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Internal Displacement and Community Resilience: Rebuilding Trust and Cohesion in Benue State, Nigeria

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Abstract
Internal displacement has become a significant global challenge, affecting millions worldwide. In Nigeria, particularly in Benue State, internal displacement due to communal conflicts, resource-based disputes, and natural disasters has disrupted traditional social structures and relationships. This study explores the impact of internal displacement on social cohesion in Benue State, focusing on trust, social networks, cooperation, and shared values among displaced populations and host communities. This study aims to provide insights into the dynamics of displacement and the pathways to restoring social cohesion in affected areas. Internal displacement is a critical issue that poses significant social, economic, and humanitarian challenges globally, with Nigeria being one of the most affected countries. In Benue State, internal displacement is primarily driven by communal conflicts, resource-based disputes, and natural disasters, leading to the disruption of traditional social structures and relationships. This seminar study investigates the impact of internal displacement on social cohesion in Benue State, focusing on key dimensions such as trust, social networks, cooperation, and shared values among internally displaced persons (IDPs) and their host communities.

Keywords: Internal Displacement, Social Cohesion, Resource Competition, Cultural Integration, Displaced Persons, Host Communities.

Introduction
Internal displacement has emerged as one of the most pressing humanitarian and developmental challenges of the 21st century. It is not only a crisis of shelter and

survival but also one that profoundly reshapes the **social, economic, and political landscapes** of affected communities. By the end of 2022, the global population of internally displaced persons (IDPs) had reached **71.1 million**, a figure driven largely by armed conflicts, political violence, and natural disasters (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre [IDMC], 2023). Unlike refugees, who cross international borders to seek safety, IDPs remain within their countries of origin and are therefore more vulnerable to neglect, inadequate protection, and social marginalization. Their displacement is often prolonged, leaving them caught in cycles of instability that affect not only their immediate well-being but also the broader resilience of their host communities. Nigeria represents one of the epicenters of the displacement crisis in Africa. With its vast geographic size, ethnic diversity, and socio-political complexities, the country has witnessed recurrent displacement crises driven by **insurgency in the northeast, banditry in the northwest, communal clashes, farmer–herder conflicts, and recurrent flooding** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], 2021). Among the most severely impacted states is **Benue State**, known as the "Food Basket of the Nation" due to its rich agricultural endowments. Ironically, this very agricultural wealth has become a source of conflict, as land and water resources have increasingly been contested between sedentary farming communities and nomadic herders. The escalation of these conflicts, coupled with recurrent flooding along the Benue River and its tributaries, has forced tens of thousands of households into temporary displacement camps or host communities, creating a humanitarian and social crisis of enormous proportions.

The displacement crisis in Benue State is multi-dimensional, with implications that extend beyond material deprivation. Prolonged displacement erodes the social fabric of communities by weakening trust, dismantling social networks, and deepening divisions across ethnic and cultural lines (Chan & Chan, 2006; Olaniyan & Yahaya, 2016). Host communities, already grappling with poverty and limited resources, often perceive displaced persons as competitors for scarce land, food, water, health services, and educational opportunities (International Crisis Group, 2017; Amnesty International, 2025). Conversely, internally displaced persons (IDPs) frequently feel stigmatized, excluded, or treated as outsiders in places where they seek refuge (Ager & Strang, 2008; World Bank, 2023). These perceptions and lived realities foster mutual suspicion, resentment, and insecurity, undermining the fragile bonds required for peaceful coexistence (Putnam, 2000; Africa Polling Institute, 2021). At the heart of this crisis lies social cohesion, which Chan and Chan (2006) define as the degree of connectedness and solidarity among community members. Social cohesion is sustained through trust, cooperation, inclusion, and shared values. In displacement contexts, these elements are severely strained as displacement interrupts established communal relationships, disrupts intergenerational traditions, and fragments shared cultural values (Berry, 2001; Ager & Strang, 2008). Yet paradoxically, these same dimensions—trust, cooperation, and collective identity—represent the building blocks upon which displaced and host communities can rebuild resilience (Olaniyan & Yahaya, 2016; World Bank, 2023). Social cohesion is therefore not merely

desirable but is an indispensable foundation for recovery, integration, and long-term peacebuilding in Benue State (Chan & Chan, 2006; Amnesty International, 2018).

Despite the urgency of the displacement crisis in Benue, scholarly and policy attention in Nigeria has tended to privilege its economic and humanitarian dimensions, such as food insecurity, shelter provision, and access to basic services (International Crisis Group, 2017; Amnesty International, 2025). While these issues are important, they overlook the social dynamics of resilience and reintegration that ultimately determine whether displaced and host communities can coexist peacefully or descend into cycles of recurring conflict (Ager & Strang, 2008; Putnam, 2000). Understanding these dynamics is essential for crafting interventions that move beyond short-term humanitarian relief to promote sustainable solutions rooted in rebuilding trust, fostering cooperation, and strengthening community resilience (World Bank, 2023; Africa Polling Institute, 2021). This paper, therefore, focuses on internal displacement and community resilience in Benue State, with particular emphasis on how trust, cooperation, and integration can be rebuilt between IDPs and host communities (Chan & Chan, 2006; Olaniyan & Yahaya, 2016). By shifting attention toward the social cohesion dimensions of displacement, the paper is intended to fill a critical gap in existing literature and contribute to both scholarly discourse and policy frameworks aimed at promoting peace, stability, and inclusive development in displacement-affected regions (Berry, 2001; Amnesty International, 2018; World Bank, 2023).

