of neighbourhoods, people, and food production, increasing hunger and the rate of individuals with disabilities (Fajonyomi et al., 2018; Okigbo, 2018, International Crises Group, 2018; Chiluwa and Chiluwa, 2020). According to Ajibo et al. (2018), ethno-religious conflicts in north central only intensified in 2018, resulting in at least 1600 fatalities and 300,000 displaced people (Human rights watch, 2019). The Benue state alone had 1,878 deaths between 2014 and 2016, despite various sources indicating that population relocation significantly affectedthe ethno-religious conflict in Nigeria. According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM, 2019; 2020), few empirical researches exist on how ethnic and religious strife fuels population displacements.

2.1.2 Dimensions of ethno-religious conflict

Ethno-religious conflict is a combination of ethnic and religious conflicts. A better understanding of the term will entail understanding what ethnic and religious conflicts are all about.

Ethnic conflicts

Ethnicity can be seen as a social formation according to culturally particular behaviours and distinctive symbols (Osaghae, 1992). Ethnic conflicts refer to conflicts and tensions between different ethnic groups within a particular region or country. These conflicts often arise due to various factors, such as historical grievances, competition for resources, political power struggles, cultural differences, or the desire for self-determination.

Ethnic conflicts can manifest in different forms, from political disputes and social discrimination to violent clashes and full-scale wars. They may involve discrimination, marginalization, segregation, ethnic cleansing and genocide. Such conflicts can have devastating consequences for the affected communities, leading to loss of life, displacement of populations, destruction of infrastructure, disruption of business and other economic activities and long-lasting social and psychological trauma.

The root causes of ethnic conflicts are complex and multifaceted. They can be influenced by factors such as socioeconomic disparities, political instability, uneven distribution of resources, colonial legacies, nationalism, religious differences, or the manipulation of ethnic identities for political purposes. Additionally, regional or international dynamics, such as geopolitical interests or interventions, can exacerbate existing tensions or fuel new conflicts.

Efforts to resolve ethnic conflicts often involve diplomatic negotiations, conflict resolution mechanisms, peace agreements, power-sharing arrangements, or truth and reconciliation processes. International organizations, governments, civil society groups, and local communities play vital roles in promoting dialogue, fostering reconciliation, addressing grievances, and promoting inclusive governance structures that accommodate diverse ethnic groups.

It is important to note that while ethnic conflicts are a significant global issue, they are not the only form of conflict. Socioeconomic, political, religious, and ideological differences can contribute to conflicts within and between societies.

Religious conflicts

Religious conflicts occur when tensions, disputes, or violence arise between different religious groups or sects within a particular region or country. These conflicts are often rooted in differences in religious beliefs, practices, or ideologies and can have profound social, political, and humanitarian implications.

Religion itself is a belief that is in line with what people consider to be purity and add value to; religion may be described by referring to what is known as the degree of purity and impurity (Shabiand Awe, 2001). Religion is a cultural institution that serves as a consecration instrument and method, just like other institutions. It is a system of beliefs and could be emotionally charged (Otite and Ogiowo, 1999).This indicates that all religions are human institutions that can be distinguished from other social institutions by the presence of sacred or celestial vitalities. According to Mbati (1999 in Alegbeleye, 2014), religion is a significant component of traditional origins and has the biggest impact on people's thoughts and sentiments. Religious institutions are observable and organized representations of customs and beliefs in specific social and historical contexts. Religious rituals and beliefs reflect the social and historical ideas outwardly, just like human emotions and attitudes do. They create images of people and things and control attitudes, feelings, and behaviour. These visible signs and manifestations result from practices and ideas, but historical settings constrain them. Political, social, and geographic factors alter views and behaviours. Therefore, religious institutions develop in reaction to religious aspirations and associated patterns. (retrieved from www.encyclopedia.com on 18/5/2023)

Religious practices and beliefs have been prominently expressed in important organizations constructed in radically different social and historical settings (Alegbeleye, 2014). This religious divide has been responsible for most conflicts in north-central states, as people of similar ethnic groups take the opposite sidein times of religious conflict.

