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## Nigeria:

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# No end to internal displacement

*Internal displacement caused by both communal violence and internal armed conflict is a recurrent phenomenon in most states in Nigeria. The parties to the fighting have sought political, economic and social advantages in a country with endemic poverty, low levels of education and a huge and alienated youth population.*

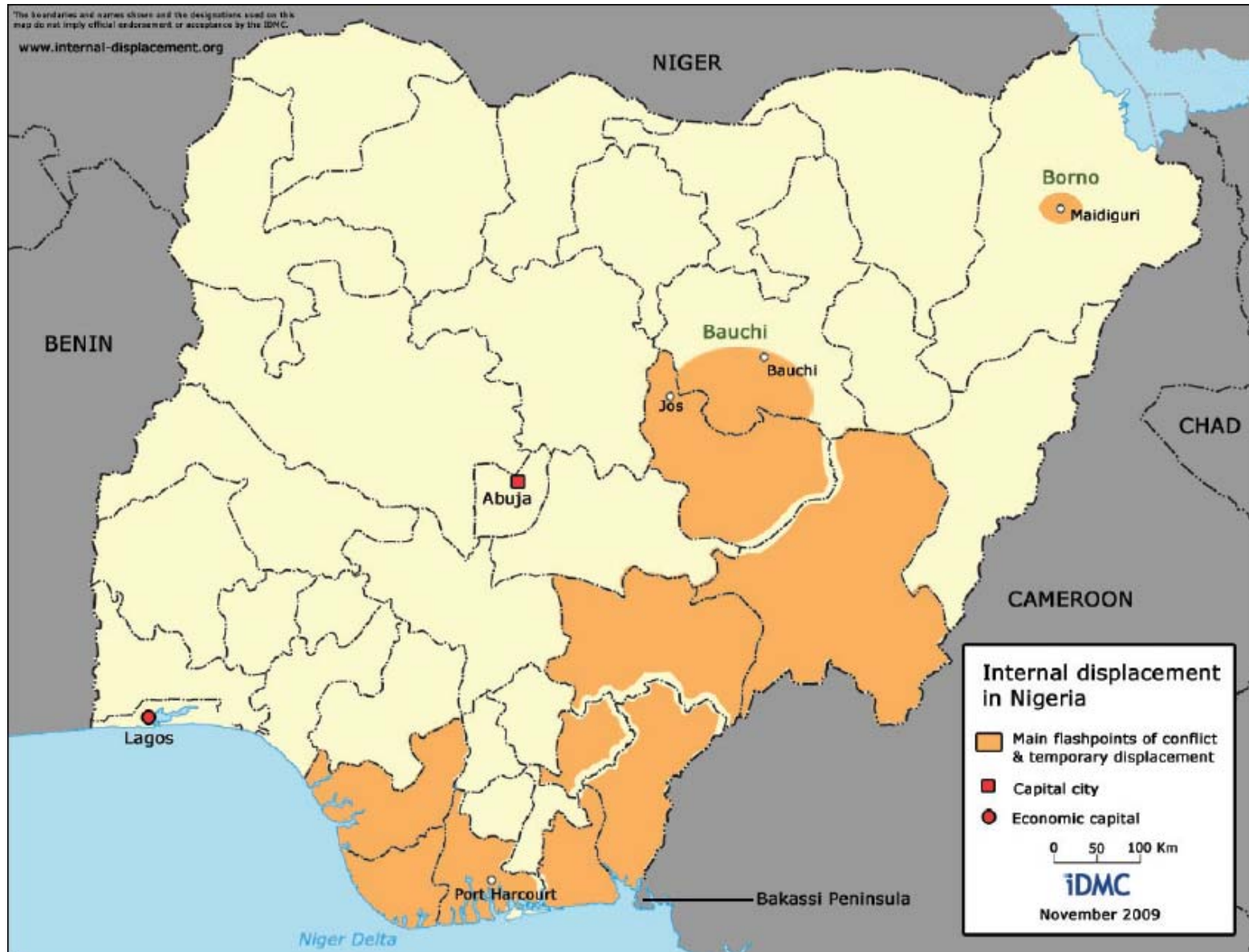
*There are no clear figures of the current number of internally displaced people (IDPs) in the country. Ad-hoc local registration exercises have hinted at the scale of displacement, but many people have sought shelter and support from family and friends and so have not been counted.*

