

The Perennial Conflicts and the Agonies of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Southern Part of Borno State, Nigeria

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Abstract

Borno State is regarded as the hotbed of Boko Haram activities in Nigeria since 1999; all mechanisms deployed by the government to achieve peaceful co-existence proved abortive. The conflict is causing untold hardship for the inhabitants within the conflict areas. With the efforts being put in place by the Federal government and State governments to alleviate the suffering of the affected people, the reality on the ground has shown that a large number of the victims are still languishing in IDP camps. In southern Borno, Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps are mainly located in three (3) Local Government Areas: Damboa, Gwoza, and Biu. Most of the victims who are lucky enough to recount their ordeals are presently in these three LGAs. Biu and its environs will be fully examined to analyse the agonies of IDPs in the conflict zones within southern Borno. The study focuses on the issues influencing the perennial attacks and the agonies of internally displaced persons in IDP camps. Despite the efforts of the Nigerian Armed Forces to put an end to this ugly trend, the pushback by the terrorists in the affected Local Government Areas in southern Borno is still visible. This is causing untold hardship to the

victims. The research method used for this study is qualitative and relies on both primary and secondary sources. The primary source utilized is oral interviews, while the secondary sources are written documents.

Keywords: Conflict, Perennial Conflicts, Agony, and Internally Displaced Persons

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Introduction

The perpetual conflicts in Borno State have become monsters hunting every soul living within the confines of the state. Many analysts have traced the protracted conflicts of Boko Haram to the death of Ustaz Mohammed Yusuf on 30th July 2009. He was a Nigerian preacher turned terrorist who founded the Islamist militant group known as Boko Haram in 2002. He was regarded as the ring leader until he was killed in 2009 in police custody after his arrest

(Ishaku, 2012, p.23). The group's official name is known as *Jama'atu Ahlis Suna Lidda'awati wal-Jihad*, which means people committed to the propagation of the teaching and jihad (Mohammed, 2014, p.76). Actually, the activities of Boko Haram began in the North and Central Borno before it spread to the Southern part of Borno. Despite the spread of the Boko Haram menace, Biu town stood against the spread of the Boko Haram insurgency. This led to the mass killing of their children belonging to the sect in 2009 (Ali, 2024).

On 14th January, 2014, Boko Haram attempted to attack Biu town, the attack was repelled by the security forces, including the local vigilante group, even though casualties were recorded on both sides. On 24th December 2019, another attack was launched by Boko Haram, but it was not successful. The attempt was rebuffed by the army and the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF). The last major attack happened on 12th January, 2022, at Tukur Buratai Institute of War and Peace, Nigerian Army University Biu, under the Biu Local Government Area. Again, on 17th February, 2025, the Boko Haram insurgents launched another attack on Biu. The attack was launched through Yimirshika. The main targets of Boko Haram during this attack were the Army Barracks, the Police station, and the prison. However, the attack was not successful because the security agent overpowered them. (Modu, 2024).

These series of attacks in Biu and its environs were stiffly repelled by the Nigerian army, CJTF, hunters, and local vigilante groups. The collaborative efforts of these security apparatuses have led to successes being recorded against the insurgents. Historical account has it that, apart from Biu town, the inhabitants of Kurnari village under Buratai and Liya village under Mandara Grau Ward have never allowed Boko Haram insurgents to penetrate these villages because of the unity among their people. However, the unity among people has equally brought peace to the above-mentioned areas (Ahmed, 2025). This made Biu town to become one of the peaceful areas within southern Borno. Even though Damboa, Gwoza, Askira-Uba, Chibok and part of Hawul Local Government Areas were badly

affected, Biu and its environs remain peaceful with minimal activities of Boko Haram insurgency. This made some non-governmental organizations, to reside in Biu town because of the safe nature of Biu town and its environs (Kuchiel, 2024). Although Bayo and Kwaya-Kusar LGAs, as part of southern Borno, had not experienced any significant attack by Boko Haram, except minor security challenges or skirmishes within the two Local Government Areas.