2.1.3 Socio-economic well-being

To comprehend the notion of socio-economic well-being, it is crucial to define well-being. Generally, well-being refers to a state of health, contentment, and potential prosperity, where individuals transition from unfavourable circumstances to favourable ones. Well-being also encompasses enhancements in people's way of life, including better education, increased incomes, improved nutrition, enhanced access to healthcare, and harmonious coexistence (Ortindi, 2021). This advancement stems from societal and economic shifts influenced by environmental and cultural factors. Thus, the process of attaining equilibrium between social and

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The country's socioeconomic health depends on the tolerance of its various religious believers, and this need is still present now. Since there can be no genuine progress without peace, all levels of government should work together to reduce ethnic and religious tensions in the nation to the absolute minimum. The fact is that effective governance and accountability are sacred due to their positive effects on citizens' socioeconomic well-being.To comprehend the situation of internally displaced individuals in North Central Nigeria, it is widely acknowledged that socio-economic well-being is a multidimensional concept demanding evaluation across various indicators. The United Nations Development Programme's human development index incorporates indicators like longevity, health, productivity in an equitable, sustainable context, and income level. An inclusive society, sustainable livelihoods, employment prospects, primary service access, and education accessibility are crucial facets in tandem with personal development. The assessment of social exclusion, economic marginalization, and civic participation neglect encapsulates the three dimensions in the social exclusion index designed to measure the extent of inclusivity. Each dimension includes several metrics that show how persons living in camps for internally displaced people cannot access the labour market, healthcare, education, and social networks. Therefore, if a person cannot access at least the indicators mentioned earlier, they are considered socially excluded, meaning that to be considered socially included, they must have access to at least 4 of the dimensions mentioned earlier (Medygyesi et al., 2017).

Socioeconomic well-being also refers to the overall state of individuals and communities regarding their economic and social conditions. It encompasses income, employment, education, health, access to essential services, food security, social mobility, and overall quality of life. Socioeconomic well-being is crucial for individuals to meet their basic needs, achieve upward mobility, and live fulfilling lives, UNDP, (2021).

According to UNDP (2021), several key aspects contribute to socioeconomic well-being, which include:

i) Income and Employment: Adequate and stable employment are fundamental for socioeconomic well-being. A higher income allows individuals to afford necessities, access education and healthcare, and participate in economic and social activities. Employment opportunities provide financial stability, social integration, and a sense of purpose. High unemployment rates and low wages can hinder socioeconomic well-being.

ii) Education and Skills: Access to quality education and skills development are crucial for socioeconomic well-being. Education equips individuals with the knowledge, critical thinking abilities, and skills necessary to participate in the labour market, contribute to

economic growth, and improve their social standing. Education also promotes social mobility and reduces income inequality.

iii) Health and Healthcare: Good health and access to healthcare services are vital components of socioeconomic well-being. Adequate healthcare ensures disease prevention, treatment, and management, allowing individuals to lead productive lives. Health disparities and lack of healthcare access can negatively impact individuals' socioeconomic outcomes.

iv) Social Protection: Social protection programs, such as social security, unemployment benefits, and healthcare coverage, contribute to socioeconomic well-being by providing a safety net during times of vulnerability. These programs mitigate the risks of poverty, unemployment, and adverse life events, helping individuals maintain a basic standard of living and promoting social inclusion.

v) Infrastructure and Basic Services: Access to basic infrastructure, including transportation, water, sanitation, and electricity, is essential for socioeconomic well-being. Infrastructure development facilitates economic activities, enhances productivity, and improves the overall quality of life. Lack of access to essential services can hinder socioeconomic progress.

2.1.4 Internally displaced persons

Individuals or groups compelled to leave their usual residences because of conflict, violence, natural disasters, or human rights violations are referred to as internally displaced persons (IDPs). IDPs are defined as "persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights, or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized border" by the United Nations Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement. However, this is only a descriptive definition and does not grant IDPs a specific legal status. The definition of IDPs is widely recognized and guided by the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, established by the United Nations (UN) in 1998.

The Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement provide a comprehensive framework for the protection and assistance of IDPs, emphasizing the responsibility of national authorities to ensure the well-being and rights of internally displaced populations. Additionally, several international organizations, including the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), work to provide support and advocacy for IDPs worldwide. Overall, the definition of IDPs revolves around the notion of forced displacement within a country's borders due to various factors, requiring specific attention and protection to address their needs and rights.

Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) face inherent exposure to hardship and protection risks due to their enforced displacement, encompassing challenges like limited access to essential services, separation from family, violence against women and girls, trafficking, discrimination, and harassment. The UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement strive to ensure that IDPs, as citizens or regular inhabitants of their nation, uphold the same rights and liberties enshrined in international and domestic law, considering their vulnerabilities and distinct needs. This encompasses the right to move freely and choose their residence. Moreover, IDPs retain the right to seek safety in different parts of their country or even seek asylum elsewhere. Notably, the critical components of the IDP definition involve involuntary movement within national boundaries.

IDPs are distinguishable from individuals who voluntarily leave their abode without compulsion and can remain securely in their residence. Likewise, IDPs differ from refugees as they have not crossed internationally recognized borders, eliminating the need for a distinct legal status due to their location beyond their nation's protection. As elucidated, IDPs are entitled to the full rights and safeguards afforded to their homeland's citizens and other habitual inhabitants (UNHCR, 2022).

