

# Nigeria's IDPs and Refugee Settlement Policies: A Critical Analysis of Effectiveness and Sustainability

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## Abstract:

Nigeria remains one of the countries with the most displaced population in Africa, with over 3 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) and thousands of refugees. In response, the Nigerian government has introduced several policies, including the National Policy on IDPs (2021), the African Union's Kampala Convention (2009), and the ECOWAS Protocol on Free Movement and Settlement. However, gaps in implementation, weak institutional frameworks, and funding constraints continue to hinder effective resettlement and long-term integration. This review critically examines Nigeria's IDP and refugee settlement policies, assessing their effectiveness, sustainability, and policy gaps. A qualitative analysis of government reports, UNHCR and IOM publications, and scholarly studies were adopted. This paper evaluates key challenges in housing, security, access to social services, governance, and economic integration. Findings highlight persistent issues such as overcrowded IDP camps, inadequate funding, security threats, and weak inter-agency coordination, all of which limit the success of resettlement programs. To thoroughly analyze how well these policies support long-term recovery and reintegration, the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework was adopted, which suggests that Nigeria's displacement policies require urgent reform, particularly in enhancing legal enforcement, improving IDP self-reliance programs, and ensuring durable housing solutions. The study concludes that a shift from short-term humanitarian aid to sustainable development approaches is crucial for achieving lasting solutions.

**Keywords:** Nigeria, IDPs, Refugee, Displacement, Settlement Policy, Sustainability, Humanitarian Response

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Background of the Study

Countless numbers of people in Nigeria have been forced to vacate their homes. This occurrence is as a result of conflict, flood, insurgence, and community crisis, which has resulted into high

rates of internal displaced populations and refugees. In Africa, Nigeria remains one of the nation facing critical displacement issues. More than 3 million internally displaced persons and thousands of refugees have been recorded due to

Boko Haram attacks, inter-communal crisis, and environmental hazard (UNHCR, 2023). As of June 2022, 3.1 million people have been internally displaced in Nigeria, primarily due to insurgence and conflict in the North East. In other regions, displacement causes are banditry and Fulani herdsman conflict. Many breadwinners have been killed on their own farms and families displaced due to several attacks by herdsman especially in the North Eastern part of Nigeria. Nigeria has more than 85,000 refugees and asylum seekers with approximately 78,000 people who have fled violence in Cameroon (UNHCR, 2023). Large population of internally displaced persons in Nigeria continues to face numerous challenges such as poor housing and infrastructures, poor healthcare system, and violation of human rights (Shehu & Abba, 2020). The Northeastern part of Nigeria, particularly Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe State, record the highest numbers of displacement. This is driven by prolonged violence from non-state armed groups (IOM, 2022). In the Middle Belt and Northwestern regions, conflicts over land and inter-community clashes have forcefully displaced thousands of people (OCHA, 2023).

The major and continuous driver of displacement in Nigeria, especially in the Northeast is the Boko Haram insurgence, which has led to the uprooting of millions from their places of abode. Also, environmental challenges such as flooding have contributed to the displacement crisis. These multifaceted causes have resulted in complex displacement scenarios that possess significant challenges to the country's capacity to provide effective and sustainable solutions for refugees and IDPs. The federal government adopted the National Policy on Internally Displaced Persons, 2012, revised 2021, the African Union's Kampala Convention (2009), and the ECOWAS Free Movement Protocol (1979). These policies aim to protect displaced persons, facilitate resettlement, and promote durable solutions (UNHCR, 2023). Despite such initiatives, the effectiveness of these policies remain critical concerns as critiques have highlighted challenges in its implementation including inadequate resources, lack of

coordination, insufficient political will, weak implementation, funding constraints, and security threats which have hindered the policy's effectiveness in addressing the needs of displaced populations (Ekoh et al., 2023).

Over the years, displacement in Nigeria has been managed through short-term humanitarian interventions, rather than long term integration responses (Akume, 2015). International Organization for Migration (IOM) has highlighted the importance of sustainable solutions including government ownership and leadership. To provide aid for displaced individuals, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has implemented projects like the Labondo Local Integration Pilot in Adamawa state to provide durable solutions for displaced persons.

However, to manage the increasing rates of displacement, a more sustainable and structured approach is required (Ekezie, 2022).

## 1.2 Problem Statement

Despite multiple efforts and commitment both nationally and internationally on policies that support displaced population in Nigeria, displacement management still remains largely ineffective and overwhelming. Most IDP camps in Nigeria suffer from severe overcrowding, inadequate sanitation, poor healthcare services, and hunger (Shehu & Abba, 2020). Many displaced persons face persistent and prolonged displacement, as government-led settlement programs struggle to provide basic livelihood services and economic reintegration opportunities for them (Agunyai & Phago, 2024). In addition, repeated security threats from Boko Haram and banditry continue to put IDPs in severe danger. The same armed terrorist that displaced them continues to attack them while at the IDP camps. This has resulted in cases of forced returns, which violates international protection standards (UNHCR, 2023). Furthermore, economic opportunities for IDPs remain limited, with most relying on humanitarian aid rather than long-term livelihood programs (Adekola et al., 2024). Also, poor inter-agency coordination among several institutions further weakens policy execution,

leading to delays in aid distribution, funds mismanagement, and lack of accountability (Bamidele & Pikirayi, 2023).

### 1.3 Objectives of the Study

This study critically analyses Nigeria's IDPs and Refugee settlement policies by:

- Evaluating the effectiveness of current policies in providing livelihood services that support displaced population.
- Identifying key policy gaps that hinder sustainable settlement.
- Recommending strategies for enhancing policy implementation and long-term sustainability.

### 1.4 Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative assessment of several policy documents, government reports, and scholarly literature to evaluate the impact of Nigeria's refugee and IDP settlement approaches. Sustainable Livelihood Framework is employed to examine the effect of Nigeria's IDPs and Refugee policies on effectiveness and sustainability. The data are gotten from:

- Government reports, which include Nigeria's National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA), National Commission for Refugees, Migrants, and Internally Displaced Persons (NCFRMI).
- International reports from UNHCR, IOM, World Bank, and OECD displacement financing data.
- Academic Literature, including scholarly articles on IDPs and refugee policy and effectiveness.

### 1.5 Significance of the Study

Understanding the strengths and weaknesses of Nigeria's settlement policies is crucial for addressing critical gaps in IDPs and refugee management, this research aims to inform policymakers, humanitarian agencies, and researchers on best practices for improving resettlement outcomes and long-term sustainability in Nigeria.