The objectives of this study are to:

1. Assess the extent to which internal displacement has affected community resilience and social cohesion in Benue State
2. Examine the effects of internal displacement on trust, cooperation, and integration between IDPs and host communities in Benue State.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

The key concepts underpinning this paper are clarified as follows:

Internal Displacement

Internal displacement refers to the forced movement of individuals or groups from their habitual homes due to armed conflicts, communal violence, human rights violations, natural disasters, or other crises, while remaining within their country's borders (Cohen & Deng, 1998; UNHCR, 2021). Unlike refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs) are not granted special legal protections under international law, leaving them especially vulnerable to insecurity, marginalization, and deprivation. In Nigeria, internal displacement is driven largely by **farmer–herder conflicts, communal clashes, insurgencies, and climate-induced disasters** such as floods (Olaniyan & Yahaya, 2016; Amnesty International, 2018; IDMC, 2023). Benue State exemplifies this reality. The state's fertile agricultural lands—its economic lifeline—are simultaneously the core of resource-based conflicts between farming communities and pastoralists. Such conflicts, alongside recurrent floods along the Benue

River, have displaced thousands into temporary camps or host communities (NEMA, 2023; IOM, 2023). The consequences of displacement in Benue are profound. For IDPs, the loss of homes, livelihoods, and established social networks often leads to trauma, instability, and dependency (Human Rights Watch, 2020). For host communities, the sudden influx of displaced persons places pressure on scarce resources, weakens infrastructure, and fuels perceptions of insecurity (International Crisis Group, 2017). These dynamics undermine **social cohesion** by straining intergroup relationships. However, displacement also presents an **opportunity to reimagine and strengthen community resilience**. The disruption of social systems highlights the need for inclusive policies, dialogue platforms, and integration strategies that can rebuild trust and cooperation. By examining internal displacement not only as a source of crisis but also as a context for **resilience-building**, this study contributes to both local and global discussions on sustainable approaches to peace, security, and development (Adger, 2003; Ager & Strang, 2008).

Social Cohesion

Social cohesion refers to the strength of relationships, solidarity, and shared identity within a community. It encompasses the social bonds, trust, and sense of belonging that facilitate collective action and cooperation. Cohesion is widely recognized as central to societal stability, peaceful coexistence, and the capacity to recover from crises (Chan, To, & Chan, 2006; Putnam, 2000). In contexts affected by internal displacement, social cohesion becomes even more critical, as the disruption of community networks can exacerbate vulnerability, social fragmentation, and conflict. Communities with high cohesion are better able to withstand shocks, resolve disputes peacefully, and mobilize collective efforts toward shared goals, including development and resilience-building.

For the purpose of this study, social cohesion is conceptualized along four interrelated dimensions, which collectively capture both its structural and relational aspects:

1. **Trust**: Trust refers to the mutual confidence that individuals and groups place in one another, as well as in institutions and governance systems. It is a fundamental element of social capital and serves as a prerequisite for effective collaboration and peaceful coexistence (Putnam, 2000). In displacement-affected areas, trust is often severely eroded due to competition for scarce resources, perceived favoritism, or historical grievances. Rebuilding trust requires deliberate interventions, including inclusive dialogue, transparent resource distribution, and accountable governance mechanisms (Olaniyan & Yahaya, 2016). For example, community committees that involve both IDPs and host residents in decision-making processes can foster trust by demonstrating fairness and mutual respect.
2. **Social Networks**: Social networks consist of the interpersonal and communal ties that provide emotional support, social security, and access to resources (Adger, 2003; Ager & Strang, 2008). Displacement disrupts these networks, often leaving individuals isolated and dependent on limited external assistance. The re-establishment of social

networks is therefore crucial for resilience. Initiatives such as community-based organizations, peer support groups, and local associations can help IDPs and host community members reconnect, rebuild solidarity, and create mechanisms for mutual aid. Strong social networks also facilitate the dissemination of information, improve resource-sharing, and foster a sense of belonging, which are essential for long-term stability.

3. **Cooperation**: Cooperation is the willingness and ability of groups to collaborate toward shared goals. While competition for resources—such as land, employment, or aid—can undermine cooperation, structured interventions can restore collaborative relationships. Conflict-sensitive programming, joint community projects, and participatory problem-solving approaches can create opportunities for IDPs and host communities to work together, reinforcing interdependence and collective action (Crisp, 2000; International Crisis Group, 2017). In practical terms, initiatives like communal farming projects, joint water management systems, or shared educational programs can serve as platforms for rebuilding cooperation.
4. **Shared Values**: Shared values are the cultural, social, and moral principles that bind communities together and provide a framework for collective identity and norms (Berry, 2001). Displacement can introduce cultural heterogeneity or exacerbate existing social cleavages, leading to misunderstandings, prejudice, or conflict. Promoting shared values requires intentional integration strategies, including cultural exchange programs, dialogue sessions, and joint community celebrations, which reinforce common identity and social cohesion (Amnesty International, 2018). Over time, these initiatives help to harmonize diverse groups, reduce social tension, and foster mutual respect and inclusion.

