# THE DILEMMA OF INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS (IDPs): BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN THEORY AND REALITY

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**ABSTRACT**

*Internal displacement remains a critical humanitarian and ethical issue, especially in Nigeria, where it is driven by entrenched socio-political dynamics. While existing literature highlights legal and policy frameworks, these often overlook the lived, context-specific realities of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Africa. A persistent gap exists between theoretical models and local experiences. This study addresses this disconnect by foregrounding the complex realities of displacement in Nigeria.*

*The research employs a contextually grounded, mixed-methods approach. It combines a comprehensive review of relevant literature and policy documents with fieldwork conducted in Abuja, Nigeria. Data includes in-depth interviews with IDPs and key stakeholders, enabling a robust analysis of both theoretical assumptions and on-the-ground conditions.*

*Engaging critically with legal and humanitarian paradigms, the study challenges dominant frameworks that universalize displacement. It argues for an epistemic shift toward context-sensitive models that reflect the cultural and socio-political particularities of Nigerian IDPs. Findings reveal significant shortcomings, despite the presence of international conventions and national policies, IDPs continue to face structural marginalization, inadequate access to resources, and poor coordination among humanitarian actors. Interview data illustrate a pronounced misalignment between policy intentions and the lived experiences of displaced persons, particularly in terms of agency, representation, and adaptive capacity.*

*The research concludes that current protection frameworks inadequately address the realities of Nigerian IDPs. A fundamental rethinking of displacement response is required, one that centres on local knowledge and conditions.*
*This study bridges the theory-practice divide and advances a more grounded framework for humanitarian action. Its focus on local voices marks a shift from abstraction to practical relevance.*
*The study advocates for adaptive, locally-informed strategies that prioritize agency, resource flexibility, and cross-sectoral coordination in addressing internal displacement.*

## Introduction

The global phenomenon of internal displacement, where individuals are forced to flee their homes without crossing international borders, has emerged as one of the most urgent humanitarians, legal, and ethical challenges of the 21st century. Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) often fall into a legal grey zone: unlike refugees, they are not covered by the 1951 Refugee Convention or its 1967 Protocol, leaving them without access to established international protection mechanisms. While the development of the *Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement* (UN, 1998) marked a significant normative milestone by articulating the rights of IDPs and the responsibilities of states, these principles remain non-binding and variably implemented across national contexts. Importantly, despite these international normative frameworks and national policies aimed at protecting IDPs, internally displaced persons in Nigeria, especially in Abuja's informal camps, continue to face systemic neglect, inadequate service delivery, and poor access to essential services such as healthcare. In the Nigerian context, the protection of IDPs is further complicated by legal and institutional deficiencies. Although the 1999 Nigerian Constitution guarantees fundamental human rights, it lacks specific provisions addressing the plight of IDPs (Olayoku, 2014; Mohammed, 2017). The National Policy on Internally Displaced Persons (2012; revised 2021) represents a state-level attempt to domesticate global protection standards, yet its operationalization has remained inconsistent and largely symbolic (IDMC, 2023; NRC, 2021). Existing literature underscores the structural disconnect between policy frameworks and the lived experiences of displaced persons, citing persistent issues such as institutional fragmentation, lack of coordination among humanitarian actors, and limited political will (Ferris, 2011; Cohen & Deng, 1998; Owoaje et al., 2016).

Scholars have made notable contributions to understanding the causes of displacement in Nigeria, ranging from Boko Haram insurgency and communal violence to climate-induced disasters and forced evictions (Crisp, 2010; IASC, 2010). Research has also examined the socio-economic vulnerabilities of IDPs, particularly in relation to access to shelter, education, and health care (UNHCR, 2022; MSF, 2020). However, while these studies provide descriptive accounts and normative critiques, they often stop short of evaluating innovative, context-specific solutions that bridge the implementation gap between theory and practice. Moreover, limited empirical engagement with IDP voices and community-driven insights remains a major blind spot in the literature. The recurring gap between policy articulation and practical implementation has created a protection vacuum, leaving IDPs in protracted vulnerability. This disconnect raises urgent questions about the effectiveness, contextual relevance, and accountability mechanisms of existing protection structures. There is a critical need to examine not only the shortcomings of current frameworks but also to identify innovative, empirically grounded, and context-sensitive solutions that reflect the lived realities of displaced populations in Nigeria.