- This study contributes to displacement policy discourse by highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of Nigeria's IDP and refugee policies.
- Offering policy recommendations to transition from short-term humanitarian responses to long-term development solutions.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1 Refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs)

Displacement occurs as a result of persecution, conflict, generalized violence, or human right violation (UNHCR). The two major causes of displacement are natural disaster and armed conflict. Displacement occurs when people are unpreparedly removed from their traditional abode or established structure of existence (UNHCR, 2020). UNCHR, 2019 has reported an unprecedented 79.5 million people around the world who have been forced from their homes. Displacement of people is in two categories: IDPs and refugees. According to United nations Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, 1998, internally displaced persons (IDPs) are persons or groups of people who have been forced or obliged to flee or leave their homes 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 or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognized state border." On the other hand, refugees are people who have fled war, violence, conflict, or persecution and have crossed an international border to find safety in another country.

According to the 1951 UN Refugee Convention, a refugee is a person who has fled their country due to persecution, conflict, or human rights violations or someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reason of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion." The

African Union's Kampala Convention (2009) defines IDPs as individuals forced to flee their homes but who remain within their country's borders. Unlike refugees, IDPs are not protected under international refugee law but fall under national policies. Thus, while Refugees are displaced persons who have crossed borders of their countries, IDPs are displaced within their home countries and they enjoy the same rights as other civilians to the various protections provided by international humanitarian law and as a crucial element of sovereignty (Adimula & Mokuolu, 2023). IDPs and Refugees flee due to war, violence, persecution or natural disasters and face devastating hardships due to displacement. 108.4 million people worldwide were forcibly displaced at the end of 2022 as a result of persecution, conflict, violence, human rights violation or events seriously disturbing public order consisting of 35.3 million refugees, 62.5 million internally displaced people, and 5.4 million asylum seekers (UNHCR, 2023).

IDPs care is the responsibility of the national government as provided under the 1998 United Nations Guiding Principles on Internally Displacement. Africa hosts over one-third of the global forced displacement population (ReliefWeb, 2019). Africa currently has more than 25 million people who are forcibly displaced (IDPs and Refugees) as a result of conflict and repression and 85% of them come from eight countries: the Democratic Republic of the Congo, South Sudan, Somalia, Ethiopia, Sudan, Nigeria, the Central African Republic, and Cameroon. West Africa is the host to the largest numbers of persons of concerns to UNHCR (Reliefweb, 2018). Millions of people have been forcefully displaced from their homes in the past decade. The number who seeks refuge within their own country as Internally Displaced Persons IDPs is significantly higher than those who cross national borders as refugee and asylum seekers (UNHCR, 2019). There are about 82.4 million forcibly displaced people worldwide (UNHCR, 2023), of which 55 million are IDPs, with 48 million resulting from conflict and violence and 7 million

from disasters Internal Displacement Monitoring Center (IDMC, 2020).

## 2.2 Causes of displacement in Nigeria

Acknowledging the impact of internally displaced persons IDPs on global security, scholars have sought to identify the causes, pointing to various triggers for internal displacement, such as poverty (Klugman, 2021), economic crisis (Helgson, 2020), natural disasters (Adeola, 2020), political violence, and armed conflict (Adewale, 2016, Dirikgil, 2022). Internal displacement remains an obstinate problem in Africa (Adeola, 2016), arising mostly from persistent conflicts, as well as other social factors. Nevertheless, the problem of IDPs caused by armed violence has remained a distinguishing characteristic of many African countries, especially Nigeria (Ekoh et al., 2022). Nigeria has experienced various forms of internal displacement, from armed conflict to natural disasters, ethno religious disputes, and communal clashes, which have affected millions of people (Mohammed, 2017). Since early 2013, and increasingly into 2014, Boko Haram's violent insurgency in northeastern Nigeria has displaced hundreds and thousands of people.

Over 470,000 are internally displaced within Nigeria, while tens of thousands have fled to neighboring countries like Cameroon, Niger, and Chad (Human Right Watch, 2014). Nigeria has had an upsurge in the case of IDPs with the proliferation of militia groups in the last one and half decades. Among these militias is the dreaded Boko Haram terrorist who violently undermines the territorial integrity and authority of the Nigerian state and causes widespread internal displacement, human rights abuse, and humanitarian crises. After a decade of conflict crisis caused by the Boko Haram terrorists group, millions have been affected, and over 2 million remain displaced (IOM, 2022). Since 2009, Boko Haram has launched several attacks on lives and destruction of properties in Nigeria, leading to the death of several people and displacement of a considerable population of people, especially in Northeast Nigeria (Adimula & Mokuola, 2023). Boko Haram had been the most complex,

destructive and mind-boggling security challenge Nigeria has ever faced (Olufolahan, 2015).

In 2022, the estimated population of these regions was 18.9 million. While Boko Haram activities have a widespread presence, its impact varies across states. Adamawa, Borno and Yobe bear the greatest impact accounting for over 82% of the total casualties and hosting the majority of IDP Camps (UNHCR 2023). These states have tragically suffered extensive destruction of lives and properties. Homes, social infrastructure like electric poles, schools, hospitals, and water pipes were ruthlessly destroyed, resulting in the displacement of over 2.5 million people and the loss of more than 10,000 lives (International Committee of the Red Cross 2016, IOM, 2018). Another cause of displacement is natural disasters such as flooding. About 1 million people living in the low lying plains of the River Niger are considered to be at risk. Flooding is recorded every year in all states along the Niger River and its tributaries, frequently causing disasters (Opukri & Ibaba, 2008). Furthermore, two-thirds of Bayelsa State and half of Delta State are

