# INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT AND EMERGING TREND OF RURAL-RURAL MIGRATION IN NIGERIA: A STUDY OF TIV ETHNIC ENCLAVES IN NIGER STATE

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**ABSTRACT**

The increasing cases of internal displacement arising from conflicts across Nigeria and the emerging patterns of ethnic enclaves in rural communities are engendering a new phase of rural-rural migration. This is against the backdrop of the emergence of pockets of communities of Tiv migrants from Benue, Nasarawa and Plateau States resident in Niger State. Relying on documentary evidence as well as qualitative data from key informant interviews (KIIs), the study examines socio-political and economic factors that drive the current trend of rural-rural migration and situates its implication for future inter-group relations. The study posits that their migration and settlement patterns are driven by a combination of factors, such as fear, violence and exigencies of livelihood resulting from violent conflict between Tiv and other ethnic groups in the north-central geo-political region of Nigeria. It submits that pro-active measures that draw from the provisions of the Constitution of Nigeria need to be put in place in order to bring about necessary mitigation.



**Keywords**: Emerging, enclave, internal migration, settlership, and Tiv

## Introduction

The phenomenon of rural-rural migration arising from conflict-engendered internal displacements is assuming prominence as an emerging pattern of migration in Nigeria, especially in the past three decades. This trend of migration, which is at variance with the dominant pattern of rural-urban migration, is driven by displacement of large rural population occasioned by communal conflicts, banditry and insurgency. The desire to overcome socio-economic and political challenges facing individuals and groups has always prompted the need for a temporary or permanent relocation to other areas human security and livelihood.It is in realization of this fact that migration has been viewedas a rational human action (Mabogunje, 1970; Oyeniyi, 2013; Ikwuyatum, 2016).

Both intra-border and cross-border movements arising from desire for greener pastures or safety considerations still remain the dominant determinant for migration (Kirwin & Anderson, 2018). The economic environment, the social environment and politics act in different ways as push and pull factors in migration. This internal migration has been largely voluntary and characterized by rural-urban drift (Castelli, 2018).



The past three decades have witnessed a gradual transformation in the pattern of internal migration in Nigeria that is characterized by rural-rural movement. This is as a result of insurgency, Herders/farmers conflict, violent communal conflicts and banditry, which displace people out





of their ancestral land to other areas (Okau&Gomment, 2020). This phenomenon of post-crisis challenges is exemplified in the presence of internally displaced persons (IDP) camps in rural communities in Benue, Edo and even the Federal Capital Territory.

This phenomenon of forced migration, a situation where people are displaced from their ancestral homes because of violence or threat of violence, is engendering an unprecedented phase of rural-rural migration across Nigeria giving rise to what Portes (1981) refers to as "ethnic enclave". It is a settlement made up of groups of migrants from a particular ethnic group concentrated in a specific locality where they reside and engage in social and economic activities to serve their own ethnic market and/or the general population (Portes, 1981). In the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Edo and Niger States there are pockets of ethnic enclaves made up of predominantly people from a particular state or region displaced by violent conflicts.

The new displacement migration is largely defined by its trend of rural-rural movement, which is a departure from the dominant forms of rural-urban migration prevalent in the colonial and post-independence era. This emerging trend of internal migration is not only underpinned by safety consideration, it is characterized by a sustained movement of increasing small number of displaced persons from their area of permanent residence to another, which confers settler status on them.

A settler is perceived as a stranger, or a migrant who does not have rights of occupancy(Ojukwu&Onifade 2010, p.175). Right of occupancy in this sense describes limitation imposed on the person in terms of enjoying political, economic and social rights and privileges. Put succinctly, a settler is a non-indigene of a state (Best, 2007). Somebody whose status does not confer on him the right to enjoy some rights and privileges. A settler has an opposite status of an indigene. An indigene is somebody whose lineage is traced to specific place or community and as well being recognized by others as one of the legitimate owners of the place (Nwanegbo, Odigbo&Ochanja, 2014).