This study responds directly to these gaps by interrogating the asymmetry between existing protection frameworks and the lived experiences of IDPs in Nigeria, with a specific focus on Abuja's displacement camps. It critically

engages the literature's dominant top-down orientation by foregrounding a bottom-up, empirically grounded analysis. The study specifically investigates access to healthcare, a severely under-explored domain in the Nigerian IDP literature, and evaluates the viability of a pilot project deploying mobile satellite communication units for digital health services. By offering a novel intersection of humanitarian technology, health equity, and participatory protection strategies, this research departs from existing analyses that primarily focus on legal and policy deficits.

Through fieldwork, stakeholder interviews, and analysis of policy documents, the study assesses the potential for scalable, community-integrated solutions that address structural constraints while preserving human dignity and agency. In doing so, it contributes not only to the theoretical understanding of internal displacement in fragile contexts, but also to the development of actionable, context-sensitive frameworks that can inform policy and practice. Ultimately, this research challenges the prevailing paradigms in IDP scholarship and proposes a recalibrated approach that aligns normative aspirations with the pragmatic realities of displacement in Nigeria. It offers actionable recommendations for improving humanitarian response, thereby contributing to a more responsive, equitable, and effective displacement protection system in Nigeria.

## Research Questions

This study attempts the investigation of the following key questions: How do the lived experiences of IDPs diverge from the protections afforded by international legal and policy frameworks? What are the primary obstacles hindering the effective implementation of these frameworks? What practical strategies can be employed to bridge the gap between theory and reality in IDP protection and assistance?

## Clarification of concepts

Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) are individuals compelled to flee their homes due to armed conflict, violence, human rights violations, or disasters, yet remain within their country's borders (UNGP, 1998; Cohen & Deng, 2012). Unlike refugees, IDPs do not cross international boundaries and therefore fall outside the scope of international refugee law. This internality, however, complicates their protection: while still under state jurisdiction, IDPs often lack access to the very rights their citizenship ostensibly guarantees. The prevailing frameworks assume state capacity and willingness to protect, but this assumption is increasingly untenable in fragile or complicit states. Thus, the IDP category exposes a critical tension between legal status and lived vulnerability, inviting a rethinking of protection that goes beyond borders and legal classifications to focus on state accountability and the politics of internal displacement.

## Theories and Realities of the State of IDP Camps in Nigeria: A Critical Literature Interrogation

The situation of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Nigeria exposes a troubling discrepancy between theoretical commitments and the lived experiences of displaced populations. At the heart of this dilemma lies a recurring humanitarian paradox: despite robust legal and policy frameworks at both international and national levels, IDPs remain largely neglected in terms of basic welfare and protection. Nigeria's adoption of the Kampala Convention (African Union, 2009) is frequently cited as evidence of its commitment to addressing internal displacement. While this convention is lauded as the first legally binding regional instrument on IDPs, its mere ratification does not equate to actionable protection. Its strength lies in the potential it provides states to domesticate and operationalize rights-based responses. However, in the Nigerian context, this potential has remained largely unrealized. No enforceable domestic law has translated the convention's rights-based principles into legally binding obligations, which weakens their applicability and limits accountability mechanisms.

Similarly, the National Policy on Internally Displaced Persons (2012; revised 2021) outlines comprehensive strategies for the management of displacement. However, its practical utility is constrained by its non-binding status. As such, it is more aspirational than actionable. Ferris (2011) and Mohammed (2017) emphasize that this implementation gap stems from bureaucratic inertia, fragmented institutional capacity, and insufficient political will. Ferris's analysis is particularly instructive in highlighting how systemic corruption and state complicity in displacement, such as through forced evictions

or failed security interventions, further undermine policy credibility.

