



NON-STATE ACTORS AND THE MANAGEMENT OF DISPLACEMENT IN BENUE STATE

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Abstract

This study examines the role of non-state actors and the management of displacement in Benue State, Nigeria, amidst recurrent communal conflicts and socio-political instability. With increasing displacement resulting from farmer-herder clashes, armed militancy, and resource competition, state mechanisms have proven insufficient in addressing the multidimensional needs of internally displaced persons (IDPs). This research employs a qualitative methodology, drawing on document analysis, policy reviews, and stakeholder interviews to critically assess the extent to which non-state actors — including international and local non-governmental organizations (NGOs), faith-based groups, community-based organizations (CBOs), and traditional institutions — contribute to humanitarian assistance, protection services, conflict mitigation, and durable solutions for displaced populations. Findings indicate that non-state actors fill significant gaps left by formal governance structures through the provision of emergency relief, psychosocial support, livelihood interventions, and advocacy for policy reforms. However, coordination challenges, resource constraints, operational duplication, and limited integration with government frameworks impede optimal impact. The study also highlights the importance of local agency and indigenous knowledge systems in sustainable displacement management, revealing that community-rooted responses often foster resilience and social cohesion more effectively than externally driven efforts. The research concludes that enhancing synergistic partnerships between state and non-state actors, strengthening institutional capacities, and mainstreaming displacement governance into broader development planning are critical for an effective, rights-based response to displacement in Benue State. Policy recommendations underscore the necessity of inclusive frameworks that leverage the comparative advantages of diverse actors to promote durable peace and human security.

Key Words: *Non-State Actors, Management, Displacement, Benue State*

Introduction

The phenomenon of human displacement has emerged as a pressing governance challenge in Nigeria, particularly in regions affected by recurrent communal conflicts, climate-related pressures, and socio-economic vulnerabilities. In **Benue State**, often referred to as the “Food Basket of the Nation,” cycles of displacement have become endemic due to escalating farmer–herder clashes, communal disputes, and resource competition. These dislocations have not only disrupted livelihoods and socio-economic activities but have also strained formal humanitarian and governmental infrastructures, exposing gaps in state capacity for effectively managing displacement crises. Consequently, **non-state actors**—including international and local non-governmental organizations (NGOs), faith-based groups, community associations,



and civil society organizations—have become pivotal in the humanitarian landscape, intervening to provide protection, relief, and durable solutions for internally displaced persons (IDPs) and affected host communities.

Scholarly discourse on humanitarian governance suggests that the increasing involvement of non-state actors reflects both a response to and a critique of conventional state-centric models of displacement management. While states have traditionally been the principal duty-bearers for the protection and welfare of displaced populations, systemic challenges such as limited resources, bureaucratic rigidity, and competing political priorities often curtail their effectiveness. Non-state actors, with their relative flexibility, grassroots linkages, and specialized expertise, have filled critical service gaps—ranging from emergency shelter provision and food distribution to psychosocial support and advocacy for displaced populations' rights. Yet, despite the indispensable roles these actors play, questions remain regarding coordination mechanisms, accountability frameworks, sustainability of interventions, and the interface between state and non-state responses.

In the context of Benue State, the dynamics of displacement and humanitarian intervention raise important analytical questions: How have non-state actors contributed to the management of displacement? To what extent do their efforts complement, substitute, or contest the role of the state? What challenges and opportunities emerge from their engagement in a complex socio-political environment marked by insecurity and institutional weakness? This study situates itself at the intersection of humanitarian governance, peacebuilding, and policy studies, seeking to explicate the role and impact of non-state actors in the management of displacement in Benue State. By critically examining their activities, strategies, and outcomes, the research contributes to broader debates on inclusive and effective displacement governance in contexts where state capacities are constrained.