In the context of **Benue State**, these four dimensions provide a robust framework for analyzing both the disruptive impact of displacement and the pathways for rebuilding cohesion and resilience. Displacement-induced social fragmentation affects the day-to-day interactions, trust levels, and cooperative behaviors of affected communities. By examining how trust, networks, cooperation, and shared values can be restored, policymakers, practitioners, and community leaders can design interventions that promote sustainable peace, social stability, and inclusive development. Furthermore, understanding these dimensions enables researchers to measure the effectiveness of integration strategies, identify gaps in community support systems, and develop targeted initiatives that strengthen resilience among both internally displaced persons and host populations. Ultimately, social cohesion is not merely a desirable social condition—it is a **prerequisite for sustainable development and post-displacement recovery**, serving as the glue that holds communities together in the face of adversity.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Global Context of Internal Displacement

Internal displacement is a critical humanitarian challenge, affecting millions of individuals across the globe. By the end of 2022, over 71.1 million people were internally displaced due to armed conflicts, violence, and natural disasters, representing a significant increase from previous years (IDMC, 2023). Unlike refugees who seek protection across international borders, internally displaced persons (IDPs) remain within their home countries, subject to the jurisdiction and governance of their own states. However, this distinction often leaves IDPs vulnerable, as they face significant barriers to accessing adequate protection, essential services, and long-term solutions.

Causes and Dynamics of Internal Displacement

The primary drivers of internal displacement vary globally but often include armed conflicts, political instability, violence, and natural disasters. For example, protracted conflicts in countries such as Syria, Yemen, and the Democratic Republic of Congo have forced millions from their homes, contributing to some of the largest IDP populations worldwide. Similarly, natural disasters, including hurricanes, floods, and earthquakes, have displaced millions, particularly in regions vulnerable to climate change (UNHCR, 2021). Displacement dynamics are complex, as they often involve secondary and tertiary displacements when IDPs are forced to move multiple times due to recurring violence, resource shortages, or insufficient living conditions in initial displacement sites. These complexities exacerbate the challenges of providing effective humanitarian aid and implementing durable solutions.

The Legal and Policy Framework for Addressing Internal Displacement

The international community has established legal and policy frameworks to address the challenges faced by IDPs. The United Nations Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, adopted in 1998, provide a comprehensive framework for protecting the rights of IDPs. These principles emphasize the responsibility of states to prevent displacement, protect IDPs during displacement, and support durable solutions, including return, integration, or resettlement (Cohen & Deng, 1998). However, the implementation of these principles often encounters significant obstacles. Many states affected by internal displacement lack the resources, institutional capacity, or political will to address the issue effectively. In some cases, governments are parties to the conflicts causing displacement, further complicating efforts to protect and assist IDPs.

Global Disparities in Addressing Internal Displacement

Responses to internal displacement vary widely across regions and countries. Developed nations, with greater resources and stronger governance structures, are often better equipped to manage displacement crises. In contrast, developing countries, which host the majority of the world's IDPs, struggle with limited resources, weak institutions, and competing

developmental priorities. For instance, in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, countries experiencing high levels of internal displacement often grapple with poverty, fragile state institutions, and inadequate infrastructure, which undermine effective responses (IDMC, 2023). Moreover, international humanitarian agencies such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) play crucial roles in supporting displaced populations. However, these organizations face funding constraints and political challenges that limit their capacity to address the growing scale of displacement.

Impact of Internal Displacement on Social Cohesion

Internal displacement has profound social implications, particularly in the context of host communities. The sudden influx of displaced populations can strain resources, disrupt social dynamics, and create tensions between IDPs and host communities. Globally, instances of heightened competition for food, water, and housing have been documented, often leading to resentment and conflict. These challenges underscore the importance of addressing internal displacement not only as a humanitarian issue but also as a critical factor in maintaining social cohesion and stability.

Emerging Trends and Future Challenges

The landscape of internal displacement is evolving, with climate change emerging as a significant driver. Rising sea levels, desertification, and extreme weather events are expected to displace millions more in the coming decades, posing unprecedented challenges for governments and humanitarian agencies. Additionally, the increasing urbanization of displacement—where IDPs migrate to cities rather than camps—requires a shift in traditional approaches to displacement management, emphasizing urban planning and infrastructure development (UNHCR, 2021). The global context of internal displacement highlights the urgency of coordinated and comprehensive responses to address this pressing issue. While frameworks like the UN Guiding Principles provide a foundation for protecting IDPs, their effective implementation requires strong political commitment, robust institutional capacity, and sustained international support. Addressing the root causes of displacement, mitigating its impacts on social cohesion, and preparing for emerging challenges are essential steps toward reducing the global burden of internal displacement.

Internal Displacement in Nigeria

Nigeria stands as one of the nation’s most severely affected by internal displacement, with an estimated 3.5 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) as of 2023. The displacement crisis in the country is primarily driven by a combination of factors, including armed conflicts, insurgency, and environmental disasters exacerbated by climate change. As the world's most populous black nation, Nigeria is facing numerous challenges stemming from protracted violence, terrorism, and resource-based conflicts, all of which contribute to the increasing

displacement of communities across the country (International Organization for Migration [IOM], 2023).

