

Rural Banditry and the Vulnerable: Managing the Internally Displaced Persons' Camps in Benue State, Nigeria

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Abstract

Women, children, the aged, and the physically challenged, among others, constitute the vulnerable population in every society but are usually catered for in crisis-ridden situations by the leadership of developed nations, contrary to what obtains in Nigeria, consequent upon rural banditry attacks. This paper investigated how leadership's attitude to banditry attacks on rural communities in Benue State, Nigeria, has rendered the vulnerable miserable with the manner in which the various Internally Displaced Persons' Camps (IDPCs) have been established to give relief to the victims. It adopted a descriptive research method, extracted data using secondary sources of data collection, and used Emergency Management Theory (EMT) to explain the paper. It reveals that before the escalation of rural banditry in Benue State, women, children, and the physically challenged were carrying out their various agricultural practices and other personal businesses without any hindrance. It observed that people appeared to have been merely protected by the efforts of their various family members and their various communities. It argued further that bandits' attacks on these rural communities created an upheaval in the environment, bringing about looting, kidnapping, maiming, and loss of lives and property of serious magnitude. The deadly attacks on these various communities, their desertion, and the displacement of family members led to a humanitarian crisis of multiple dimensions. The need to take care of the vulnerable population by the government led to the setting up of Internally Displaced Persons' Camps (IDPCs). The paper concluded that these IDPCs are poorly managed and characterized by corruption and negligence, among others. It is recommended that security in rural communities be beefed up to forestall further bandits' attacks, while the IDPCs should be properly protected, funded, and better managed.

Keywords: *Internally Displaced Persons' Camps (IDPCs), Management, Benue State, Nigeria, Rural banditry, Vulnerable Population*

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Introduction

Globally, women, children, the physically challenged, and the elderly are regarded to be the most vulnerable set of people in society. For them to live a protected and meaningful life, they require adequate security and protection from the government in view of the fact that they are considered a weak species and, thus, a defenseless category of human beings. The provision of security for them by the leadership is considered crucial for their advancement in society. Prior to the escalation of rural banditry in Benue State in 2015, Nigeria, the vulnerable populations in the rural environment have been living in an atmosphere of peace and security without any disruption while they have been carrying out their rural businesses without any encumbrance. This scenario has boosted local production and economy and, by extension, contributed meaningfully to national development (Ogbe & Ogali, 2022). For instance, an avalanche of records indicates that agricultural development, especially productivity in crops and animal husbandry, has thrived over the years in the region (Kughur *et al.*, 2015).

In Nigeria, banditry has become a worrisome national security issue of public concern, which has enveloped the Northwest region, particularly Zamfara, Katsina, Kaduna, Sokoto, and Niger States (Olaniyan & Yahaya, 2016). The upsurge in rural banditry in some of the communities in Benue state and the colossal proportions of its dastardly attacks have changed the tempo of peaceful co-existence in the various communities prone to bandit attacks. This development has disgustingly impacted the peaceful co-existence and harmony in the various communities, bringing about the desertion of rural communities, family dislocation, depletion of the rural economy, and the emergence of Internally Displaced Persons' Camps. This drift to urban centers is putting pressure on the social facilities in the urban areas in that region. Furthermore, the consequential deaths of major men, who were hitherto breadwinners of the family, have created a vacuum in the family, apart from the increase in the number of widows and orphans that dot the various communities now. This crisis has become worrisome to the leadership and the Nigerian public due to the danger it foreshadows for peaceful co-existence and development in the affected areas, as well as the urban crises it might likely provoke.

Scholars such as Abraham and Auwalu (2022), Sanchi, Alhassan, Ajibade and Sabo (2022), Rosenje and Peju-Rosenje (2022), Ahmed (2021), Rufai (2021), Yusuf (2021), Asmau and Abdulrasheed (2020) severally averred that rural banditry was caused by multi-dimensional

factors such as border porosity, arms proliferation, the existence of ungoverned spaces, youth unemployment, poverty and state fragility, among others. In recent times, bandits' attacks on rural communities in Benue State, Nigeria, have created an atmosphere of fear, uncertainty, and despondency. These scholars equally noted the deleterious effects that the phenomenon has inflicted on women and children and their means of livelihood. As a result of the upsurge in rural banditry, several communities in Benue State, Nigeria, have been attacked by bandits, women and children kidnapped, and ransom often paid to secure their release. As a result of these incessant bandits' attacks, communities have been deserted; family members have been dislocated, while the rural economy has equally suffered depletion.

The government, which is expected to provide adequate security for the citizenry as canvassed by Hobbes, Locke, and Rousseau in their social contract theories, has not been able to offer such adequately, effectively, and efficiently due to certain challenges. These challenges include, among others, a lack of adequate security personnel that are well-trained and equipped with sophisticated weapons and logistics as in best practices of the developed nations of the world to perform effectively. Since many of the bandits' leaders are natives of the region, their familiarity with the local terrain provides an advantage for them to quickly overrun the landscape. In spite of the numerous strategies adopted by various levels of governments of the troubled states, such initiatives could not easily dissuade the bandits from overrunning the rural communities, thereby giving the bandits a field day to attack these rural communities sporadically and incessantly without any restraint.