Non-State Actors and the Management of Displaced Persons in Society

Displacement – whether internal or across borders – has become a global humanitarian challenge in the twenty-first century. Millions of individuals are forced from their homes due to conflict, violence, persecution, environmental degradation, and socio-political upheaval. While States have the *primary legal obligation* to protect displaced populations, non-State actors increasingly play central roles in supporting, managing, and advocating for displaced persons' needs when state capacity or political will is limited or absent. This discussion examines the roles, contributions,



challenges, and implications of non-State actors in the management of displaced persons, using empirical evidence and scholarly perspectives.

Conceptualizing Non-State Actors in Displacement Management

Non-State Actors (NSAs) encompass a broad spectrum of entities outside formal government structures. These include international and local non-governmental organizations (NGOs), faith-based groups, civil society organizations, refugee-led networks, and even armed non-State actors who exert control over populations. Such actors operate alongside, around, or within State efforts to provide care, protection, and durable solutions for displaced communities (Querton, 2022). ([OUP Academic](#))

While international law traditionally frames the State as the central protector of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs), the growing presence and influence of NSAs reflect a *pluralization of humanitarian governance* in response to large-scale displacement crises (Querton, 2022). ([OUP Academic](#))

Humanitarian and Service Provision Roles of NGOs

NGOs, especially international humanitarian organizations, have emerged as *primary implementers* of relief operations for displaced populations. These roles typically include:

1. Basic Assistance and Welfare Services:

NGOs often provide essential goods and services, such as food distribution, shelter construction, security, education, health care, water and sanitation, as well as psychosocial support. Their agility and specialized expertise often enable faster response than state agencies, especially in conflict-affected contexts. For example, NGOs such as the Norwegian Refugee Council concentrate on protecting the rights and well-being of displacement-affected populations globally. ([Wikipedia](#))

2. Psychosocial Support and Livelihood Initiatives:

In Nigeria's IDP settlements, NGOs have implemented poverty-reduction strategies through skill acquisition programs (e.g., tailoring, hairdressing, soap making), which help displaced persons build resilience and economic independence. These interventions thereby address both immediate survival needs and longer-term self-reliance. ([gsujournals.com.ng](#))

3. Advocacy and Rights Protection:

Non-State actors also advocate for displaced persons' legal and human rights, filling gaps where States fail to enforce protections. Civil society organizations influence policy debates and promote the inclusion of displaced voices in decision-making



processes. The Global Refugee-Led Network is one such actor that ensures refugees are represented in global forums and humanitarian planning. ([Wikipedia](#))

4. Specific Sectoral Responses:

Certain NSAs target particular sectors, such as education. In the Syrian refugee crisis, faith-based organizations provided educational services when state systems could not meet the needs of displaced children, illustrating the sector-specific contributions of non-State actors in refugee management. ([SpringerLink](#))

Conflict, Protection, and Armed Non-State Actors

The role of non-State actors isn't confined to peaceful humanitarian activities. In many conflict zones, **armed non-State actors** (e.g., rebel groups, militias) control territories and thus influence displacement dynamics and protection outcomes. These groups may provide services or enforce norms in areas where government authority is absent. Moreover, research suggests that non-State armed actors can pose both *threats* and *partial protective functions* for internally displaced persons, affecting safety, access to aid, and norms of behaviour in crisis settings. ([International Review of the Red Cross](#))

Challenges and Limitations of Non-State Actors

Despite their importance, non-State actors face critical challenges:

1. Resource Constraints and Accountability:

Even well-resourced NGOs often struggle with limited funding, donor dependence, and accountability mechanisms, which can undermine program scale, consistency, and effectiveness.

2. Coordination with State Structures:

Coordination between NSAs and governmental bodies is frequently weak, leading to duplication of efforts and gaps in service delivery.

3. Protection and Ethical Boundaries:

Overreliance on non-State actors can blur accountability for protection norms and rights enforcement, raising ethical concerns, especially when NSAs substitute for absent state protections rather than complement them.

4. Operational Risks in Fragile Contexts:

Operating in insecure environments (e.g., insurgent zones) exposes NSAs to security threats, limiting their capacity to reach displaced groups and exposing staff and beneficiaries to risk.