Apart from government workers and non-governmental organizations living in the area, the government had equally established IDP camps in the Biu Local Government Area. Also, a permanent IDP settlement was built along Miringa Road for the benefit of Internally Displaced Persons from other Local Government Areas. The peaceful co-existence in the Biu Local Government Area has contributed immensely to the economic activities of the area, with livestock markets in Miringa and Biu main markets recording a large number of people patronizing the market for different types of grains. Also, the neighbouring livestock market in Kwaya-Kusar is booming with a large number of people coming from different states of the federation to patronize the markets for livestock and grains in large quantities.

Analyses of Significant Keywords in the Study

Conflict: The word "Conflict" is as old as mankind. It is derived from the Latin word 'Confligere', meaning to 'strike together'. Lexically, conflict means to strike, dash, fight, struggle, or battle, clash, contention, confrontation, a controversy or quarrel, active opposition, strife or incompatibility, to be at variance. Conflict results from a mental and psychological state of mind associated with opposition arising from simultaneous but incompatible desires, needs, drives, or impulses, disagreement or clash between ideas, principles, or people (Miriam. 2009, p36). Conflict is a particular relationship between states or rival factions within a state, which implies subjective hostilities or tension manifested in subjective economic or military hostilities. Burton defines conflict as a struggle over

values and claims to scarce status, power, and resources in which the conflicting parties aim to injure or eliminate their rivals (Burton, 2008, p87). Perennial or Incessant conflicts could be regarded as long-drawn warfare between opposing forces, especially a prolonged and bitter but sporadic struggle. In other words, conflict means open, violent aggression between or within groups. In summary, perennial conflicts connote a fight that is constant in nature without an end in sight over irreconcilable differences. An example of a perennial conflict is the Boko Haram fight, which has continually affected Borno and Yobe states since 2009. The perennial conflicts of Boko Haram have shown the agony that people are going through in the conflict zones or in the camps where the IDPs are residing.

Agony is an intense physical pain or mental anguish. Also, is an extreme physical or mental pain undergone by someone facing physical assault during a fight, war, conflict, or crisis. Mariam Web defines agony as misery and suffering. While all these words mean "the state of being in great trouble," agony suggests pain too (Webster, 2025). The literary meaning of agony underscores the experience of Internally Displaced Persons in various IDP camps in the study area.

Internally Displaced Persons are people or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence in particular as a result of or to avoid the effects of armed conflict situations of generalized violence, violation of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognised state borders (Best, 1989, p73). The people in this category are the main subject of analysis in this study.

Geographical Location of Borno State and Its People

Borno State is located within the latitudes of 10 N and 14 N and longitudes 11 30 E and 14 45 E. The State is the second largest in Nigeria after Niger state with a total land mass of 61, 435sq km. Taraba State came third in terms of land mass. Borno State shares borders with the Republic of Niger to the North, the Republic of Chad to the northeast and the Cameroon

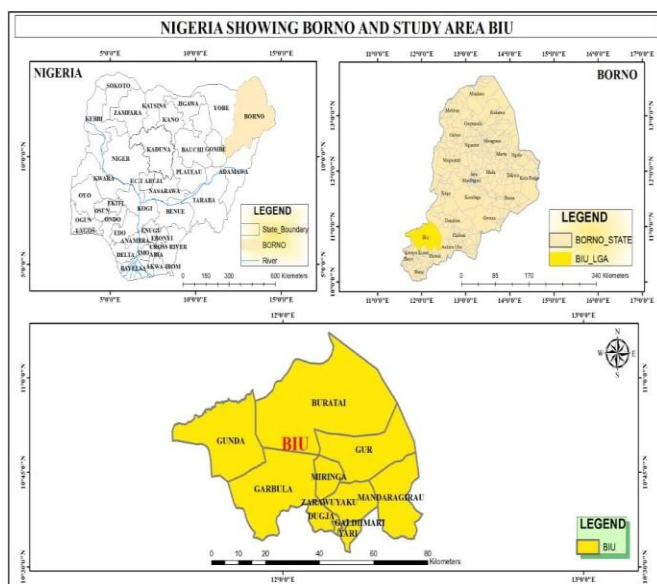
Republic to the east. It also shares borders with Adamawa State to the south, Gombe State to the southwest, and Yobe State to the west. Borno State has only 27 Local Government Areas (UNCHR, www.unchr.org 2025). Borno north and central have eighteen Local Government Areas, while nine LGAs are in Borno South.

