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# COMMUNITY SUPPORT AND CHALLENGES OF REINTEGRATING CHILDREN, WOMEN, AND FAMILIES RETURNING FROM IDP CAMPS IN NORTH-EAST NIGERIA

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## Abstract
This empirical paper examined support roles for communities and the challenges, risks, and barriers facing them in the reintegration of children, women and families returning from Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps in North-east Nigeria. The methodology adopted by this study was a qualitative research method namely phenomenological research design that used a series of semi-structured Key Informant Interviews (KII) and Focused Group Discussions to gather data for the study. For the interviews, a semi-structured interview was adopted. Data analysis was done using the Thematic Analysis approach. The findings of the study identified the key support needs of children, women, and family IDP returnees to include local community/family support, psychological/counselling support, schooling support, economic support, and whole-of-family support, among others. The results also identified key roles for communities in supporting comprehensively and ensuring the reintegration efforts of the IDP returnees. The findings also highlighted that the communities need to provide significant support to the efforts at reintegration of the IDP returnees in terms of resources. Finally, the study recommends strong empowerment of the communities through information sharing and the provision of capacities and resources. The study also recommends that stakeholders strive to forge a strong bond of partnership that sees both the government and community role-players as important equal partners and co-drivers of the reintegration intervention.

**Keywords:** camps, children, community support, displacement, families, IDPs, reintegration, returnees, role, women

## Introduction
Humanitarian emergencies remain one of the most daunting development challenges of the twenty-first century. Though humanitarian crisis arising from displacement or forced migration is as old as the human race itself, the scourge, however, started to grow in startling dimension soon after World War II as a consequence of military coups, internal armed conflicts, generalized violence, human rights violations and natural disasters, among other factors (Bernard, 2017). For instance, if forced migration or displacement was not taking place in Iraq, Afghanistan, Iran or Haiti at a certain given time, it would be parts of Africa,



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particularly Somalia, Sudan, Mali, Rwanda or Ethiopia-Eritrea at another given time, or Haiti in North America (IOM, 2015).

In 2002, a certain Islamic sect known as Boko Haram started to draw public attention to itself as a result of its extremist jihadist stance and acts (Imasuen, 2015). Soon afterwards, it started to have brushes with agents of the Nigerian State, particularly the police and other law enforcement agencies due to its violent activities. Things began to take a bizarre twist in 2009 when its leader, Mohammed Yusuf, was assassinated while in the custody of the Nigerian Police Force. Following that unfortunate incident, many members of the sect fled the country to neighbouring countries in Africa and the Middle East, where they came in contact with leaders of some transnational terrorist organizations, particularly the al-Quada, ISIS, and el-Shabaab, among others, and terror or conflict merchants and entrepreneurs who, it was widely believed, gave them ample training in guerrilla, tactics and warfare, and material support in pursuit of Islamic terrorism (Ford, 2013; Imasuen, 2015; Shehu & Abba, 2020). By 2012, the sect had regrouped back in Nigeria with heavily fortified membership and increased offensive power. Thus, between 2012 and 2014, it began to launch ferocious violent attacks on communities spread across the six states in North-east Nigeria: Bornu, Adamawa, Yobe, Gombe, Taraba, and Bauchi, killing hundreds of thousands of innocent souls and destroying property valued of millions of naira (Imasuen, 2015). Apart from the horrendous deaths and destruction, the said attacks forced millions of inhabitants of the region into voluntary displacement as people fled their original homes for fear of their dear lives and sought refuge or protection in communities outside their villages (Shehu & Abba, 2020).

The foregoing thus unleashed untold humanitarian crises of international proportions upon the North-east region and their neighbours in parts of Nigeria, marked of course, by various pockets of both official and unofficial SDP camps scattered across the region and other parts of Northern and Middle Belt Nigeria (Weiner & Mbaezue, 2019). While statistics concerning the number of persons internally displaced and fleeing their homes as IDPs vary markedly among researchers, agencies and organizations, the same statistics have maintained one particular direction of all-time high. For instance, while the Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) stated that the number of IOPs fleeing from their homes as a consequence of the Boko Haram attacks varied between 1.8 million in 2018 to 1.9 million in 2020 (IOM, 2015), the International Committee of the Red Cross revealed that the IDP figures in North-east Nigeria were 2,118,550 from 436,058 households as at August 2020 (ICRC, 2017). Similarly, the UN Office for the Coordinator of Humanitarian Affairs revealed that about 1.7 million persons were voluntarily displaced in 2018, and over 3.3 million of those affected by the Boko Haram attacks in North-east Nigeria were facing “critical and crisis levels” of food, nutrition, medicare, and security deprivations (UN OCHA, 2018). The United Nations Development Programme on its own also stated that about 10 million IDPs were in dire need of life-saving humanitarian assistance in 2018 (UNDP, 2018). The foregoing are by all standards very gruesome statistics.