The term "internal displacement" (IDP) also refers to events that cause internal displacement, such as war, widespread violence, abuse of human rights, and natural or artificial calamities. The words "in particular" suggest this is not an exhaustive list. The statement "as a result of or in order to avoid the effect of" also acknowledges the possibility of internal displacement following or anticipating the repercussions of coercion. The IDP definition allows particular groups, such as indigenous communities or pastoralists, to be displaced because violence, landmines, or instability obstructed their migration routes. Although homeless people and members of underprivileged urban communities frequently face marginalization, deprivation, and human rights abuses where they live, these groups are not inherently regarded as IDPs.

Similarly, the IDP criteria do not include those who relocate for economic reasons. Irregular migrants or third-country nationals in situations similar to IDPs are entitled to protection and assistance under international humanitarian and human rights law. As already explained, refugees have a special legal status because they are outside their country of origin and thus without their country's protection.

Despite the lack of legal status, a person can be considered an IDP until s/he finds a durable solution, which is reached when the person's needs for assistance and protection are no longer directly related to their displacement, and they can exercise their human rights without facing any discrimination because of it. International humanitarian and development players are complementary in providing IDPs with long-term solutions, with national authorities bearing the primary duty. A durable solution is furthermore achieved when an individual is sustainably (re)integrated withi)an area where s/he has taken refuge (local settlement), ii) another area of

her/his country (settlement elsewhere in the country), or iii) her/his place of origin (sustainable return).

2.2 Conceptual Framework

The framework guiding the study will be depicted below, reflecting the independent variable (ethno-religious conflict) with its proxies' incessant attacks and forced displacement, and the dependent variable "socio-economic well-being" with its proxies (food security and decent shelter).
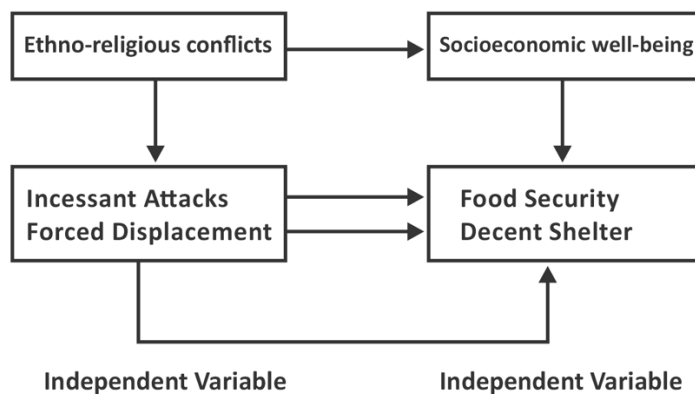

Figure 2.2.1: A Conceptual Model illustrating the relationship between ethno-religious conflict and socioeconomic wellbeing.
Source: Researcher's Conceptualization (2023).

2.2.2 Incessant attacks and food security
Residents of the north-central region have recently been subjected to a steady stream of unprovoked attacks that have taken on racial and religious dimensions. These attacks are characterized by the maiming, raping, and murder of innocent people by marauding invaders, who typically carry them out at night when most people are sound asleep. Concerned by these senseless killings, a research organization called Nextier SPD has raised the alarm that Jihadist terrorism, which began with Boko Haram in Northern Nigeria twelve years ago, has since spread to Southern Nigeria through the North-Central zone that separates the North and South, and is rapidly moving to the south through the north central (Agbakwuru, 2023).

To arrest the unpleasant development, the group stated, "For the federal and state governments to cultivate and use these forests for large-scale agribusiness is one approach to curb the proliferation of armaments in such forests. To find the sources and routes of illegal weapons, there is a dire need for security agencies to rely on cutting-edge intelligence. Security services must use an annihilation plan to combat terrorism rather than a hit-and-run tactic. In order for the

state to prevail against the jihadists who frequently unleash terror on unarmed populations, it is expected that all these factors promoting the rise of terrorism need to be swiftly addressed" (Agbakwuru, 2023).

Recently, the North Central states of Plateau and Benue have been the scene of unrelenting, unprovoked attacks that have taken on racial and religious overtones. These attacks are characterized by maiming, raping, and killings committed by marauding invaders who carry them out mostly at night while people are soundly asleep. In response to these senseless killings, Nextier SPD, a research organization, opined, "For the federal and state governments to cultivate and use these forests for large-scale agribusiness is one approach to curb the proliferation of armaments in these forests. For the state to prevail against the jihadists who frequently unleash terror on unarmed populations, it was further said that "all these factors promoting the rise of terrorism need to be swiftly addressed" (Agbakwuru, 2023).