Borno is a heterogeneous state comprised of the Kanuri inhabiting Abadam, Mobbar, Gubio, Guzamala, Kukawa, Nganzai, Monguno, Marte, Ngala, Kaka-Balga, Dikwa, Bama, Konduga, Mafa, Kaga, Magumeri, and Maiduguri. Local Government Areas (CIRDDOC, www.cirrdoc.org, 2024). The Shuwa ethnic group can be found in Mafa, Jere, Marte, Mongonuo, Dikwa, Ngala, Kala-Balge, Bama, and Konduga Local Government Areas. Other ethnic groups in southern Borno, such as Bra, Hausa, and Fulani, inhabit Askira\Uba, Biu, Hawul, Kwaya-Kusar, Bayo, and Shani Local Government Areas. While Mandra people can be seen in Gwoza LGA, the Kibaku people are the majority in Chibok Local Government Area. Bayo LGA comprises Babur, Bura, Marghi, Hausa, and Fulani ethnic groups (Lawan, 2024). The main occupation of a large number of people living in Borno state are farmers producing crops such as rice, millet, cassava, date palms, beans, cows, fruits, vegetables, sorghum, wheat, sweet potato, sugarcane, groundnut, cotton, and sweet pepper popularly called "tatashe" etc. Also, livestock such as cow, sheep, goats, and fishing. Kanuri is the main indigenous language cutting across central Yobe in Yobe state (Ibrahim, 2024). While Hausa is regarded as the general language spoken in Borno state,

The Study Area

Southern Born is the area of study with a clear focus on the Biu Local Government Area because Biu has relative peace in southern Borno. There are nine (9) Local Government Areas in Southern Borno as follows: Biu, Kwaya-Kusar, Damboa, Gwoza, Askira-Uba, Chibok, Hawul, Shani, and Bayo. Gwoza is the largest LGA in terms of land mass. Biu town is one of the Local Government Areas in Borno

State, situated between latitudes 10°34'N and 10°40'N of the Equator and Longitudes 12°03'E and 12°07'E of the Greenwich meridian (Waziri, 2009). It covers a total area of 3,315 km², with a growth rate of 3.5% and an estimated population of 294,459, based on the 2006 National Population Commission census. Biu shares boundaries with Damboa to the north, Hawul to the south, Askira Uba to the east, and Kwaya Kusar to the west (Figure 1). Biu Plateau's geographical location provides a climatic advantage compared to neighbouring communities. The rainy season begins in May and ends in October, with rainfall ranging from 35 mm in the northern part to about 55 mm in the southern part of the study area. The average temperature ranges between 28°C and 45°C (CIRDDOC, www.cirrdoc.org, 2024). The map below shows the topography of Biu.



Source: Geography Department, Nigerian Army University Biu, 2024 (Afolayan, 2025).

Methodology

The study adopted a qualitative research approach, and a single case study research design premised on historical analytic methods and interpretations, which hinged on gathering in-depth analysis of the Perennial Conflicts and the Agonies of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in the Southern Part of Borno State, Nigeria. The information was collated from both primary and secondary sources. The primary source was derived from oral interviews with the victims and others who were directly or

indirectly involved. The secondary sources include newspapers, magazines, textbooks, journals, the internet and other relevant written documents.