Insights into the demographics of the Boko-Haram-induced IDPs in the North-east Nigeria region shows that while youths and men cohorts significantly feature as part of the statistics, the majority of them (over 75%) were children and

women (Shehu & Abba, 2020; IOM, 2015; NEMA, 2018). A few of these women and children (usually aged below 9) were co-perpetrators of the terrorist violence (either as woman or child combatants, spies, suicide bombers, messengers, preachers, etc. fighting on the side of the Boko Haram sect), the majority of them were, of course, victims of the terrorist attacks as malnourished orphans, single-parent children, traumatized widows, who had lost their husbands in the terrorist attacks, impoverished housewives, etc. (Weiner & Mbaezue, 2019).

Over the years, international organizations, particularly the International Organization for Migration, and the UN Office of the Coordinator for Humanitarian Affairs, governments, and international humanitarian NGOs have been grappling with the challenge of finding the solution to the problem of the IDPs (Orlans, 2020). As Orlans also states, the foregoing bodies today recognize and support three strategies as durable solutions to the problem of IDPs, which include voluntary return and reintegration, local integration, and resettlement or settlement elsewhere (Orlans, 2020). Among these three strategies, the first option (voluntary return and reintegration) as IOM's DTM contends, is widely portrayed by the humanitarian community as well as governments as the preferred durable solution to forced displacement or migration (Orlans, 2020; IOM, 2015). As IOM and other experts on voluntary displacement reveal, voluntary return and reintegration as a preferred solution to the IDPs problem is fraught with a number of challenges, risks and barriers to various stakeholder groups (Orlans, 2020).

Much of the literature on displacement and forced migration concentrates efforts on understanding the plight and experiences of the displaced population or the efficiency of the various humanitarian interventions (Long, 2010; Eriksen & O'Brien, 2018). Such studies treat humanitarian crises as being separate from the deeply rooted challenges of development and sustainability. As Long (2010) observed, the prevalent school of thought that informs both research and policy on forced migration, which, of course, sees displacement as merely a humanitarian challenge needs proper interrogation. Long also contends that one of the reasons conventional solutions to displacement are proving most ineffective is the failure to engage with the broader actors outside the displaced population themselves and the humanitarian donor groups (which include, particularly the host and home communities) and how their responses or actions frame the plight of the displaced persons.

Against the foregoing backdrop, this paper attempts to examine community support and the challenges of reintegrating children, women, and families returning from IDP camps in Nigeria. The focus of this study is, of course, the IDP returnees to various communities overran by the Boko Haram terrorists in North-east Nigeria. The study is a qualitative study that used the Key Informant Interview (KII) and Focus Group Discussion (FGD) design as part of its research methodology. This being the case, this study addressed the following research questions. What kinds of support do children, and women/families returning from IDP camps in Nigeria need? What roles can communities play in providing support to children and women/families returning from IDP camps? What are the needs of communities that can enable them to provide support towards the reintegration of children and women/families returning from IDP camps? What are the challenges, risks, and barriers faced by communities in reintegrating children and women/families returning from IDP camps?

***Statement of the problem***

Investigations so far reveal that since the period of 2012-2014, Boko Haram terrorism in Nigeria has taken a worrisome turn to this day. The violent attacks on communities in North-east Nigeria that accompanied the menace have unleashed one of the worst humanitarian crises ever known in the history of forced migration in the world. As a consequence, millions of inhabitants, particularly children, and women across the six states of Borno, Adamawa, Yobe, Taraba, Gombe, and Bauchi, who were lucky to have survived the horrendous attacks were forced to flee their original homes to seek safer places of refuge in parts of the country. As a consequence, the conflict has led to the collapse of the entire framework for rural livelihood in most parts of the region. As most development and humanitarian agencies have observed, for instance, the conflicts have led to severe humanitarian crisis, with over 2.5 million internally displaced; and between 3.3 million and 10 million facing 'critical and crisis' levels of food insecurity, malnutrition, psycho-social trauma, loss of livelihoods, loss of social networks; and severe public health challenges. The humanitarian crisis the conflict unleashed was also responsible for the widespread incidents of gender-based violence, sexual abuse, rape, child abuse, and human trafficking. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF) also reported that over 150 schools were destroyed in the attacks, while 2295 teachers lost their lives and 13,000 of them were internally displaced.