*In 2009, increasingly bloody clashes between the army and militia members in the Niger Delta led to the displacement of thousands of people. However, with access to the area limited, the numbers, location and needs of IDPs are unknown. Recent steps to resolve the conflict have given IDPs cause to hope for a return home, notably the disarmament of some militia members under an amnesty.*

*In several central and northern states, outbreaks of violence over election results or between communities divided along religious lines have triggered large-scale death, destruction and displacement. Most recorded IDPs have sought refuge in police or army barracks, hospitals, mosques and churches.*

*The government has not yet adopted a national IDP policy, and national, international and local agencies have assisted IDPs on an ad-hoc or selective basis. The signing of the African Union's IDP convention in October 2009 may indicate the government's intention to address internal displacement in a more consistent and coherent manner.*

## Map of Internal Displacement in Nigeria



Source: IDMC

More maps are available on <http://www.internal-displacement.org>

## Background and causes of displacement

Nigeria has been affected by recurrent internal conflicts and generalised violence since the end of military rule and the return to democracy in 1999. The systematic and overlapping patterns of inequality in the country have been described as “breeding grounds” for conflict (O. Okpeh, 2008; CRISE, June 2007). As a result, the country is faced with the ongoing challenge of responding to a fluctuating but always sizeable internally displaced population.

Nigeria is made up of an extremely complex web of ethnic, linguistic and religious groups. Conflicts have been triggered by disputes over access to land, citizenship and broader questions of identity, particularly between people considered indigenous to an area and those regarded as settlers. Indigenous groups have routinely prevented settlers from owning land or businesses, or accessing jobs and education, inevitably causing tensions. According to a strategic conflict assessment carried out by the Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution in 2002, the return to democracy and the competition for the new political opportunities had led to increased violence. Local competition for resources has often been aggravated by “inter-elite” rivalries over privileges such as political and public service appointments, oversight of projects and admission into schools (IPCR, October 2002).

The principal source of wealth in Nigeria is the grouping of oil fields in the Niger Delta, and the country’s dependence on revenues from it have undermined stability and governance. Huge amounts of oil are removed from pipelines, and oil

smuggling is seen as a major threat to the rule of law in the whole West African sub-region (UNODC, July 2009). State revenues have not been shared effectively, and factional elites have taken control of state institutions, perpetuating the exclusion of other groups and accounting in large part for the poor score of Nigeria on the 2009 Failed States Index: the country was fifteenth worst of 177 countries (The Fund for Peace, 2009). A decade after the return to democracy, transparent management behaviour, effective accountability and equitable distribution of resources are still rare, and the legitimacy of the state is still questioned (Chatham House, April 2009).

## The Niger Delta

The southern Rivers, Bayelsa and Delta States, considered the core of the Niger Delta region, have been the scene of violent competition for land, political power and oil wealth. The government’s failure to ensure security, limit environmental damage, deliver social development or establish effective local institutions led to an armed insurgency that escalated dramatically in early 2006 (ICG, 3 August 2006). While some groups such as the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) used non-violent means in their struggle for increased minority and environmental rights, others chose armed conflict. Militias have clashed with the Nigerian army, kidnapped numerous foreign workers and destroyed installations (Vanguard, 7 June 2009; IRIN, 17 November 2008). With many armed groups failing to uphold their goal of promoting social justice, drug trafficking and in recent years the more profitable theft of oil have become common in the region (CFR, 9 September 2009).

In May 2009 thousands of people were displaced by fighting between government forces and militants of the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND), which was created through the merger of different armed groups in 2005. The Joint Task Force (JTF), charged with restoring order in the Niger Delta, launched Operation Restore Hope in an effort to uproot militant groups. The JTF launched land and air strikes around the city of Warri in Delta State, and later extended its offensive to neighbouring Rivers State (Reuters, 24 May 2009). The number of casualties among the civilian population is unknown and reported IDP figures have varied, from 1,000 people sheltering in a school and hospital in the local capital Ogbé Ijoh to up to 10,000 residents believed to have fled into the forest and unable to return home (IRIN, 22 May 2009; BBC, 21 May 2009; AI, 20 May 2009). Most of the people being hosted in the hospital were reportedly women and children, and the reported arrests of the first men who sought refuge there on suspicion of being militants encouraged other men to remain in hiding in the bush (FoE-Nigeria, 19 June 2009). Hygiene conditions in the overcrowded hospital were reportedly very poor, and displaced women complained of the disruption to family life caused by the forced separation from family members and the community (FoE-Nigeria, 19 June 2009).

