

# The Travail and Feasibility of Returning Home of Gwoza women in New Kuchingoro Internally Displaced Persons camp, Nigeria

Seun Bamidele<sup>1</sup>, and, Innocent Pikirayi<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1, 2</sup>Department of Anthropology, Archaeology and Development Studies, Faculty of Humanities, University of Pretoria, Hatfield 0028, South Africa

Email: [oluwaseun.bamidele@gmail.com](mailto:oluwaseun.bamidele@gmail.com)

## Abstract

*The lived experiences of women in Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) camps are poorly understood despite the centrality of this issue in discourses on victims' experiences. This study examines the travail of Gwoza women in New Kuchingoro IDPs camp in Abuja, Nigeria. It attempts to identify the survival strategies adopted by women and the possibility of their returning home, in northeastern Nigeria. The study adopted a qualitative research design utilising both primary and secondary data. Insights for data analyses were drawn from transactional theory of stress and coping strategies. The study reveals that Gwoza women rely largely on humanitarian aid from NGOs, while the federal government has largely failed to fulfil that role. Reliance on subsistence farming and humanitarian aid implies that their coping or survival strategy is only tentative. Gwoza women also regard the issue of security as a source of livelihood crucial to their survival, which they are unlikely to get should they return home where they will be exposed to attacks by the insurgent Boko Haram. Moreover, the Nigerian government has not given them any assurance on the provision of adequate security and means of livelihood upon return. They are thus compelled to remain in camp.*

**Keywords:** Gwoza women, Boko Haram, Security, Livelihood, New Kuchingoro IDPs camp

## Background and context of the study

The operations of the Boko Haram insurgency in Borno State, Nigeria, have resulted in the forced displacement of inhabitants of the state (Elkaim 2012). Displacement has become a central issue in all the affected localities in the state as well as other parts of northern and eastern Nigeria (see Imasuen, 2015; Aloba and Obaji, 2016; UNICEF, 2016). Meanwhile, activities in the Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) camps are monitored by national security agencies, with movements restricted with the consequence that most inhabitants are unable to farm or subsist (Olanrewaju, 2018). IDPs are now dependent on humanitarian assistance, which is often overstretched (Olanrewaju *et al.*, 2018).

While considerable attention has been paid to the insurgency, its victims and government efforts towards combatting it, the same cannot be said about the experiences of the mostly women victims of the New Kuchingoro IDPs camp, in central Nigeria. Among the various issues relating to the women's experiences in such camps, their survival and coping strategies are central. This

is particularly so because women in the camp are care givers and managers of homes therein. Women from Gwoza Local Government Area (LGA), have suffered most from a trajectory of Boko Haram insurgency (International Crisis Group, 2016); UNICEF, 2016; United Nations, 2018). Gwoza is the biggest Local Government Area in Borno State, located in the town of Gwoza, a border town, about 135 kilometres south-east region of Maiduguri. The terrain is rocky and hilly (Marama, 2014). Gwoza Hills, some 1300m above sea level, are part of the Mandara Mountains, a natural barrier between Nigeria and Cameroon. The town is some 20 kilometers from the infamous Sambisa Forest, a notorious hideout for Boko Haram insurgents, who infiltrated the area in 2009 (Bodunrin, 2014; Marama, 2014; International Crisis Group, 2016). Crucially, Gwoza has been declared the centre of the Boko Haram caliphate (Audu, 2014) and constantly under insurgent attack until the Nigerian military took over in 2014 (Audu, 2014; Bodunrin, 2014; OCHA, 2019). By mid-October 2014, some 5,000 Gwoza residents displaced by insurgents were squatting on the fringes of Abuja, in central Nigeria (Umar, 2014; OCHA, 2020). The insurgents' attacks have been particularly devastating for women in Gwoza (UNICEF, 2016, OCHA, 2020). Gwoza is empty, and so much devastated that there is practically no hope that peace will be restored there, particularly because the counter attacks by the military against insurgents have been politicised (International Crisis Group, 2016).

Nigerians, especially women, can no longer focus on laudable ventures because of fear of Boko Haram attacks (Igidi, 2014; OCHA, 2020). This fear has also led to displacement from rural to urban areas including neighbouring states where inhabitants feel safer or protected by the presence of national security agencies (International Crisis Group, 2016; OCHA, 2019). Subsequently, the hope of returning home for the forced migrant women of Gwoza is fading day by day since the insurgency is not over and women are caught up in the middle of the conflict (International Crisis Group, 2016). This examines the coping strategies of these women, focusing on New Kuchingoro IDPs camp in Abuja. The study also probes into the possibility of these women returning home soon.