The incessant attacks, which brought about desertion of the various rural communities and dislocation of family members apart from the depletion of the rural economy, invariably led to the emergence of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). With the surge in this phenomenon, the government was constrained to establish Internally Displaced Persons' Camps (IDPCs) in various places to cater for the displaced people, who fled their original abode. The manner by which these IDPCs management was organised has generated a lot of controversies among scholars. Though much work has been done on rural banditry, especially in Nigeria's North-central, there seems to be a dearth of information on how rural banditry affects the vulnerable populations, especially women and children in Benue State, and the manner through which these IDPCs are managed to cater for the IDPs.

Against this backdrop, this paper attempted a reappraisal of rural banditry, the vulnerable populations, and the management of the Internally Displaced Persons' Camps in Nigeria's North-central. In order to accomplish the task under examination, the paper is divided into five sections. The first section treats conceptual clarification and gives a theoretical framework to anchor the discourse, while the second section explores the escalation of rural banditry and the challenges of the vulnerable population in Nigeria's north-central region. The third section examines the resettlement of the vulnerable and the management of the IDPCs in Benue State, Nigeria, and the fourth section examines the challenges confronting the management of the IDPCs in Benue State. The last segment offers the conclusion and recommendations.

Conceptual Clarifications

Rural Banditry

Various contending perspectives have been offered by different scholars like Abraham and Auwalu (2022), Sanchi, Alhassan, Ajibade, and Sabo (2022), Rosenje and Peju-Rosenje (2022), Ahmed (2021), Yusuf (2021) and Asmau and Abdulrasheed (2020) to explain the concept of rural banditry. Other scholars who contributed to the illumination of the concept include Abdullahi (2019), Okoli and Ugwu (2019), Jaafar (2018), Gadzama, Saddiq, Oduehe and Dariya (2018), Uche and Iwuamadi (2018), Rufa'i (2018), Anka (2017) and Mohammed and Alimba (2016). Conceptually, however, rural banditry originates from the term bandit, which refers to an illegally armed organization that terrorizes people and deprives them of their belongings. It is the same as creating gangs that use light weapons to assault individuals. In light of this, a crime intentionally designed, premeditated, and committed for personal gains is called banditry (Sanchi *et al.*, 2022).

Conversely stated, it is the act of invading and attacking victims by members of an armed group, whether or not it was planned, using weapons of offense or defense, especially in semi-organized groups, with the intention of overcoming the victim and obtaining treasure or achieving certain political goals. The public perception of these bandits is that they are lawless, desperate marauders without a place to call home. To avoid being exposed, apprehended, convicted, and jailed, they instead often hover around in the forest and mountains (Anka, 2017).

However, in a situation when banditry is used in reference to a rural community, it refers to a group of rural criminals that engage in unlawful activities such as raiding villages, abduction, and rustling cattle in order to make money. Therefore, rural bandits are groups that terrorize and rob people of their goods, cash, livestock, sheep, camels, and other assets. They work inside and along rural boundaries with the assistance of local partners and, in some circumstances, state agents sent to ensure people's protection and security (Sanchiet *al.*, 2022; Abdullahi, 2019). In his own perspective, context, and usage, Adeniyi (2018) maintained that rural banditry is only capable of robbing herders of their livestock or raiding their ranches to take cattle. While Olaniyan and Yahaya (2016) emphasized, however, that cattle rustling as a type of rural banditry has exacerbated the issue of identity disputes and sown the germ of enmity among people who previously lived as brothers keepers in an environment of peace and tranquility.

Corroborating the foregoing, Altine and Oyelude (2020a) cited the brazen and gruesome massacre of people in agrarian communities with sophisticated weapons by suspected herdsmen and reprisal attacks from the surviving victims as examples of rural banditry activities. They added that other crimes include cattle rustling, kidnapping, armed robbery, drug use, arson, and rape. A combination of factors has been advanced as the propelling force behind rural banditry. Some of these factors include the availability of ungoverned spaces (Okoli & Ugwu, 2019), economic inequality and marginalization (Oladeinde, 2022; Ignatius, 2020), high level of unemployment rate (Mustapha, 2019), and poverty (Adegoke, 2019). Others consist of a weak security system (Okoli & Ugwu, 2019; Adebayo, 2018), border porosity (Rosenje & Adeniyi, 2021), proliferation of arms (Ochi *et al.*, 2022; Adeniyi, 2018), and poor governance (Ignatius, 2020), among others.

The Vulnerable Population

Conceptualizing vulnerability or vulnerable populations is challenging since the meanings ascribed to the concept in various disciplines are multi-dimensional with both universal and particular meanings and can, therefore, be examined from different perspectives (Limante & Tereskinas, 2022). Vulnerability as a concept has been expressed as the degree to which a system, or part of it, may react adversely during the occurrence of a hazardous event. It thus implies a measure of risk associated with the physical, social, and economic aspects and

implementations resulting from the system's ability to cope with the resulting event (Proag, 2014).