The Norwegian Refugee Council (2021) and the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC, 2023) corroborate these claims by offering empirical evidence of the consequences of failed implementation. Their reports note persistent issues such as overcrowded IDP camps, limited healthcare access, and the absence of long-term reintegration strategies. While their documentation is thorough, it presumes that the main challenge is resource scarcity. This view overlooks the deeper political economy of displacement, where humanitarian crises often become sites of bureaucratic profiteering and governance failure.

The UNHCR (2022) and Médecins Sans Frontières (2020) describe the health crises in Nigerian IDP camps, including high incidences of malnutrition, communicable diseases, and mental health disorders. Their insights underscore the disconnect between international health protocols and the local realities in displacement camps. However, these reports tend to underexplore the structural causes of health inequities, such as land tenure insecurity, environmental degradation, and marginalization of minority groups, which are not simply the result of logistical failure but of systemic neglect.

The scale of Nigeria's internal displacement is staggering. Sasu (2022) reports an increase from 1.07 million IDPs in 2014 to 2.7 million in 2023. While these figures highlight the magnitude of the crisis, they require contextualization. The raw data, though compelling, does not account for the unregistered IDPs outside formal camps, those living with relatives, in urban slums, or in transit. These "invisible populations" fall through the cracks of humanitarian assessments and remain largely excluded from aid distributions and policy planning.

In tracing historical antecedents, John (2022) references the Nigerian Civil War (1967–1970), noting the displacement of approximately 10 million people. This historical lens is important, as it situates displacement not merely as a contemporary issue but a recurring feature of Nigerian statehood. However, the comparison underemphasizes the differences in institutional capacity, international engagement, and media attention then and now. Thus, while historically informative, the parallel must be rich. This way, Rahila (2022) expands on the drivers of displacement in Nigeria, identifying conflict, environmental disasters, and political violence. Her account is valuable for its holistic perspective but would benefit from a more critical evaluation of the state's role, not just as a responder to crises, but as an active participant in the political and economic structures that produce displacement. The assumption that the government is merely overwhelmed or under-resourced fails to explain patterns of selective intervention and abandonment.

Lawson and Temisere (2020) observe that some displaced persons seek refuge with relatives rather than in camps, suggesting a significant gap in official IDP data. This insight challenges the dominant camp-centric model of humanitarian response. It invites a shift towards community-based protection mechanisms and calls for an expanded definition of displacement that includes social and economic dislocation.

Beyene (2023) identifies the strain on host communities due to the influx of IDPs. While important, this line of inquiry must also scrutinize the state's abdication of responsibility. The burden on host communities is not simply a logistical challenge but a consequence of poor urban planning, unregulated migration patterns, and weak decentralization.

From a health perspective, UNICEF (2020) and Afzal (2020) report alarmingly high malnutrition rates (18%) in IDP camps, well above the global emergency threshold of 15%. These figures suggest a failure not just of service delivery but of camp design and management. The absence of urban planners and public health experts in camp development points to a critical oversight in humanitarian governance.

The International Displacement Monitoring Centre (2022) documents the health risks in Abuja's IDP camps, including a 2021 cholera outbreak with 385 cases and 13 deaths. This reflects broader institutional dysfunction and the inability of agencies like NEMA and SEMA to mitigate preventable crises. Their role, while central, often appears reactive rather than preventative.

Ngwa et al. (2020) and Winifred et al. (2021) highlight the widespread prevalence of malaria, malnutrition, PTSD, and depression among IDPs. These findings point to the need for integrated, trauma-informed care models, rather than

episodic interventions. The tendency to isolate health from its social determinants, such as housing, sanitation, and food security, continues to hamper sustainable recovery.