The Nigerian government continues to open up areas formerly controlled by Boko Haram insurgents, in addition to facilitating the return of thousands of inhabitants to their homes especially, women (Matfess, 2017; Nwaubani, 2017, 2018). The intending returnees comprise a large number of women from the New Kuchingoro IDPs camp. There are security concerns, and these include the insecurity on the major routes to their homes, the presence of land mines and

improvised explosive devices in the localities (Igidi, 2014). Women are afraid to return to their homes. Nonetheless, the intending returnees cannot depend on humanitarian aid for too long as they do not know when the war against insurgency will end. In this regard, this study interrogates how Gwoza woman manage these contrasting choices of either returning home or staying in the camp. This study is guided by the following research questions: How are the internally displaced Gwoza women surviving? What challenges are they facing in New Kuchingoro IDPs camp? What are their coping strategies? What measures have been put in place by the Nigerian government to facilitate the return of these migrants home, and what are the challenge faced? The objective of the study is to understand the travail of the Gwoza women in their quest to return home, in a context dominated by an insurgency.

### **Conceptual Approaches and Theoretical Framework**

This study is located within the broader context of and literature on internally displaced persons (IDPs). The study appraises previous studies on IDPs from national and regional perspectives, focusing on women. It acknowledges research done at regional (Tull, 2019; Logie., Okumu., Mwima., Hakiza., Irungi., Kyambadde., Kironde., and Narasimhan., 2019; Oladeji., Oladeji., Chamla., Safiyanu., Mele., Mshelia., & Agbor, 2018; Corbin & Hall, 2019; Ojengbede., Babawarun., Olayiwola., Ogun., Kongnyuy., & Adorin, 2019; OHCHR, 2020) as well as national levels ( Ajayi, 2020; Abdulazeez, and Oriola, 2017; Olanrewaju, et al., 2018 and Ajayi, 2020). However, none of these works have specifically examined the coping strategies of women in New Kuchingoro Internally Displaced Persons' (IDPs) camp. Those works that have investigated the camp do not focus on the coping and survival strategies of women therein. Most of these have focused on the causes and factors that induce internal displacement, their psychosocial challenges, education provision, including electoral process relating to them. Studies on coping and survival strategies are important to understand how and why such persons become resilient under such challenging circumstances.

Moreover, trans-disciplinary leanings of literature on resilience has allowed for a synthesis of ideas from development studies, insurgency and humanitarian relief. This has influenced the different approaches to the conceptualisation and situation of resilience in various contexts. Resilience largely refers to the 'ability to rebound, maintain, or strengthen functioning, throughout and when there is a disturbance, or enhance the ability to cope with success within

the face of utmost adversity or risk' (Ishaku, Adeniran, Onyekwena, & Castradori, 2020). Ungar (2011) describes resilience as a set of behaviour over time that mirrors interactions between people and their environments, especially, opportunities for private growth. According to Carpenter (2013), resilience refers to mechanisms and capacities necessary in stopping conflict and promoting peace or addressing the aftermath of conflict. These mechanisms embody the capacities to foster bigger social and political cohesion and to handle the causes of fragility (Carpenter, 2013). From a political perspective resilience is the ability to address changes in capability, effectiveness or legitimacy. These changes are driven by shocks – sharp changes – or through long-run erosions (or increases) in capability, effectiveness or legitimacy. This is underpinned within the agreement that binds the state and voters, mirroring the main focus, which is the political processes, through the state, nation, and expected area – unit, negotiate agreement or are reconciled (Ishaku *et al.*, 2020).

Other studies have examined the context of resilience through various frameworks. While Chandlers (2012) frames resilience in the human security paradigms and post-interventionist discourses, Joseph (2013) considers resilience as a style of 'governmentality' that illustrates human responsibility. Bourbeau (2013) views resilience as an "inherently dynamic and sophisticated process" that does not essentially move towards a previous state, but rather makes diversifications and changes that are performed among social constructs and a dynamic flux. Discussions on resilience in sub-Saharan Africa are woven within the socio-political economy of everyday life. In this regard, it is used as a metaphor to describe the myriad ways of negotiating and mediating various encounters with the 'state'. Thus, resilience in everyday sub-Saharan Africa could be described in terms of adapting techniques and coping mechanisms utilised by the marginal majority and subalterns. Resilience can also be examined as the potential to create opportunities for doing new things, for innovation and development (Bohle, Etzold and Keck, 2009), making it a form of social agency which may emphasise efficiency through a collectivised approach. Using the lived experiences of women in the Kuchingoro IDPs camp in Abuja, the study opens up new vistas into how the marginal minorities endure the situation in which they find themselves, and, ways by which they learn how to live within limits to withstand disappointment and proceed in the face of adversity that impacts on the quality of life (Ishaku *et al.*, 2020).

Some studies have shown how family resilience strategies adopted by women-headed families in IDPs camps in Rwanda changed during the genocide. For instance, Verpoorten (2005) reports that the sale of cattle decreased during peace times but increased tremendously during violent insurgency because of the fear of raiding in the IDPs camps, the need for food and the displacement of cattlemen and their families.