Ojewale (2021) identified several mutually reinforcing factors that aid incessant attacks in north-central Nigeria, including the following:

i) **Hate speech:** More than any other aspect, hate speech disparages or assaults an individual or group of individuals based on origin, race, ethnicity, nationality, colour, religion, gender, sexual orientation, or disability and is used in interpersonal and group communication.

ii) **Government inability to adequately protect citizens from violent crime:** Because most attacks take place on roads that make it difficult for security forces to block the invaders and, if possible, trail them, it is expected that the government should increase its efforts in the area of providing artificial intelligence logistics to help the security forces detect and apprehend criminals.

iii) **Small guns and light weapons proliferation:** In the region, widespread poverty, rising unemployment, and drug usage are major contributing factors to violence and threats of violence. The poverty rate in the area is 42.7%. Additionally, 10% of Nigeria's drug users reside in this area. According to Ojewale (2021), the spread of small arms and light weapons, especially those made locally, is a factor in drug consumption. In the plateau states of Benue and Nassarawa, locally produced weapons were utilized in around 50% of the crimes. Additionally, reports indicate that herders have attacked settlements in north-central Nigeria using a variety of militia from several other countries. Politicians were accused of bringing in terrorists from other nations to assist them in rigging the election who have, after the said election, turned to perpetrating these dastardly acts, unleashing terror on innocent Nigerians.

iv) **Political intimidation of the opposition by the ruling party:** Political figures employ thugs, particularly young ones, to frighten and destabilize people in opposition so that they can continue to be politically relevant and remain in power. Attacks are common in the area for these and other reasons, and most aim to kill political opponents.

v) **Open grazing ban:** Pastoralists and sedentary farmers have regularly attacked each other in Benue and Plateau state's rural areas. The farmers accuse the pastoralists of directing their livestock to graze on their farms, destroying their crops. According to pastoralists, this occurs because the farmers obstruct their grazing paths. Cattle grazing in Benue was virtually outlawed in 2017 when the state administration passed the Open Grazing Prohibition Law. To implement the ban, the state government established the Livestock Guard. After fighting with Fulani pastoralists and driving them from substantial portions of Benue, the guards took cattle and shot at them, most times making the herders begin attacking farmers in Benue on a considerable scale. As a result, this act by livestock guards affected the state's food security (Ojewale, 2021).

On the other hand, food security is when everyone, at all times, has physical and financial access to enough safe and nutritious food that satisfies their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life that is considered to be in a state of food security, as defined by the 1996 World Food Summit. Given the definition provided above, it is evident that the persistent attacks on farmers in the region have resulted in a lack of physical and financial access to food in the north-central states (Ojawale, 2021).

Dimensions of food security the four dimensions listed by the World Bank must be met to attain food security. These dimensions include the following:

i) **Physical availability of food**: Looking critically at what is happening in the north-central states, one can say that it will be challenging to achieve physical food availability due to the growing spread of insecurity in the area. Food availability addresses the supply aspect of food security and is determined by the level of food production, stock levels, and net trade.

ii) **Economic and physical access to food:** A sufficient quantity of food at the national or international level does not automatically provide food security for households. In order to achieve food security goals, policies now place more emphasis on income, expenditure, markets, and prices. However, this focus is lacking in the north-central states since malicious attacks and killings have undermined people's incomes.

iii) **Food utilization:** Utilization is frequently defined as the body extracting the most nutrients from the diet. Individuals who receive enough care and feeding will consume

enough energy and nutrients due to proper food preparation, a varied diet, and intra-household food distribution. This defines a person's nutritional condition when coupled with good biological absorption of their food.

iv) **Stability of the other three dimensions over time:**Even if you now consume an acceptable amount of food, you are still seen as having food insecurity if you occasionally have insufficient access to food, putting your nutritional status in danger. Poor security circumstances, political unrest, or economic concerns (such as unemployment and increased food prices) may impact food security status.All four dimensions must be fulfilled simultaneously to realise food security objectives.

2.2.3 Forced displacement and decent shelter

When a person or group of people are forcibly chased away from their homes due to natural or artificial calamities, this is called forced displacement. According to the United High Commissioner for Refugees (2022), 81,000 individuals might be forcibly displaced by the end of 2022due to conflict, violence, and human rights violations. While some people were uprooted across states, most of those affected by ethnic and religious conflicts were internally displaced. (Kellenberger, 2009; Oguonu&Ezeibe, 2014; Oyefara& Alabi, 2016) noted that the herder-farmer conflict in Nigeria has resulted in thousands of deaths, tens of thousands of displaced people from their ancestral homes, destruction or looting of properties worth millions of naira, burning or destruction of homes and crops, and the killing or rustling of livestock are all forms of forced displacements (Lenshie et al 2020).