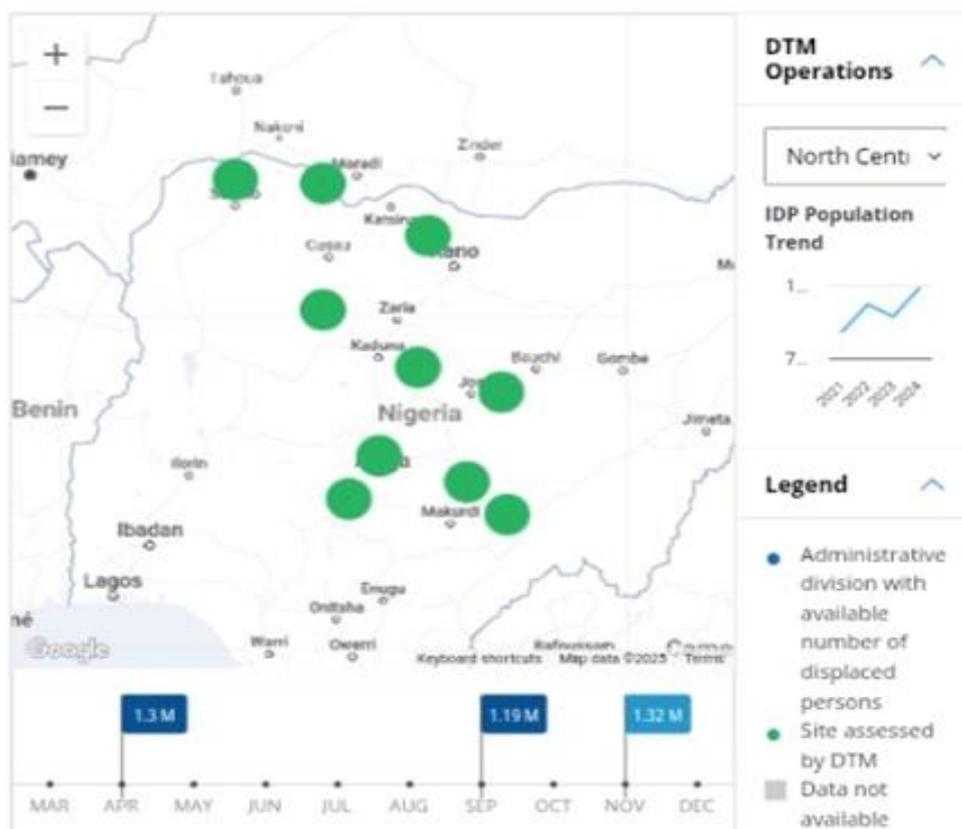
overwhelmed by devastating floods for at least one-quarter of each year (Ibid)

### 2.3 Settlement Policies and Effectiveness in Policy Implementation

Settlement policies refer to government and institutional strategies aimed at providing shelter, security, social services, and economic opportunities for displaced populations. These policies include temporary camps, resettlement programs, and integration initiatives. Effectiveness in this context refers to how well policies meet the intended objectives. It includes access to basic services, security, governance efficiency, and overall well-being of displaced persons. Sustainability involves ensuring that settlement policies support long term economic, social, and environmental stability. Sustainable policies focus on; Economic self-reliance, which includes job creation and vocational training. Social Cohesion comprises of integration with host communities, and Environmental sustainability which includes reducing ecological impacts of settlements.

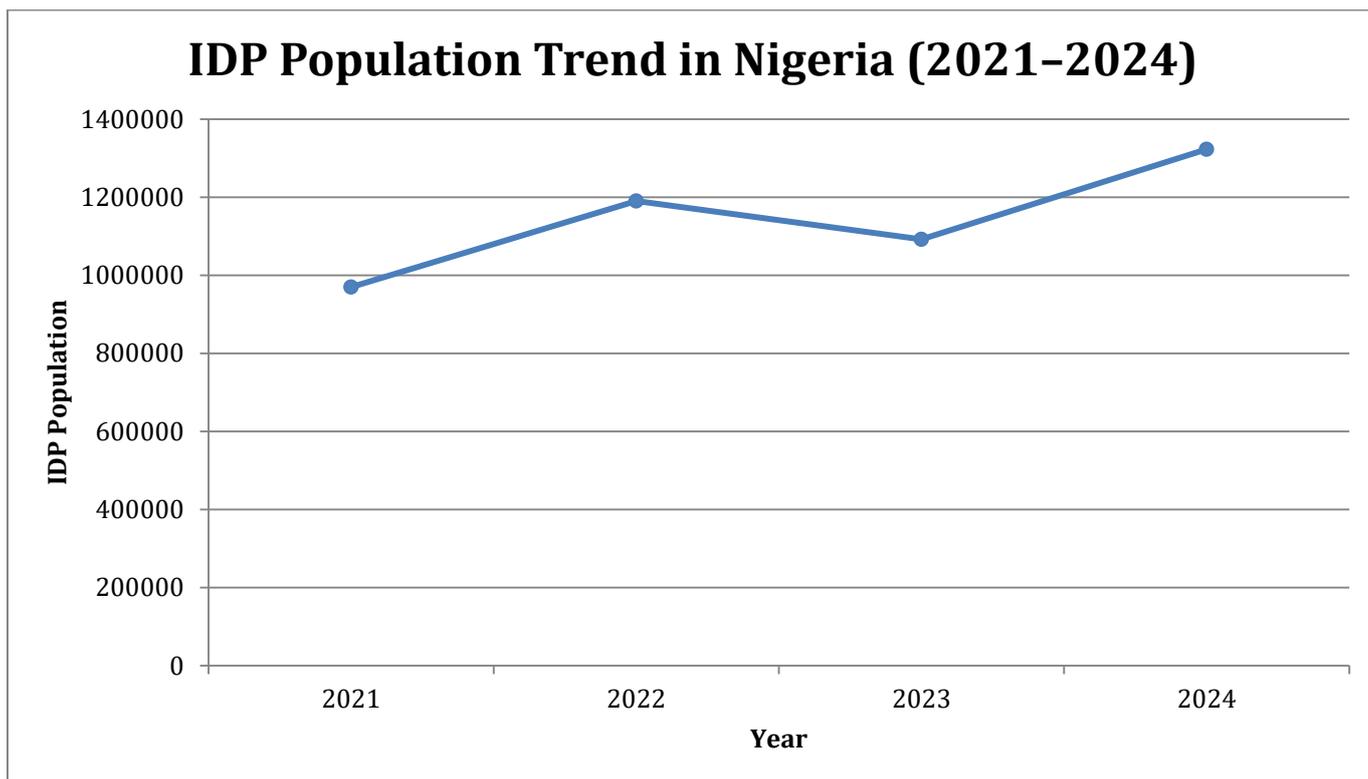
**Fig 1: Map showing the distribution of IDP sites across Nigeria**

Source: International Organization for Migration (IOM). (2024)