As part of the efforts to contain the crisis, governments, international agencies, and humanitarian NGOs created various official and informal IDP camps across parts of the country, mostly in the North-east, Abuja, and Middle Belt Nigeria and even in the country's neighbouring countries like Chad, Niger, and Cameroon. It was in these camps that millions of the fleeing displaced persons poured into since 2009, with a good number of them, have stayed there for upwards of 10 years running, under the care of and sustenance by both local and interaction of humanitarian agencies, and organizations, net-worth philanthropists, and faith-based caregivers. Against this backdrop, investigations reveal that many of the IDPs at a point started to suffer from the consequences of 'donor fatigue' or 'donor compassion fatigue' on the part of humanitarian donor agencies, and to that extent started to experience increased shrinking of humanitarian supplies and assistance they used to receive from the latter. Again, as a consequence of the said 'donor fatigue', another cycle of critical food insecurity, malnutrition, and other impoverishment risks descended on the IDPs. Many of them also became once again traumatized by the said feelings of loss of their individual means of livelihood in the violent attacks and hopelessness about the vision of them and their children achieving a profitable future.

This being the case, most of the IDPs began to voice out their preference for voluntary return and reintegration into their home communities as a durable solution to their present plight. By all standards, the very option of voluntary return and reintegration is also fraught with a number of challenges, risks, and barriers which are considered to be as big as those of their present plight in their camps; challenges that are not only faced by the returning IDPs themselves but also by their home communities which they now prefer to return to.

***Review of literature***

Quite recently, scholarship on sustainable development as well as international development initiatives has begun to appreciate the overall importance of linking development interventions with humanitarian crises in regions and areas affected by both natural and man-made disasters and violent conflicts (Tamminga, 2017; Keller, 2017; Blind, 2019, UNDP, 2020). In fact, the linkages between sustainable development and humanitarian crises have since been examined by a number of studies (Eriksen & O'Brien, 2018; Stromberg, 2007).

Similarly and quite recently, scholarly attention has also been shifting towards humanitarian emergencies caused by conflicts and generalized violence. As studies, including Blind (2019) point out, as long as humanitarian crises caused by wars and other violent conflicts are their development challenges, they can never be addressed successfully using quick-fix interventions and short-term measures (Shehu & Abba, 2020). Their solutions, of course, need to include not only long-term development programmes but also the joint efforts of all stakeholders, particularly the home or host communities themselves (Tamminga, 2017; Blind, 2019; Stromberg, 2007; Keller, 2017), that can lead to stability. As several studies have noted (UNDP, 2020; Eriksen & O'Brien, 2018; Fielden, 2008), there are now renewed efforts in the international responses to humanitarian crises induced by violent conflicts to move beyond providing immediate relief materials, such as food, clothing, shelter, and essential medications. Restoring damaged livelihoods, rehabilitating individuals, restoring social networks, allaying fears, building resilience, reducing risks, and preventing further relapse to the spread of conflicts are also equally very important (Shehu & Abba, 2020). Development experts also believe that response efforts to humanitarian emergencies can only yield the desired results if adequate attention is paid to not only gaining a better understanding of the peculiar needs, preferences and perceptions of the victims but also winning the cooperation and support of members of either the host communities of the displaced persons or the original home communities of the returning IDPs (Adekola, Azuh, Amoo & Brownell, 2019). Also very important is how those needs and perspectives, cooperation and support fit into or reflect the overall long-term interest of sustainability or how humanitarian interventions could be conceptualized and designed to integrate the former (communities).

How has previous literature been able to rescue the term internally displaced persons (IDPs) from the confusion of its meaning with the meaning of its sister term 'refugees'? While the term 'refugees' simply refers to persons who are displaced from their original homes within a given country with clearly recognized international borders to another place located in another country (IOM, 2015), IDPs, on the other hand, is defined by the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement as:

> "persons or group of persons who have been forced, obliged to flee, to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular, as a result or in order to avoid the effect of armed conflict situations of

> generalized violence, violations of human rights, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized state border" (UN OCHA, 2018: 145).