Case Study: NGOs in Nigerian IDP Camps

In Nigeria's northeast (e.g., Borno State), the humanitarian landscape illustrates both the contributions and constraints of non-State actors. Multiple NGOs have played vital roles in delivering health care, education, and food assistance to IDPs displaced by Boko Haram insurgency. However, challenges such as insecurity, mistrust, diversion of relief materials, and weak collaboration among humanitarian actors have undermined the effectiveness of some efforts. (tojqi.net)

Non-State actors have become indispensable in the management of displaced persons worldwide. They provide essential humanitarian services, advocate for the rights of displaced communities, and often fill gaps left by under-resourced or absent State systems. Nevertheless, their contributions must be grounded within broader frameworks of coordination, accountability, and partnership with states and international agencies to ensure sustainable protection and durable solutions. As displacement continues to rise globally, a nuanced understanding of the strengths and limitations of non-State actors is critical for effective humanitarian governance and policy development.

Assessment of Non-State Actors and the Management of Displacement in Benue State, Nigeria

Benue State in Nigeria's North-Central region has experienced chronic internal displacement due to violent communal conflicts, particularly between sedentary farmers and nomadic herders. This has led to massive humanitarian challenges and the involvement of various non-state actors in managing the displacement crisis. Non-state actors—including non-governmental organizations (NGOs), community groups, and international humanitarian agencies—play crucial roles in humanitarian response, relief provision, and protection of displaced populations where state mechanisms often fall short.

Non-State Actors in Displacement Contexts

Non-state actors broadly include NGOs, international agencies such as the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) and UNICEF, community-based organizations, and, paradoxically, armed groups influencing displacement dynamics (e.g., violent non-state actors) (Ndidigwe & Adie, 2025). Non-state humanitarian actors have increasingly filled gaps left by government response in displacement contexts globally and within Nigeria (Oke, Okla, & Agidi, 2023), including Benue State.

In Benue, NGOs have been identified as central to tracking, supporting, and managing IDPs through relief supplies and conflict mitigation initiatives (Ngibo, 2025). They



mobilize resources for food, shelter, and basic services in camps and informal settlements hosting large displaced populations. The latest IOM assessments indicate Benue hosts a significant proportion of North-Central Nigeria's IDPs, with estimates in the hundreds of thousands (Ngibo, 2025; Amnesty International, 2025).

Drivers of Displacement and the Role of Armed Non-State Actors

The bulk of displacement in Benue is attributed to violent communal clashes, particularly between herders and farming communities over land and resources (Akosu & Edward, 2024). These conflicts reflect the influence of violent non-state actors whose presence and activities aggravate insecurity and displacements (Ndidigwe & Adie, 2025). Their activities not only drive populations from their homes but also complicate humanitarian access and protection for the displaced.

Non-state armed actors' involvement in conflicts impacts the protection of civilians and the overall security of displacement settings. While violent actors are not humanitarian responders, their existence and activities are integral to understanding the context in which humanitarian non-state actors operate. Their actions directly shape patterns of displacement and humanitarian need across affected Local Government Areas (LGAs) in Benue.

Humanitarian Response and Management Strategies

Non-governmental organizations in Benue State have adopted multiple roles in managing displacement. Field research shows NGOs contribute toward IDP tracking, conflict management mediation, provision of food and non-food items, and facilitating adaptation strategies (Ngibo, 2025). Their qualitative engagement—through key informant interviews and focus groups with displaced persons—highlights localized efforts in sectors such as shelter, sanitation, and psychosocial support.

Despite these contributions, humanitarian response by non-state actors has been described as **grossly inadequate** relative to the scale of needs (Daodu, Shabu, Kile, & Enefu, 2024). IDPs continue to face overcrowding, food and water insecurity, inadequate shelter, and limited medical services in camps and informal displacement settings. These gaps indicate that while non-state actors mitigate some impacts of displacement, **collaborative and sustainable approaches** involving state actors and international support are crucial.