A significant contributor to internal displacement in Nigeria is the ongoing farmer-herder conflict, particularly in states like Benue. These conflicts have escalated due to a mix of factors such as competition for land and water resources, compounded by climate change and demographic shifts. The shrinking availability of arable land due to desertification and climate-induced changes, such as irregular rainfall patterns, has forced herders to move further south in search of grazing grounds, often coming into violent conflict with farming communities who rely on the land for their livelihood (Olaniyan & Yahaya, 2016). This tension over resources has led to violent clashes between ethnic groups, resulting in mass displacements in regions like Benue State, where large numbers of farmers are displaced from their farmlands. In addition to conflicts between farmers and herders, insurgent activities in parts of the North, particularly by groups like Boko Haram and other militant groups, have also exacerbated the displacement crisis. These insurgent groups often target civilian populations, causing widespread destruction and forcing millions to flee their homes. These complex security challenges have severely affected both urban and rural populations, forcing many to seek refuge in displacement camps or within host communities (Human Rights Watch, 2020).

Benue State, often called the "Food Basket of the Nation," is particularly affected by internal displacement. The state is not only central to Nigeria's agricultural production but also home to many ethnic communities, each with distinct cultural practices and livelihoods. The displacement in Benue has disrupted these communities' primary economic activities, including farming, which affects the state's food security and economic stability. The primary occupation of many residents in Benue involves agriculture, and with large-scale displacement, both farmers and pastoralists face severe economic challenges due to the loss of their livelihoods (Amnesty International, 2018). Furthermore, the influx of displaced persons into host communities has placed an enormous strain on local resources, infrastructure, and services, contributing to heightened tensions between the displaced populations and their hosts. As both groups compete for access to limited resources such as food, water, shelter, and healthcare, existing tensions are magnified, often leading to conflicts over resource distribution, cultural differences, and social integration. This growing pressure on local communities creates a fertile ground for further destabilization and division, as host populations begin to feel that their resources and safety are under threat (International Crisis Group, 2017).

The challenges of managing internal displacement in Nigeria are compounded by weak governance, ineffective conflict resolution mechanisms, and inadequate humanitarian support. Government responses to the displacement crisis have often been slow and fragmented, with insufficient investment in the rehabilitation and integration of displaced persons. Consequently, IDPs face poor living conditions, limited access to education and healthcare, and ongoing insecurity. The state's failure to provide adequate solutions to the crisis has

further exacerbated the plight of displaced individuals, hindering the restoration of social cohesion in affected areas. Internal displacement in Nigeria, and particularly in Benue State, is a multifaceted crisis driven by violent conflicts, environmental challenges, and weak governance. The severe disruption of livelihoods, strained resources, and heightened tensions between IDPs and host communities pose significant barriers to social cohesion and development. Effective intervention strategies that address the root causes of displacement and promote sustainable solutions are essential to alleviate the suffering of affected populations and rebuild trust and cooperation within communities.

Factors Influencing Social Cohesion in Displacement Settings

The dynamics of social cohesion in displacement settings are shaped by several critical factors, which often interplay in complex ways. Understanding these factors is essential for comprehending the challenges faced by displaced populations and host communities. Below are the key factors influencing social cohesion in displacement contexts:

1. **Resource Availability**: One of the most significant drivers of conflict and social fragmentation in displacement settings is the availability and distribution of resources. Resources such as land, water, food, and social services are often scarce, particularly in areas receiving large numbers of displaced persons. In contexts like Benue State, where farmer-herder conflicts are prevalent, competition for these resources intensifies, leading to tensions between internally displaced persons (IDPs) and host communities (International Crisis Group, 2017). When displaced persons and host populations vie for limited resources, it can foster resentment, competition, and distrust. Displacement itself often results in the disruption of livelihoods, which exacerbates the competition for basic necessities, leading to further strain on community relations. A lack of access to resources often undermines the potential for cooperation, contributing to a weakening of social cohesion.
2. **Cultural and Ethnic Differences**: Displacement often brings together people from diverse cultural, ethnic, and religious backgrounds. In Benue State, where ethnic diversity is already significant, the sudden influx of displaced populations into host communities can create a challenging environment for integration. Differences in language, customs, and practices may lead to cultural misunderstandings, discrimination, and social exclusion. For instance, certain displaced groups may be perceived as outsiders, which can result in stigmatization, prejudice, or even violent conflict. Cultural differences can also affect the willingness of displaced persons and host communities to cooperate, as shared values and norms are essential for the establishment of social cohesion. As Berry (2001) argues, when cultural diversity is not effectively managed, it can lead to social fragmentation rather than integration. The fear of losing cultural identity or dominance may make host communities wary of absorbing IDPs, especially in resource-constrained settings.

3. **Perceptions of Security**: Perceptions of security, or the lack thereof, are central to the establishment of trust and cooperation between displaced populations and host communities. In conflict-prone areas, IDPs may have fled violence, and their presence in host communities could be accompanied by fears of further violence, insecurity, or crime. In many cases, IDPs may be viewed as potential threats, particularly if they are seen as competitors for resources or if they are perceived as contributing to instability (Putnam, 2000). Inadequate security measures or poorly coordinated peacebuilding efforts can exacerbate these fears, undermining social cohesion. On the other hand, when there is a strong sense of security and protection, cooperation and social trust are more likely to develop, as individuals feel safer and more willing to engage in collective efforts for rebuilding their communities. Security concerns, therefore, play a central role in determining whether IDPs and host populations can coexist peacefully or whether tensions and conflicts will persist.
4. **Institutional Support**: Institutional support, including effective governance, humanitarian aid, and development interventions, plays a critical role in fostering or hindering social cohesion in displacement settings. According to Crisp (2000), the presence of strong and responsive institutions is essential for addressing the needs of displaced populations and ensuring that host communities do not feel overwhelmed or marginalized. Governments, humanitarian organizations, and community leaders are pivotal in providing necessary resources, mediating conflicts, and facilitating dialogue between IDPs and host communities. When institutions fail to provide adequate support, or when interventions are fragmented or poorly coordinated, tensions between displaced populations and host communities may worsen. On the other hand, when there are well-organized and transparent mechanisms for resource distribution, conflict resolution, and community engagement, social cohesion is more likely to be maintained. In contexts like Benue, where institutional weaknesses are prevalent, fostering cooperation between displaced persons and host communities becomes significantly more challenging without effective support systems.