This study examines this contemporary pattern of rural-rural migration induced by displacement with focus on Tiv migrant settlers in Niger state of Nigeria. Providing answers to critical questions such as what informed their choice of destination, and what are the implications of their settlership status constitutes the objectives that this study seeks to achieve.

**Methodology**

This study adopts the qualitative research method relying on primary and secondary sources of data for descriptive analysis. Primary data sourced through key informant interview (KII) was generated from the migrantTiv settler communities in Niger state, which form the universe, of the study. The focal areas include six communities of RafinKwara, Kudna, Kango, Gbacidan in Lapai local





government, MuzuruGado in Gurarara and Gigbe spread across three local governments: Lapai, Gurara and Paiko.

The choice of these communities is justified by their status as "ethnic enclave". Tiv migrants constitute the dominant population in these areas. Six key informants were purposively selected from across the three local governments representing these communities and interviewed on a range of issues relating to the subject matter of the study. Secondary data was also generated from relevant journal articles and books. Both primary and secondary data are textually presented using descriptive analysis.

**Theoretical framework of Analysis**

The theory of forced migration is adopted for this study. It is a unifying theory as well as middle-ground theory that relies on trans-disciplinary inquiry into the system of migration (Vella, 2019). It argues that potential migrants use observational information in their environment to assess threat to their person and to form and revise beliefs about their personal safety by basing their decision on whether to stay owing to such beliefs or threat assessment. It assumes that a dissatisfied individual chooses the best alternative location; satisfied individuals move only if the alternative location is at least as good as the current one and individuals who know they cannot find partners move randomly (Hegselmann&Flache, 1998).

The forced theory of migration finds its usefulness in this study of rural-rural migration because of multidimensional analytical capacity, which combines both economic and non-economic migration determinants in explaining a factor that may drive an individual to migrate from one to place to another. This framework best explains the situation of forceful movement of displacedTiv migrants from Benue, Nasarawa, Plateeau and Taraba states to Niger State.

**The Emerging Trend of Rural-Rural Migration in Nigeria**

Migration study has revealed a trajectory involving different trends of migration.Oyeniyi (2013) observes that internal migration in Nigeria has manifested curious and complex trends involving rural-urban, rural-rural, urban-urban and urban-rural dynamics. According to him, internal migration is determined by a number of factors; the most notable being economic recession and economic growth, education, marriage, civil service transfer and national service. While these factors could explain the economic determinants of rural-urban and urban-urban migration they are inadequate in explaining forced migration.

The emerging trend of rural-rural migration is driven by internal displacement resulting from violent conflicts. The corollary of this is that decision to migrate is not determined necessarily by economic consideration but by human safety and assurance of livelihood. Across the country, violent contestations have resulted in internal





displacement of millions of people, mostly rural population owing to dwindling power of the state to exercise control over its territory. Most of those affected by these conflicts, some of whom have stayed in IDP camps for upward of four years, are rural dweller whose source of livelihood is dependent on peasant agricultural activities. Some of the decision to migrate becomes a function of their ability to assess threat which a for majority of rural-rural migration in Nigeria. Ravenstein celebrated the dominance of rural-urban migration as paraphrased by King thus:

Migrants move mainly over short distances; those going longer distances head for the great centers of industry and commerce; most migration is from agricultural to industrial areas; large towns grow more by migration than by natural increase; migration increases with the development of industry, commerce and transport; each migration stream produces a counter stream; females are more migratory than males, at least over short distances; males are a majority in international migration; the major sources of migration are economic( King, 2013, p.12).

Although there is sense in the statement that urban areas grow more by migration than by natural increase, the emphasis on economic determinism fails to recognize other determinants of urban demographics.

The fixation on rural-urban migration has its root in the colonial era and is sustained by the growing population in urban areas. The selective and unequal urban

development, which colonial government in Nigeria embarked upon resulted to growing disparity between urban and rural areas thereby making rural-urban migration a dominant pattern of migration (kirwin& Anderson, 2018). This is supported with the fact that Nigeria has a high urban growth of 4.0 percent with an annual projected population growth of 2.5 per cent in 2022 out of its 216 million people (UN, 2022). The dominant view has been that centrifugal factors at the place of habitual residence and centripetal factors at the place of destination serve as push-and-pull factors drawing migrants from rural to urban areas (Mabogunje, 1970; Samer, 2010; Olajide, 2013; Castelli, 2018).