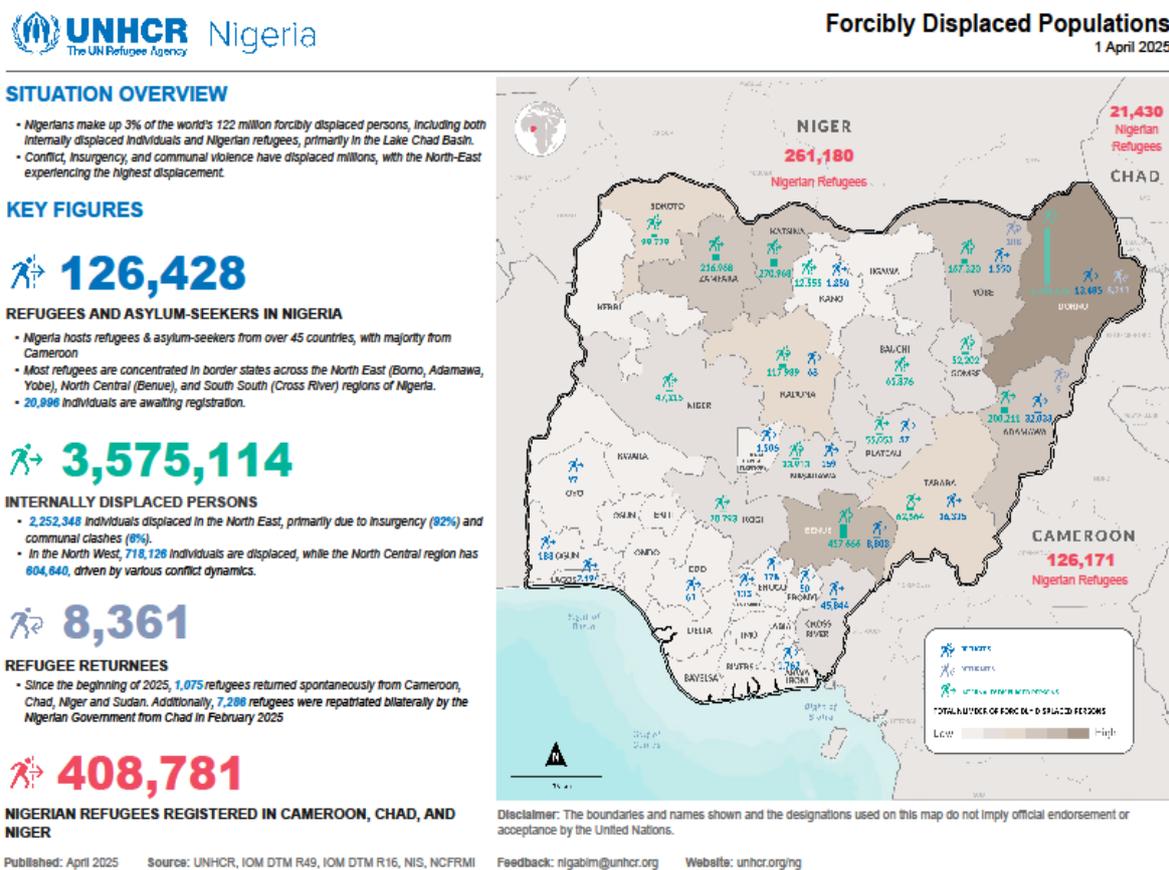
**Figure 2: IDP Population Trend in Nigeria**

Source: International Organization for Migration (IOM). (2024)



**Figure 3: Map showing IDPs, Refugee and Refugee Returnees in Nigeria**

Source: UNHCR. (2024)



### 3. Theoretical and Analytical Framework

To critically analyze the success and challenges of Nigeria's refugee and IDP settlement policies, it is essential to apply established theoretical frameworks. This study adopts Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (SLF) developed by Chambers and Conway in 1992 as the central theoretical perspective for analyzing Nigeria refugee and IDP settlement policies. According to Chambers and Conway, 1992, "Livelihood is the capabilities, assets, and activities required for a means of living. Livelihood is sustainable when it can cope with and recover from stresses and shocks, and maintain, or enhance its capabilities and assets both now and in the future, while not undermining the natural resource base." The SLF was developed with the intention to enhance the efficiency of development cooperation (Kollmair & Gamper, 2002). This framework was adopted to provide a comprehensive approach for assessing the effectiveness of settlement policies by analyzing critical livelihood assets covered by the framework.

This framework identifies five cores of capital essential for sustainable livelihoods which entails:

- 1) Human capital: In the context of SLF, it is defined as the skills, knowledge, ability to labor, and good health that together enable people to pursue different livelihood strategies and achieve their livelihood objectives (DFID, 2020). Changes in human capital have to be seen not only as isolated effects, but as well as a supportive factor for the other assets (Kollmair & Gamper, 2002)
- 2) Social capital: This means the social resources upon which people draw in seeking their livelihood outcomes, such as networks and connectedness, that increase people's trust and ability to cooperate or membership in more formalized groups and their systems of rules, norms, and sanctions, For most deprived population like IDPs and refugees, social capital represents a place of refuge in mitigating the effects of shocks or lacks in other capitals through informal networks (Scoones, 2009).
- 3) Natural capital: These are natural resource stocks from which resources flow and services

(such as land, water, forests, air quality, erosion protection, biodiversity degree and rate of change, etc.) useful for livelihood. A good air and water quality represents a basis for good health and other aspects of livelihood (Kollmair & Gamper, 2002).

4) Physical capital: This comprises of the basic infrastructure and goods needed to support livelihoods, such as affordable transport, secure shelter and buildings, adequate water supply and sanitation, affordable energy, and access to information.

5) Financial capital: This is the financial resources that people use to achieve their livelihood objectives and it comprises the availability of cash or equivalent (Kollmair & Gamper, 2002). Applying this framework to Nigeria's displacement policies enables a systematic evaluation of whether current settlement programs move beyond short-term humanitarian assistance to offer displaced persons the tools for long term integration and resilience. The Sustainable Livelihoods Framework will be applied throughout this study to evaluate the extent to which Nigeria's settlement policies enable displaced populations to access and sustain these five livelihood assets. Each dimension will be assessed in relation to the SLF to determine both policy effectiveness and long-term sustainability.

#### 3.1 Application of the framework

The Sustainable Livelihoods Framework is used as the analytical structure for evaluating the key components of Nigeria's IDP and refugee settlement strategies:

- Human Capital: Section 5.2 evaluates access to healthcare and education. Evidence reveals that IDP settlements often lack medical personnel, facilities, and learning infrastructure. Over one million displaced children are out of school, while poor healthcare results in preventable mortality both severely undermining human capital development.