Finally, Badeson and Chatharal (2020) offer a comprehensive list of challenges facing IDPs: food insecurity, rising crime, ethnic tension, and poor sanitation. Their critique is effective in mapping the symptoms but falls short of interrogating the underlying policy incoherence and institutional decay.

This literature interrogation reveals a consistent pattern: policies and conventions are in place, but implementation is fragmented, under-resourced, and politically compromised. The lived experiences of Nigeria's IDPs diverge sharply from the rights and protections promised on paper. Bridging this gap requires a shift from normative rhetoric to actionable, context-sensitive frameworks grounded in accountability, local agency, and interdisciplinary coordination. This study situates itself within that gap, aiming to offer empirically informed pathways for reform that respond not only to what IDPs lack, but why they continue to lack it.

## Nigeria and IDP Camps: Examination of Abuja Camps

An internally displaced person (IDP) is someone who has been forced to leave their home but is still within their country's borders. Internal displacement is a global phenomenon, but nearly three-quarters of the world's IDPs live in just 10 countries - Syria, Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Ukraine, Colombia, Ethiopia, Yemen, Nigeria, Somalia and Sudan (Report of the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) 2022), as a result of unresolved conflicts that continued to trigger unrest.

The total number of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Nigeria first became significant after the Nigerian-Biafra civil war of 1967-1970. It is now estimated at 4.5 million and continues to rise (Report of the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) 2022). The current wave of IDPs is driven by terrorism, effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, natural or human-made disasters within a given geographical region among others. It is imperative to provide social support and health services to this vulnerable population who has lost their sources of livelihood, housing, and access to quality health services. The Federal Government of Nigeria and many humanitarian organizations have jointly embarked on schemes and various aid programs geared toward the settling of IDPs by building camps and various structures to serve as shelters for them while administering the necessities for their continued safety and health.

As of December 2022, there were approximately 4.5 million IDPs in the country. This places Nigeria as the third-highest country in Africa for the number of IDPs, behind the Democratic Republic of Congo and Ethiopia (IDMC, 2023). Sadly, the plight of Nigeria's IDPs often goes unnoticed and neglected. In Nigeria, Boko Haram and other non-state armed groups as well as clashes between herders and farmers have pushed some 4.7 million Nigerians (as of November 2024) out of their homes, especially in parts of North-East Nigeria and the country's Middle Belt, but increasingly also in North-West Nigeria. An estimated 40% of IDPs live in 309 camps and camp-like settings and 60% live in 2,072 host communities. Below are the IDP camps in Abuja:

**Area 1 IDP Camp, Durumi, Area 1, Abuja**

Urban IDP camps are theoretically designed to offer safety, stability, and access to essential services by leveraging city infrastructure. Ideally, such settings enable better aid delivery, integration into local economies, and access to healthcare and education. However, conditions at Abuja's Durumi Area 1 camp reveal a stark disconnect from these ideals. The camp faces severe overcrowding, poor sanitation, unreliable water access, and heightened health risks (MSF, 2020). Residents endure food insecurity due to erratic aid, lack stable incomes, and have limited access to education, contributing to high dropout rates (IOM, 2022; UNICEF Nigeria, 2021). The looming threat of eviction, amid uncertain land tenure and urban expansion, adds to their vulnerability. While humanitarian frameworks advocate coordinated support, the reality at Durumi highlights the urgent need for practical, context-sensitive interventions that uphold the dignity and rights of IDPs.

**New Kunchingoro, IDP Camp, Games Village, Abuja**

The name "Games Village" suggests structure and community, yet New Kuchingoro IDP camp

in Abuja reflects prolonged displacement, uncertainty, and marginalization. Intended as a temporary shelter, the camp has become a space of stagnation with limited pathways to resettlement or self-reliance (Brookings & UNHCR, 2010). Despite its proximity to the city, residents face exclusion from formal employment due to legal barriers, discrimination, and a lack of vocational skills, forcing many into unstable, exploitative informal labor (NRC, 2021). Promises of empowerment through training and livelihoods are often undermined by poor coordination and inconsistent funding (IOM, 2022). Women and youth are particularly vulnerable, facing risks such as gender-based violence and child labor (UNHCR, 2022). New Kuchingoro exemplifies the gap between policy and reality, underscoring the need for sustained, inclusive, and context-driven responses that transform theoretical empowerment into tangible progress for IDPs.