Over the years, there has been a growing number of rural-rural migration across Nigeria due to internal displacement arising from insurgency, herders/farmers conflict, communal conflicts and rural banditry (IOM, 2021). Ikwuyatum (2016), observes that migration assumes different forms over space and time with the process and pattern in Nigeria, as in other countries in West Africa, becoming very dynamic and complex.This complexity is shown in the increasing number of settler communities across the country owing to internal displacement.

Though there is no official figure, the existence of settler communities of internally displaced persons, fleeing from Boko Haram insurgency, in the Federal Capital Territory and Edo State and that of Tiv settler communities in Niger state owing to persistent communal and





herders/famers conflicts, and banditry show a growing influence of non-economic factors as determinant of migration in the country.

From Ravenstein (1885, 1889) law of migration to Mabogunje (1970) world system approach and the 'new economics of labour migration' ramification in the globalization era, not much attention has been given to rural-rural movement of people at both individual and group levels due to displacement. But combination of factors ranging from declining state powers, climate change, ethnicity to religion have resulted in conflicts that have displaced thousands of people forcing them to migrate..

Ravensteins' law of migration as contained in the above outline fits into the glorification of rural-urban matrix of migration. It gives little attention to the fact that migration could be conditioned by the dynamic nature of society, which affects migration pattern. This is the reason King (2013, p.9)) observes that the 'age of migration' has seen a proliferation of new types of migration which forms important element of increasingly complex global map of population movement.

The emerging trajectory of rural-rural migration in Nigeria can be situated in the context of a new population movement that is not voluntarily determined but largely influenced by involuntary actions such as population displacement occasioned by insurgency, herders/farmers

conflict, communal conflicts, banditry and sundry criminal activities characterized by kidnapping and night raiding.

Analysis of the emerging trend of migration is amenable to the forced migration theory of Vella (2019). The reason for migration and choice of destination are no longer economically determined. Forced migrants use observational information in their environment to assess threat to their person and to form and revise beliefs about their personal safety before taking their decision on whether to stay owing to such beliefs or threat assessment. It assumes that a dissatisfied individual choose the best alternative location; satisfied individuals move only if the alternative location is at least as good as the current one and individuals who know they cannot find partners move randomly (Hegselmann&Flache, 1998).

Population displacement has become a major contributor to internal migration in Nigeria (Nwajiuba, 2011). It is in agreement with this view that Oyeniyi (2013, p.26) states that: Conflicts and wars in Africa have, at different times, stimulated in-migration and out-migration in different parts of Africa. While the Nigerian Civil War of 1967-1970 remained the only large scale civil conflict in Nigeria, intergroup conflicts of different kinds dotted Nigerian landscapes stimulating a flux of people compelled to seek refuge elsewhere.

The salience of this statement underscores the unprecedented huge population of displaced people across the country owing to violent conflicts. Report of the







Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) puts the number of internally displaced persons in Nigeria at 2,191,193 (IOM, 2021). Some of these people have been forced to migrate to different parts of the country, as the case under study.

**Tiv Migration to Niger State: The Background**

The past three decades have witnessed increasing cases of conflict along the Benue Valley, where the Tiv ethnic group live on both banks of the River Benue. This stretch of fertile land, which covers more than 800 kilometers, is home to six states namely Benue, Adamawa, Taraba, Nasarawa, Kogi and Plateau (Gyuse & Ajene, 2006). States like Benue, Nasarawa, Taraba and Plateau states have been in the center of the orgy of violent contestations arising from factors such as resources, psychological needs, values and recently poor governance (Best, 2006). The area is inhabited by a medley of other minority ethnic nationalities engaged majorly in peasant agriculture.