Vulnerability means susceptibility to harm resulting from an interaction between the resources available to individuals and communities and their life challenges. It results from developmental challenges, personal incapacities, disadvantaged social status, the inadequacy of interpersonal networks and supports, degraded neighborhoods and environments, and the complex overlapping interactions of these factors over the life course. This situation may arise from individual, community, or larger population challenges and requires different types of policy interventions – from social and economic development of neighborhoods and communities and educational and income policies to medical interventions (Mechanic & Tanner, 2007).

Thus, people become vulnerable if access to resources at a household or individual level is the most critical factor in achieving a secure livelihood or recovering effectively from a disaster. The households with direct access to capital, tools, and equipment and able-bodied members are the ones that can recover most rapidly when a disaster strikes. As such, the most vulnerable people are the poorest, who have little choice but to locate themselves in unsafe settings (Proag, 2014). Hence, vulnerable groups include women, mentally and physically handicapped persons, children and elderly persons, poor people, refugees, and livestock (Proag, 2014).

Due to the prevalence of rural banditry activities, women and children have been the most affected. Women living in such a region, where bandits operate, are, therefore, at risk from socio-economic and political instability. Rape and sexual exploitation resulting in unintended pregnancies are two additional difficulties faced by women and girls that are frequently mentioned in such regions. Additionally, as a coping mechanism for the crisis, prostitution and begging have become more accessible to women. The majority of the males, who were displaced from their occupations, have turned to stealing and touting to support themselves. Therefore, the banditry situation in Nigeria, especially the North-central, threatens peace, security, and prosperity (Ochi *et al.*, 2022).

Internally Displaced Persons' Camps (IDPCs)

Conceptualizing internally displaced persons (IDP) has attracted controversies based on context and usage. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA) (1998, cited in Nemine & Zalakro, 2019) provides that internally displaced persons are:

persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their home or places of habitual residence in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights, natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized state border (p. 155).

Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) are, therefore, persons or groups of persons who have been constrained to abandon their homes or places of habitual residence unexpectedly as a result of armed conflict, internal strife, systematic violations of human rights, or natural or man-made disasters but have not crossed an internationally recognized state border (Kampala Convention, 2009, cited in Mohammed, 2017). Conversely stated, IDPs are people who have been uprooted from their homes and traditional social networks due to a natural disaster or a violent conflict but have stayed within their national borders. They endure different forms of injustice against them, including violent attacks planned by their own government or outsiders (Omoraka *et al.*, 2022).

IDPs are primarily characterized by two factors: the coercive or otherwise involuntary nature of the movement and the fact that the movement occurs within national boundaries. Armed conflicts, violence, violations of human rights, and natural disasters are among the most frequent reasons for involuntary movements. People are forced to leave their houses as a result, losing access to the most crucial defenses, including social networks, services, and livelihoods. Mobility within national borders is the second aspect of the IDPs (Durosaro & Ajiboye, 2011). IDPs are assumed to have the same rights as the general public because they continue to be legally protected by the national authorities of their country of habitual residence (Durosaro & Ajiboye, 2011).

In Nigeria, like in any other clime, any type of relocation that has caused family breakdown, the collapse of infrastructure, the loss of life, and the destruction of property is often called internally induced displacement. People have no choice but to leave their current location due to security (Norwegian Refugee Council, 2017). However, when uprooted, families merely flee to protect their and their children's lives. The victims experience unimaginable economic hardship,

psychological agony, and social disruption of serious magnitude as a result of this predicament. In this sense, the IDPs require the aid of the government and other humanitarian organizations that could intervene to mitigate the effects of adversity and bring succor to them (Omoraka *et al.*, 2022).

In view of the above explication, Internally Displaced Persons' Camps (IDPCs), therefore, refer to the temporary accommodation facilities such as mosques, schools/school-fields, churches, and informal settlements like village squares or open spaces that are provided for people that are made to flee their habitual place of residence to find safety, which in the course of this, their health and security are consequently affected (Adewale, 2016). In the context of Nigeria, places that are adopted for the use of IDPs are government buildings, schools, churches, town halls, and tents, among others. These shelters are not adequate or laced with sufficient social/health facilities, and in most cases, the IDPs are often asked to leave these temporary places of habitation, or in some cases, the accommodations are destroyed. Ahmad (2018) contended that these accommodations are, at most times, over-crowded and unsuitable in terms of sanitation and water facilities, with women having no privacy at all. In this regard, IDPs are exposed to security challenges, which range from gender and child-based hostility, separation from family, exploitation, and detention with no consideration of the rule of law (Obaji & Aloba, 2016).

Theoretical Exploration

This paper is anchored on Emergency Management Theory (EMT) as the framework of analysis to assess the management of IDPCs in Benue State. The notion was first proposed by David McEntire, an American expert in disaster management (Omoraka, 2021), after the terrorist attacks on the Pentagon and the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, in the United States of America. This theory was developed in an effort to offer a practical, proactive, and reactive but comprehensive paradigm for managing disruptive and hazardous occurrences (Ughulu & Igabor, 2021).