The Internally Displaced Persons in the IDP Camps in Southern Borno

The subject of analysis in this study focuses on Internally Displaced Persons in different IDP camps in Biu and its environs. Though southern Borno comprises only nine (9) Local Government Areas, IDP camps were located in three (3) LGAs. These are Damboa, Gwoza, and Biu. Under the Hawul Local Government Area, there is relative peace with a few numbers of internally displaced persons living with their relatives or under the care of the head of communities. Though there is a small camp which is being used as a makeshift, if there is any crisis within the radius of Asikra-Uba and other adjoining LGAs within the area (Mohammed, 2024). Asikra-Uba, which is one of the epicentres of the Boko Haram conflict, never held an IDP camp; rather, the displaced people in Asikra-Uba are living in Lassa IDP camp in Adamawa State (Maryam, 2022, p6). Only Biu and its environs are selected for this analysis because of accessibility. At the time of this study, in southern Borno, Gwoza, Chibok, and Asikra-Uba were not advisable to conduct research because of the prevailing conflict in the area. To have an accurate analysis of IDPs from the conflict zones in southern Borno, Biu is chosen because it is easy to move freely within the town (Babakura, 2025). This was why Biu LGA was selected with a total land mass of 2,098 square kilometres and is equally housing a large number of IDP camps with two hundred and ninety-four (294) tents erected for about 1,806 people in the camp (Sadia, 2025). Though the other camps built to accommodate IDPs from conflict areas are yet to be put to use along Miringa road.

Apart from the fact that Biu has a large number of internally displaced people, there is relative peace in Biu. This is because the Boko Haram has not succeeded in taking control of Biu, despite several attempts to enter Biu town. However, a few members of Boko Haram are hibernating in adjoining villages

under Biu town. Examples of this could be traced to Diskusah village and other villages along Damboa road where members of Boko Haram are constantly arrested by the local hunters and vigilante group. The internally displaced people are living peacefully in Biu town without any fear of attacks or being harassed by the indigenes. Certainly, there is no place like home. The liberty of being at home is eroded completely.

A rough estimate of women living in the Biu IDP camp is about 387, with an estimated figure of girls between the ages of 6 months – 15 years hovering around 136. The number of girls between the ages of 18-24 hovered around 34, but they hardly stay permanently, according to an informant's account. Information derived during the field study shows that a majority of women often leave the IDP camp every morning for their daily activities outside the IDP camp and return in the evening; some could be seen physically present around 6:30 pm. However, it is difficult to gain access to the camp at this hour because of security (Abubakar, 2025). The pictures below were taken in Biu IDP camp to buttress the analysis made above.



Source: A visit to Biu IDP Camp, Near Government Girls' Secondary School, Biu, on 16th November, 2023 with 400 Level Students of History Department, Nigerian Army University Biu. Borno State, Nigeria (Deji, 2023).



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Source: A visit to Biu IDP Camp, Near Government Girls' Secondary School, Biu, on 2n October, 2024 with 400 Level Students of the History Department, Nigerian Army University Biu. Borno State, Nigeria (Deji, 2024).



Source: A visit to Biu IDP Camp, Near Government Girls' Secondary School, Biu, on 2n October, 2024 with 400 Level Students of the History Department, Nigerian Army University Biu. Borno State, Nigeria (Deji, 2024).

The Agonies of Internally Displaced Persons in the Camp

The agonies of people began when they were prevented from going outside their homes to fend for their families whenever a crisis or conflict loomed within their vicinity. Psychological trauma resulted from being confined to a sedentary life whenever conflict prevents people from free movement before moving to the IDP camp. Usually during Boko Haram attacks, the breadwinners of families (men) are the main targets. Having killed the head of the house, the woman began to fend for herself and her children. Women combine Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) with the agony of living in a different environment, strange to her. Life under the control of a different authority, which could be alien to her culture, and faith, is a difficult task or rules that can be kept easily. The task of keeping the house together as a woman is traumatic (Ngarka & Akombo, 2027, p78).

Even though men are the main generators of conflict in any society, the victims who bear the consequences of the conflict generated by men are women and children. Women and children bear the greater brunt of the conflicts (Babangida, 2025, p75). The victims of conflict in the camp are directly affected, having trauma without an end in sight. The people who seem not to be affected by trauma, vicariously bear the trauma; having seen their family members and neighbours going through undeserved agonies that they know nothing about. Available data show that as of 2024, a total of 370,446 households

were displaced in Borno State, a total of 6,698 households (including 3,096 residing in camps/camp-like settings and 3,602 in the host communities). In Biu alone, 5,773 households were residing within the host communities, while 286 households were living in the IDP camp (DTM Nigeria, www.dtm.iom.int, 2024). If this large number of households were displaced by 2024, one can imagine the number of affected people within Borno State.