**Wassa Settlement, Apo Mechanic Village**

Though Wassa IDP Settlement's proximity to Abuja's Apo Mechanic Village suggests potential economic integration, this advantage is undermined by exploitative informal labor marked by unstable jobs, poor conditions, and low wages (ILO, 2021). While resilience frameworks highlight displaced persons' adaptive capacities, Wassa residents face systemic neglect and chronic underemployment. Many lack formal IDs, barring access to formal jobs, financial services, and legal protection, deepening their marginalization, especially among women and youth (UNHCR, 2022; NRC, 2020). Without official recognition or inclusion in urban planning, they remain excluded from essential social services (Ferris, 2016). Thus, economic empowerment models relying solely on informal sector participation fall short, underscoring the need for inclusive policies, legal safeguards, and sustained investments in skills and infrastructure.

**Kuje host community by Abuja at 30 Housing Unit, Zone D**

Integration into host communities ideally offers IDPs access to social networks and resources, fostering mutual support and resilience (IASC, 2010). However, in Kuje's Abuja at 30 Housing Unit, this ideal clashes with reality. Strained social services, limited infrastructure, and scarce livelihood opportunities fuel competition and tensions between hosts and IDPs (Ferris & Ferro-Ribeiro, 2012). Overcrowding, poor access to water and healthcare, and inadequate housing often undermine integration efforts (UNHCR, 2022). Moreover, unequal resource distribution and lack of IDP participation in local governance exacerbate social exclusion and conflict (IDMC, 2021; Brookings Institution, 2010). True integration requires inclusive governance, fair resource allocation, and community engagement to address the needs of both displaced and host populations.

## How Can Theory Be Translated into Practice for Effective IDP Support in Abuja, Nigeria?

What explains the persistent disjunction between established theoretical frameworks for IDP protection and the lived realities of displaced persons in Abuja, Nigeria? This research interrogates why, despite a proliferation of policy instruments, such as the Kampala Convention and Nigeria's National Policy on IDPs, tangible improvements in the lives of displaced persons remain elusive. Are these frameworks structurally deficient, or is the failure rooted in context-specific implementation gaps? The findings reveal that while existing policies provide a normative foundation, their translation into practice is obstructed by systemic barriers including fragmented governance, inadequate resources, and weak accountability structures.

## Beyond Policy Pronouncements: What Drives or Hinders Action?

How can stakeholders move beyond rhetorical commitment to effective, on-the-ground interventions? Unlike prior studies that primarily highlight institutional incapacity or resource constraints (e.g., UNHCR, 2021; IDMC, 2021), this research emphasizes the need for an adaptive governance model, one that is responsive to Nigeria's socio-political complexities and displacement drivers. It finds that sustainable IDP support requires decentralizing implementation, improving inter-agency coordination, and embedding anti-corruption mechanisms into aid delivery (Transparency International, 2020). Moreover, this research questions whether standard frameworks, often designed for generalized displacement contexts, adequately account for

Abuja's urban informality and demographic heterogeneity. It argues that one-size-fits-all models may in fact entrench existing inequalities, unless recalibrated through locally embedded, participatory processes (IASC, 2010).

## Empowerment or Dependency? Who Holds Agency in Displacement Contexts?

Is it sufficient to treat IDPs as beneficiaries, or must they be repositioned as co-architects of their own recovery? Contrary to earlier works that often frame IDPs as passive recipients of aid (e.g., Ferris, 2011), this study underscores the theoretical and practical importance of empowerment as a central pillar in displacement response. Access to education, vocational training, and decision-making mechanisms is not merely instrumental, it is constitutive of human dignity and long-term resilience. Thus, the research contributes conceptually by shifting the focus from humanitarian relief to rights-based, capability-enhancing approaches that restore agency to displaced persons.