Together, these factors—resource availability, cultural and ethnic differences, perceptions of security, and institutional support—shape the dynamics of social cohesion in displacement settings. The ability of both displaced populations and host communities to cooperate and rebuild their relationships depends largely on how these factors are managed. In Benue State, addressing these factors through inclusive governance, equitable resource distribution, and conflict-sensitive approaches is crucial for promoting long-term social cohesion and stability. By understanding the underlying factors that influence social cohesion, policymakers and humanitarian actors can design interventions that mitigate conflict and foster cooperation between displaced persons and their hosts.

Impact of Displacement on Social Cohesion

Internal displacement disrupts the social fabric of communities, creating tensions and divisions that weaken social cohesion. In Benue State, the consequences of displacement are profound, affecting trust, cooperation, and integration between displaced persons (IDPs) and host communities.

Erosion of Trust

Displacement often leads to a breakdown of trust, a cornerstone of social cohesion. Displaced persons may harbor feelings of mistrust toward host communities due to perceived discrimination, marginalization, or neglect in the distribution of resources and aid. Similarly, host communities may view IDPs with suspicion, perceiving them as competitors for scarce resources or as contributors to local instability. In Benue State, tensions over access to land—essential for agriculture—and the perceived inequitable distribution of humanitarian aid have significantly eroded trust between these groups. For example, Olaniyan and Yahaya (2016) highlight how unresolved disputes over land access have fueled mistrust, exacerbating pre-existing divisions. The erosion of trust undermines collective efforts to address common challenges, making reconciliation and long-term integration more difficult.

Resource Competition and Conflict

The influx of IDPs into host communities places immense strain on already limited resources, including food, water, shelter, and healthcare. This competition often leads to resentment, tension, and outright conflict between IDPs and host populations. In Benue State, resource scarcity has escalated disputes over essential services and communal resources. Studies by the International Crisis Group (2017) reveal that the lack of coordinated resource management has heightened competition and reduced opportunities for cooperation, posing a significant threat to social harmony. This competition not only undermines immediate stability but also disrupts long-term development efforts by diverting attention and resources from broader societal needs.

Cultural Differences and Stigmatization

Cultural differences between IDPs and host communities can act as barriers to integration, further fragmenting communities. Differences in languages, traditions, and social norms often lead to misunderstandings and alienation. For instance, IDPs in Benue frequently encounter stigmatization based on their displacement status, which exacerbates feelings of exclusion and isolation.

Amnesty International (2018) notes that in Benue, divergent cultural practices and languages have intensified social fragmentation, with some host communities perceiving IDPs as outsiders or intruders. This stigmatization discourages cooperation and mutual understanding, perpetuating divisions and undermining efforts to foster a cohesive society.

Role of Institutions

Government agencies and humanitarian organizations play a pivotal role in mitigating the challenges of displacement and promoting social cohesion. However, in Benue State, inadequate institutional support and poorly coordinated interventions have limited their effectiveness.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, 2021) underscores how inconsistent funding, fragmented policy implementation, and limited community engagement have hindered efforts to address displacement comprehensively. For example, IDP camps in Benue often lack basic amenities, and host communities frequently feel neglected in aid distribution, further straining relationships.

Psychosocial and Emotional Impacts

Beyond physical and economic challenges, displacement significantly affects the emotional and psychological well-being of individuals and communities. IDPs in Benue often experience trauma, grief, and anxiety due to the loss of homes, livelihoods, and loved ones. These emotional burdens compound the difficulty of rebuilding trust and fostering cooperation with host communities.

Moreover, host communities may also face psychological stress due to the rapid changes brought by the arrival of IDPs, including increased competition for resources and heightened security concerns. Addressing these psychosocial impacts is crucial for promoting reconciliation and rebuilding social cohesion.

Need for Comprehensive Interventions

To mitigate the negative impacts of displacement on social cohesion, comprehensive and inclusive interventions are necessary. These should include equitable resource distribution, culturally sensitive integration programs, and active efforts to rebuild trust between IDPs and host communities. Institutions must also engage all stakeholders in decision-making processes to ensure that interventions address the unique needs and concerns of both displaced populations and host communities.

EMPIRICAL STUDIES ON SOCIAL COHESION AND DISPLACEMENT

Empirical studies provide critical insights into the importance of social cohesion in displacement settings and the factors influencing its dynamics. Adger (2003) underscores the significance of social capital—networks of relationships and trust—in fostering community resilience during displacement. Communities with strong social capital tend to adapt more effectively to crises, as these networks facilitate resource sharing, cooperation, and collective problem-solving. This finding highlights the role of trust and relationships in mitigating the adverse effects of displacement. Putnam (2000) further emphasized that trust and cooperation are fundamental for rebuilding fractured communities. His research revealed that the erosion of trust in displacement contexts often leads to weakened social bonds, making recovery and

integration efforts more challenging. Building trust among displaced populations and host communities is essential for restoring social cohesion and ensuring long-term stability.