Clashes in the city of Warri have caused displacement in 2009, but again no clear information has ever been made available on the number of people displaced. Warri is the administrative centre of the oil industry of the western Niger Delta region, and lies on a boundary between three distinct ethnic groups. It has been the site of

frequent communal conflicts over the past forty years as well as of clashes between militants and government forces (CFR, 9 September 2009). The Delta State government announced the beginning of a programme for some 5,000 IDPs to return to their homes in Warri in August 2009. The government guaranteed that the JTF would not target IDPs and that funds would be set aside to rebuild the communities destroyed in the clashes (Ministry of Information – Delta State, 3 August 2009). The JTF withdrew from Gbaramatu in Warri South Local Government area in mid-August 2009, leading to hopes for further returns to that area (MISNA, 14 August 2009).

Processes to end the insurgency and restore peace in the Niger Delta have edged forward. In 2008, the federal government agreed with Delta traditional leaders to set up a committee to identify a way forward. The committee issued recommendations in November 2008, which were reportedly sufficient to “serve as a catalyst” for the resolution of the conflict (IRIN, 28 May 2009; ICG, 30 April 2009, p.1). They included a comprehensive disarmament, demobilisation and rehabilitation programme including amnesty for militants, increased allocation of the Delta’s oil revenues to the region, and the urgent economic and human development of the Delta (Government of Nigeria, November 2008). In a parallel process, the federal government created in September 2008 the Ministry for Niger Delta Affairs to focus on the development of infrastructure and the empowerment of the youth population. Although created to address some of the root causes of the unrest in the region, the Ministry has suffered from a lack of funding and

also legitimacy in light of existing mechanisms (ICG, 30 April 2009).

The first measure to be implemented has been the amnesty programme, which led MEND to declare an indefinite ceasefire (ICG, 1 November 2009). By the end of October 2009, the government had estimated that up to 15,000 militants had handed in their weapons, including some of the most renowned rebel leaders (AFP, 25 October 2009). Notwithstanding this progress, obstacles remain in the absence of concrete plans for the demobilisation and rehabilitation of former militants or a comprehensive development strategy for the Niger Delta (AFP, 1 November 2009; USIP, 17 September 2009; ISS, 9 September 2009). The increasingly fragmented MEND may still have some capacity to regroup, with many fighters still holding arms despite calls from some leaders to join the amnesty programme (AFP, 23 October 2009).

### **The Middle Belt**

The “Middle Belt”, which runs across Nigeria, is the area with the highest concentration of minority ethnic groups. It comprises Taraba, Adamawa, Plateau, Nassarawa, Benue Kogi States, as well as southern Bauchi, southern Zaria and southern Kaduna (ActionAid, 2008). All these areas have witnessed intra-ethnic or inter-ethnic conflicts that have spread across different states. Researchers have pointed to a “crisis of citizenship” in which “different attitudes to citizenship contribute to political conflicts” (W. Idowu, 1999), articulated around the “settler-native” identity, fuelled by feelings of exclusion and struggles for recognition as causes of conflicts in these areas (ActionAid, 2008).

As in the Niger Delta, social factors such as mounting poverty, low levels of education and youth alienation have also contributed to the frequent occurrence of violence (AllAfrica, 7 August 2009). Conflicts have been triggered by a range of events including elections and disputed election results, boundary disputes, challenges to existing customary rights, political assassinations, the creation of new local government districts, land disputes, religious dissent, population movements and the impact of development projects (The Guardian, 18 January 2009; ActionAid, 2008, p. 22).

Impunity for perpetrators of sectarian violence is common. While government authorities are reportedly sometimes under political pressure to bring perpetrators to justice (IRIN, 24 April 2009), in some cases security forces have themselves been responsible for arbitrary killings (HRW, 20 July 2009). As repeated bouts of violence in Plateau State in 2001, 2004 and 2008 have shown, lack of accountability has prevented the sustainable resolution of sectarian conflicts.