It was argued that unless the measures and strategies for implementing them are put in place, the society would be marred by unrecoverable emergencies that will threaten its existence. EMT assumes that disastrous emergencies are inevitable in society and tend to cause unrecoverable effects unless responsible, immediate, and urgent measures are taken to prevent, respond,

recover, and mitigate these emergencies. It also presupposes that proactive, reactive, and post-emergency occurrence procedures and plans should be developed in order to confront devastating events and their repercussions head-on if the human species and society do not wish to be compared to the extinct animal species. The theory further assumes that the measures to be adopted should be in line with the nature of the disaster and must conform to the fundamental principles of preparedness, response, recovery, and mitigation (Omoraka *et al.*, 2022).

Its application to this study is premised on the fact that calamities like rural banditry are common in all human civilizations, including that of North-central Nigeria, and have the potential to endanger society. Hence, EMT is analytically advantageous for this paper. The area's population will inevitably be displaced or diminished over time due to calamities like rural banditry if appropriate and functional management mechanisms are not put in place to address them. The National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA), along with the State Emergency Management Agency (SEMA), which is tasked with managing disasters and their aftermath within the nation, is one such effective and efficient emergency institution. The mission of this body is basically to coordinate resources toward efficient and effective disaster prevention, preparedness, mitigation, and responses (Oruonye *et al.*, 2021).

Emergent institutions like NEMA and SEMA employ disaster management plans and mechanisms such as early warning and awareness generation, the use of satellite technology to pick distress alerts and locations, and search and rescue operations. Other equipment and strategies adopted in carrying out its operations include Geographic Information System, Mobile Clinic, Development of Disaster Response Units (DRUs), collaboration with Climatology and Weather Forecasting Agencies, employee training and capacity building, disaster advocacy, and post-disaster assessment (Omoraka *et al.*, 2022). In line with the assumptions of the emergency management theory, NEMA has a disaster management plan that streamlines its actions toward disaster preparedness, mitigation, response, and recovery to cater to and be responsible for the management of vulnerable populations who reside in the Internally Displaced Persons Camps across Benue State and Nigeria at large.

Escalation of Rural Banditry and the Challenges of the Vulnerable Population in Benue State, Nigeria

There is no gainsaying the fact that rural banditry constitutes a severe threat not just to the security of people in Benue State but also to the country at large, given its growing repercussions and implications, especially for the vulnerable population. The federal and state governments need to pay attention to the nature of the escalating rural banditry in Benue State, especially given the area's rising rate of internally displaced people (Okoli & Ogayi, 2018). Attacks by rural bandit groups have become more recurrent and menacing, posing a variety of challenges to the vulnerable population in Benue State. Hence, the upsurge in rural banditry in the region has led to the gargantuan loss of lives and property, the abandonment of communities, the dislocation of families, widespread poverty, lack of basic amenities, escalation of diseases, apart from the increase in the number of widows, widowers, and orphans, who have now turned the Internally Displaced Persons' Camps into the somewhat permanent abode (Abdullahi, 2022; Rosenje & Adeniyi, 2021). For instance, records indicate that over 3,000 people have been displaced due to bandits' attacks on 12 villages in the Paikoro Local Government Area of Niger State between 23rd and 24th January 2021 (Ahmad, 2021). The graphic expression of this scary scenario is illustrated in Table 1:

Table 1: Selected Incidences of Rural Banditry Attacks in North-Central Nigeria (2018-2023)

S/N	Date of Attack	Place of Attack	Nature of Attack
1	22 nd May, 2018	Ayati-Ikpayongo in Gwer East District of Benue State	Two Nigerian priests and 17 worshippers
2	10 th August, 2018	Tse-Ujoh-Tiev inside Ksatina-Ala LGA of Benue State	About 11 people were killed
3	20 th February, 2019	Agatu Local Council Area of Benue State	An unspecified number of farmers were killed
4	29 th May, 2021	Shikaan, Mbegena and Kpavcommunities in KatshinaAla and Gwer West LGAs of Benue State	About 42 persons were killed in the attacks
5	20 th June, 2021	Police Station at Kastina-Ala Town of Benue State	14 people were killed in the attack
6	November 19, 2021	Tor Donga in Kastina-Ala LGA of Benue Stat	7 villagers were killed in the attack
7	23 rd March, 2022	Yoyo Community, Katsina-Ala LGA of Benue State	At least 3 persons were killed in the attack
8	11 th April, 2022	Communities in Logo, Tarka, and Guma LGAs of Benue	A total of 25 people, including a traditional ruler, were killed in the

		State	separate attacks on the communities
9	24 th May, 2022	TseAlashi Village in Guma LGA of Benue State	Five people were killed while working on their farms
10	12 th June, 2022	Igama Community of EdumogaEhaje District in Okpokwu LGA of Benue State	37 people were killed, and houses were burnt in the community
11	23 rd September, 2022	Mchina and Mou Villages in Logo LGA of Benue State	12 people were killed while several others were seriously injured
12	19 th October, 2022	Gbeji Village in Ukum LGA of Benue State	18 persons plus a policeman were killed
13	11 th November, 2022	Peva Village in Kastina-Ala LGA of Benue State	5 people were killed
14	19 th January, 2023	Abagana Community, Opposite IDPC along Makurdi/Laafi Road, Benue State	Family of 6 and two other persons were beheaded in the attack
15	6 th April, 2023	Umogigi in Benue State	46 persons were found dead after bandits' attack on rural village
16	15 th May, 2023	Communities in Apa and Gwer West LGA of Benue State	A total of 9 people were killed in the attack on the communities
17	13 th June, 2023	Ahume End of the Naka/Makurdi Road in Benue State	Gunmen abducted police officers and two other persons
18	8 th July, 2023	ZakiAkpunna 1 and Diom Communities of Mbatere District in Ukum LGA of Benue State	24 residents of the communities were killed in the bandits' attack
19	3 rd July, 2023	Ugba in Logo LGA of Benue State	One person was killed, while two other people were kidnapped
20	12 th August, 2023	Orteses, Guma LGA of Benue State	Five people were killed in the attack