The Tiv ethnic group constitutes majority population in the Benue valley and is one of the largest ethnic groups in Nigeria numbering over six million. They have commanding human population in Benue state, and significant number of indigenous population in states like Nasarawa, Taraba and Plateau. Tivs have been in the centre of the major conflicts in this area resulting in massive population displacement (Wali & Egwu, 2003; Best &

Idyorough, 2003; Nnoli, 2003, Lyam, 2006; Azgaku, 2006; Jibo, 2014). Some of these conflicts, which the Tivs have been a party, include the Tiv/Jukun crises in Taraba and Benue states, Tiv/Azara conflict in Nasarawa, The Kwalla/Tiv conflict in Plateau state and the farmers/herders crises in Benue, Plateau, Nasarawa and Taraba states.

Tiv migration, which arises from displacement, is attributable to a combination of social, economic and political causes. Since 1991, they have been involved in violent communal conflicts with other communities resulting in lost of lives, livelihood crisis, population displacement, which creates dire humanitarian crisis. These challengeshave worked at different degrees to force them to migrate in large population as attested to by Best and Idyorough (2003) and Jibo (2014). The persistence of these communal conflicts in one form or the other has forced them to seek refuge outside their ancestral land (Yecho, 2006; Azgaku, 2006).

While incessant violent conflicts are implicated as a cause of the Tiv migration, the political dimension is represented by governance deficit. The near-absence of the state in most parts of the hinterland where Tiv communities live and engage in peasant agriculture suggest a situation of an ungoverned space with implications on human security. Key in this consideration is the increasing irrelevance of the state at the local level arising from emasculation of local governments by state governments as well as declining capacity of both state and federal governments to





provide security. As observed by Okoli (2021), the situation is exemplified by devastation caused by militancy, communal violence, insurgency and armed banditry.

Apparently, in their consideration of destination, human safety and livelihood play a very influential role. Majority of the displaced persons who are predominantly farmers prefer a relatively safe rural destinations where they can have access to land to live and engage in their farming activities (M. Awua, I. Iorshashe, M. Koryol& E. Jortar, personal communication, January 17, 2019).

Major factors that account for the choice of Niger State as the destination point for the Tiv migrants include distance, livelihood, and peace. It has been established that the greater intensity of violence the greater the initiative of forced migrants to undergo long distances to seek refuge (Bohra-Mishra & Massey, 2011). Distance is thus a major factor in the choice of Niger State destination. It is considered as a safe distance from Benue, Taraba, Nasarawa and Plateau States that have become theatres of ethno-political conflicts. The proximity of the areas they inhabit to the FCT provides incentive for livelihood activities as the area is endowed with fertile land for agricultural activities, which is the major occupation of the migrants (I. Anjier, personal communication, January 18, 2019).

Migration of displaced Tiv families to Niger is believed to have commenced in the early 90s following the Tiv/Jukun crisis of 1991 (Personal communication,

RafinKwara, April 25, 2019). Subsequent conflicts have ensured that the people move in drove for habitation in this rural communities.

The significance of the Tiv settlership in Niger state is underscored by the presence of what Portes (1981) calls "ethnic enclave". Tiv communities made up of displaced migrants from Benue, Nasarawa, Taraba and Plateau states are found in three local government areas in Niger state where they engaged in agricultural activities as their main business and also serve the interest of the Niger state in general (T. Hama, personal communication, Rafin Kwara, April 24, 2019).As Lee (1966) points out, personal contacts and sources of information are vital factors influencing migration decision. This factor accounts for the increasing number of Tiv migrant population in Niger state. The Tiv ethnic enclaves so far identified include Rafin Kwara,

Kudna, Muzuru, Gigbe, Kango and Gbacidan.

RafinKwara said to be the first and largest Tiv settlement is in Lapai Local government area. The early migrants from Taraba state populate it. Other Tiv enclaves found in Lapai local government area includes Kudna, Gbacidan and Kango. Gigbe is located in Paiko while Muzuru-Gado is situated in Gurara local government area. All these communities were founded between 1991 and 2000.