According to Funmi (2014), women bear the greater percentage of the effect of insurgency in every IDPs camp, and constitute about 70 percent of the world's poor. Women in IDPs camps suffer great hardships in time of insurgency; are subjected to all kinds of violence - sexual assault (such as rape), physical violence (such as beating, maiming, murder and destruction of property in the camps (Barau 2018). In view of these happenings, many programmes are introduced by government as well as non-governmental organisations, to improve the women's standard of living. These include economic empowerment programmes at national, state and local levels. However, Olanrewaju *et al.* (2018) found that despite various government policies and programmes aimed at alleviating poverty, a greater proportion of women in this area do not benefit from such.

According to Shuaib (2019), the coping strategies and initiatives employed by small-scale businesswomen in IDPs camp during insurgency keep them safe and ensure their livelihoods, including those who have assumed the new roles of family heads. The coping strategies commonly found among survivals of insurgency are categorised into pre-insurgency strategies and during and after insurgency strategies. Pre-insurgency coping/survival strategies involve the use of local language to pass information. During and after insurgency strategies include the creation or relocation of markets, contributions, creation of opportunities, diversification of selling, selling of belongings, dependence on civil society or church organisation, borrowings and change in areas of hawking.

A perusal of the literature on insurgency reveals a gap on the survival or coping strategies of Gwoza women in New Kuchingoro IDPs camp. Consequently, this study examines the coping mechanisms of Gwoza women in the camp. The study is thus significant because it opens up new vistas into how these women endure the situation in IDPs camp, how they have learnt to live within the limits of their livelihoods, their ability to withstand disappointment, and still forge ahead in the face of adversity that imparts a negative quality of life.

This study is anchored on Transactional Theory of Stress and Coping (TTSC), developed by Folkman and Lazarus (1984). The theory is based on family protective and family recovery factors that play critical roles in their functioning when challenged by risk factors emanating from things such as trauma, misfortune or transitional events that trigger changes in family patterns of functioning or structure. TTSC argues that the family's ability to withstand a risk and stressful event rests heavily on family elasticity or buoyancy. This position forms the basis of the research on coping strategies. TTSC also argues that there are certain family basic needs that are important for survival and attainment of welfare, comfort and safety. These needs are beyond the normal basic necessities of life like food and shelter. Such needs include physical and non-physical needs for humans to survive and cope in stressful situations. Accordingly, the efficacy of TTSC cannot be contested, for it provides valued insights into causes of insurgency as well as coping strategies adopted by the family. Scholars see TTSC as a strategy focused on single parent households; remarried family units and interracial married couples as well as longitudinal research on children (Lazarus and Folkman 1984). TTSC also focuses on the ability of a family to withstand and rebound from stressful life challenges, overcome war related trauma and disabling physical and psychological wounds and return to productive roles in the society.

Gwoza women residing in New Kuchingoro IDPs camp have trained themselves to withstand and respond to insurgency and prolonged adversity. From January 2014, they have been living on the support of humanitarian aid from different sources, in addition to imbibing and adopting various strategies of survival while confined to the camp due to the insurgency. The TTSC offers holistic analysis of the place of Gwoza women in the camp, the reason they find it difficult to return home, including the inconsistent state policies and fragmented protection and provisions of humanitarian aid programmes, as well as the inadequacy of external support.

### **Methodology and Research design**

This study is informed by desktop, archival and fieldwork. A qualitative case study-oriented research design was employed, focusing on Gwoza women in the New Kuchingoro IDPs camp in Abuja. The main strengths of a single case study are at least three-fold; first, to focus on detailed, in-depth data collection from multiple sources in a specific location, and for a particular group (Bryman, 2008; Robson, 2002); second, to pay particular attention to the surviving context, which is important for an in-depth analysis, and third, such a study can be more valuable

than studies pursuing fleeting knowledge from diverse contexts (Gerring 2007) and does not run the risk of conceptual stretching (Sartori, 1970, 1984). The latter is a problem often confronted by statistical and large comparative studies that subject quite dissimilar cases to one-size-fits-all analytical frameworks, including theory development (George and Bennett, 2005). This case study approach is particularly valuable for understanding pathways to Gwoza women's coping/survival strategies in the camp.

### ***Desktop Studies***

An extensive desk study was used, reviewing existing literature, and collecting secondary data on coping/surviving strategies of the women in the camp and feasibility of their returning home. This was collected from local civil society organisations and non-governmental organizations. Desktop studies were complemented with six months fieldwork in the camp.

This study also utilized documentary and/or information in the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) and the National Commission for Refugees, Migrants and Internally Displaced Persons (NCFRMI), in Abuja. NEMA and NCFRMI resources are especially useful for case study construction as they are stable, broad, and exact (see Yin, 2003). These documents provided a wealth of information about the processes and dynamics through which coping/surviving strategies of the Gwoza women in the camp have been discussed, negotiated, and implemented by these categories of groups in Abuja.