Challenges in Displacement Management

Scholarly studies outline several challenges to effective displacement management in Benue:



1. **Resource Limitations:** NGOs and humanitarian agencies often operate with funding constraints, limiting their capacity to deliver comprehensive services across all affected locations (Daodu et al., 2024).
2. **Coordination Gaps:** Coordination between government bodies, international agencies, and non-state actors is inconsistent, leading to duplication of efforts and unmet needs.
3. **Protection and Security:** Ongoing insecurity, exacerbated by violent non-state actors, continues to hinder access to displaced populations and increases humanitarian risk.
4. **Social Impact:** Displacement significantly affects social cohesion between IDPs and host communities, leading to marginalization and resource competition (Zamani, Yusuf, & Samuel, 2025).

Policy Implications and Recommendations

To improve the management of displacement in Benue State, the literature suggests:

- ❖ **Enhanced Coordination Mechanisms:** Structured partnerships between NGOs, government agencies, and international bodies can improve aid delivery efficiency.
- ❖ **Focus on Livelihood and Reintegration:** Beyond immediate relief, there is a need for sustainable livelihood programs and reintegration frameworks to support displaced populations long term (Ajao & Afilaka, 2025).
- ❖ **Security Interventions:** Addressing root causes of conflict and strengthening security measures can reduce future displacement and enable safer humanitarian operations.
- ❖ **Support for Social Cohesion:** Programs that foster trust between host communities and IDPs can promote peaceful coexistence and resilience (Zamani et al., 2025).

The assessment of non-state actors in displacement management in Benue State reveals a complex humanitarian landscape where NGOs and humanitarian agencies have played substantive roles under challenging conditions. While they provide critical relief and support, their efforts are constrained by funding shortages, coordination complexities, and persistent insecurity. Addressing displacement effectively requires a multi-stakeholder approach that reinforces non-state capacities while enhancing government leadership and international cooperation.



Review of Related Empirical Studies of Non-State Actors and the Management of Displacement

The management of displacement—whether internal or cross-border—is a multi-faceted endeavour increasingly shaped by *non-state actors* (NSAs). These include non-governmental organizations (NGOs), civil society groups, faith-based organizations, diaspora networks, and various advocacy bodies. Scholarly research on this topic highlights both the contributions and limitations of non-state actors in displacement contexts, particularly amid protracted crises where states alone cannot provide adequate responses (Schweiger, 2024). *Empirical studies* reveal patterns in roles, impacts, challenges, and interactions between NSA intervention and the broader humanitarian and governance landscape.

Roles and Contributions of Non-State Actors in Displacement Management

Non-state actors operate across many displacement settings—providing humanitarian aid, protection services, advocacy, conflict mitigation, and socio-economic integration initiatives. Research underscores how these actors often *fill service gaps* left by state and international institutions.

- ❖ In the context of the **Syrian refugee crisis in Turkey**, non-state actors played vital roles in *managing refugee needs*, including delivering services and aiding integration, beyond what the host state could provide alone (Sever & Özerim, 2019). For example, their empirical study documented the *profiles, activities, and contributions* of multiple NSAs in facilitating Syrian refugees' management processes, from basic assistance to integration programs.
- ❖ Faith-based organizations constituted an important subset of NSAs in displacement contexts, particularly in *education provision* for Syrian refugees in Turkey, where these organizations *substituted state roles* in schooling for displaced children—reflecting a growing trend of NGOs providing essential societal services amid governance gaps (Tezel McCarthy, 2017).

Impact and Effectiveness of Non-State Actors' Interventions

Empirical evaluations have addressed *both the effectiveness and limitations* of non-state actors' contributions:

The **localization of humanitarian response** has been empirically examined in conflict and displacement settings. McGrath et al. (2025) analyzed 48 studies and found that *locally led NGO and community responses* improved service coverage and responsiveness, but often lacked meaningful participation and empowerment of affected populations. While these NSAs enhanced operational effectiveness,



international organizations frequently retained control of funding and decision-making, limiting the potential for sustainable local agency (McGrath et al., 2025).