In November 2008, disputed results in Plateau State elections led to some of the worst inter-communal unrest in the country for years. In the state capital Jos, several thousand people were reportedly displaced by clashes that were described as being between Christians and Muslims (BBC, 1 December 2008). However, the tensions primarily reflected resentment between the indigenous (Christian) minority and settlers from the Hausa-speaking Muslim north (Reuters, 30 November 2008). IDPs of both faiths reportedly found refuge together in makeshift camps around Jos or in temporary camps in mosques, churches, army barracks and

hospitals in the city (IRIN, 4 December 2008). At the beginning of December, the Nigerian Red Cross had registered some 14,000 IDPs in 13 camps (ICRC, 4 December 2008). The Department of State Service has estimated that over 800 houses were destroyed in the clashes (Daily Trust, 24 March 2009), constituting the major obstacle to the return of IDPs to their homes.

In February 2009, between 4,500 and 5,000 people were displaced following sectarian violence in the city of Bauchi (IRIN, 25 February 2009; ThisDay, 28 February 2009). Though the exact cause of the clashes remains unknown, violence flared up after a dispute between two different religious communities. Many people found shelter in schools or army barracks or fled to neighbouring Jos, as violence spread throughout Bauchi and led to more deaths and destruction (Punch, 23 February 2009). Fleeing residents reported that security agents either did not intervene to prevent the unrest, or were absent from certain areas, thereby contributing to the spread of violence (Punch, 23 February 2009).

In July 2009, clashes between an Islamic group and the Nigerian army, which started in Bauchi and quickly spread to neighbouring Borno, Yobe and Kano States, led to new displacement. Between 3,500 and 4,000 people reportedly fled the violence across the four states, most of them following heavy fighting in Maiduguri, the capital city of Borno State (ICRC, 31 July 2009; AP, 29 July 2009). IDPs found shelter in police and army barracks. By the beginning of August, the Nigerian Red Cross was reporting that most of the IDPs in Maiduguri had returned home, except for around 160 peo-

ple whose homes had been destroyed during the violence (IRIN, 5 August 2009).

### **General numbers and patterns of displacement**

There are no reliable statistics on internal displacement in Nigeria hence different numbers exist in the absence of any comprehensive survey. The figures provided by government and non-governmental agencies are generally only estimates referring to localised displacement situations. In general, estimates are based on registration exercises undertaken by the Nigerian Red Cross (IRIN, 5 August 2009; ICRC, 31 July 2009; ICRC, 4 December 2008) and thus they only include people who have sought shelter at temporary IDP camps. In most cases, numbers are not disaggregated by age and sex.

In a 2008 interview with a local newspaper, the Federal Commissioner for Refugees estimated that around half a million people had been displaced between 1999 and 2005, when communal clashes peaked (This Day News, 17 April 2008). The figure would of course increase if recent situations such as those described above were taken into account. As there are no mechanisms in place to monitor durable solutions, it is also impossible to determine whether and when people have ceased to be displaced.

Nigeria also regularly experiences displacement as a consequence of natural disasters such as flooding or soil erosion (IRIN, 3 November 2009; Leadership, 6 September 2009; IRIN, 7 August 2009). In conflict-affected states, the occurrence of natural disasters has further complicated displacement and return patterns

and the attempts to distinguish between conflict and non-conflict IDPs.

There are no official IDP camps of a long-lasting nature in the country. Temporary shelter is normally provided in army or police barracks, schools or hospitals but they serve as IDP camps only for a limited period. The vast majority of displaced people in Nigeria reportedly seek refuge with family, friends or host communities in areas where their ethnic or religious group is in the majority (Je'adayibe, 2008). Some of those officially staying in camps will spend most of the time with family and friends and only go to the camps to collect assistance from government, faith-based or other humanitarian organisations (FoE-Nigeria, 19 June 2009). Many appear to return to their homes or resettle near their home areas soon after the violence which forced them to leave has subsided, but an unknown number also resettle in other areas of the country.

In urban areas, the right of IDPs and other residents to adequate housing has suffered from persistent institutional policies of forced evictions, which have led to new patterns of intra-urban displacement. The Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions estimated in 2008 that over two million people had been forcibly evicted since 2000 in cities such as Lagos, Port Harcourt and Abuja (COHRE, May 2008, p.7). In Abuja, residents of informal settlements were evicted as part of the implementation of the Abuja Master Plan, a planning framework drawn up to make the new federal capital more orderly than its predecessor Lagos (Reuters, 23 July 2008; IRIN, 23 November 2007). Most demolitions have affected residents who

arrived after the establishment of the Federal Capital Territory in 1991, also referred to as “non-indigenes” or settlers, and they have often been carried out with violence by heavily-armed security agents (COHRE, May 2008, p.11).