### ***Interviews***

Three approaches were used in collecting interview data: semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), and non-participant observations were utilised. Even though these methods in themselves present an incomplete picture, triangulation (see Denzin, 1978, 2006) was employed to construct a comprehensive account of the dynamics of coping/surviving strategies of the Gwoza women and their feasibility of returning home. Thirty (30) interviews and five (5) focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted. Each focused group discussion consist of six (6) members each. The FGDs included; Gwoza women in the New Kuchingoro IDPs camp; members of the public around the camp, including representative of the village head in the camp; government officials involved in policy formulation around the camp; security operatives in the camp; and, members of non-governmental organisations working in the camp. Most of the Gwoza inhabitants reside in the town, due to its proximity to Abuja, the Federal Capital Territory

(FCT) of Nigeria. To guard against bias and reflect diverse perspectives, semi-structured interviews were conducted at multiple sites in the camp from May 2021 and July 2021, to obtain a broad range of perspectives. Interview transcripts were coded to identify key themes and issues arising from the data.

### **Findings and Discussion**

The women identified in this paper as ‘Gwoza’ come from the town identified by the same name, located in the north-east of Nigeria. They are part of the Borno community living on the border between Nigeria and Cameroon. They are Muslims and very often a subject of attack and detention by Boko Haram militants. Their plight was highlighted in 2014, when Boko Haram insurgents declared the town as the seat of their self-proclaimed caliphate, ostensibly because of its very strategic location – being close to the mountains which provided a perfect hide-out from government soldiers. Nigerian soldiers have taken control of the town, a move which has encouraged some residents, including the women who had been displaced by the militants, to return.

Gwoza women in the camps in Abuja suffer various forms of neglect, discrimination, inequality and violence (Olanrewaju 2018). It is important to highlight their plight and understand the travail these women are encountering in such camps as a result of the insurgency (Mirth, 2014). Women in New Kuchingoro IDPs camp function as wage earners and as caregivers to their families through both large commercial and smallholders farming (Oladele, 2018). They have thus assumed the role of breadwinners, a function normally assumed by men, who unfortunately have fallen victim to the insurgency in one way or the other. However, a greater percentage of Gwoza women in the camp are poorly educated, cannot find employment and thus depend mainly on humanitarian aid for livelihood (Ishaku *et al.*, 2020; Mirth 2014; Mohammed, 2018). The fear of attack from the insurgents make it difficult for some of the women to engage in farming and trading. They have also fallen victim to crime, which affected their operations in the camp. (Alli *et al.*, 2019; Ajayi, 2020).

In an effort to improve the situation of Gwoza women in the camp and curb the destructive activities of the security agents and neglect, the state and local governments organise

entrepreneurship training programmes for women, financial empowerment approaches and so on.<sup>1</sup> Notwithstanding, Gwoza women in the camp are not adequately catered for in terms of healthcare, welfare, feeding and accommodation. In spite of the resources spent on this programme, several controversies bedevil it, including how the women have managed to survive in the camp thus far.

### *Feasibility of Returning Home*

Nearly all the literature on women (Mirth, 2014; Adelana, 2016 Adewale, 2016; Mohamed, 2018; Oladele, 2018; Olanrewaju, 2018) identifies insecurity and uncertainty of livelihood as the major reasons for the refusal of women to return to their homes in the face of insurgency that still rages in the northern region. As is the case for women in IDPs camps all over the world, security and livelihood challenges are indispensable to the possibility of returning home. The implication is that both of these conditions are essential and bidirectional. Adequate security and protection from insurgency attacks would enhance their ability to secure a means of earning income, which is fundamental to surviving in their homes. Women in New Kuchingoro IDPs camp, primarily migrated to the camps for security reasons; once there, the possibility of being able to earn a better livelihood became a compelling reason to remain there. This implies the women are, to some extent, receiving material provisions in the camps, which influences their choice to remain there. Governmental agencies (NCFRMI and NEMA), for their part, feel that the women have overstayed their envisaged time in the camp, and should be considering returning home. They claim that insurgents have been defeated.<sup>2</sup> While the army has taken over control of the town, it remains uncertain whether the conditions for return are ideal. In her own words,

Surviving at home would have been the best option if everything is normal. If not, I can live anywhere else provided. I am trying to do something that can make me to survive.<sup>3</sup>

The respondent showed emotion focused coping style. Her emotional function in relation to the life-threatening and environmental challenge at home is acknowledging that neither she nor the other women can stop the activities of the Boko Haram sect in their place. Her acceptance shows that her behaviour is reality oriented, which is a positive coping strategy. She stated that

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<sup>1</sup> Interview with GW#9, May 16, 2021.

<sup>2</sup> Focus group discussion with NCFRMI#1, May02, 2021.

<sup>3</sup> Interview with GW#14, May 11, 2021.