## Can Collaboration be More Than a Buzzword?

Given the complex web of actors involved in IDP support, how can collaboration be meaningfully structured? While previous literature acknowledges the importance of coordination (NRC, 2021), this study identifies the lack of shared accountability frameworks and trust as critical barriers to effective partnerships. It argues that true collaboration must go beyond project-level coordination to include co-design, open information-sharing, and joint monitoring mechanisms between governmental, humanitarian, and civil society actors. In doing so, it adds a nuanced layer to existing debates on multi-stakeholder displacement governance.

## Is Sustainability Achievable Without Addressing Structural Violence?

To what extent can displacement solutions be sustainable if underlying causes, such as conflict, governance failure, and environmental degradation, remain unaddressed? Building on and expanding the arguments of the World Bank (2020) and UNDP (2021), this research contends that sustainability must be reconceptualized to include systemic transformation. Rather than treating displacement as a temporary emergency, the findings advocate for integrative models that combine immediate humanitarian assistance with long-term development strategies, rooted in inclusive policy reform, peacebuilding, and equitable access to services (IOM, 2022).

Unlike many studies that focus on the technical or logistical challenges of aid delivery, this work interrogates the political economy of displacement, uncovering how elite capture, informal settlements, and invisible populations (those outside formal camps) complicate the implementation of durable solutions. Thus, this research extends the discourse by emphasizing that bridging the theory-practice divide is not only a question of capacity but one of political will and institutional ethics.

## What Does this Study Add?

By posing these critical questions, this study challenges the assumption that well-designed policies automatically yield meaningful change. Instead, it reveals the contested terrain between normative ideals and operational realities, and proposes context-sensitive, empirically grounded strategies for narrowing this gap. It diverges from previous studies by spotlighting issues of agency, structural exclusion, and adaptive governance, while converging on the shared recognition that the current system is inadequate. Ultimately, this research aims to provide not only a critique but a roadmap, one that aligns policy aspirations with the lived experiences of Nigeria's internally displaced populations.

## Findings

### I. Limitations of Existing Theoretical Frameworks

This research reveals a disconnect from ground realities. Theoretical models in this case oversimplify the complex dynamics of displacement, failing to account for local contexts, cultural nuances, and the specific vulnerabilities of diverse IDP groups. International legal instruments, while providing a foundation, often lack enforcement mechanisms and are not adequately implemented at the national and local levels. The "protection" paradigm may be too top-down, neglecting the agency and self-reliance of IDP

communities. Again, there is inadequate consideration of specific challenges. Existing frameworks are not adequately addressing the unique challenges faced by women, children, and persons with disabilities within IDP populations.

This way, the interplay between displacement, conflict, and climate change are not be fully integrated into theoretical models. The long-term implications of displacement, including social integration and economic recovery, are often overlooked.

**II. Specific Challenges Faced by IDPs in Abuja, Nigeria**

This research reveals security and protection challenges. Persistent insecurity and violence in conflict-affected areas, even within IDP camps, exposing IDPs to further trauma and risk. Lack of access to justice and legal remedies for IDPs who have experienced human rights violations. The risk of forced returns to unsafe areas. Again, humanitarian assistance poses another challenge. Inadequate and inconsistent delivery of humanitarian aid, including food, water, shelter, and healthcare. Corruption and mismanagement of aid resources, leading to inequitable distribution and limited impact. Overcrowding and poor sanitation in IDP camps, contributing to the spread of disease. Moreso, there are socio-economic challenges. Limited access to education, employment, and livelihood opportunities for IDPs. Discrimination and social exclusion by host communities, hindering integration and self-reliance. Psychological trauma and mental health issues stemming from displacement and conflict. Importantly, governmental policy ends at theory rather than addressing the lived experiences. Weak implementation of national IDP policies and laws. Lack of coordination among government agencies, humanitarian organizations, and other stakeholders. Insufficient political will and resource allocation to address the needs of IDPs.