As earlier hinted, governments, IOM, UN OCHA, and the entire humanitarian community have endorsed three traditional options as durable solutions to the plight of IDPs, including voluntary return and reintegration, local integration, and resettlement or settlement elsewhere (IOM, 2015; Bernard, 2017; UN OCHA, 2018; Orlans, 2020). What exactly does each of these solution options mean? Local integration simply refers to a situation whereby IDPs voluntarily acquire the legal rights to naturalise in their places of refugee, the economic right to establish sustainable livelihoods and standards of living comparable to those of the host country, and the right to social and economic adaptations and acceptance that enable them to contribute to the social life of the host community and live without fear of discrimination (Fielden, 2008). Resettlement or settlement elsewhere implies the movement of displaced persons to a destination within the country other than their place of origin and refuge where they would have permanent residence (UN OCHA, 2018; Eriksen & O'Brien, 2018; IOM, 2015). Like local integration, resettlement involves the displaced persons acquiring all the legal, economic, and socio-cultural rights comparable to members of the host community. Voluntary return and sustainable reintegration in the words of IOM simply refers to the situation whereby the displaced persons choose the option of "going back to their places of origin" based on their individual choices and to get reabsorbed there (IOM, 2015; Orlans, 2020).

Among the three aforementioned solutions to the IDPs' plight, voluntary return and reintegration are widely endorsed by other humanitarian communities as well as the government as the preferred durable answer to the conditions of the displaced persons (IOM, 2015; UN OCHA, 2018). As Orlans (2020) observed, the return process does not end in the act of just arriving back home, but also ultimately implies another complicated and lengthy adaptation and reintegration process, which can be achieved by encouraging conversations and consultations on the return movements that ensure active participation of the IDP population, the humanitarian agencies and the home communities, on one hand, and the home communities on the other hand, and based on the understanding that the status quo ante should be maintained. Furthermore, IOM (2015) also observed that the return process is an ongoing process, nurtured by the identity that combines the understanding of the past, experiences of the present, and prospects of the future. The organization, therefore, recommended that comprehensive approaches and new understandings are needed to replace old narrow interpretations and that can ensure security, wide participation, livelihoods, and a new sense of belonging for the displaced population. IOM also revealed that it and its partners have redesigned their assessment tools for return movements in order to respond effectively to the humanitarian and development needs of each set of IDP returnees on a case-by-case basis and with context-specific indicators that can allow it to assess the quality of the return movement, plan resources and operations, and design coherent interventions that link humanitarian, recovery, and stabilization activities (IOM, 2015; UN OCHA, 2018).

In much of the literature on the topic of this study, community support features significantly here and there, thus highlighting how important the roles of both the host communities and home of origin of the IDPs are, particularly in the voluntary return and reintegration process of the latter. For instance, in their seminal study on the reintegration of children, women, and family IDPs returning to their communities in Australia from various violent conflict zones, Grossman & Barolsky (2019) first and foremost identified the kinds of support returnees (children, women/families) needed from communities and categorized same into children's support needs and women/family support needs. On one hand, the researchers highlighted women returnees' support needs to include, community/family support (that creates a basic sense of belonging), psychological support through counselling, economic and practical support, financial and livelihood support, and case management support needs. On the other hand, the two researchers also identified the support needs of children IDP returnees to include social support/engagement with others in local community affairs, personal/psychological support, schooling support, religious guidance, and whole-of-family reintegration support approach (Benotman & Malik, 2016). Other researchers that shared similar views on the support needs of IDP children and women/families returnees included Devakumar et al. (2014), van der Heide & Geenan (2017), d'Estaing (2017), Grossman, Carland, Tahiri & Zammitt (2017) and Holmer & Shtuni (2017), IOM (2015), UN OCHA (2018), Hoyle, Beadfor & Frenett (2015), Huckerby (2015), and Patel (2017, among others.