- **Physical Capital:** As shown in section 5.1, the vast majority of IDPs live in overcrowded and temporary shelters with insufficient sanitation. The absence of durable housing and infrastructure reduces stability, increases vulnerability to diseases, and limits integration into host communities.
- **Social Capital:** Displacement erodes traditional support networks. Section 5.3 discusses poor community integration, heightened vulnerability to gender-based violence, and lack of participation in resettlement decisions. These factors indicate weak social cohesion and exclusion from host society systems.
- **Financial Capital:** Section 5.5 shows that few IDPs have access to livelihood programs or financial resources. Without vocational training or employment access, most remain aid-dependent. Economic marginalization restricts autonomy and prolongs displacement.
- **Natural Capital:** Though less emphasized in current policy, environmental vulnerability such as settlements in flood-prone areas and lack of land ownership, as discussed in section 6.2 prevents IDPs from rebuilding livelihoods or establishing long-term residence. By aligning these five capitals with the existing policy environment and on-ground realities, the SLF highlights deep structural gaps in Nigeria's displacement response. While frameworks like the National Policy on IDPs (2021) exist, their failure to holistically empower displaced persons across these livelihood dimensions

renders settlement efforts largely unsustainable. Using the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework enables a comprehensive and structured analysis of Nigeria's IDP and refugee policies. This reveals not only the symptoms of ineffective implementation but also the deeper, systemic issues impeding long-term recovery. This framework reinforces the study's call for a shift from short-term relief toward sustainable development strategies that address the full spectrum of displaced persons' needs and capacities.

#### **4. Overview of Nigeria's Refugee and IDP Settlement Policies**

##### **4.1 Institutional Frameworks**

Nigeria's refugee and IDP policies involve multiple government agencies and international partners such as the National Commission for Refugees, Migrants and Internally Displaced Persons (NCFRMI), which coordinates IDP and refugee policies, oversees resettlement programs and legal protections, and works with UNHCR and NGOs on refugee integration. Based on the constitution of the federal republic of Nigeria, the NCFRMI and NEMA have the legal responsibility to carry out humanitarian intervention in response to IDPs in the country. NCFRMI was established through Decree 52 of the Act 1989 to manage the status of refugees. It incorporates tenets of the United Nations Convention of 1951 and the 1967 and 1969 protocols of the African Union Convention. Subsequently, the federal government expanded the NCFRMI's mandate to include IDPs because NEMA, unfortunately failed to extend its operations in some states (Bamidele & Pikirayi, 2023). In response to the IDP crisis, the international community has adopted various protocols and frameworks to manage it. National Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and International Organizations, which Provides funding and technical assistance for

refugee settlement, advocates for refugee and IDP rights, and assists in durable solutions like resettlement and repatriation. The government as a state actor is primarily concerned with the adequate security and welfare of displaced citizens during disasters through special emergency management agencies.

In Nigeria, NEMA operates at the federal level, while SEMA functions at the state and local level. These agencies are specialized agencies established to manage disasters at the federal, state and grass root levels (Agunyai & Phago, 2024). They are the foremost emergency institutions with activities to rescue people affected or displaced by disaster, they connect the government and the displaced people through the delivery of humanitarian aid in humanitarian camps across Nigeria (Ekezie, 2022). State Emergency Management Agencies (SEMAs) implement IDPs policies at state and local levels and manages state specific resettlement programs. The Nigerian government through NEMA has been responsible for the management of disasters, including the safe custody of IDP and the provision of humanitarian aid. To manage the victims of natural and manmade disasters in Nigeria, the federal government established NEMA under Act 12 of 1999 as amended by Act 50 of 1999, and vested the organization with the responsibility of providing humanitarian aid and emergency response, managing IDP camps and temporary settlements, and coordinating disaster relief efforts.

The specific functions of the agency under the act include formulating policy on all activities relating to disaster management in Nigeria and coordinating plans and programs for the efficient and effective response to disasters at national level, coordinating and promoting research activities relating to disaster management at the national level, monitoring the state of preparedness of all organizations or agencies that may contribute to disaster management in Nigeria, educating and informing the public on disaster prevention and control measures, coordinating and facilitating the activities the provision of necessary resources for search and rescue and

other types of disaster curtailment activities in response to distress call, coordinating the activities of all voluntary organizations engaged in emergency relief operations in any part of the federation, receiving financial and technical aid from organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) for the purpose of disaster management in Nigeria, collecting emergency relief supplies from local and foreign sources and from international agencies and NGOs, and ensuring the effective distribution of emergency relief supplies to victims of natural or other disasters and assisting in the rehabilitation of the victims where necessary (NEMA, 1999). Nigeria has developed multiple legal and policy frameworks to manage its IDPs and refugees in line with regional and international commitments.

Under the 1996 Guidelines for Internal Displacement, the management of IDPs is under the national government. In Nigeria, the National Emergency Management agency NEMA is the government agency in charge of the management of IDPs. It manages disasters by rescuing and ensuring the safe relocation of disaster victims to safe humanitarian camps and the delivery of humanitarian aid to camps and the agency faces arrays of challenges, mainly because the IDPs camps lack structure. Nigeria has been finding it increasingly difficult and is almost failing in its task to manage its plethora of IDPs. However, studies have noted fundamental gaps in the functionality and managerial capacity of NEMA and the quality of humanitarian service delivery (Agunyai & Phago, 2024). Weak enforcement, security challenges, and inadequate funding continue to undermine their effectiveness (Bamidele & Pikirayi, 2023). Evidence showed that despite the attention and commendation on the Nigerian government for timely and swift interventions through NEMA, especially on how the displaced persons are offered shelter, food, healthcare, clothing, water and other services in humanitarian camps, humanitarian aid is still largely scarce and the sustainability of humanitarian aid is still very bleak in IDP camps in Nigeria (Akawu et al., 2023).

**Table 1: Institutional Framework for IDP and Refugee Settlement in Nigeria**

Institution	Role in IDP/Refugee Management	Challenges Faced
National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA)	Coordinates emergency response and IDP relief efforts	Limited funding, bureaucratic delays
National Commission for Refugees, Migrants, and Internally Displaced Persons (NCFRMI)	Implements resettlement programs and oversees refugee protection	Weak inter-agency collaboration, policy execution challenges
State Emergency Management Agencies (SEMAs)	Manages IDP camps at the state level	Insufficient resources, lack of coordination with federal agencies
UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees)	Provides humanitarian assistance and advocacy for refugee rights	Relies on donor funding, limited long-term solutions
IOM (International Organization for Migration)	Supports IDP data collection, reintegration programs, and policy recommendations	Coordination challenges with Nigerian government agencies
Federal Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs, Disaster Management & Social Development	Oversees IDP welfare, coordinates national policies	Overlapping mandates with other institutions, slow implementation