**III. Best Practices and Innovative Approaches**

There is need for a shift from government focus to community-Based Approaches. Empowering IDP communities to participate in decision-making processes and develop their own solutions. Strengthening local coping mechanisms and social networks. Utilizing community-based monitoring and reporting systems to ensure accountability. There is also need for a multi-sectoral intervention. This way, integrating humanitarian assistance with development initiatives to promote long-term recovery and resilience. Addressing the root causes of displacement, including conflict, poverty, and climate change. Promoting education, skills training, and livelihood programs to empower IDPs economically. The advancement of science and technology are under-valued. Utilizing mobile technology and data analytics to improve aid delivery and monitoring. Employing geospatial mapping to identify and assess the needs of IDP populations. Using social media and online platforms to raise awareness and mobilize support. This calls for improved coordination and collaboration. Strengthening partnerships between government agencies, humanitarian organizations, and civil society. Establishing clear roles and responsibilities for all stakeholders. Enhancing information sharing and data management. There is also need to focus on Mental Health and Psychosocial Support. Integrating mental health services into humanitarian response plans. Providing culturally appropriate psychosocial support to IDPs. Addressing the trauma experienced by children and other vulnerable groups.

**IV. Bridging the Gap**

This research reveals that to bridge the gap, there is need for increased political commitment. Prioritizing IDP protection in national and international agendas. Strengthening legal and policy frameworks. Allocating adequate resources to address the needs of IDPs. Various research on IDPs is underutilized in determining issues of the IDPs. There is need for enhanced Data Collection and Analysis. Improving the quality and availability of data on IDP populations. Using data to inform policy decisions and program design. Conducting regular assessments of IDP needs and vulnerabilities. There is need for meaningful participation of IDPs. Including IDPs in all stages of planning and implementation of assistance programs. Ensuring that IDP voices are heard and their needs are addressed. These findings, can contribute valuable insights into the complex challenges of IDP protection and inform the development of more effective and sustainable solutions.

## Conclusion

This research has critically interrogated the persistent divergence between theoretical frameworks for IDP protection and the lived experiences of internally displaced persons, with a focused lens on Abuja, Nigeria. While national and international instruments, such as the Kampala Convention and Nigeria's National Policy on IDPs, articulate rights-based commitments, this study finds that these frameworks remain largely aspirational in practice. The global crisis of internal displacement, affecting millions, illustrates the structural inadequacies of prevailing humanitarian paradigms, which often prioritize standardized, top-down responses over context-specific, participatory strategies.

Conceptually, this study challenges the assumption that legal and policy formulations inherently lead to effective protection. The findings underscore that theoretical models, while normatively robust, frequently fail to account for the political economy of displacement, bureaucratic inertia, and the agency of displaced persons themselves. This divergence calls for a rethinking of protection theory, from a static rights-based model to a dynamic, context-responsive framework rooted in local realities and lived experiences.

Methodologically, by employing a mixed-methods approach, integrating critical literature review, and qualitative interviews, this research provides a multidimensional view of the challenges and opportunities in IDP support. It highlights overlooked factors such as informal displacement, corruption in aid distribution, and the exclusion of IDPs from decision-making processes, thereby offering a more grounded understanding than studies that rely solely on policy analysis or camp-based assessments.

Compared to earlier studies, which often attribute implementation failures to resource scarcity or institutional weakness (e.g., Ferris, 2011; UNHCR, 2021), this research argues that deeper structural and governance issues, such as elite capture, policy incoherence, and the marginalization of displaced voices are at the heart of the problem. At the same time, it aligns with recent critiques (e.g., IDMC, 2023; Rahila, 2022) that emphasize the need for more inclusive, durable, and locally informed solutions.