With regard to the roles of communities in the efforts at reintegration of children, women and families either returning from IDP camps or violent conflict zones, what are the needs of the communities in order to play the said role, and the challenges and risks before them, views or opinions in much of the literature varied among many researchers. In the first instance, Grossman & Barolsky's (2019) findings, which significantly agreed with the conclusions of Spalek & Imtoual (2007), Tahiri & Grossman (2013) and Briggs (2010), highlighted the following as the roles of communities in reintegrating children, women and families from IDP camps or combat zones: informal support roles (counselling and psychological support towards sense of belonging), financial support, religious support, and leadership support). Again, for communities to play these roles creditably, opinions in the literature led by those of Vermeulen (2013), Weine (2013), Weine (2012), Weine & Almed (2012), and Chenoweth & Stchick (2001) agreed that communities need the following resources: training and education, skills for coordination, networking, and mobilization of existing resources, skilled professionals, and funding for community services. Finally, contending opinions in the literature on community support to the reintegration efforts of IDP also observed that failure on the part of the communities to play the aforementioned roles owing perhaps to lack of the needed resources usually results in a number of significant challenges and risks. The fundamental challenges and risks as highlighted by Murphy, Charney, and Barkworth (2015), Ellis & Abdi (2017), and Peucker (2017), among others, included potential stigma and reputation damage for associating with the returnees, especially ex-terrorist combatants, a risk to community safety posed by returnees, and risk of failing to provide community support which is capable of re-radicalizing of the returnees.

Others were the shortage of culturally appropriate skills and resources, lack of structured support or leadership, and non-funding of community services.

**Method**

As earlier hinted, this study is qualitative research. Its methodology, therefore, comprised the qualitative research method and semi-structured Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) to capture elaborate and in-depth responses from participants, but flexible enough for in-depth probing and clarification of issues as they emerged (Gillham, 2001; Nyberg, 2012; Pritha, 2020; Crossman, 2020). A series of interviews were conducted by this researcher and two research assistants using a semi-structured interview protocol, a digital tape recorder, and field journals.

Participant recruitment for the study was guided by earlier established recruitment thresholds of IDPs or victims (5-10 people), community leaders (10-15 people), and government/agency officials (10-15 people). Participants were recruited through referrals and a purposive sampling technique based on the stock of knowledge and experience in relation to the topic of the research (Marshall & Rossman, 2014). Based on the foregoing, the study met its stated recruitment thresholds of selecting 32 persons as participants in the interviews (n = 32; community leaders - 12, IDP returnees - 9, government/agency officials - 11). The gender breakdown of the participants was 19 male and 13 female respondents. The 32 participants were also selected as follows: community leaders (Bornu - 6, Adamawa - 3, Yobe - 3), IDP returnees (Bornu - 5, Adamawa - 3, Yobe - 1), and government/agency officials (NEMA - 2, State Emergency Management Agency SEMA: Bornu - 2, Adamawa - 1, Yobe - 1, IOM - 1, UNDP - 1, UNICEF - 1, ICRC - 1, Human Rights Watch - 1). While the IDP returnees were selected based on their involvement in the Boko Haram violent conflicts as direct victims and beneficiaries of community support towards their integration, the community leaders and government/agency officials were selected based on their direct and indirect responses to the Boko Haram insurgency, particularly implementation of various victim-support initiatives.

Fifteen semi-structured interviews were conducted across parts of North-east Nigeria (7 in Bornu: Dikwa, Bolori II in Maiduguri, Chibok, Kawtakare, Damboa, Gubio, and Madagali; 5 in Adamawa: Malkohi and Fufore, and 3 in Yobe: Dutse). The interviews which lasted between 37 and 65 minutes each were conducted by this researcher in the company of two (2) well-trained research assistants, using a digital tape recorder, interview protocol, and field journals. Simultaneous transcription of the recorded interviews also took place with the aid of computer software (NVivo II Theme Reader, Mind Manager, rilab's knowledge map, and Hart's Diction 5.0), where permissible throughout the interviews, confidentiality and anonymity of each interviewee as part of the requirements for approving the interviews in the first place were ensured. A number of ethical challenges came mostly from some overzealous participants, which if allowed would have adversely affected the credibility of the interview processes, were successfully overcome. Immediately after the data analysis exercise, both the recorded and transcribed copies of the interviews were put away into this researcher's private locker and secured against any possible intruder, waiting to be physically shredded or deleted in the computer two years after this research.

Trustworthiness and authenticity of data inquiry were established based on Lincoln & Guba's (1985) four criteria: credibility, transferability, conformability, and dependability. In particular, the credibility of this research was also established using four key techniques: *prolonged engagement* with the participants in the field and in reading and re-reading the transcripts of the data, *peer-debriefing*, *triangulation*, and *member-checking* (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Krefting, 1991; Nowell et al., 2017).