Source: Adeniyi, Rosenje, Peju-Rosenje, & Salami (2023)

It is striking to note that as a result of these pervasive rural banditry attacks, the vulnerable people in Benue State are confronted with a lot of challenges, some of which include infringement on their human rights. They often experience severe human rights abuses more than able-bodied men. These abuses include the infringement of rights to private and family life, human dignity, the right to freedom of movement, the right to life, and many others. It is worth mentioning here that the guiding principles on internal displacement state that these at-risk groups, who eventually become internally displaced people, are entitled to the same legal protections under domestic and international law as other citizens of their country. The principles

emphasize that IDPs must not be discriminated against simply because of their displacement or because of their race, sex, language, religion, social origin, or other similar factors (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, 2022).

As a result of incessant and sporadic attacks of bandits on the rural communities of the Benue State of Nigeria, the challenges facing the vulnerable people became more pronounced. These include the dissolution/dislocation of families, loss of lives and property, lack of money, and prevalence of hunger and malnutrition. When bandits target these vulnerable communities, some of them perish while fleeing, while others pass away in camps established for the internally displaced people (Ochi *et al.*, 2022) as a result of the pains inflicted on them during the attack and their inability to get proper treatment for the sustained injuries.

It should be acknowledged that this series of bandits' attacks led to the emergence of Internally Displaced Persons. For instance, the Benue State Government disclosed that over 18,000 displacements were recorded in one month (Okoh, 2023) with accompanying consequences. According to the National Emergency Management Agency's (NEMA) assessment, the large-scale displacement of children as a result of bandit attacks has had an impact on their schooling. However, when these displaced children are able to attend school, the quality of education given to them is frequently subpar and inadequate due to the unfavorable learning environment, other characteristics, and a dearth of teaching resources. Most often, ineffective volunteers serve as teachers to work with these kids (Abdulazeez, 2016). Invariably, as a result of these bandit attacks' induced displacement, children are unable to pursue sound education, and some of them escape from their respective homes without any insight about where to look for their families (Ochi *et al.*, 2022).

Consequent upon rural banditry attacks, the vulnerable populations, especially the physically challenged people, often lose valuables whenever they were forced to leave their homes and land. They have encountered situations where they were unable to continue their previous employment, which has resulted in unemployment or underemployment. In view of this situation, their incomes have plummeted considerably, thus endangering their ability to support themselves or their families. Loss of livelihood frequently causes a reduction in access to food and a malnutrition crisis. It might prevent vulnerable individuals from affording contraception or force them to have transactional sex, which would lead to an increase in pregnancy and STI

rates. The most disadvantaged groups frequently have less money available to buy food since they are not only robbed of the land and natural resources that provided them with food prior to displacement but equally their means of survival. Malnutrition brought on by persistent food shortages raises the risk of respiratory and gastrointestinal illnesses, especially in children (Onuegbu & Lebari, 2022; Dunn, 2018).

Health-wise, rural banditry activities and the subsequent displacement they cause have an impact on the physical and mental wellbeing of the vulnerable populations, particularly when the impacts of bandit assaults are unanticipated, poorly managed, or left unattended to. This puts vulnerable people in danger, sometimes making them more likely to contract infectious diseases than the general population. Scholars like Fayehun and Akanle (2022) and Omoraka, Ogoh, and Yusufu (2022) argued that poor reproductive health and an increased risk of sexually transmitted infections (STIs) are connected to rural banditry-related displacement.

Socially, the desertion of communities and dislocation of families induced by rural banditry has impacted on the social lives of the most vulnerable people. For instance, in the Fungzai and Kubwat villages of Lombin District in Mangu Local Government Area of Plateau State, about 35 persons were reported killed by bandits, who ambushed a moving vehicle conveying women and children who were fleeing out of a community under attack. Also, many houses were burnt down (The Sun, 2023). Pronounced and persistent bandit attacks irreparably harm social networks that existed in the places of origin while simultaneously fostering new ones in the camps that Internally Displaced Peoples (IDPs) fled to. These connections are crucial for wellbeing, prosperity, and stability. Their interruption can have an impact on security, chances for employment, and mental health. Reduced access to education can have negative impacts on social life both immediately and over time, with repercussions for security, livelihoods, and mental health (Ochi *et al.*, 2022; Ada & Thomas, 2020).