This migration of Tiv farming population to rural communities started in 1991 during the Tiv/Jukun crisis, which resulted in the displacement of large Tivpopulation in Taraba state (I. Iorshashe, personal communication, April 24, 2019).

**Settlership Pattern of Tiv Migrants in Niger State**

The settlership pattern of Tiv migrants in Niger State shows a significant similarity with a typical Tiv settlement in Benue State. They live in cluster in the areas they are found, mostly in mud and thatched houses, a practice still common in most rural areas of Tiv land. Their population is predominantly made up of yam farmers.



The head of a settlement is called a Zaki (leader in Tiv) who is also referred to as*Mai Angwa* (head of community in Hausa). The Zakis are usually the founders of these settlements. They pay tributes on behalf of the other settlers to Emirs of the kingdom they reside and also perform administrative role of settling minor disputes and ensuring peaceful inter communal cohabitation with their hosts. This practice is not different from what obtains back home. Except that the absence of state agents in these communities makes the*Zakis* and their lieutenants very important figures as no decisions can be taken without their input in every village.

Rafin-Kwara community provides a good example of what Tiv enclaves in Niger state looks like. The community is located off Lambata-Bida road in Lapai local government. It is the largest of theTiv enclaves in the state. There are claims that Rafin-Kwara was first inhabited in 1991 by oneIornonguIorshashe, a Tiv migrant who fled Taraba state in 1991 during the Tiv/Jukun conflict (I. Iorshashe, personal communication, April 24, 2019). He is the Zaki of the community.

The break down of law and order, which posed serious challenge to human safety, made him to relocate with his family to a free vast land in Lapai local government now known as Rafin-Kwara. Since then, there has been ceaseless influx of displaced migrants of Tiv extraction to the community.

RafinKwara and the other Tiv enclaves, Kudna, Muzuru Gado, Gigbe, Kango and Gbacidan wear the look of a typical Tiv Village in Benue state their ancestral homeland. Evidence of Tiv culture and tradition are visible everywhere across these enclaves. This sets them apart from the neighbouring communities of the indigenous people.

The community is believed to have an unofficial population of about 1000 Tiv migrants. For Christian worship, a Roman Catholic Church and an NKST Church service the community. NKST is an indigenous Tiv church meaning *Nongu u Kristu u IserSha Tar*, meaning the





Universal Reformed Christian Church in English translation. The Tiv people are predominantly worship in Catholic and NKST churches. This mode of worship is also reflected in their life style in Niger state.

The settlership status of Tiv people in areas they reside in Niger state is not debatable.They recognize that they are being hosted by the indigenes of Niger state and do everything not to abuse the privilege. Most of the settlers are first generation migrants who are fully aware of how they got to Niger state and the circumstances that led them their. They still maintain close family ties with members of their families back in their respective states and see themselves as settlers (I. Anjier, personal communication, April 24, 2019).

**Rural-Rural Migration and Implications of Inter-group Relations**

Rural-rural migration has the capacity to diffuse the potency of some critical factors that give communal conflicts its virulent character in Nigeria. Cordial inter-group relations resulting from rural-rural migration could be a very critical element in national integration as people of different ethnic groups and religions are made to interact with each other. However, conflict over issues such as ethnicity, religion, identity politics and cultural prejudices in addition to competition for natural resources are likely implications of inter-group relations. Communal conflicts assume its critical salience from the deployment of these primordial factors (Egwu, 2006).

The implications of these factors on inter-group relations in both urban and rural areas in Nigeria have been through competition for control over natural resources, identity politics, cultural prejudices and religious intolerance. The lack of capacity of the Nigeria state to manage these factors has been a major factor driving social, economic and political conflicts across the country.

It is obvious that conflict could lead to migration and migration, which enhances contact between people of different backgrounds, has demonstrated its capacity as a veritable source of schism. This conflict begets migration and migration begets conflict matrix intricately defines implications of demographic mobility in social relations. This is not to assume that migration, at all times, generate conflict or conflict generates migration always. Rather, as Nnoli (1978) observes, it is the degree of competing claims among the people (indigenes and settlers) over available resources that brings conflict.