## 4.2 Legal and Policy Frameworks for IDPs and refugee

### 1) The National Policy on Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) (2012, Revised 2021)

Nigeria's National Policy on IDP (2012, revised 2021) was established with the core function of providing legal protection, humanitarian assistance, and long term solutions for displaced persons in Nigeria. The National Policy on IDPs serves as Nigeria's primary framework for addressing displacement. Key provision include protection and assistance for IDPs, provisions of durable solutions, including resettlement reintegration and return options, guidelines for coordination among government agencies, international organization, and NGOs, and recognition of IDPs' rights to education, healthcare, and livelihood. Despite these frameworks to assist IDPs, poor implementation, weak enforcement, and inadequate funding continues to pose challenges, particularly at the state and local level (Agunyai & Phago, 2024). 2) African Union's Kampala Convention (2009). The African Union's Kampala Convention (2009), which Nigeria has ratified provides a framework for the protection and assistance of internally displaced persons, which African countries are

obligated by article 9 (2) (b) to protect internally displaced people to the fullest extent practicable and with the least possible delay. These countries, including Nigeria are obligated to provide adequate humanitarian assistance, including food, water, shelter, medical care and other health services, sanitation, education, and any other necessary social services, and where appropriate, to extend assistance to local and host communities (Human Right Watch, 2014).

Nigeria ratified the Kampala Convention, which is the first legally binding regional treaty on internal displacement. It mandates state responsibility for preventing displacement, protection of IDPs' rights in accordance with international humanitarian law, and obligates governments to provide housing, security, and reintegration programs (Adekola et al., 2024). Despite ratification, its domestication and implementation into national law has been slow and inconsistent, with IDPs often lacking access to fundamental rights, limiting its impact on internal displacement governance (Adekola et al., 2024). 3) The ECOWAS Protocol on Free Movement, Residence and Establishment. As a member of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), Nigeria is obliged to provide free

movement and settlement rights for refugees and displaced persons within the region. Despite the mandate, enforcement of this policy remains weak due to security concerns and bureaucratic obstacles. 4) Nigeria's Refugee Laws and International Commitments. Nigeria is a signatory to several international refugee protection agreements, including the 1951 UN Refugee

Convention and 1967 Protocol recognizing refugee rights. 5) The UNHCR Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF). This framework encourages long-term refugee integration and self-reliance. However, refugee policies remain heavily dependent on humanitarian aid with limited long-term integration effort.

**Table 2: Summary of Nigeria's Refugee and IDP Policies**

Policy	Year	Key Provisions	Implementation Challenges
National Policy on IDPs	2012 (Revised 2021)	Legal framework for IDP protection. Guidelines for resettlement and reintegration. Humanitarian aid provisions.	Weak enforcement at state and local levels. Insufficient funding for implementation. Lack of long-term integration plans.
Kampala Convention (AU)	2009	First legally binding regional framework on internal displacement. Emphasizes state responsibility in preventing and responding to displacement. Provides protection for IDPs.	Nigeria has ratified but not fully domesticated into national law. Poor awareness and enforcement mechanisms.
ECOWAS Free Movement Protocol	1979	Grants displaced persons the right to move and settle within ECOWAS countries. Provides legal backing for refugees' mobility.	Security concerns have led to restricted border controls. Poor implementation due to regional instability.
UNHCR Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF)	2016	Focuses on long-term refugee integration and economic self-reliance. Encourages government partnerships with private sectors and NGOs.	Nigeria still heavily depends on humanitarian aid rather than durable solutions. Weak policy execution at federal and state levels.

## 5. Effectiveness of Nigeria's IDP and Refugee Settlement Policies

Despite Nigeria's commitment to protecting IDPs and refugees, implementation gaps, weak governance, and funding constraints continue to undermine the effectiveness of settlement policies. The majority of IDPs have settled in self-settled locations (non-government authorities' sites) and within host communities. These groups have often been considered "invisible" and do not receive needed support (UNOCHA, 2016, Olanrewaju et al., 2019). The IDPs experience numerous problems, including inadequate assistance, insecurity, health challenges, and lack of rehabilitation options (Ibrahim, 2019, Obiefuna & Adams, 2021). This section evaluates the impact of existing policies across key areas including housing, security, access to social services, and economic integration. Many of the displaced persons in Nigeria face serious challenges including lack of food, water, shelter, and access to education and healthcare (Human Right Watch, 2014).

### 5.1 Housing and Infrastructure

While some government built settlements exist such as Bama Resettlement Camp in Borno, most IDPs still rely on makeshift housing with poor sanitation. Government resettlement efforts have been slow and uneven, with some displaced populations forced to return to unsafe areas. Policy implementation remains inadequate, failing to meet international standards for housing displaced persons. One of the biggest challenges facing Nigeria's IDP and refugee settlement policies is the lack of durable housing and infrastructure. Most displaced persons live in overcrowded IDP camps, temporary shelters, or informal settlement, exposing them to health risks, security threats, and harsh environmental conditions (Ekoh et al., 2023). Key Issues in housing and infrastructure includes overcrowding. Most IDPs camps especially in Borno, Adamawa and Yobe, exceed their capacity leading to poor living conditions and inadequate sanitation (Shehu & Abba, 2020). Another problem is the durability of shelter. A lot of IDPs live in temporary shelters

that are unsuitable for long term settlement, increasing the risk of secondary displacement (Adewale, 2016). Water, sanitation and hygiene (wash) services is one of the housing and infrastructure issues facing IDPs, which causes poor access to clean water and sanitation, thereby increasing the risk of disease outbreaks like cholera and malaria (UNCHR, 2023).

### 5.2 Access to Healthcare, Education, and Social Services

Access to healthcare, education, and social services is critical for the well-being and reintegration of displaced persons. However, most IDPs and refugees face severe limitation in accessing basic services particularly in conflict affected regions. Challenges in social service access include Healthcare. IDP settlement lack adequate medical facilities and trained personnel, leading to high mortality rate from preventable diseases (Ekezie, 2022). Many IDP camps have limited medical facilities, leading to high rates of malnutrition, maternal mortality, and disease outbreak (WHO, 2021). Prolonged dwelling in displacement often results in adverse outcomes, including increased disease incidence, food insecurity, and mental health issues (Mubarak et al., 2016). Diseases such as cholera, measles, tuberculosis, and sexually transmitted diseases are common in several IDP camps as observed in Kuchingoro camp in Abuja, Bakassi camp in Borno, Stefanos camp in Plateau, and Mullum camp in Taraba (Agunyai & Phago, 2024). Education is also one of the basic services that should be provided for IDPs. However, statistics have shown that over one million displaced children lack access to education leading to high dropout rate especially in the Northwest (UNICEF, 2023). Children become highly vulnerable to begging, hard labors, and abuse because of the insufficient teaching and learning process in IDP camps in Nigeria. Furthermore, social welfare programs such as cash transfer program exist but are underfunded and inconsistently implemented. Service delivery is inadequate, with government efforts and most IDPs heavily dependent on NGOs and

international agencies for survival (Agunyai & Phago, 2024).