In the Nigerian context, Olaniyan and Yahaya (2016) explored the impact of internal displacement on social structures, revealing that displacement often results in the marginalization and exclusion of internally displaced persons (IDPs). This exclusion, driven by competition over scarce resources and cultural differences, hinders the successful integration of IDPs into host communities. The study concluded that addressing marginalization is critical for fostering social cohesion and reducing tensions in displacement-affected areas. The International Crisis Group (2017) provided additional evidence from Benue State, where unresolved resource conflicts between farmers and herders have exacerbated social fragmentation. The study highlighted that resource scarcity, coupled with weak conflict resolution mechanisms, fuels distrust and competition, further undermining social cohesion. The findings suggest that addressing resource conflicts and promoting equitable resource allocation are vital steps toward rebuilding trust and cooperation. Amnesty International (2018) examined the sociocultural dynamics in displacement settings in Benue State, revealing that cultural differences and stigmatization significantly hinder integration efforts. Displaced populations often face discrimination based on ethnicity or religion, creating barriers to cooperation and collective action. The study recommended the implementation of cultural awareness and integration programs to bridge divides and promote harmony.

These empirical studies collectively underscore the multifaceted nature of social cohesion in displacement contexts. They highlight the importance of addressing trust, resource competition, cultural differences, and institutional support to foster integration and rebuild fractured communities. For Benue State, these insights provide

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study draws on **social capital theory** and **conflict theory** to explore the relationship between internal displacement and social cohesion. Social capital theory, as articulated by Putnam (2000), emphasizes the importance of networks, norms, and trust in fostering cooperation and maintaining social cohesion within communities. The theory provides a valuable framework for analyzing how displacement disrupts these networks, weakening trust and social bonds. For instance, when communities are fractured by displacement, the erosion of shared norms and relationships can lead to heightened mistrust and reduced cooperation, which undermines social cohesion. Social capital theory also underscores the potential for rebuilding trust and relationships through community engagement, open dialogue, and institutional support, offering a pathway to recovery and reintegration. Complementing this, **conflict theory** (Coser, 1956) informs the analysis of resource-based conflicts that often drive displacement and strain social cohesion in Benue State. Conflict theory highlights the inherent competition for scarce resources—such as land, water, and social services—as a root cause of displacement and tension. It provides a lens to understand how such competition exacerbates mistrust and hostility between displaced persons and host communities. Furthermore, the

theory points to the critical need for equitable resource distribution, robust conflict resolution mechanisms, and inclusive policies to mitigate these tensions and foster a more cohesive society.

LITERATURE REVIEW: CONTEXT AND GAPS

Existing literature highlights the multidimensional challenges associated with displacement, including its economic, humanitarian, and social aspects. Studies such as those by Adger (2003) and Putnam (2000) have underscored the importance of trust and cooperation as foundational elements of community resilience and social cohesion. In the Nigerian context, Olaniyan and Yahaya (2016) revealed how displacement exacerbates marginalization and exclusion, while the International Crisis Group (2017) detailed the role of unresolved resource conflicts in driving tensions between IDPs and host communities in Benue State. Despite these insights, much of the existing research focuses predominantly on the economic and humanitarian dimensions of displacement, with less emphasis on the social dynamics and long-term implications for community stability. For example, while studies like Amnesty International (2018) have highlighted issues of stigmatization and cultural barriers, they often lack detailed analyses of how these factors interact with institutional efforts to rebuild cohesion. Similarly, while the role of resource competition has been widely acknowledged, there is a need for empirical investigations into how these dynamics specifically affect social relationships and trust at the local level.

This paper addresses these gaps by focusing on the social dimensions of displacement in Benue State, with particular emphasis on trust, cooperation, and integration among IDPs and host communities. By applying social capital and conflict theories, the research aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the interplay between displacement and social cohesion. It will also identify actionable pathways to rebuild trust, strengthen networks, and foster cooperation in the wake of displacement. In doing so, the study contributes to the broader discourse on displacement and social cohesion, offering practical recommendations for policymakers, humanitarian organizations, and community leaders in Benue State and beyond.

DISCUSSION

Conditions Giving Rise to Internal Displacement in Benue State

Benue State, often referred to as the "Food Basket of the Nation," is endowed with fertile lands that support extensive agricultural activities. However, this natural endowment has also made it a hotspot for conflicts, particularly between farmers and herders, over access to land and water resources (Amnesty International, 2018). These farmer-herder conflicts have been aggravated by several factors, including population growth, climate change, and inadequate conflict resolution mechanisms.

Farmer-Herder Conflicts

The root cause of displacement in Benue State can be traced to the competition for arable land and water between sedentary farmers and nomadic herders. Historically, these groups coexisted through traditional land-sharing agreements and conflict resolution practices.