The internal relocation of vulnerable individuals has a variety of consequences on the displaced individuals, their host communities, and those they left behind. Threats to their physical safety, wellbeing, and human rights are the most pressing. More importantly, it has pronounced and lasting effects on socio-economic growth. Internal displacement can have a significant negative impact on the economy at the individual, community, and even national level due to the harm it causes to people's physical health, psychological wellbeing, and environment, as well as their

ability to secure a good livelihood and access to security, education, housing, basic infrastructure, and a shared social life. A displacement crisis might have an unquantifiable cost due to the financial resources required to sustain the people impacted and the decline in production and accompanying consumption it may engender (Ochi *et al.*, 2022; Omoraka *et al.*, 2022). These situations are experienced by the vulnerable populations of the various victim communities of Benue State.

Resettling the Vulnerable and the Management of the IDPCs in Benue State, Nigeria

Resettling the displaced, vulnerable individuals following a bandit attack is still a problem in Northern Nigeria as a whole. This is due to the fact that the cause of these people's initial displacement has not been resolved. Furthermore, the management of the many IDP Camps is not pleasant, and as a result, the vulnerable individuals who have been displaced often display signals of wanting to go back to their homes, which is obviously not gratifying. However, it is regrettable that more than 2 million Nigerians remain displaced despite the government's "self-acclaimed efforts" (Onuegbu & Lebari, 2022).

The federal government, foreign organizations, and state governments play a prominent role in the resettlement of vulnerable individuals who are internally displaced in their various original abodes in Nigeria, as well as in the management of the IDPCs through established agencies. Governmental organizations, such as the State Emergency Management Authority (SEMA) for state governments and the National Emergency Management Authority (NEMA) for the federal government, are in charge of handling internally displaced people (IDPs). These governmental organizations are created to provide the fundamental buildings and infrastructure necessary to meet the demands of the weaker members of society in terms of welfare and security (Shebbs *et al.*, 2018).

As a result, in accordance with the National Protocol for Internally Displaced Persons (NPIDP), NEMA and SEMA, in Nigeria, are tasked with locating conflict zones and swiftly evacuating the affected vulnerable populations to a nearby safer locality before transporting them to IDPCs. Conveyance into IDP camps is not required because it is typically up to the displaced individuals to accept or reject the government's offer to transport them there. As a result, SEMA and NEMA

personnel can be located in each IDP camp, where they have both specific and general responsibilities (Lamaran, 2021; Abubakar, 2018).

Like in other areas of the country, individuals, NGOs, religious groups, and other caregivers also work to lessen the suffering of the vulnerable people in IDP camps across the area. By donating food, clothing, and medical supplies to these camps, churches, NGOs, and private citizens help vulnerable people survive on a daily basis (Chegwe, 2016). In the same vein, the Nigeria Mortgage Refinance Company (NMRC), in collaboration with the Industrial Training Fund (ITF), participates in the resettlement and management of vulnerable people by providing vocational skills acquisition program in the IDPCs as part of its corporate social responsibility (Ada & Thomas, 2020; The Guardians, 2017).

Table 2 shows the populations of IDPs existing in various locations in Benue State while Table 3 displays some of the existing IDPCs established to cater for the victims of bandits' attacks in Benue State.

Table 2: Populations of IDPs and Official IDP camps Benue state, Nigeria

S/No	Name of Camp/LGA	No. of IDPs
1	Abagena Camp (Mkd LGA)	8,210
2	Daudu Camp I (UNHCR SHELTER) (Guma LGA)	5,451
3	Daudu Camp II (Guma LGA)	20,172
4	Gbajimba Camp (Guma LGA)	29,500
5	Anyiin Camp (Logo LGA)	7,466
6	Ugba Camp (Logo LGA)	3,080
Total		73,879

Source: Ukase & Jato (2022)

Table 3: Populations of IDPs and Unofficial IDP camps in Benue state

S/No	Name of Camp/Community	No. of IDPs
1	Abagena Community	7,691
2	Abeda Camp	2,668
3	Abeda Community	22,949
4	Agan Camp	4,798
5	Agan Community	5,517
6	Agatu	65,347
7	AngwanOchonu	4,951
8	Anini Village	4,962

9	Anyiin Community	65,496
10	Daudu Community	43,344
11	FHA	4,353
12	Gbajimba Community	28,875
13	Gwer West	60,243
14	Ichwa	9,587
15	Kwande	9,465
16	LGEANASME	23,151
17	LGEATyodugh	5,672
18	NEPA Quarters	8,008
19	OgiriAjene	9,506
20	Okpokwu	4,080
21	Tionsha	10,500
22	Ugba Community	8,651
Total		409,814

Source: Ukase &Jato (2022)

In Benue State, as typical of another area in Northern Nigeria, internally displaced person camps (IDPCs) are used to accommodate vulnerable people who have been forced to flee their respective communities as a result of unremitting and intermittent rural banditry attacks. These are either established by NEMA or SEMA. These are establishments that frequently have a depressing appearance and subpar architectural designs. They are typically developed without good planning and are situated in settings like secondary schools that were abandoned by students due to crises and conflicts, including bandit raids, herder-farmer crises, communal conflict, and religious crises, among others (Shebbs *et al.*, 2022).