Multiple instances of forced relocation that brought the nation perilously close to collapse were caused by conflagrations between ethno-religious groups. Enormous human casualties, internal displacements and refugee crises, lost investments, strained relations between communities or ethnic groups, and threats to internal security and public order have all resulted from it. Furthermore, one would concur with Alegbeleye (2014:144), who asserts that "these conflicts are partly caused by the high unemployment rate in the country along with social injustice and inequality." Most unemployed Nigerians have turned into tools in the hands of lawbreakers who pay them to carry out violent forced relocation, just as the Holy Bible says, "Idle hands are the devil's workshop."

Repeated violent conflicts between the Fulani herders and their host community have increased. The different ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria can also be attributed to the Nigerian institutional failure. Security services are frequently accused of siding with invaders by receiving bribes and organizing attacks on defenceless civilians, making people lose faith in their capacity to serve as an impartial empire in checkmating attacks that cause displaced people. According to Canci and Odukoya (2016), traditional African cultures lacked social control mechanisms, including kinfolk, religious institutions, and political structures prioritising the community's welfare.

Kellenber, (2022) posits that, narratives on wars and population displacements in Nigeria unfairly focus on Boko Haram and North East Nigeria despite the significant population displacements brought on by pastoralist-farmer conflicts in North Central Nigeria (Adewale,2016, Jacob; 2016; Eke, 2019; Ajodo- Adebanjoko. 2019; Ajayi, 2020). Scholars have linked conflicts between farmers and herders to security challenges in Nigeria, such as separatist activities (Lenshie et al., 2020; Chukwuma, 2020). The Nigerian government has ignored academic assessments of the relationship between herder-farmer conflicts and population displacement, even though studies linking forced displacements in the north central to long-standing ethnic and religious tensions, attacks by bandits, kidnapping, armed robberies, and attacks by herdersare long-standing enmity between the two (International Organization for Migration, 2021; 2022). (Mbah et al., 2021).

A decent shelter is a living space that offers appropriate and suitable circumstances for human existence. It includes a home's physical framework and the fundamental amenities required for a secure, healthy, and respectable existence. For a shelter to qualify as decent, the requirements mentioned earlier must be met; however, the situation with internally displaced people in north central Nigeria is nothing to ride home about because makeshift tent accommodations are typically offered to those who are displaced and living in IDP camps throughout the states of north-central Nigeria.

The United Nations' use of decent shelter goes beyond simply having a roof over one's head. It implies that the housing meets specific minimum standards, such as:

i) **Structural stability:** The house must have sturdy walls, floors, and roofs that can resist environmental conditions while maintaining the tenants' safety. From looking at the makeshift tents frequently given to internally displaced people in north-central Nigeria, it is clear that what is being provided lacks all the characteristics of appropriate shelter as its structural stability is frequently nothing.

ii) **Weatherproofing:** Residents should be shielded by the housing from the elements, such as rain, wind, extremely high or low temperatures, and other climatic variables. These features are generally absent from the lodging frequently offered by state emergency management organizations throughout the states of north-central Nigeria, and as a result, it is impossible to define any of it as an acceptable shelter.

iii) **Sufficient living space**: There should be enough room for the occupants to go about their daily business without feeling cramped, including separate spaces for sleeping, cooking, and using the restroom. What is available in IDP camps in the north-central region is very different because most camps are overrun with people and lack adequate space for daily activities.

iv) **Essential services:** It should be possible to get basic amenities such as running water, toilets, electricity, and heating/cooling systems inside or nearby. However, one can accurately claim that all of these are lacking when observing the IDP camps in North Central Nigeria.

v) **Health and hygiene:** The home should encourage excellent health and hygiene, have adequate ventilation sanitation features, and take precautions against disease transmission. However, diseases are common among IDPs in the North Central states, and the government provides them with little to no medical care. Most of the time, non-governmental organizations provide health care services to IDPs. People find it challenging to pay for the medical expenses linked to such referrals because referrals frequently accompany such medical care.

vi) **Security:** Residents should feel comfortable and secure in their homes thanks to the housing's level of security and protection against crime and violence. The IDPs in North Central Nigeria lack this, as most of the time, people in these camps are attacked and killed without any protection to fend off the herders' frequent attacks (UNHCR, 2021).

Providing vulnerable groups with suitable housing, such as IDP camps, or subpar housing conditions, is sometimes related to decent shelter. The right to adequate housing for all people is a fundamental human right that international organizations like the United Nations support, but all of these rights are denied to the displaced people of North Central Nigeria because the majority of them do not know when they will return to their ancestral homes and resume living their everyday lives.