Theoretically, the study contributes to the evolving discourse on displacement by proposing a shift from a protectionist logic to an empowerment-oriented, resilience-based approach. It suggests that sustainable responses must be holistic, bridging humanitarian aid and development planning, while addressing the root causes of displacement such as conflict, governance failures, and socio-economic exclusion.

Conclusively, bridging the gap between theory and reality in IDP protection is not simply a matter of better implementation; it requires reconceptualizing what protection entails, who drives it, and how it is sustained. This research offers both a critique and a path forward, calling for stronger political will, equitable resource distribution, improved coordination, and, crucially, the central inclusion of IDP voices in policy formation. By reframing IDPs not as passive beneficiaries but as active agents in their recovery, this study moves the conversation beyond theoretical commitments toward more just and actionable outcomes.

## Recommendations

### 1. Reform and Contextualization of Theoretical Framework and Foster Community-Led Solutions

To ensure relevance and effectiveness, global IDP protection frameworks should be adapted to local realities by incorporating cultural, social, and gender-specific vulnerabilities. In Nigeria, this entails domesticating the Kampala Convention through enforceable legislation that promotes inclusive and context-sensitive responses. Protection models should transition from top-down approaches to dynamic, community-driven frameworks that emphasize the agency and self-reliance of IDP communities. Furthermore, theoretical models must be expanded to address intersecting issues such as climate change, conflict, and displacement. Achieving this requires interdisciplinary collaboration among environmental scientists, conflict analysts, and humanitarian actors. Finally, displacement frameworks should integrate long-term recovery and reintegration goals, ensuring that solutions are sustainable and not limited to short-term emergency responses.

**Strengthening IDP Protection and Welfare in Abuja**

Efforts to enhance IDP protection in Abuja should begin with improving camp security and legal protection mechanisms. This can be achieved by establishing independent monitoring systems and mobile legal aid clinics to address human rights violations and prevent forced returns. To ensure transparency in aid delivery, anti-corruption measures such as digital vouchers, biometric registration, and third-party audits must be implemented. Tailored support services for vulnerable groups, particularly women, children, and persons with disabilities, should be prioritized through targeted healthcare, education, and protection interventions. Additionally, mobile health and sanitation units should be deployed to address overcrowding, prevent disease outbreaks, and improve access to clean water and hygiene services.

**3. Health and Legal Protections**

Enhance camp security and access to justice through mobile legal aid and monitoring systems. Implement anti-corruption measures in aid delivery, and provide targeted health, education, and sanitation services, especially for vulnerable groups. Integrate mental health and psychosocial support into primary healthcare using mobile clinics and trained community actors.

**4. Promote Participation, Digital Innovation, and Community Empowerment**

Institutionalize participatory planning by involving IDPs in decision-making, grievance redress, and service delivery. Support IDP councils, peer-led training, and civic engagement. Use mobile apps, geospatial tools, and digital media to assess needs, track displacement, and amplify IDP voices.

**5. Improve Coordination and Data-Driven Policy**

A centralized, inter-agency coordination unit for IDP affairs should be established at both federal and state levels, with clear mandates, adequate funding, and inclusive representation, including that of IDPs themselves. Collaborative action plans must be developed among key stakeholders, such as NEMA, SEMA, NGOs, and civil society organizations, supported by shared databases, unified reporting standards, and common monitoring indicators. Policy implementation should be strengthened through performance-based funding models that reward measurable outcomes, alongside regular external evaluations to ensure accountability and consistency.

**6. Participation accountability**

Participatory planning processes must be institutionalized, ensuring that IDPs are involved in all stages of program development, from needs assessments to implementation and evaluation. Accountability mechanisms, such as community scorecards and independent ombudspersons should be established to allow IDPs to report grievances and influence policy responses. Finally, civic engagement and leadership among IDPs should be actively supported to facilitate their integration into local governance structures and empower them as stakeholders in their own recovery and development.

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