The basis for the agonies of people in the IDP camp is rooted in psychological problems emanating from the gory experiences during the attacks. It made some of them lose interest in what they usually liked, handwork, farming, trade, and other activities that usually bring money to them. Keeping them under the control of alien authority makes them subservient or second-class citizens in the IDP camp. In Biu, many people interviewed confessed that they did not like the job they were doing. To the farmers among them, they equally confessed that there was no adequate space for them to have free land to cultivate their farms the way they did while they were in their homes. Those who were into different technical trades began to work for the traders or rice millers in the markets who paid them in cash or foodstuffs (Sadia, 2025).

Even though most of these victims of Boko Haram attacks in the IDP camp were villagers who had no access to modern health care facilities like their counterparts in urban centres like Biu, the scant health care facility provided by the government served their immediate needs. Sudden displacement to a new environment aggravated their health problem. Treating victims diagnosed with a specific ailment was difficult because of the unavailability of drugs in the health facilities in Biu. Therefore, the inability to get money to purchase the required drugs led to the dependence on the NGOs for the provision of over-the-counter drugs. The impact of government in health care is not felt, according to the IDPs (Hauwa, 2025). Though the government usually makes provision for drugs, the corrupt officials among the health workers divert these drugs to other uses thereby preventing the victims from

having access to them (Isah, 2025). Women and their children were at the receiving end of this ugly trend hence resorting to native herbs for the treatment of ailments without proper diagnosis.

Another agony of life in the IDP camps is their inaccessibility to basic education. Many victims said they could barely feed themselves let alone send their children to school. The NGOs that volunteered to teach the children in the camps are frustrated because the children prefer to go and work in the market, particularly the rice mills machine area, where they could easily get a little food for their immediate consumption. Also, parents aided them to go to the market with the intention of getting raw rice to keep. The larger number of children in the IDP camp go about hawking for food, which is an impending danger for the immediate community, the state and Nigeria at large (Sadia, 2025). Life in the IDP camps usually leads to early marriages for many young teenage girls who are easily lured into early marriage because their parents do not have enough money to cater for them. Instead of staying with them without food or a direction on trade to learn, the parents quickly arrange for them to marry a man whom they presume is capable of taking care of them (Salamat, 2025). This increased the incidence of early marriages, resulting in unplanned number of children who they cannot cater for in future.

The Efforts of Government and Non-Government Organisations on IDPs

Different NGOs have come up with different programmes to help the internally displaced persons in various camps in Borno state, such as Maiduguri, Konduga, Jere and other areas in Borno State. However, Biu and its environs are the main focus of this particular study. The GlobalGiving has contributed immensely to alleviating the suffering of IDPs. A programme was launched in 2018 which was strictly an economic development project aimed at reducing poverty within the ranks of women in the IDP camp. Local-made machines for local diets were supplied. About 120 IDPs were trained on how to produce about fifty thousand (50,000) briquettes for 1000 households in the area. In doing this, training and production centres were built for IDPs. The

vulnerable people in the IDP camp were supported with clothes, mobile health services and educational materials for the children (GlobalGiving, <https://www.globalgiving.org/projects>, 2025).³² Below is the pictorial evidence of an officer distributing food items. Also, the pictorial evidence of the briquette burning inside the local stove is equally displayed.



NGO Staff waiting to distribute food items to Internally Displaced Persons in Knoduga



The making of the briquette by women in the IDP camp.



After making the briquette, ready for use instead of using firewood. A compressed fuel block; a small

rectangular block of compressed material such as charcoal, sawdust, or coal dust.