“*Surviving at home would have been the best option if everything is normal.*” She equally engaged problem focused technique to handle the challenge of livelihood: “*I am trying to do something that can make me ... survive.*” Thus, admitting that she cannot do anything regarding security and environmental challenge is emotional-coping orientation. This is a mechanism which she applied through acceptance and seeking social support, while adopting problem-focused strategy to address livelihood issues.

When asked why had not returned home, the women gave a variety of reasons, as did government agencies, NCFRMI and NEMA. The following a respondent in New Kuchingoro IDPs camp said:

We prefer to stay in the camp than going back home. Before my coming here the situation at home was so pathetic, that many of the members of my family were killed by Boko Haram. Living in the midst of insurgency is a terrible. Only God can convince us of going back because here, we can easily do one or two things to make ends meet. Many women lost husbands and children. Surviving and coping at home is very difficult. Since we have been staying in the ... camp, we can eat and live a better life and we are also assured of security. Here we have police barracks around us and vigilante groups are also here. We can make small trades and we are still enjoying some support from government and other humanitarian agencies from non-governmental organisations that are also taking care of us. Although there is no place like home, the issue of security and livelihood are very important to us. We are women and are good at trading and farming. We cannot return back home for farming; the land is now full of mines and Boko Haram is still active. They are yet to leave our villages and communities. New Kuchingoro ... is presently our home and we are surviving here. We can only return if Boko Haram’s violent activities are removed <sup>4</sup>

The excerpt above from a female respondent illustrates the adaptation of three coping strategies which fall into problem-focussed, emotion-focussed, and support-seeking taxonomies as highlighted by Folkman and Lazarus (1984). She highlights physical and psychological challenges: the security, emotional harm experienced due to the loss of members of her family. She also showed that women were experiencing demanding situations, affecting their well-being, security and livelihood while at home, but the instance they relocated to the camp their circumstances changed into benign-effective -- kind and non-threatening. Besides, the environmental disruption experienced following displacement was not just a perceived threat, but

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<sup>4</sup> Interview with GW#14, May16, 2021

also a real one leading to loss of their loved ones, security and livelihood. On returning home, the respondent highlights coping flexible and purposive behavior, which is reality oriented.

Selected respondents from the government agencies, NCFRMI and NEMA, also echoed the same sentiments, indicated that security and livelihood were of paramount importance, and necessary if the women are to return home. While the women are able to conduct some trade in the camp, thereby able to survive and cope, this depended on the security in the camp. Below is the response of one of the representatives of the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) in Abuja:

These women prefer to stay in Abuja with concrete reasons which still have to do with their survival. The issue of security has been 30% solved within the camp and even in their communities. They cannot go back to their homes because of the survival and coping strategies they have built around themselves here in the ... camp. As regards survival and coping, the government has not made provision for them and some of those who remained back home are still suffering [from lack of] ... the benefits promised. But they have been engaging in all forms of trading within and outside the camp. There is inadequate military presence back home and check-points are not well stationed in all the communities, but here in camp, they are very satisfied by going about their ...trading and farming around the camp. Many areas still have [land]mines, and a large number of the communities are porous. The government has perfected all their documents for relocating them back to their communities but it seems that women are not cooperating with the government because livelihood and security are very important for them and their children. They ought to have been dislodged from the New Kuchingoro IDPs camp, but they are not ready to return home. The support of the government is also limited here because all the money has been spent on accommodation and preparation for relocation of these women, but the place is not ready yet.<sup>5</sup>

Thus, security and a means of earning income are priorities for the women in the camps. Although what they earn in the camps is very little, such earnings might well elude them if they opt to return in the face of protracted insurgency and insecurity in Gwoza. As such, their refusal to leave the camp until the issue of their livelihood and security are resolved points to a positive strategy that will ensure their wellbeing. They acknowledge that their psychological and environmental challenges can only be solved by not shying away from the root cause, which is the insurrectional activities of Boko Haram. It should be noted that, however small their means, living in the camp has still enabled them to engage in small-scale trading and farming. The

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<sup>5</sup> Interview with NEMA#18, May 14, 2021.

implication of this is that life in the camp is considered marginally better than the option of returning home, even though it is still clouded in uncertainty. From this viewpoint, we argue that their survival and coping strategies have been developed in the camp as a direct result of the relative security which, to some extent, is available there, as well as the source of their livelihoods. This further underscores the actual threat to their livelihood and security should they return home. Therefore, their coping behavior is goal-oriented, and their emotional response is acceptance of their reality. Both point towards a positive strategy that will enable them to take needful steps to alleviate the effect of the stressors, as underscored in subsistence activities both in and outside the camp. Although life in the New Kuchingoro IDPs camp is undeniably difficult, a large number of the women have adjusted to it, since they make a living from it.