Conflictual inter-group relations between the Tiv settlers and the indigenes of Niger State could take time to manifest, but that could be a function of available natural resources such as land for agricultural activities. Dispute over land, especially, could pose a serious implication on the relationship between the Tiv migrants and their hosts in due course if not properly managed. Land remains an existential threat to inter-group relations as it is not only an economic factor but also an ancestral heritage and symbol





of socio-political prominence (Okoli&Ukwandu, 2021). This could happen if the population of migrants continues to increase thereby putting pressure on existing space.

Aside competition for land, conflict rooted in cultural differences could pose serious challenge to inter-group relations between the Tiv migrants and their Niger state hosts. The Tivs and their hosts have different ethno-religious background with little or no cultural affinity. These differences could be a tool for manipulation of the rural populace by political elites desperately seeking state power. An instance of this is the *Ombatse* crisis in Nasarawa State.

The early challenge of the Tiv migrants was largely characterized by adjustment challenges. They had to contend with settling down in a new environment with absence of social amenities. Several years after, complete government absence still sets these settlements apart from other indigenous communities around them. "The situation here is so pathetic. The community has no public school, no access to portable water, no electricity, no primary health care facilities, and no access road" (E. Jortar, personal communication, April 25, 2019).

The implication of this on individuals and the society is that these settler communities may soon start to acquire the nature and character of ungoverned spaces with its attendant consequences. Ungoverned spaces are characterized by absence of the state (Raleigh, 2013). This is defined in terms of state presence in the provision of

amenities and administrative structure. Absence of state presence in these communities could create a vacuum likely to be filled by criminal elements that could use them as fortress for nefarious activities.

In the long run, the apparent cases of negligence and marginalization of the migrant communities could be a recipe for demands for political participation and contestations with implications on inter-group relations. This could inexorably pitch the settlers against their hosts. The likely disparity in terms of distribution of social amenities and access to state power between the settler and indigenous people may be the driver of bitter ethnic feud in future as we have seen in Ife versus Modakeke in Osun state and between Hausa and Kataf in Zango- Kataf Kaduna state. The lack of coordinated policy on internal migration by the Nigerian state,according to Oyeniyi(2013), leaves migrants completely at the mercy of their host communities.

**Conclusion**

The increasing cases of internal population displacement of rural people, arising from violent conflicts, have brought a trend of rural-rural migration in Nigeria. This is exemplified by the presence of ethnic enclave of Tiv settlers in some local communities in Niger State of Nigeria. This emerging trend of rural-rural migration, which is capable of enhancing national integration, also has implications on inter-group relations in the future. Factors such as competition for natural resources, identity politics





and cultural differences/prejudices could be sources of violent contestation arising from the contact between the settlers and indigenous population.

Rural-rural migration is assuming position of significance owing to two basic factors: declining opportunities in urban areas due to national economic decline and the increasing number of displaced agrarian population resulting from increasing cases of communal violence, banditry, herders/farmers, and kidnapping. While the former acts as disincentive for rural-urban migration, the latter increases rural-rural migration. It is evident that forced rural migrants prefer to go to rural areas where they have access to land for agricultural activities in spite of the daunting challenges. It is therefore recommended as follows:

(a) The experience of displaced Tiv migrants as shown in the analysis in this study has demonstrated that the Nigerian state and international organisations have done very little in developing a legal frame that stipulates the rights and obligations of internally displaced persons, like has been done for refugees. The International Organisation for Migration (IOM) and other relevant organisations need to, as a matter of urgency, develop a legal framework on the rights and obligations of migrants.

(b) The lack of government presence in the migrant settlements has the potential of turning them

into 'ungoverned spaces' in the future with attendant consequence that they could become breeding ground for criminals. Niger State government needs to identify these communities and ensure government presence in terms of provision of social amenities and presence of security agents.

(c) Because of the sensitive nature of issues relating to land, the government come up with a clear policy on land use to prevent conflict between settlers and indigenes over land.

(d) Niger state government should pursue a conscious effort to integrate the Tiv migrant communities to the larger indigenous Niger State community

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