### 5.3 Security and Protection of Displaced Populations

Security remains a major concern for IDPs and refugees in Nigeria particularly in Borno, Adamawa and Yobe state where insurgent attacks persist, many IDP camps have been targeted by Boko Haram, bandits, and other armed groups leading to forced displacement abduction and sexual violence (Bamidele & Pikirayi, 2023). Attack on IDP camps, cases of Boko Haram raids in IDPs settlement have been reported increasing fear and secondary displacement (UNHCR 2023). Another key security challenge is the gender based violence (GBV). Women and girls in IDP camps face high risks of sexual exploitation abuse and human trafficking (Adekola et al., 2024). Report from Amnesty International, 2022 indicates that displaced women and girls face gender based violence and exploitation in camps. Government led forced returns of IDPs to insecure areas violate international protection principles (Ekoh et al., 2023). Some returnees have been forcibly relocated to unsafe areas violation. Security remains a major weakness, with ineffective law enforcement and inadequate protection for displaced populations. Camps leaders can hardly control violence in the camps, leading to a humanitarian crisis where people who are expected to be in camp are abducted for ransom (Agunyai & Phago, 2024). It was on record that the majority of IDPs are victims of the farmers-herders crisis, and due to lack of effective camp control and monitoring, there have been increased incidence of forceful abductions, forceful conversions, and forceful marriage of underage children in the camp (Robinson, 2024).

### 5.4 Governance and policy coordination

Nigeria's displacement management is fragmented with overlapping roles among NEMA, NCFRMI and SEMAS leading to bureaucratic inefficiencies and delays. Corruption and poor

accountability further hinder policy effectiveness (Shehu & Abba, 2020). Key governance challenges include weak inter-agency coordination. Also, poor collaboration between NEMA, NCFRMI, and state agencies is another challenge, which often causes overlaps, inefficiencies, and delay in aid distribution. Corruption and resource mismanagement is another major issue facing governance and policy coordination. Reports indicate misallocation of funds meant for IDP program (Ekoh et al., 2023). Additionally, government funding remains unpredictable and inconsistent; forcing reliance on international donors (Adewale, 2016). The bureaucratic structure weakens policy implementation, leading to delays, and inconsistencies in settlement programs. (Bamidele & Pikirayi, 2023) identified that inadequate coordination between government's agencies and non-governmental organizations marred the provision of targeted humanitarian aid in several IDP camps in Nigeria, It was also found that agencies like NEMA refused to give administrative support to NGOs that are willing to offer women humanitarian assistance in the camp (Agunyai & Phago, 2024) The provision of humanitarian aid by Nigerian government is not only meager but hardly gets to the internally displaced women in Kuchingoro camp (Olawajaju et al., Bamidele & Pikirayi, 2023).

### 5.5 Economic Integration

Most settlement policies focus on short term relief rather than long term integration (Shehu & Abba, 2020). Few displaced persons have access to livelihood programs, vocational training or financial services. The dependency on humanitarian aid prevents any refugees and IDPs from achieving self-reliance (Agunyai & Phago, 2024). Economic sustainability remains a major challenge, as few policies address job creation and financial independence for displaced persons.

**Table 3: Summary of settlement policies in different areas**

Policy Area	Assessment	Key Issues
Housing & Infrastructure	Weak	Overcrowding, poor sanitation, lack of durable housing.
Healthcare & Education	Inadequate	Insufficient medical facilities, high child dropout rates.
Security & Protection	Poor	Attacks on IDP camps, gender-based violence, forced returns.
Governance & Coordination	Weak	Bureaucratic delays, corruption, poor inter-agency collaboration.
Economic Integration	Limited	Few livelihood programs, high dependency on aid.

**Key Challenges and Policy Gaps**

Despite Nigeria’s legal frameworks and commitment for managing IDPs, significant gaps in policy enforcement, funding allocation, legal protection, and governance continue to undermine the effectiveness of IDP and refugee settlement programs. This section integrates verified data from the World Bank, research gate and UNHCR reports to highlight key challenges and policy gaps.

**6.1 Weak IDP Data Systems and Policy Implementation**

One of the major barriers disrupting effective displacement management in Nigeria is the lack of accurate and centralized IDP data (Bamidele & Pikirayi, 2023). The World Bank (2024), reports that Nigeria lacks a comprehensive IDP and refugee database. Inadequate database for displaced populations result in poor tracking of movements and inconsistent aid distribution. Lack of standardized monitoring system also causes gaps in policy implementation and reliance on outdated statistics, which makes long-term planning ineffective. NEMA hardly has accurate data on precarious conditions affecting most IDP camps in Nigeria. Lack of accurate data constitute a big challenge to effective management of IDP camps and humanitarian aid, as it would be very difficult for the government to plan, manage, and

resolve problems affecting IDP in their various camps (Agunyai & Phago, 2024).

**6.2 Lack of a National Housing Policy for IDPs**

The housing and living conditions in IDP camps remain critical with overcrowding, poor sanitation and lack of durable housing affecting displaced persons (Shaibu & Olu-Adeyemi, 2020). According to a research gate study Nigeria’s IDP camps in Borno, Benue and Adamawa state suffer from overcrowded shelter with families living in makeshift tents, limited access to clean water and sanitation, increasing disease outbreak, absence of long-term resettlement programs forcing prolonged camp stays. Most IDPs in Nigeria live in overcrowded and poorly maintained camps. No legal requirement for durable IDP housing, leading to temporary shelters, overcrowding in camps, increasing disease outbreaks and security risks and slow government response in relocating displace persons to permanent homes (Agunyai & Phago, 2024).

**6.3 Non-Domestication of the Kampala Convention**

Although Nigeria has endorsed the Kampala Convention (2009), it has not been integrated into national law (Magaji, 2023). Without domestication, the mandates outlined by this policy cannot be achieved. As opined by (African

Union, 2009), many African countries have certified this policy, but haven't domesticated it. Countries that are yet to adopt this policy often encounter reintegration and sustainability challenges (IDMC, 2020). This also creates legal uncertainties for displaced persons. Some of the challenges emanating as a result of non-integration of the Kampala Convention into Nigerian law include limited legal recognition of IDPs, limiting access to education, healthcare and jobs, inadequate legal framework for IDP land ownership, preventing long term settlement, and government led forced returns of IDPs to unsafe areas (UNHCR).