It has been noted that the management of IDPCs in Benue State, like in any other place in Northern Nigeria, is not only unbalanced but also devoid of fundamental humanitarian objectives and beliefs. Because local government engagement is crucial to the efficient and comprehensive development of grassroots organizations, the institutional framework for administration lacks the structure required to achieve meaningful success. Additionally, the management of IDPCs in the area and the entire nation is reactive. This is because IDPC administrators respond to circumstances of displacement by setting up camps to house the displaced people along safety regions without making enough preparations for their wellbeing. This is because they do not offer a long-term solution to the primary causes of displacement (Shebbs *et al.*, 2022; Abubakar, 2018).

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Also, the management of IDPCs in the area and the nation as a whole is dependent on foreign organizations with little regard for the needs of the populace. International organizations are viewed by the government as being made of angels and working miracles. It detests the efforts of international organizations that donate money, aid, and humanitarian initiatives to take care of the welfare of the disadvantaged people in the IDPCs and considers local institutions to be incompetent. The possibility to use internal procedures to address the issues of rural banditry and internally displaced people in the area where their camps are located is revoked by this excessive independence (Onuegbu & Lebari, 2022).

Likewise, in Nigeria and Benue State, IDPC management is corrupt and politicized. Political office holders in the area take advantage of the management of IDPCs by providing the government with false information that is unjustified in reality in order to take advantage of the government. Therefore, managers of IDPCs are typically utilized as a type of political patronage, where contracts are given to political subordinates at exorbitant prices in order to reward their loyalty. Due regard is not given to the Federal Republic of Nigeria's Appropriation Act, which leads to the majority of these contracts being abandoned and the cash allocated being embezzled (Omorakaet *et al.*, 2022; Lamaran, 2021).

In furtherance of the foregoing, the management of IDPCs in Benue State and nationwide is conventional and theoretical. The activity deals with due process and red tape rather than directly taking into account the interests of the vulnerable persons who have been forcibly displaced. Management places more emphasis on following processes and protocols than on achieving goals. This orthodox component cast doubt on the entire IDPC management system, rendering it seems unreal and incapable of addressing the immediate issues facing the vulnerable individuals. This is evident in the management institutions' incapacity to meet the fundamental requirements of those who are most vulnerable, which worsens their living conditions in the IDP camps (Shebbs *et al.*, 2022; Abubakar, 2018).

Challenges Confronting the Management of the IDPCs in Nigeria's North-central

The management of any organization to yield positive results no doubt requires many factors ranging from good leadership, adequate funds, and a friendly environment, among others. Managing Internally Displaced Persons Camps (IDPCs) in Benue State is confronted by several challenges despite all efforts made by the government and stakeholders involved in the project.

Some of the challenges confronting the management of IDPCs consist of poor government response, politicization, and lack of reliable statistics on IDPs and fund paucity. Others include the absence of designated camps for IDPs, the hostility of the host community, inadequate security, and corruption, among others.

Lack of reliable statistics on IDPs constitutes a great challenge to its management in the region. The actual number of persons displaced by recurring bandits' attacks needs to be determined before any meaningful planning and eventual intervention can be effectively undertaken. In Benue State, reliable data in this regard is lacking, and this constitutes a fundamental constraint that undermines effective protection and assistance of IDPs in Benue State. The capacity to gather relevant data is potentially inefficient due to poor communication and transportation networks. Most of the IDPs are uprooted away from their homes into areas that are virtually not easily accessible.

The National Commission for Refugees, Migrants and Internally Displaced Persons (NCRMIDPs), National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) and State Emergency Management Agency (SEMA) by virtue of their enabling statutes collate data on IDPs in the region without any agreeable standards in terms of methodology. Data derived from these sources are, therefore, questionable, inaccurate, and misleading (Shedrack & Nuarrual, 2016). The cumulative effects of the lack of reliable statistics on IDPs lead to the continued distortion of the true pictures and understanding of the severity and dynamics of internal displacement in the region even before national authorities and international communities for the purposes of any feasible and result-oriented intervention (Ekoh *et al.*, 2022).

The paucity of funds remains a fundamental challenge confronting the management of IDPCs in Benue State. Funds are crucial in efficiently managing displaced people or any venture. For the purpose of managing the affairs of the internally displaced in the region, funds come directly from the federal and state governments, international humanitarian and donor agencies, as well as other forms of donations from within and outside the region. However, despite the various sources from which funds are generated for the IDPs, there are still problems of insufficient funds for the efficient management of the IDPCs, as is the case with most issues within the region. Available funds tend to be inadequate, which affects virtually every aspect of the process,

thereby leading to the use of substandard materials and personnel below the quality required and desired for the effective managements of the IDP camps (Onuegbu & Lebari, 2022).

Absence of designated camps for IDPs equally posed a challenge to the effective management of IDPCs in Benue State. It is common to see that whenever there is an emergency resulting in the displacement of people; victims are hurriedly relocated to available public infrastructures like schools and other public places on temporal basis. However, situations of internal displacement are not like a scorpion bite, so it does not easily freeze away (Olukolajo *et al.*, 2014). For instance, about 4,800 IDPs who are majorly women and children that were displaced by bandits' attack in Kyaram, Gyambau, Dungur, Kukawa and Shuwaka villages in Garga District of Kanam Local Government Area of Plateau State were camped in Garga Central Primary School (Ogune, 2022). There was a dearth of IDPs' camps of permanent nature in the region. This situation made shift camps porous and not specially constructed to ensure adequate security to forestall secondary attack on the victims in the region. A large proportion of IDPs in this region reside with their family and friends, who, at times, are members of their host communities (Chintuo & Egolum, 2020; Shedrack & Nuarrual, 2016).