3.0 Methodology
3.1Population of the study
The population of this study comprised 122,000 internally displaced persons in IDP camps in three states of north-central Nigeria: Benue, Nassarawa and Plateau. These three selected states have internally displaced people's camps where the researchers, through random sampling, obtained whatever information that was needed for the study. These states were chosen since they have IDP camps for displaced people due to ethno-religious conflicts.

Table 3.1: Breakdown of the Population of Internally Displaced Persons Camps Per State

S/N	State	No Displaced persons
1	Benue	80,000
2	Nassarawa	4,000
3	Plateau	38,000
Total	3	122,000

Source: State Emergency Management Agencies of the above States 2023

3.2 Sample size determination and sampling technique

To maximize the statistical precision of the study while controlling costs, a unique parametric statistical formula was applied to obtain a sample size which was considered appropriate for this study, a sample size calculation provided by Bill Godden (2004) sample size determination formula for finite populations was utilized as shown below.

$$SS = \frac{Z^2 \times P(1-p)}{M^2}$$

Where:

SS= Sample size; Z= 1.96 at 95 confidence level

P= Population proportion assumed to be 0.5 (50%); M= error margin

Therefore: $\frac{1.96^2 \times 0.5(1-0.5)}{0.05^2}$

$$SS = \frac{3.8416 \times 0.25}{0.0025}$$

SS= 384.16 app.385

Therefore, the above was used to determine the sample size using the population of this study. The percentage of the population prevalence of ethno-religious conflicts is estimated at 50% (as the population proportion).

Our new Sample will be = SS ÷ (1+ SS-1) ÷ N

= 385 ÷ (1 + 385- 1) ÷ 122,000= 385÷ 1+ 384 ÷ 122,000

= 385÷ 1 + 0.00315=385÷ 1.00315

= 383.7 app. 384

Sample size, therefore, = 384.

Thus, the sample size of 384 will be proportionally allocated to the IDPs in the three states and the researchers adopted Bowler's proportion allocation statistical technique to administer the quota of questionnaires for the IDPs. The Bowler's sample size determination formula is denoted as:

Q= A/N x n/1

Where: Q = Number of IDPs selected for study; A = Population of each state

N = Total population of the Study; n = estimated sample size

1 = statistical constant

Table 3.2 Table for sampling estimation

S/No	State	No Displaced persons	Sample Size Determination	Sample Size for each State IDP
1	Benue	80,000	80,000x384÷122,000	252
2	Nassarawa	4,000	4,000x 384÷122,000	13
3	Plateau	38,000	38,000x384÷122,000	120
Total		122,000		385

Source: Researchers' sample size determination 2023

4.0 Data presentation, analysis and results

Theis research work assesses the effect of ethno-religious conflict on socioeconomic well-being of internally displaced persons in North Central Nigeria. Data collection was primarily relied on a questionnaire designed on a 5-point Likert scale and addressed structured questions aligned with the study objectives.In administering the questionnaire, the researchers employed a quota sampling technique using simple random sampling within internally displaced persons camps across the selected three states for this study. The presentation is based on fully filled and returned questionnaires, out of 385 distributed questionnaires, only 360 were fully filled and returned.

Table 4.1 Objective one: to determine whether incessant attacks affect food security

	Effect of Incessant Attacks	Food security ratings					
		SA	A	U	D	SD	Total
1	Incessant attacks affect farming activities of IDPs in North central Nigeria	154	145	20	30	25	360
2	Frequent crises affect agricultural activities in North Central Nigeria	152	156	0	22	30	360
3	Incessant attacks affect availability of food to IDPs in North Central Nigeria	126	144	12	32	46	360
4	Spread of attacks affects food security of IDPs in North Central Nigeria	140	145	20	30	25	360
5	Incessant attacks, propels hikes in food prices to IDPs in North Central Nigeria	154	120	0	56	30	360
6	Non-affordability of food by IDPs has increased as a result of poverty	160	144	11	27	18	360
	Average total	**147**	**142**	**10**	**32**	**29**	**360**

Source: Fieldwork 2023

The result suggest that more respondents strongly agreed and agreed that incessant attacks affect food security of IDPs in North Central Nigeria. The table shows that the cluster of mean of items for incessant attacks is 3.91 above the cut point of 3.0 (5+4+3+2+1 = 15/5 = 3 for a five- point summation Likert scale). Based on the objective, respondents agreed and strongly agreed that incessant attacks affect food security of IDPs in North Central Nigeria. This implies that incessant attacks affect farming activities, propels food prices hike and non-affordability of food due to increased poverty of IDPs, thus affecting food security in the region.