The orientation of the women has completely changed during their protracted stay in the IDPs camps. For instance, those who expressed a preference for returning home draw attention to some impediments, including unstable income, insecurity, lack of water and electricity, lack of income-generating opportunities, the presence of landmines on their farmland, and the absence of family members or relatives, especially their husbands.

The majority of us here like the camp since it is safe place for us to survive and we are coping. At least [there are] no attack on us from Boko Haram, no fleeing and no burning of our camp. But if there is possibility to choose a better place to survive and cope in life, home is better.<sup>6</sup>

A primary evaluation of the response above showed that the stressor, the Boko Haram, is a danger and a challenge to the wellbeing of the women should they return home. This life-threatening stressor has forced them to acknowledge their circumstances, requiring them to adapt in an alternative environment, to help the women build the appropriate forms of resilience for their wellbeing. Based on this, we conclude that the women are likely to remain in the camp until security is adequately addressed by the government. It is evident that the return of women to Gwoza is bidirectionally anchored on provision of security and a definitive source of livelihood.

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<sup>6</sup> Interview with GW#18, May 13, 2021

## Survival Strategies

### *Government efforts*

The hesitancy of the Gwoza women to return home can be attributed to the inability of the state to respond properly to their needs.<sup>7</sup> Till now, the national security agencies have not been able to partially or fully guarantee the security of these women. The intensity of the insurgents' activities is still seriously high. The, women are therefore left with no option but to resort to self-protection and self-preservation within the New Kuchingoro IDPs camp.<sup>8</sup> Although the federal and state governments responded by sending security agencies to Gwoza, to stop the Boko Haram insurgency, insecurity remains a reality, and the agencies are apparently not doing enough.<sup>9</sup> The federal government set up National Commission for Refugees, Migrants and Internally Displaced Persons (NCFRMI) to look into this,<sup>10</sup> but its findings were never made public. One respondent from New Kuchingoro IDPs camp had this to say:

The government is not doing anything for us. Those officials working for NCFRMI and NEMA will just come to the camp for investigation of all the reliefs' materials given to us by the NGOs and other Faith Based Organisations.... Even the purpose of officials coming from NEMA and NCFRMI is that they are the third parties between the NGOs and those philanthropists that always give us food. The major functions of these officials just to come and screen all these items or donations and gave feedback to the authorities.<sup>11</sup>

In a similar issue, one of the respondents in New Kuchingoro IDPs camp echoed the following:

Gwoza women in New Kuchingoro IDPs camp are seriously suffering in the hands of the federal government. We are getting all our support and relief materials from NGOs. We are not really getting much from the government and as a result of the lack of government financial support, the women cannot get education, medical support and proper welfare. Many women have been dying because of the adverse living conditions in the camp.<sup>12</sup>

The consequences of this is that without a means of support from the government, Gwoza women are not ready to return home. From these responses, it is evident that inasmuch as the government cannot provide financial and material support, the return of the women home remains unfeasible.

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<sup>7</sup> Focus group discussion with NCFRMI#3, July 16, 2021

<sup>8</sup> Focus group discussion with GW#4, June 23, 2021

<sup>9</sup> Interview with NEMA#5, June 14, 2021

<sup>10</sup> Focus group discussion with NCFRMI#2, June 12, 2021

<sup>11</sup> Focus group discussion with NCFRMI#9, June 15, 2021

<sup>12</sup> Interview with NEMA#18, June 25, 2021

### *Efforts of the NGOs*

Data obtained from interviews with respondents reveal that the NGOs only provide temporary relief. This calls for the decisive and permanent intervention of the government. Since the establishment of New Kuchingoro IDP's camp, NGOs have stepped in by forming connections and relations across the lines, with the support of external donors. For instance, there have been many forms of interactions between the Gwoza women and the NGOs in the camp. These organisations have also organised different women empowerment programmes in the New Kuchingoro IDPs camp to equip the women to ensure better acclimatisation cum future. The efforts of the NGOs have been fruitful because they are supported by women leaders in the camp from various families, religious, traditional and opinion leaders from the camp. It was at the NGOs women empowerment programmes that all these women continue to learn more trading and farming skills for survival in the camp. Evidently, the efforts of the NGOs have a positive impact in the camp. An excerpt from the camp women's coordinator evidenced this:

NGOs have been the main sources of our women livelihood. We have many NGOs that are helping us in terms of security and provision of humanitarian aid for our Gwoza women. NGOs supply us materials to build bashers (minor shelters) for sleeping. Though all those bashers are soaked during the rain seasons and are not proper accommodation they are still preferable. This place is still better than the battlefield. And this place is still better than living in Gwoza. We will cherish the roles of all these NGOs in our lives. Since arriving here, they have been helping us and their support is considerably more than that of government.<sup>13</sup>

In the same vein, a member of Gwoza Women Association says:

In this New Kuchingoro IDPs camp, our major sources of humanitarian support are from the NGOs. The federal and Borno State government will just come to the camp generate information and leave ... We, Gwoza women are not really feeling the impact of government agencies at all. They always come to the camp once in a year and at times during festivities. Government agencies are not really supporting us in the area of security and livelihood. They are leaving us to fate. We cannot really work here because most of us are farmers and we do not have land to cultivate. NGOs are the major food donators for us women. They always donate all the necessary basic necessities.<sup>14</sup>

As a result of their sole reliance on the aid Gwoza women receive from the NGOs, the success of the latter initiatives have become predominant in the daily living of the former. They perceive their presence and everything they do as means of securing their families and tickets for their

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<sup>13</sup> Interview with GW#11, July16, 2021

<sup>14</sup> Interview with GW#19, July11, 2021

survival in the camp. Additionally, the NGOs built a network of informants through a bottom-up women empowerment approach, and through this, always receive firsthand information about far-off ways of coping, which the NGOs always quickly addressed through Gwoza women leaders. Part of the strategy was the hosting of Gwoza women representatives to meetings on entrepreneur empowerment trainings and programmes in their offices or camp open spaces. In that way, NGOs survival approaches proved far more successful than the unreliable humanitarian support from the government.

### *Women's Survival Efforts*

The women's survival efforts are anchored on mutual and the meagre income generated from micro-trading and low-scale farming in the vicinity of the camp. This applies, particularly, to the women who are receiving training and empowerment programmes for entrepreneurship from the non-government agencies, religious organisations and philanthropists.<sup>15</sup> Thus, the women work hard for their survival and that of their children. Both the non-government agencies, religious organisations and philanthropists, on the one hand, and government agencies, on the other, acknowledge the value of the contributions of women to ensure their own survival. This is also a recognition of the women's efforts that prompted the offering of these training and empowerment programmes. They work with the Women Association, representing all the women in the New Kuchingoro IDPs camp.<sup>16</sup> This association plays an invaluable role in fostering a sense of hope and solidarity amongst the women, functioning as a social support that has helped them to adopt emotion-focused coping mechanisms. Consequently, the women are able to alleviate the psychological and environmental distresses they are experiencing. The adaptation of emotion-focused orientation initiated by the association has helped in releasing pent-up emotions, besides being a channel of distraction from their environmental challenges and escapism from unpleasant memories. Through the association, the women come together once in a while to review contributions and suggestions on how to ensure or enhance their survival, and ultimately empower themselves and their children while in the camp. Thus, the association has helped to minimise and prevent the emotional component of the stressors triggered by the Boko

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<sup>15</sup> Interview with GW#24, June 24, 2021.

<sup>16</sup> Interview with GW#27, June 27, 2021.

Haram insurgency and government neglect. The achievements of the association are, however, very much dependent on the training and guidance provided by non-government agencies, religious organisations and philanthropists.

Moreover, a major flaw in the support offered to women by NEMA is the lack of funding to procure concrete materials such as farming implements. There are women, who are enthusiastic about engaging in micro-farming in the camp.<sup>17</sup> Subsequently, many desperate women have engaged in risky and negative strategies of survival, leading to their deaths.<sup>18</sup> Living conditions in New Kuchingoro IDPs camp are poor, and only made bearable by humanitarian intervention. Once they became involved, humanitarian agencies have stemmed the escalating casualties. At first, most women were rendered idle, but soon became active farmers and traders upon receiving entrepreneurship training from non-government agencies, religious organisations and philanthropists. As a result, the camp is now the site of much informal economic activity, through micro-businesses like agriculture and trading, although the women continue to receive humanitarian aid on a monthly basis.<sup>19</sup> Overall, the efforts of these agencies have enhanced the coping and survival strategies of the women. As a result of the strength of the NGOs working in the camp, NEMA has given them space and effectively handed over the running of the entire camp. For instance, NGOs have been allowed to erect office points within and beyond the precincts of the camp, which has enhanced their efficiency in managing the needs of the camp. In some cases, they collaborate with the NCFRMI and NEMA to enhance the welfare of the women, preparing them for a possible return to Gwoza.<sup>20</sup>

### **Coping and Survival Strategies of Gwoza Women**

From the focus group discussions, it appears the survival and coping strategies adopted by the women are bifurcated. First, the support which the women get from the non-government agencies and faith based organisations used to sustain their micro- businesses. Secondly, having a means of earning a living is deemed essential in the event of their returning home, although the

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<sup>17</sup> Interview with NEMA#27, 2021

<sup>18</sup> Focus group discussion with GW#17, May 29, 2021

<sup>19</sup> Interview with GW#17, June 28, 2021

<sup>20</sup> Focus group discussion with GW#3, June 13, 2021

security that is a prerequisite for this return has not been addressed, probably because of the obvious financial implications this has for government. A respondent said:

We can see that there are survival strategies available for women within the neighbourhood. Women always receive humanitarian aid and materials from non-government agencies, religious organisations and philanthropists. Going back is not possible now without proper security and better ways of living for us and our children. Although women are still living on the edge of survival, these non-state actors are providing donations hoping that we will survive and return to our homeland. They have been coming to our camp monthly but during the past two years, their frequency has been drastically reduced. But we are still depending on them for our survival.<sup>21</sup>

From the above, it is evident there are transactional relationships between the women and their acquired environment (the camp and the neighbourhood). Consequently, coping has become benign-effective, unlike the unkind and life-threatening environment they were experiencing in Gwoza. This also shows that women adopted support seeking methods through radical acceptance of the change in environment and the social support of non-state actors. They function as positive stressors to the wellbeing and purposive behavior of the women, who cannot compromise on their security and livelihood.

Another observation made during the focus group discussions was that some women live in neighbouring communities outside the New Kuchingoro camp, but have regular interactions with those residing in the camp. They are also members of the Women Association and come to the camp to trade. A member of the Women Association living in the neighbourhood commented on the livelihood situation of the women, and their desire to return home:

The women are trying to maintain their survival strategies in order to sustain the families. We still believe that we are still 95% depending on donors for our survival and sooner or later, some may stop coming to the ... camp for our support. We really need means to survive. Although, there is much suffering, this is better compared to being in Gwoza. Gwoza is a no-go area for now and no woman is ready to leave the camp and return home. We still have a strong feeling of not going back. Government promises are not realistic and the policies concerning our relocation are not consistent. We prefer to die in this camp than perish in the hands of Boko Haram .... Being held hostage by Boko Haram is much worse compared to living in this camp. Women are happy, though not fully...<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Interview with GW#26, July 13, 2021

<sup>22</sup> Interview with GW#28, June 19, 2021

The excerpt above also shows that even though these women are not really satisfied with the conditions in the camp, they perceive the place as aiding their psychological and cognitive coping for survival. This is what is missing in Gwoza. This implies that despite the support received, the women are really struggling to survive and cope. They face uncertainty regarding the length of their stay in the camp and the feasibility of going home, since the Boko Haram insurgency is not over. They are unlikely to return home, preferring to remain in the camp where they are receiving some security and support. However, based on the comments of some of the study participants, there is much uncertainty regarding how long they can count on the support they are receiving. For this reason, we conclude that their coping and survival strategies are still tentative.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The study, therefore, promises to be a major contribution to the growing literature on displacement and insurgency, by focusing on the women in local society. This study is part of an ongoing conversation on the dynamics of conflict in northern Nigeria and neighbouring countries affected by the Boko Haram insurgency. It hopes to contribute towards resilience literature, using approaches from applied and core social sciences. Focus is on Gwoza women, their survival and coping strategies, including some of the critical decisions they have to make. Women from Gwoza find themselves displaced from north-eastern region of Nigeria, with the insurgency having destroyed their traditional livelihoods, families and other support networks.

This study has demonstrated that while living conditions in the New Kuchingoro IDPs camp are far from ideal, they are still preferred, given the support the women receive from non-state actors and the modicum of security provided by the federal government. This creates an ideal environment for subsistence activities, which women have assumed to cope with adversity and relocation. This paper focused on the difficulties arising from decisions for a possible return to north-eastern Nigeria, given the diminishing support from the state and non-state actors, and, critically, the security situation in Gwoza, which remains edgy. This is part of a broader consideration on the part of women in avoiding negative livelihood and risk strategies, in coping with displacement and insecurity. Upon return, these women are likely to encounter food insecurity, and, given the war, with no guarantees they will find supporting family structures still in place. These are disproportionate risk they should not take. This study has presented a broad

outline of the official and unofficial roles of government and non-government agencies in sustaining the livelihoods of IDW, although this was not a main focus area. Further research could be done on the NGOs that shoulder so much of the burden of IDW in war-ravaged countries, and on the players in government who give shape to government agency inputs. A study of this nature would enhance knowledge of the logistical and functional aspects of the problem of IDPs, and of government agencies in relation to that of the NGOs, which seem to achieve so much more than government does on far leaner budgets. It would also open up vistas on how funds are attracted from non-government agencies to government, and the full extent of government's activities in the IDPs camp.

The study have focused on the coping, sustainability and livelihood strategies of women in the IDPs camp. Several questions arise as to the situations of their male counterparts, which is an area worthy of research. Such research would answer questions on the effect of insurgency on the entirety of life and conditions for IDPs.

Lastly, the study recommends that the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework and the Transactional Theory of Stress and Coping are employed for case studies of IDPs in other IDPs camps in other locations. It would be of value to find out how size of camp, geographical location and nature of camp inhabitants affects coping and livelihood strategies.

**Ethical Statement:**

Compliance with Ethical Standards - Yes

(In case of funding) Funding - No funding

Conflict of Interest – No Conflict of Interest

Ethical approval - Yes

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