The hostility of the host community members constitutes another disquieting challenge obstructing the effective management of IDPCs in North-central Nigeria. Often times, members of the host community seek to share from the commodities, incentives and relief packages provided for the displaced vulnerable people and not being able to achieve this goal may create frustration in them and results in hostility against the IDPs. The hostility usually takes different forms, ranging from segregation to robbery and other forms of attack. Therefore, in order not to endanger the lives of IDPs, whom they are mandated to protect, management agencies are usually obligated to cater, to an extent, to members of the host community by letting them have a share of materials meant for the IDPs, thus reducing their ration. Therefore, the fractions between IDPs and host communities resulting from the concentration of assistance to IDPs and the scarcity of resources for distribution are major hindrances to IDPC management (Eweka & Olusegun, 2016; Ladan, 2013).

In addition, corruption has worsened the situation as a revelation from the activities of the government and IDP management has shown that the greedy rich tend to steal from these poor people residing in the various camps and host communities. There has been primitive accumulation of funds and relief materials meant for the internally displaced and their camps in

the region. A classic example of this is the corruption charges leveled against the immediate past Secretary to the Government of the Federation, Babachir Lawal, who allegedly used his office to award a mere cutting of grass contract in an IDP camp in the North-east to his company at an outrageous amount (Nnochiri, 2020; Vanguard, 2016). Unfortunately, he has neither been charged to court nor any step taken towards the investigation and prosecution of the case. Though he was removed from office, the state and the ruling class have maintained a hypocritical silence on the issue. This is only but one such instance, as there are several unreported or ignored matters of corruption or allegations of corruption within the process of IDPCs' management in Benue State (Onuegbu & Lebari, 2022).

Given the nature of facilities available in most of the IDPCs in the region, reliable medical facilities are also lacking. The deficiency in health facilities inevitably leads to increased outbreaks of diseases within the context of individual competition for space and other related facilities like water and sanitary facilities. These embarrassing situations throw to the wind any assurance that durable solutions in the form of return, resettlement and rehabilitation can be achieved for IDPs, whose numbers and identities are unascertainable. The situation becomes complex when one considers that there are no specially tailored housing development projects and security for vulnerable populations like IDPs in the IDPCs that dotted the region (Ekohet *al.*, 2022; Chintuo & Egolum, 2020).

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study reappraised the nexus between rural banditry, the vulnerable, and the management of the IDPCs in Benue State. It revealed that rural banditry constitutes a severe threat to the security of Benue State, given its growing effects on the vulnerable population, which are mostly women, children, and the physically challenged, among others. Rural banditry's activities have led to the loss of lives and property, the abandonment of various rural communities, the separation of families, widespread poverty as well as increase in the number of widows, widowers, and orphans who now reside in IDPCs across Benue State.

The study discovered that the federal and state governments, in conjunction with foreign and local organizations, played a dominant role in resettling and managing the displaced inhabited IDPCs. The government's agencies like NEMA and SEMA are created to offer the fundamental

buildings and infrastructure necessary to meet the vulnerable people's demands regarding their welfare and security. The study further exposed that the management of the IDPCs in Benue State is confronted by challenges like poor government response, politicization, lack of reliable statistics on IDPs, fund paucity, absence of designated camps for IDPs, hostile nature of the host community, inadequate security and corruption, among others. Therefore, the study concluded that these challenges have enormously affected the management of the various IDPCs as it is evident in the management's incapacity to meet the fundamental requirements of those who are most vulnerable, which worsens their living conditions in the IDPCs in the region.

Therefore, in order to improve the management of IDPCs in Benue State and make the body acquiescent to effectively and efficiently cater to vulnerable populations, the following recommendations were offered:

- NEMA, which is responsible for managing IDPCs, should endeavor to create an enabling environment and address the challenges confronting them, such as the provision of water and sanitary facilities, to arrest the outbreak of diseases, especially epidemics, which could easily disarray the IDPCs.
- The government should beef up security in the IDPCs in Benue State to forestall further attacks by bandits.
- Governments should be more proactive and responsive by designating safe areas for building permanent camps for IDPs with schools and health centers. This would facilitate a healthy life and produce skillful human beings among internally displaced persons for the betterment of their lives.
- The government should make financial and bureaucratic contingency plans in preparation for events of displacement. The bureaucratic process should be simplified to accommodate swift release of funds and other resources for management of IDPs to suit the sudden nature of displacement.
- Government should ensure the deployment of technology and ICT facilities towards effective monitoring and evaluation of IDPs, IDPCs and the management processes, to ensure that actions are taken in accordance with the guiding principles on Internal Displacement and for the overall benefit of the IDPs.

- Governments should collaborate with all stakeholders of IDP management to fight corruption and sensitize the host communities on the need to keep off trouble and be hospitable towards IDPs.

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