The data analysis for the study was carried out using the *Thematic Analysis* approach, which utilizes a particular technique for identifying, analyzing, organizing, describing and reporting 'themes' found within a data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006: 95; Nowel et al, 2017). The technique used in the thematic analysis was Moustaka's (1994) modified version of van Kaam's 7-step model or Lincoln & Guba's (1985) four-step model (Moustaka, 1994; Lincoln & Guba (1985; Maxwell, 2012). The thematic analysis was, of course, carried out with the aid of a computer theme reader software known as NVivo II.

## Findings and Discussion

Here, the results of the series of interviews with the participants in the study are presented. The presentation is done along the lines of the four research questions that served as a guide for the study.

### *Support needs of children and women returnees from IDP camps*

The majority of the interviewees identified social support and engagement in the local community to be of 'top priority' to children and young returnees (P-013). Other needs of the children IDPs which the participants identified in the interviews were psychological support, religious guidance, school-based support, mentors and role models, and more importantly, whole-of-family support to ensure as a stable family environment as possible in which children's and young people's needs can be met by their primary caregivers.

In one instance, one particular interview respondent saw the local school environment as a key social support and engagement site for meeting the integration needs of the child, a site she described as the "second home for children" (P-08). In addition, this 'second home' (school environment) provides peer socialization benefits, a sense of efficacy in developing new learning and skills, and the potential for a positive connection with teachers and other school staff, who might serve as role models or guides, so argued by manly of the participants. As one participant observed:

> "The school could offer counselling and maybe some programs. The first step should be taken by the school. The school is someone's second home at that youthful age. If the counsellor notices that the child has been withdrawn and lonely, she should take steps to do a lot more" (P-023).

With regard to the needs of women and family returnees, the majority of the participants also identified similar needs with those of their children counterparts. However, the emphasis here was on creating a sense of belonging and social inclusion for the women returnees, as well as the need for extensive psychological

support. The importance of a holistic approach was also noted by the participants, who argued that provision of support has to be made to support the children of returnee women in order to support women themselves more effectively as they undergo reintegration and adjustment. Most of the interviewees also stressed the importance of providing basic economic and practical support to returnee women and facilitating their access to services to facilitate their reintegration. As one participant noted:

> "You can't solve the reintegration without solving the economic question. Part of integration in modern society involves economics. Everything costs money. You're not living in the village any more, where you don't need much money. In modern society, you turn on the tap and there's a water bill to pay" (P-015).

***Roles for the community in supporting reintegration***

Most interviewees identified informal social support as playing a critical role in the reintegration efforts for both children and women returnees. This type of support was seen by the participants as fundamental for the successful reintegration of returnees. The participants also emphasized the important role of local community networks in helping facilitate returnees' access to local opportunities for such things as means of livelihoods, employment, volunteering and re-engaging with other pro-socio-economic structures. Aside from these informal relationships and networks, the majority also anticipated local organizations playing a key role in facilitating the reintegration of returnees into local networks, particularly when they first returned. As one participant emphasized:

> "They (the community) can provide a sense of belonging, neighbourhood and neighbourliness, as a safe place to go and have a chat... In my experience, the best source of support like this is unstructured informal support ... and case management model which helps in identifying such places that help in connecting and encouraging one to access groups that can be of assistance" (P-010).

Other support roles for communities as identified by most of the interviewees included financial support, religious guidance, and provision of support structures and leadership (some influences that can show the way).

***Communities' capacity and resource needs to support the reintegration of IDP returnees***

Most participants also identified training and education of community members around general awareness of issues relating to returnees from IDP camps; strengthening local support structures and leadership, stronger skills development for local Muslim community service providers to enable culturally appropriate support mechanisms; and greater funding of community services and organizations to build community capacity for both formal and informal engagement with returnees. Unsurprisingly, most of the participants stressed or rather argued that better funding of community organizations is very necessary in

order to facilitate the reintegration of returnees who are likely to require "intensive support" (P-011). As one participant summarized this dominant viewpoint:

> "Many community organizations rely on volunteer staff, but the reintegration of returnees cannot be done on a voluntary basis through goodwill. The first resource needed would be funding to employ community-based staff. Community leadership also need to be resourced to understand and provide targeted and informed guidance" (P-017).