4.2 Test of Hypothesis one

H_0 Incessant attacks has no significant effect on food security of internally displaced persons.

Table 4.2a Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Incessant attacks affect availability of food in IDPs	3.91	1.116	360
Food security is affected as a result of spread of attacks on IDPs	4.00	1.120	360

Source: SPSS version 20.0

Table 4.2b Correlations

			Incessant attacks affect agricultural activities of IDPs in North-Central Nigeria	Food security of IDPs in North-Central Nigeria is affected by frequent crises
Spearman's rho	Incessant attacks affect agricultural activities of IDPs in North-Central Nigeria	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.940**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	360	360
	Food security of IDPs in North-Central Nigeria is affected by frequent crises	Correlation Coefficient	.940**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	360	360

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

R = .940

Sig. = .0001

Interpretation

Table 4.2a shows the descriptive statistics of the relationship between incessant attacks and food security of internally displaced persons has a mean 3.91 with a standard deviation of 1.116, on the other hand food security has a mean score of 4.00 with a standard deviation of 1.120. an observation of the standard deviation values reveals that there is almost the same variation of data points amongst the dependent and independent variables. This implies that incessant attacks

constitute about the same percentage of variables that significantly affect food security of internally displaced persons in North Central Nigeria.

Table 4.2b is the Spearman ranked correlation coefficient matrix of the relationship between incessant attacks and food security which has a value of (0.940) indicates that correlation is significant at 0.0001 level (2-tailed). This implies that there is strong positive correlation between the independent and dependent variables. Thus, incessant attacks to a large extent affect food security of internally displaced persons in North Central Nigeria. The incessant attacks to food security in North Central Nigeria which is statistically significant with (0.0001) is less than 0.05, therefore, the null hypothesis should be rejected.

Table 4.3 Objective two: to determine whether forced displacement affect decent shelter

Effect of forced displacement Decent shelter ratings							
		SA	A	U	D	SD	Total
1	Forced displacement due to conflicts renders IDPs in North central Nigeria homeless	123	155	0	38	44	360
2	Decent shelter is lacking in most IDPs camps in North Central Nigeria	162	125	0	33	40	360
3	Overcrowding in the IDPs camps is as a result of forced displacement	145	125	10	32	48	360
4	Lack of decent shelter increase level of exposure to diseases in IDPs camps	128	126	04	62	40	360
5	Forced displacement affect hygiene condition of IDPs in North Central Nigeria	136	126	14	50	34	360
6	Lack of decent shelter exposes IDPs to natural hazards	118	138	24	25	55	360
	Average total	135	132.5	8.6	40	43.5	360

Source: Fieldwork 2023

The above suggest that more respondents agreed and strongly agreed that forced displacement affect decent shelter of IDPs in North Central Nigeria. The table shows that the cluster of mean of items for incessant attacks is 3.96 above the cut point of 3.0 (5+4+3+2+1 = 15/5 = 3 for a five-point summation Likert scale). Based on the objective, respondents strongly agreed that forced displacement affects decent shelter of IDPs in North Central Nigeria. This implies that forced displacement increased number of homeless people, overcrowding in the IDPs camps and affect the hygiene condition as well as exposes more IDPs in the region to natural hazards.

4.4 Hypothesis two

H_0 Forced displacement has no significant effect on decent shelter of internally displaced persons

Table 4.4a Descriptive statistics

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Forced displacement is responsible for overcrowding in IDPs camps	3.96	1.130	360
Lack of decent shelter has made IDPs in North Central to be exposed to diseases	3.93	1.034	360

Source: SPSS version 20.0

Table 4.4b Correlations

			Forced displacements due to conflicts renders IDPs homeless	Decent shelter is lacking in most IDPs camps in North central Nigeria
Spearman's rho	Forced displacements due to conflicts renders IDPs homeless in North central Nigeria	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.893**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	360	360
	Decent shelter is lacking in most IDPs camps in North central Nigeria	Correlation Coefficient	.893**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	360	360

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

R = .893

Sig = 0.0001

Interpretation

Table 4.4a shows the descriptive statistics of the relationship between forced displacement and decent shelter of internally displaced persons has a mean 3.96 with a standard deviation of 1.130, on the other hand decent shelter has a mean score of 3.93 with a standard deviation of 1.034. an observation of the standard deviation values reveals that there is almost the same variation of data points amongst the dependent and independent variables. This implies that forced displacement constitutes about the same percentage of variables that significantly affect decent shelter of internally displaced persons in North Central Nigeria.