In Port Harcourt, the local government has identified hundreds of buildings in waterfront communities for demolition, both to enable urban development and to eradicate criminal activities in the city, where clashes between security forces, oil militants and other criminal groups have been common. UN-HABITAT has estimated that at least 200,000 people will be affected by the demolition of all the 41 waterfront communities in the city (AI, 28 August 2009).

### **National and international responses**

The national responsibility to respond to displacement lies with the local governments, and only if they are unable to cope are state governments called in. State Emergency Management Agencies (SEMAs) exist in some states, but they have varying capacities. Only when this second level of response is ineffective does the state government appeal to the federal government for support. The President takes the final decision on whether the federal government intervenes. At the federal level, the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) coordinates emergency relief operations and assists in the rehabilitation of victims where necessary.

For coordination purposes, NEMA has divided the country into six disaster-management areas, for each of which it has operational offices. Where SEMAs

are established, NEMA collaborates and supports them. In other cases, resources are overstretched and assistance to victims is often delayed (Government of Nigeria, 30 July 2009). NEMA often supports IDPs in the emergency phase of a crisis, but it lacks the resources to assist people displaced for a longer period of time or to help returnees reintegrate, and it has no IDP-specific, age-specific or gender-specific policies.

The National Commission for Refugees (NCFR) has taken de facto responsibility for post-emergency situations and long-term programmes aimed at durable solutions for IDPs as well as refugees. If necessary, it assists NEMA with camp management, and it has a dedicated unit working on IDP issues but it lacks both the resources and the structure that could facilitate an effective response.

The federal government is considering whether to create a separate agency responsible for IDPs or to attach this responsibility to the mandate of existing agencies such as NCFR. A national IDP policy has been planned since the creation of the Nigerian Presidential Committee on IDPs in January 2004, but it was yet to be approved by the Federal Executive Council in November 2009. NCFR highlighted in a 2008 press statement that Nigeria was among the countries in the African Union to deliberate on a convention for the protection and assistance of IDPs in Africa (Daily Trust, 26 June 2008). Its signature at the end of October 2009 (IRIN, 26 October 2009) could provide an opportunity for Nigeria to adopt a comprehensive approach to the continuing IDP situations in the country.

Most internal displacement situations are managed on an ad hoc basis and only in the emergency phase. The Nigerian Red Cross (NRC), the most prominent humanitarian organisation, has the structure and the personnel to respond at very short notice, and often provides immediate assistance ahead of the local governments. Faith-based organisations also play an important role in both immediate relief and long-term support to IDPs of their religion. International organisations have also responded on a case-by case basis, most often in an uncoordinated fashion.

The UN in Nigeria has focused on development rather than humanitarian issues, as no humanitarian agency has been willing to commit the ongoing resources necessary and as the UN community feels there is more to be gained in tackling the development failures causing the recurrent conflicts. In this context, coordination between humanitarian agencies at all levels has been limited. The UN country team will implement programmes under the second UN Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF II) for the period from 2009 to 2012, for the first time “delivering as one” to ensure faster and more effective operations towards the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals (UN, June 2008). As a first step, however, this new approach will only be implemented in six selected states, one in each of the geopolitical zones in Nigeria, while the UN country team will take collective responsibility for the achievement of outputs and progress towards the outcomes agreed under UNDAF II.

*Note: This is a summary of IDMC's new internal displacement profile on Nigeria. The full profile is available online [here](#).*



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## **About the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre**

The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, established in 1998 by the Norwegian Refugee Council, is the leading international body monitoring conflict-induced internal displacement worldwide.

Through its work, the Centre contributes to improving national and international capacities to protect and assist the millions of people around the globe who have been displaced within their own country as a result of conflicts or human rights violations.

At the request of the United Nations, the Geneva-based Centre runs an online database providing comprehensive information and analysis on internal displacement in some 50 countries.

Based on its monitoring and data collection activities, the Centre advocates for durable solutions to the plight of the internally displaced in line with international standards.

The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre also carries out training activities to enhance the capacity of local actors to respond to the needs of internally displaced people. In its work, the Centre cooperates with and provides support to local and national civil society initiatives.

For more information, visit the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre website and the database at [www.internal-displacement.org](http://www.internal-displacement.org).

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