***Challenges, risks, and barriers for communities***

The majority of interviewees also found that the greater proportion of anxiety in the communities regarding the returnees centred around enhanced stigma and reputational damage, risks of backlash of the returnees turning around to inflict physical harm and threaten the safety of the community; risk of the community failing to provide community support, as they (community) lack the needed capacities and resources; lack of funding of local community organizations for service provision, and lack of structured support and leadership; and shortage of culturally appropriate skills and resources. In particular, participants stressed that the lack of funding that would help communities provide their support to assist the reintegration prospects of returnees was a potential barrier to both resourcing and 'volunteer fatigue.' One participant put it this way:

> "Resources! My community has some professionals who are capable, but the capabilities are overstretched and they need more funds to do their jobs well, especially for intensive support like this. Without resources, no one is willing to fund this out of his own pocket, nor can they" (P-024).

By and large, communities also felt that they were under-equipped with respect to the general skills or resources that would be needed in managing the multiple challenges, risks, and barriers emerging from the situation of returning IDPs.

**Conclusion**

For decades until quite recently, a big gap in current knowledge and policy programming had existed with regard to the role local communities could play in reintegrating family members returning from either IDP or refugee camps to their original homes. However, there has been increasing recognition, both locally and internationally, of the critical role communities could play in the reintegration process, including the mechanisms through which they (communities) could be empowered to play a leading role in any reintegration efforts.

This study, therefore, hypothesized that community involvement is essential to enhance the prospects of successful reintegration for children, women and family returnees. This qualitative research sought to gather data to explore this proposition and to develop a model for community-based reintegration of IDP returnees in North-east Nigeria.

Four research questions were put forward to provide a guide for the investigation. The first stage in the research effort was a review of both scholarly and grey literature relevant to the topic of the study. The literature review not only explored the kinds of support IDP returnees need but also the role that community resilience and social and family networks can play in the reintegration efforts and the types of challenges, risks and barriers facing these communities as they strive to contribute to the reintegration efforts. The second stage of the research involved data collection through a series of semi-structured interviews with the affected IDPs, community and government/agency officials. The interview results revealed a lot about the complexities and challenges as well as opportunities that exist for community participation in the reintegration of returnees in the Nigerian environment as outlined in the section on results and discussion.

Overall, based on the data and findings from this research, it is the conclusion here that there are significant roles that communities can play in supporting the successful reintegration of children, women and family returnees from IDP camps in Nigeria. Indeed the findings of this study show that without such support at the local community level, key reintegration needs around social support, connections, sense of belonging, and social inclusion are likely to be a mirage. In fact, excluding or minimizing community involvement in reintegration processes, of course, risks potential hostility and suspicion that can create big barriers to successful reintegration, with accompanying risks for both the returnees and communities at large in terms of radicalization, community safety and security.

***Recommendations***

As our findings show, communities in North-east Nigeria, like most rural communities in other parts of the country, can boast of abundant expertise, knowledge, skills and other capabilities which can be harnessed to contribute both intellectually and materially towards enhancing successful reintegration of returnees. Therefore, there is the need to continually empower communities by way of support in the form of information provisioning, training and education, greater funding, and provision of vital non-financial resources that can enhance their ability to create transitions for returnees as they normalize their lives back in their home communities. What is more, our findings also show that there exists considerable goodwill, and appetite for engagement on the part of key community leaders and organizations, who recognize the benefits of supporting reintegration and the risks attendant on failure to do so.

Again, as our findings show, much tension still prevails between communities and government role-players with regard to where the ultimate authority should reside in the design and implementation of the reintegration model. Such tension is unnecessarily counter-productive. Efforts should, therefore, be made by the appropriate stakeholders in both communities and government not only to resolve such tension but also to continually look out for likely sources of further tension and strive to nip such in the bud before they become cancerous to the concerted efforts at reintegration of IDP returnees.

Finally, in place of allowing tension to build between communities and government role-players in the reintegration intervention efforts, the two parties should emphasise forgoing a stronger bond of partnership between themselves for

greater results. It is also recommended that the two parties should see themselves as equal partners and co-team players and ensure equitable sharing of both responsibilities and power towards co-design and co-delivery of reintegration. What is more, while the communities occupy a very critical position both on account of their presence at the grassroots level and in light of the emphasis on local, contextual support needs for children, women and family returnees, the overall importance of government both as the ultimate holder of power of the state, supreme law enforcer, and big financier of the reintegration intervention (including the communities as beneficiaries), is eminently incontestable.

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