Table 4.4b is the Spearman ranked correlation coefficient matrix of the relationship between forced displacement and decent shelter which has a value of (0.893) indicates that correlation is significant at 0.0001 level (2-tailed). This implies that there is strong positive correlation between the independent and dependent variables. Thus, forced displacement to a large extent affect decent shelter of internally displaced persons in North Central Nigeria. The forced displacement to decent shelter in North Central Nigeria which is statistically significant with (0.0001) is less than 0.05, therefore, the null hypothesis should be rejected.

4.5 Discussion of Findings

Objective one: to assess the effect of incessant attacks on food security of internally displaced persons

As presented earlier, in order to determine whether incessant attacks affect food security of internally displaced persons, respondents' views were inquired; it was found out that, incessant attacks affect agricultural activities of internally displaced persons, it was also found out that incessant attacks affect availability and affordability of food by internally displaced persons. Data evidence suggest that, food security isaffected as a result of spread of attacks on IDPs. This finding is in tandem with Ortindi, (2021); Fajonyomi, et al (2018), Odozi and Oyelere, (2019) Nnaji, et al (2022), who noted that, continuous pastoralist-farmer conflicts negatively affect food security and that, this affect socioeconomic development and national unity. This finding is further supported by Herbert (1976) cultural imperialism theory which states that marginalized groups are affected by dominant cultures and religion. This implies that cultural and religious domination can form and subordinates' ethno- religious identities resulting in inequity, social unrest and frequent conflicts that hinder people from engaging into meaningful ventures that serve as means of livelihood to them, thus throwing people into poverty, hunger and starvation that often results into diseases and consequently, deaths.

Objective two: to ascertain the effect of forced displacement on decent shelter of internally displaced persons

In order to ascertain whether forced displacement affect decent shelter, respondents' views were inquired; it was found that forced displacement renders internally displaced persons homeless and also affect their hygiene conditions as well as lack of decent shelter exposing them to natural hazards and affecting their access to education and other social amenities. This is in agreement with Ezeogidi, (2020), Mbah et al (2021), Alegbeleye, (2014), who noted that ethnoreligious conflicts affect socioeconomic well-being and social order as well as disrupt political systems leading to forced displacement of people who are termed settlers. This is further supported by Karl Max conflicts theory (1867) who opines that, power struggle for resource control play a significant part in ethno-religious conflicts leading to forced displacement of a significant number of population and as a result affecting decent shelter of the affected population.

5.0 Conclusion and recommendations

This study on ethno-religious conflict and socioeconomic wellbeing of internally displaced persons in North Central Nigeria is very timely and unequivocally crucial, as ensuring a peaceful coexistence that is free from religious extremism, incessant attacks, and forced displacement will enable the displaced persons to go back to their ancestral homes, businesses, worship of their respective religion, farming, school children will return to classes and normalcy will be returned. This will impact positively on their food security, decent shelter and overall socioeconomic well-being. This can be possible if sincere reconciliation is reached, it will transcend into members of

the different ethnic and religious groups to imbibe tolerance among themselves to allow their government to formulate and implement policies that will bring about development that have eluded them for a long time due to ethno-religious conflicts.

To this end, emphasis is laid on different ethnic ang religious groups to embrace tolerance so as to give peace a chance as no meaningful development and well-being cannot be achieved where there is no peace. It is therefore expected that government of these states will initiate programmes that will reconcile and rehabilitate the region that has witnessed social and economic unrest as a result of the prolong ethno-religious conflicts and:

i)   Government should conduct comprehensive food security assessments in areas affected by ethnic and religious conflict to understand the extent and nature of the problem. These assessments should include surveys, interviews, and data collection from displaced populations, local communities, and relevant stakeholders so that, policymakers can design targeted interventions.

ii)   Government should develop and implement sustainable food programs that focus on both immediate relief and long-term food security. These programs should include the distribution of emergency food aid, but also incorporate initiatives such as community gardens, vocational training in agriculture, and livelihood support. By addressing the root causes of food insecurity, such as disrupted livelihoods and agricultural activities, these programs can help IDPs regain self-sufficiency.

iii)   Government should conduct housing and shelter assessments in areas with a high concentration of IDPs to understand the specific challenges they face in accessing decent shelter. These assessments should involve collaboration with local housing authorities, NGOs, and international agencies to collect data on housing conditions, displacement trends, and the availability of safe and affordable housing options.

iv)   There should be support for adequate shelter by providing financial and technical support to improve housing conditions for IDPs. This support could include initiatives to repair and upgrade existing housing, build new housing units, and establish temporary shelter options. Additionally, explore partnerships with local organizations and agencies to facilitate access to affordable housing and rental assistance programs for displaced populations.

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