#### 6.4 Limited Economic Reintegration Programs for IDPs

A World Bank (2024) report highlights that most Nigerian IDPs remain dependent on humanitarian assistance, with limited access to sustainable economic opportunities. Economic reintegration remains underfunded and overlooked, with several policies focused on other aspects of support (IDMC, 2020). Despite the creation of vocation training programs in some IDP camps, large numbers of displaced individuals are without training and empowerment. Additionally, many IDPs becomes useless and faces discrimination in host communities, as they have little or no trainings and empowerment skills, limiting their access to jobs and employment (UNHCR, 2020). red tape and corruption and misallocation of IDP relief funds (Agunyai & Phago, 2024).

Also, they experience inequality, as there are no financial services or entrepreneurship programs to help IDPs rebuild their lives (IOM, 2018).

#### 6.5 Weak Gender Protection Laws for IDPs

Women and children in IDP camps face high risks of gender-based violence (GBV), sexual exploitation, and human trafficking which are caused by lack of legal protection for displaced women against Gender Based Violence. There are few female led security units in IDP and poor law enforcement response to GBV cases leading to impunity. Ekezie, 2022 concludes that women and children are the most vulnerable groups among IDPs in Nigeria. Inequality is common in several camps and it was specifically revealed that men seem to be better placed than women in Kuchingoro camp. Despite the fact that men are few in this camp, they still harass and discriminate against women (Agunyai & Phago, 2024).

#### 6.6 Uncoordinated IDP Policy Management

Multiple government agencies including NEMA, NCFRMI, and SEMAs are responsible for IDP management, yet poor coordination leads to inefficiencies and duplication of efforts (World Bank, 2024). Some of the issues arising from the poor policy management includes conflicting mandate among agencies creates inefficiencies, delayed response to emergencies due to bureaucratic

**Table 4: Summary of Policy Gaps in Nigeria's IDP and Refugee Settlement**

Policy Gap	Source	Key Issues
Non-domestication of the Kampala Convention	Magaji (2023)	Nigeria has ratified but not integrated the Kampala Convention into domestic law. IDPs lack legal recognition, restricting access to land, jobs, and education. Forced returns of IDPs violate international protection standards.
Lack of centralized IDP data system	World Bank (2024), Data Gaps in Forced Displacement	No national database for IDP tracking, leading to inconsistent aid distribution. Reliance on outdated statistics,

		making policy planning ineffective. Weak inter-agency coordination, causing bureaucratic delays.
Inadequate housing and camp conditions	Shaibu & Olu-Adeyemi (2020)	Overcrowded IDP camps, with families living in makeshift tents. Poor access to clean water and sanitation, increasing disease outbreaks. Lack of durable housing policies, forcing long-term camp dependency.
Dependence on humanitarian aid, limited economic integration	World Bank (2024), Changing the Narrative on Forced Displacement	Over 60% of IDP funding comes from international donors, making policies unsustainable. Few livelihood programs, leaving IDPs dependent on relief aid. Discrimination in host communities, limiting IDP access to economic opportunities.
Gender-Based Violence (GBV) and security risks	Shaibu & Olu-Adeyemi (2020)	IDP women and children face high risks of sexual violence, exploitation, and human trafficking. No female-led security units in IDP camps. Weak law enforcement, leading to impunity for perpetrators of violence.
Fragmented governance and corruption	World Bank (2024), Forced Displacement Report	Conflicting mandates among agencies (NEMA, NCFRMI, SEMAs) cause inefficiencies. Delayed response to IDP needs due to bureaucratic red tape. Misallocation of IDP relief funds, reducing policy effectiveness.

### 7. Policy Recommendations for Effective and Sustainable IDP and Refugee Settlement

To address the challenges of policy gaps identified, settlement strategies must focus on long-term development interventions rather than short term responses. The following recommendations integrate policy improvements with long term sustainability strategies to ensure

lasting solutions for displaced populations in Nigeria.

- 1) Legal protection framework for IDP protection should be strengthened by integrating Kampala convention into Nigerian law, banning forced returns, and providing land access and rights for permanent integration.

- 2) Durable housing and resettlement programs should be expanded by adopting a national housing policy and scaling up low housing projects, especially in states with heavy displaced populations.
- 3) Dependence on foreign aid should be reduced and economic self-reliance should be promoted by increasing domestic government funding and establishing vocational training centers for IDPs and refugees.
- 4) Maximum security and the prevention of Gender Based Violence in IDP camps should be promoted by implementing and enforcing stricter rules against Gender Based Violence and establishing female led security units.
- 5) Governance and Policy coordination should be promoted by creating a single national management agency, implementing strict anti-corruption measures, and developing host communities led resettlement initiatives.

**Table 5: Summary of Sustainable Policy Actions**

Policy Area	Recommended Actions	Expected Impact
Legal Frameworks	Fully domesticate the Kampala Convention	Strengthen IDP legal protections and rights
Housing & Resettlement	Develop a National Housing Policy for IDPs	Provide long-term, durable housing solutions
Economic Empowerment	Expand vocational training and microfinance programs	Reduce aid dependence, improve self-reliance
Security & Protection	Strengthen security in IDP camps and enforce GBV policies	Reduce violence, enhance camp safety
Governance & Coordination	Establish a unified IDP management agency	Improve policy implementation and reduce inefficiencies
Funding & Sustainability	Increase domestic budget allocation for IDP programs	Reduce reliance on international donors, ensure stability

**8. Conclusion**

Nigeria’s IDP and refugee settlement policies remain largely ineffective due to weak enforcement, fragmented governance, and over reliance on short term support. While some progress has been made such as national Policy on IDPs 2021 and donor supported relief programs, most solutions fail to provide long term sustainability. For Nigeria to achieve effective and long-lasting solutions, IDPs and refugee settlement policies must shift its focus from short term interventions to sustainable developmental approaches. These strategies will ensure adequate

implementation and enforcement, which guarantees IDP protection under national law, provides durable housing solutions, economic empowerment programs that integrate IDPs into labor market, stronger governance to eliminate corruption and mismanagement of resources, and enhanced security measures to prevent IDP camp attacks and gender based violence. Without these structural strategies, millions of displaced individuals will be vulnerable to poverty, insecurity, and relegation. A comprehensive government led approach complemented by international partnerships can ensure a sustainable future for displaced population.

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