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ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON THE LIVELIHOODS OF INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS (IDPS) IN NORTH-EAST NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This study assessed the impact of COVID-19 on the livelihoods of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in North-East Nigeria using a survey research design. The target population consisted of 7.1 million IDPs across Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe States. A sample of three hundred and eighty four (384) IDPs was selected, with the sample size determined using Taro Yamane's table of sample size determination. Data were collected through a self-developed questionnaire and analyzed using frequency counts and simple percentages. The results indicated that the COVID-19 pandemic had a significant negative effect on the income-generating activities of IDPs, with significant reductions in income reported by the majority of participants. The findings highlights the severe economic challenges faced by this IDPs. To mitigate the adverse economic effects of COVID-19 on Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in North-East Nigeria, it is recommended that targeted financial assistance and income-generating programs be developed and implemented to provide immediate relief and long-term economic stability for the IDP population.

Keywords: Internally Displaced Persons, Covid-19 Pandemic, Income Generating Activities, Livelihood of IDPs

Introduction

Nigeria's North East region faces numerous challenges, including instability stemming from the prolonged Boko Haram insurgency, climate change-induced floods, droughts, and dry spells, as well as outbreaks of crop and livestock diseases (Prince *et al.*, 2023). The COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbated these issues. By early May 2020, the pandemic's effects on agriculture and food systems in North East Nigeria were evident, particularly with disruptions to food supply chains and interstate transportation of agricultural goods, including commodities and animal feed (Amusan & Agunyai, 2021).

The Boko Haram insurgency has inflicted severe hardship on communities, leading to the widespread displacement of people. The violence and destruction of lives and property have drawn both national and international attention, necessitating humanitarian interventions, such as the establishment of camps for internally displaced persons (IDPs). Boko Haram's brutal assaults on military personnel, religious institutions, schools, media outlets, and markets have deeply affected the socio-economic and political fabric of Nigeria, extending their destabilizing influence to

neighboring West African countries (Oghuybu, 2024).

Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic has disproportionately impacted IDPs in North East Nigeria, worsening their already precarious livelihoods. Economies and essential sectors such as healthcare, agriculture, and food production rely heavily on IDP labor, yet policies introduced at the start of the pandemic failed to account for their unique needs, further diminishing their means of survival in various camps across the region (Bello, 2022). Historically, Borno State has been a major trade hub due to its strategic location along Nigeria's borders. As returnees from IDP camps resettle in Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe states, many have had to navigate new socio-economic and political realities. While many formerly relied on donor assistance, some have managed to adapt and find alternative livelihoods. However, underemployment remains widespread, forcing returnees to find new ways to sustain themselves in their altered environment (Mohammed, 2022).

By early May 2020, the pandemic's detrimental effects on agriculture and food systems were becoming evident, with disruptions to food supply chains and interstate movements of agricultural produce, including commodities and animal feed (Belton *et al.*, 2021). The pandemic compounded existing vulnerabilities, leading to widespread job loss and reduced access to essential livelihood activities, especially among IDPs in Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe states (Gbigbiddje *et al.*, 2021). With limited access to employment and essential services, many IDPs found it increasingly difficult to support themselves. The pandemic's economic impact disproportionately affected those who were already struggling, including displaced persons reliant on agriculture and informal work. This research aims to explore the effect of COVID-19 pandemic on the livelihoods of displaced populations in North East Nigeria, focusing specifically on Borno State.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are to:

1. Evaluate the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Income Generating Activities of Internally Displaced Persons in North-East Nigeria.
2. Assess changes faced by the Internally Displaced Persons in North-East Nigeria due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
3. Identify the coping strategies adopted by Internally Displaced Persons in North-East Nigeria in response to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic

Research Questions

1. What are the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Income Generating Activities of Internally Displaced Persons in North-East Nigeria?
2. What are the changes faced by the Internally Displaced Persons in North-East Nigeria during the pandemic?
3. What are the coping strategies adopted by Internally Displaced Persons in North-East Nigeria in response to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic?

Research Method

Survey research design was adopted in this study. The population of the study comprised of seven million and one hundred thousand internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Borno, Adamawa and Yobe State. While a sample of three hundred and eighty six (386) IDPs participated in the study. The sample size was determined using Taro Yamane (1967) table of sample size determination. The research instruments used in this study was a self-developed questionnaire. Data collected were analyzed using frequency counts and simple percentages.

Presentation of Results

The demographic characteristics of the respondents such as gender, age group, years spent on the IDPs camp and educational attainment were presented in table 1:

Table 1: Socio-Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

S/N	Variable	Responses	Frequency	Percentages
1	Gender	Male	107	28%
		Female	279	72%
2	Age Group	Below 25 years	20	5%
		25-34 years	121	31%
		35-44 years	137	28%
		45 and above	106	35%
3	Education Attainment	Non-formal	213	55%
		Primary	87	23%
		Secondary	55	14%
		Tertiary	31	8%
4	Years Spent in IDPs Camp	Less than 1 year	12	3%
		1-3 years	96	25%
		4-6 years	127	33%
		7-9 years	84	22%
		10-12 years	65	17%

Table 1 presents the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents. Results revealed that, majority of the IDPs interviewed were female (about 72%) compared to males (28%). The age distribution shows a significant concentration of individuals in the 25-34 years age group (31%), with a significant percentage in the 45 and above category (35%). In terms of education, the majority have non-formal education (55%), followed by primary education (23%), with fewer holding secondary (14%) or tertiary qualifications (8%). Regarding their time spent in IDP camps, most respondents have been there for 4-6 years (33%), with a considerable respondents having been in the camps for 1-3 years (25%), and fewer in the other time brackets.