However, increasing population pressure and the expansion of agricultural activities have reduced the availability of grazing lands, creating tension between the two groups. Climate change has further exacerbated these tensions. Prolonged droughts in the Sahel region have pushed herders southward into Nigeria's fertile Middle Belt, including Benue State, in search of pasture for their livestock. Simultaneously, erratic rainfall and flooding have disrupted farming cycles, intensifying the struggle for resources and leading to violent confrontations that displace entire communities (Olaniyan & Yahaya, 2016).

Climate-Related Displacement

In addition to conflicts, climate-induced disasters such as flooding have contributed significantly to internal displacement in Benue State. The state experiences annual flooding, particularly in low-lying areas along the Benue River. For instance, the 2019 and 2022 floods displaced thousands of residents, destroyed homes, and submerged farmlands, leaving many without shelter or livelihoods (National Emergency Management Agency [NEMA], 2023). These recurrent disasters exacerbate the already dire conditions for displaced populations, making recovery and resettlement more challenging.

Prolonged Displacement and Semi-Permanent IDP Camps

The scale and frequency of displacement in Benue State have led to the establishment of semi-permanent IDP camps, where thousands of displaced persons reside under precarious conditions. Between 2018 and 2023, the state recorded over 2 million displaced persons, many of whom remain unable to return to their communities due to unresolved conflicts and inadequate support for rebuilding their livelihoods (NEMA, 2023). These camps are characterized by overcrowding, inadequate access to basic amenities such as clean water and healthcare, and limited opportunities for economic activities. The prolonged stay in these camps disrupts traditional social networks and weakens community cohesion, as displaced persons struggle to integrate into host communities or rebuild their lives.

Socioeconomic and Psychological Impacts

The displacement crisis in Benue State has far-reaching socioeconomic and psychological impacts. The loss of livelihoods, particularly in agriculture, has plunged many households into poverty. Children’s education is often interrupted as families prioritize survival over schooling. Additionally, the psychological toll on displaced individuals, including trauma from witnessing violence and the uncertainty of prolonged displacement, further complicates efforts to rebuild lives and communities (International Organization for Migration [IOM], 2023).

Strain on Community Resources

The strain on community resources is one of the most immediate and significant consequences of internal displacement, particularly in regions that were already grappling with resource

scarcity before displacement occurred. Host communities, already facing socio-economic challenges, often find themselves under immense pressure when displaced populations arrive. With the sudden influx of IDPs, competition for resources such as land, water, healthcare, education, and other basic services intensifies. This is particularly evident in areas such as Benue State, where agriculture is the primary livelihood for many residents, and where displacement due to farmer-herder conflicts and climate change exacerbates these pressures (Olaniyan & Yahaya, 2016).

Competition for Basic Resources

One of the most pressing issues in displacement settings is the competition for basic resources. In agricultural regions like Benue, where land and water are essential for the livelihoods of both host populations and displaced persons, the sudden influx of IDPs increases competition over these limited resources. This is particularly problematic in regions where farmland and water sources are already scarce or increasingly difficult to access due to population growth, environmental degradation, and climate change (International Crisis Group, 2017). Displaced persons, many of whom are farmers, seek to continue their agricultural practices in their new host communities. However, in a situation where land and water are already limited, this creates a highly charged environment where disputes over land ownership, land usage, and access to water become common. Moreover, the pressure on essential services such as healthcare and education further compounds the strain on resources. For instance, schools in host communities may become overcrowded as displaced children join local students, and healthcare facilities may become overwhelmed with patients from both groups. This creates a situation where services that were already inadequate to meet the needs of the local population are further stretched. According to Amnesty International (2018), the displacement in Benue has led to significant overcrowding in healthcare centers and schools, limiting access to quality services for both host communities and IDPs.

Erosion of Social Trust and Cooperation

The competition for resources often leads to the erosion of trust between displaced persons and host communities. When both groups are struggling to access limited resources, tensions rise, and perceptions of unfairness and discrimination emerge. For example, IDPs may feel that they are not receiving their fair share of aid or that they are being marginalized by host communities. In turn, host communities may view IDPs as competitors for scarce resources or as burdens on local services, particularly when external assistance appears to be disproportionately directed at displaced populations (Olaniyan & Yahaya, 2016). This breakdown in trust creates significant challenges for fostering cooperation and rebuilding social cohesion. According to Putnam (2000), trust is a key pillar of social capital, which is necessary for social cooperation and collaboration. When communities cannot trust one another, it becomes increasingly difficult to address common challenges, such as managing resources, providing security, or rebuilding local infrastructure. As tensions escalate, divisions

between displaced persons and host populations deepen, and social fragmentation becomes more pronounced.

Cultural and Social Fragmentation

Displacement often results in the introduction of culturally diverse groups into host communities, which can exacerbate existing social divisions and introduce new cultural tensions. The cultural differences between IDPs and host communities—such as different languages, religious practices, and social norms—can hinder the integration process. In Benue State, for example, host communities may harbor cultural prejudices or fears about displaced populations, which can manifest in exclusionary behavior or social stigmatization (Amnesty International, 2018). The perception of IDPs as outsiders or as a threat to local customs can prevent meaningful social interaction, further hindering the process of integration. These cultural differences, combined with the competition for resources, often lead to social fragmentation. In many instances, displaced populations may isolate themselves from host communities, forming their own social networks or relying on external aid for support. This undermines the development of cohesive, integrated communities and limits opportunities for collaboration and peacebuilding. The inability of displaced populations and host communities to forge new, inclusive social bonds means that the prospect of social cohesion in these areas is severely compromised.