A compressed briquette inside locally made charcoal pot

Sources: (GlobalGiving

<https://www.globalgiving.org/projects>, 2025)

Apart from the above organisation, a well-known humanitarian organisation worldwide has performed creditably in terms of providing water, sanitation, and hygiene, which include the provision of hand washing stations, sanitation facilities and hygiene kits. UNHCR distributed emergency shelter kits and helps with the construction of more permanent homes for the displaced people in Borno State.

More importantly, UNHCR provided cash assistance, start-up grants, seeds, tools, and small livestock to help the IDPs achieved self-sufficiency. UNHCR believed education is key, which led them to provide teaching materials, catch-up classes and life skills for the IDPs (UNCHR,

<https://www.google.com/search?q=UNCHR+in+Biu+IDP+camp>, 2025).

On the part of the government, both state and federal governments are working around the clock to provide for the victims of the Boko Haram conflict. While ensuring food sufficiency, the government equally working around the clock to ensure that the IDPs return to their permanent home with adequate security. However, these efforts have not yielded the desired positive results. Under Governor Zulum, he has distributed food and cloth items to vulnerable people in Biu, Hawul, Shani, Kwaya Kusar, Askira-Uba, Chibok and Bayo Local Government Areas in Borno South (Galadima, 2024, p32)

The victims in the IDP camps confirmed the distribution of foodstuffs by Governor Zulum in the camps particularly in Biu and other surrounding LGAs in southern Borno (Amaju, 2025). The federal government usually through the member of the

House of Representatives representing the constituency, Hon Muktair Betara has made several visits to the IDPs in Biu.³⁵ Although the presence of a state emergency agency was not pronounced in the IDP camp. However, the victims claimed that whenever new arrivals joined them in large numbers, the emergency agency comes around to provide immediate needs for them (Alheri, 2025).

Conclusion

The agonies of internally displaced persons in this study bring to limelight the challenges of Internally Displaced Persons during and after the conflict. People in conflict areas faced vast suffering, often disproportionately impacted by the social, economic, and psychological consequences of conflict. Beyond the physical harm of violence, they experience the loss of loved ones, displacement, disruption of life and prevention of access to healthcare and education were the perennial challenges they faced in the various camps. The experience of IDPs in Biu was not an isolated case, rather the economic situation in Biu and its environs aggravated situation of the victims who found themselves within the confines of IDP camps.

As enumerated in the analysis above, everybody was a product of his or her background, the peculiarity of the area where the victims found themselves has kept them in perpetual attacks of the terrorists, which finally resulted in moving to IDP camps. Biu and adjoining communities are relatively free from the menace of Boko Haram attacks. However, the targeted areas by Boko Haram in southern Borno have not made life easy for the victims of the terrorist group. However, government and NGOs are working around the clock to ensure that households affected are well cared for, particularly women. The fundamental problem of the victims hinged on a lack of proper orientation among the people, a lack of education, cultural beliefs tied with religion in terms of family circle, and raising an unnecessary number of children beyond the economic capacity of parents. The dire consequence of this singular act remains the root cause of the agonies that people are going through during and after the conflict.

To attain a peaceful co-existence for people in this zone, the following steps are urgently required:

- i. Adequate training and orientation about the composition of the family with stringent measures from the cultural and religious authorities to ensure a manageable number of children are produced in each household.
- ii. There must be a unity of purpose to fight Boko Haram, just like the measures taken by the Biu people to eliminate the Boko Haram elements in their domain by eliminating them. An example of this unity could be seen in adjoining villages like Kurnari and Liya near Buratai, where Boko Haram never had access to these villages.
- iii. Since the Kinetics approach seems to be difficult to eliminate Boko Haram activities, the unity of purpose adopted by the Biu people should be adopted in northern and central Borno to eliminate Boko Haram. This will give women a lease of life in the area. The only way to put an end to the suffering and pains of people is to eliminate Boko Haram not degrading them. This is because it has been proven in places like Sir-Lanker, Senegal, that terrorists can be defeated completely.
- iv. Government and political leaders must adhere strictly to the rules of the game in politics to avoid unnecessary rancour among the players. Unnecessary fight leads to escalating conflict, which puts the lives of women in danger.

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