Research Question One: What are the economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on Income Generating Activities of Internally Displaced Persons in North-East Nigeria?

Table 2: Effect of Covid-19 Pandemic on Income Generating Activities among IDPs in Borno State

S/N	RESPONSES	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGES
1.	Decrease Significantly	231	59.8%
2.	Decrease Moderately	121	31.3%
3.	Remained the Same	19	4.9%
4.	Increase Moderately	13	3.4%
5.	Increase Significantly	2	0.5%
	TOTAL	**386**	**100%**

The analysis of responses on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on income reveals a substantial and predominant negative effect among participants. A significant 59.8% reported a significant decrease in income, while an additional 31.3% indicated a moderate decrease. A relatively small percentage reported that their income remained the same (4.9%), and even fewer experienced a moderate (3.4%) or significant (0.5%) increase. These findings underscore the widespread economic challenges faced by the surveyed individuals, with the majority grappling with significant reductions in their income, highlighting the severe economic repercussions of the pandemic on their livelihoods.

Research Question Two: What are the changes faced by the Internally Displaced Persons in North-East Nigeria during the pandemic?

Table 3: Challenges Faced by the IDPs in North East Nigeria during the pandemic

S/N	Challenges	Frequency	Percentages
1.	Marketing Challenges	78	21.2%
2.	Policy and Regulation Challenges	51	13.9%
3.	Financial Challenges	118	32.1%
4.	Discrimination and Stigma	69	18.8%
5.	Market Competition	52	14.1%
	TOTAL	**384**	**100%**

Table 3 presents the analysis of responses concerning the challenges faced by internally displaced persons during the pandemic indicates a variety of difficulties experienced by this population. Financial challenges emerge as a prominent concern, with 32.1% of respondents identifying economic hardships as a primary issue. This suggests that a significant proportion of IDPs are grappling with financial constraints, which could impact their ability to meet basic needs and sustain livelihoods during the pandemic. Marketing challenges are also prevalent, affecting 21.2% of participants, indicating obstacles in promoting and selling goods or services. Discrimination and stigma (18.8%) highlight the social challenges faced by IDPs, suggesting that this vulnerable group encounters biases or negative perceptions,

potentially hindering their integration or access to resources. Market competition (14.1%) is identified as another noteworthy challenge, indicating that IDPs may face difficulties in competing for economic opportunities within their displaced communities. Additionally, policy and regulation challenges (13.9%) underscore the impact of governmental policies and regulations on the well-being of IDPs during the pandemic. These findings collectively emphasize the multifaceted nature of challenges faced by IDPs, encompassing economic, social, and regulatory dimensions, and underscore the need for comprehensive support mechanisms to address their diverse needs during the ongoing pandemic.

Research Question Three: What are the coping strategies adopted by Internally Displaced Persons in North-East Nigeria in response to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic?

Table 4: Coping Strategies of IDPs during the Pandemic

S/N	RESPONSES	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
1.	Accessing humanitarian aid	113	29.27%
2.	Seeking employment or engaging in income-generating activities	101	26.17%
3.	Community support and cooperation	66	17.10%
4.	Pursuing education or participating in skill development programs	53	13.73%
5.	Improvising shelter and settlement	32	8.29%
6.	Advocacy and community engagement	19	4.92%
	TOTAL	**386**	**100%**

The analysis of responses regarding the coping strategies employed by internally displaced persons (IDPs) during the insurgency reveals a diverse range of adaptive measures. The most frequently reported coping strategy is accessing humanitarian aid, with 29.27% of respondents relying on external assistance to address their immediate needs. Seeking employment or engaging in income-generating activities closely follows, with 26.17% of IDPs actively working towards sustaining their livelihoods. Community support and cooperation are also significant, with 17.10% of participants highlighting the importance of mutual assistance within the displaced community. Pursuing education or participating in skill development programs is reported by 13.73% of respondents, reflecting a focus on long-term resilience. Improvising shelter and settlement (8.29%) and advocacy and community engagement (4.92%) represent additional coping strategies, emphasizing the multifaceted approach IDPs adopt to navigate the challenges posed by the insurgency. These findings highlight the resourcefulness and adaptability of IDPs, as they employ a combination of strategies to address various aspects of their displacement experience.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on income-generating activities among Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in North-East Nigeria has been overwhelmingly negative. A significant majority of respondents reported a notable decline in their income, with 59.8% experiencing a significant decrease and 31.3% facing a moderate decrease. This indicates severe economic hardships for IDPs, exacerbating their already vulnerable situation. The challenges they face are complex, with financial constraints being the most prominent (32.1%), followed by marketing difficulties (21.2%), and social issues such as discrimination and stigma (18.8%). These challenges are compounded by market competition and regulatory hurdles. In response, IDPs have adopted various coping strategies, with humanitarian aid being the most common approach (29.27%), followed by seeking employment or engaging in income-generating activities (26.17%). Community support (17.10%) and participation in education or skill development (13.73%) also play critical roles in their coping mechanisms, highlighting their resilience and resourcefulness amidst adversity. To effectively support Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in North-East Nigeria amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, it is crucial to enhance humanitarian aid, focusing on both immediate relief and long-term economic empowerment. This involves increasing financial assistance and creating sustainable income-generating opportunities. Strengthening community networks for mutual support and addressing financial and marketing challenges.

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