The Role of Institutions in Addressing Resource Strain

Government and humanitarian organizations play an essential role in addressing the strain on resources in displacement settings. Effective governance and coordination of aid distribution are crucial in ensuring that both host communities and IDPs have equitable access to essential services and resources. However, in many displacement situations, including in Benue State, inadequate support and poorly coordinated interventions have contributed to the escalation of resource-based tensions (UNHCR, 2021). In some cases, the limited capacity of local and national institutions to manage the distribution of aid and resources has exacerbated existing inequalities, contributing to the erosion of social cohesion. Research by Crisp (2000) emphasizes that institutional support is a key factor in fostering social cohesion in displacement settings. When governance structures are weak or ineffective, the ability to address resource conflicts and promote cooperation between displaced persons and host communities is significantly diminished. Without effective institutional interventions, the competition for resources will likely continue to escalate, undermining efforts to restore social trust and cooperation.

The strain on community resources is a critical factor influencing social cohesion in displacement settings. When resources such as land, water, and basic services are limited, both displaced persons and host communities are forced into direct competition, which often leads to conflicts, mistrust, and social fragmentation. In regions like Benue State, where agricultural activities are essential for livelihoods, the pressure on these resources can exacerbate tensions

and undermine social cohesion. Furthermore, cultural differences and inadequate institutional support further complicate efforts to address these issues. As such, addressing the strain on community resources is vital for promoting social cohesion and rebuilding community resilience in the aftermath of displacement. Without effective management of resources and equitable distribution, the social fabric of affected areas will continue to fray, making long-term recovery and peacebuilding efforts more challenging.

The Need for Interventions

The challenges posed by internal displacement in Benue State underscore the urgent need for comprehensive interventions. Addressing the root causes of displacement, such as resource-based conflicts and climate-induced disasters, requires long-term policy solutions and conflict resolution mechanisms. Additionally, rebuilding social cohesion through initiatives that promote integration, dialogue, and trust between displaced populations and host communities is critical for fostering peaceful coexistence and sustainable development. The conditions giving rise to internal displacement in Benue State reflect a complex interplay of environmental, socioeconomic, and political factors. The resulting displacement crisis has profound implications for the state's social fabric, emphasizing the importance of targeted interventions to mitigate its impact and promote resilience.

Social Cohesion in Displacement Contexts

Social cohesion is defined as the strength of relationships and solidarity among members of a community, encompassing dimensions such as trust, social networks, cooperation, and shared values (Chan, To, & Chan, 2006). Studies have shown that displacement often undermines these dimensions, leading to weakened trust, fractured social networks, and heightened tensions (Adger, 2003). For instance, a study by Ager and Strang (2008) highlights that integration and social cohesion are often disrupted in displacement settings due to resource competition, cultural differences, and exclusionary practices. Similarly, Olaniyan and Yahaya (2016) found that displacement in Nigeria exacerbates tensions between IDPs and host communities, with competition for limited resources often leading to conflict. In Benue State, cultural differences between IDPs, many of whom belong to agrarian communities, and host populations have created barriers to integration. Resource competition and perceptions of insecurity further strain relations, highlighting the importance of fostering trust and cooperation to rebuild social cohesion.

CONCLUSION

Displacement has profound and multifaceted impacts on the social fabric of communities, particularly in regions like Benue State, Nigeria, where it disrupts long-standing relationships and community structures. The dislocation of individuals and families weakens the bonds of trust, both within displaced populations and between them and host communities. Trust, a critical component of social cohesion, is further eroded by perceptions of discrimination,

unfair resource allocation, and the lack of effective communication between these groups. Social networks, which are vital for communal support and resilience, are often dismantled during displacement. These networks, once centered around shared livelihoods, cultural practices, and communal cooperation, become fragmented, leaving displaced individuals isolated and vulnerable. Resource competition exacerbates these challenges, as both displaced and host communities vie for limited essentials such as land, water, food, and shelter. This competition often intensifies pre-existing tensions and creates new conflicts, making peaceful coexistence difficult. Cultural differences and stigmatization add another layer of complexity. The influx of displaced persons into host communities often introduces unfamiliar cultural practices, languages, and values, which can lead to misunderstandings and prejudice. Stigmatization of IDPs as outsiders or as burdens on local resources further alienates them, hindering efforts to integrate them into the social and economic life of the host communities.

Despite efforts by government and humanitarian agencies to address these issues, significant gaps persist. Interventions are often hampered by inadequate resources, poorly coordinated efforts, and a limited emphasis on the social dimensions of displacement. Existing strategies frequently focus on immediate relief, such as food and shelter, without addressing the long-term goal of fostering social cohesion. To ensure sustainable peace and development in Benue State, it is essential to adopt a comprehensive and multidimensional approach. Building trust between displaced persons and host communities should be prioritized through inclusive dialogue and participatory decision-making processes. Equitable resource allocation and development initiatives must be implemented to reduce competition and foster a sense of shared purpose. Cultural integration programs, emphasizing mutual respect and understanding, can bridge divides and combat stigmatization. Addressing the social implications of displacement requires a coordinated effort that transcends humanitarian relief. Sustainable interventions must address the root causes of tension and actively promote cooperation, inclusion, and resilience among all affected groups. Only through such holistic approaches can Benue State achieve lasting peace and harmony in the wake of displacement.

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