In Nigeria's **Borno State**, field-based empirical research showed that local NGOs as responders in an internally displaced persons' (IDP) camp were tasked with humanitarian interventions. However, the study revealed *significant mismanagement of funds* and challenges undermining effective support, illustrating that NSA involvement is not inherently effective and may be constrained by organizational malpractices (Author, 2025).

Accountability, Protection, and Legal Frameworks

There is also empirical attention to the **accountability** of non-state actors in displacement contexts. Adeola (2021) examined how the *African Union's Kampala Convention* demands accountability from armed groups and other non-state actors contributing to displacement. The empirical analysis emphasized the need for *national and regional mechanisms* to hold NSAs responsible for displacement effects, reflecting a governance gap where state and non-state roles intersect (Adeola, 2021).

Participation and Agency of Displaced Populations

Emerging research has focused on the *participation of displaced persons themselves*—a domain closely tied to the role of NSAs in empowerment processes. Recent studies highlight that enabling *internally displaced persons (IDPs)* to participate in decision-making and governance initiatives enhances the effectiveness and legitimacy of interventions. For instance, qualitative field research underscores the *importance of meaningful IDP participation* in humanitarian planning—a domain where NGOs and NSA structures can facilitate or hinder inclusive processes (Journal of Refugee Studies, 2025).

Challenges and Critiques

While NSAs play crucial roles, empirical studies also critique their involvement: Localization efforts, while theoretically beneficial, often fall short in practice due to *resource constraints and power imbalances* with international agencies (McGrath et al., 2025).

The literature also shows that *organisational accountability and ethical practices* remain concerns, especially where local NGOs operate in poorly regulated environments, sometimes diverting funds or failing to deliver essential services (Author, 2025).



Empirical research on non-state actors in displacement management underscores that NSAs significantly shape humanitarian responses, governance practices, and protection frameworks. Their roles range from direct service delivery and education provision to legal accountability and community participation. However, the literature also reveals ongoing challenges related to empowerment, accountability, resource control, and integration with state systems. Understanding these dynamics is essential for improving displacement outcomes and building more resilient, inclusive humanitarian governance structures.

Conclusion

The management of displacement in Benue State has increasingly involved a diverse range of non-state actors, including non-governmental organizations (NGOs), faith-based organizations, community-based associations, and international humanitarian agencies. These actors play a crucial role in providing immediate relief, facilitating social reintegration, advocating for the rights of displaced persons, and complementing the efforts of the government. The study demonstrates that while non-state actors significantly alleviate the socio-economic and psychological hardships of displaced populations, challenges such as limited coordination, resource constraints, and occasional duplication of efforts hinder the overall effectiveness of displacement management. Moreover, the reliance on non-state actors underscores systemic gaps in governmental capacity and policy implementation, revealing a need for more structured and sustainable frameworks. Therefore, the involvement of non-state actors is indispensable, but it requires strategic collaboration, accountability, and integration with state-led mechanisms to ensure comprehensive and long-term solutions for displaced communities in Benue State.

Recommendations

Having studied None-State Actors and the management of Displacement in Benue State, the study recommend the following:

1. Strengthen Collaboration Between State and Non-State Actors

A coordinated framework should be established to ensure synergy between government agencies and non-state actors, minimizing duplication of efforts and maximizing the impact of interventions in displacement management.

2. Capacity Building for Non-State Actors

Regular training and skill development programs should be provided for staff of non-state actors to enhance their efficiency in humanitarian response, psychosocial support, and conflict-sensitive programming.



3. Establishment of a Resource Mobilization Mechanism

Both state and non-state actors should develop sustainable funding strategies, including local and international partnerships, to reduce over-reliance on short-term donor aid and ensure continuous support for displaced populations.

4. Monitoring and Accountability Systems

Implement robust monitoring, evaluation, and reporting systems to track the effectiveness of interventions, ensuring transparency, accountability, and evidence-based decision-making in displacement management.

5. Community Participation and Empowerment

Displaced persons should be actively involved in planning and decision-making processes. Empowering communities through livelihood programs, skills acquisition, and social reintegration initiatives will foster resilience and self-sufficiency.

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