

**NIGERIA INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS (IDPs) AND ENVIRONMENTAL
DEGRADATION: THE CURRENT SITUATION**

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Abstract

This study examined the connection between Internally Displaced Persons IDPs and environmental degradation as a result of the increasing number of IDPs. This study is evaluative in nature and it involves the use of secondary data obtained from books, archival materials, journals, and the internet. The study revealed that the continuous increase in IDPs over a limited space will have short and even long-term effects on the environment which can result in severe environmental degradation. The paper also examined the contribution of government agencies, individuals, and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in ameliorating the effect. The study finally recommends that government can help in curbing the situation of environmental degradation in IDPs camps by setting up Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement that will ensure the protection of the environment; it also recommends that government and NGOs should move away from strategies like "survival-focused" model to focus on "self-reliance" model.

Keywords: Conflict, Ecosystem, Environmental Degradation, Internally Displaced persons IDPs

Introduction

The scourge of internal displacement of persons is not limited to Nigeria or the African continent (as seen in the case of the Rwanda civil war in the 1990s) as global unrest, insurgency, natural disasters and even alleged genocide in countries like Syria, Myanmar, Pakistan, Vietnam and Peru resulted in widespread internal displacement (Devictor & Do, 2016). Displacement camps of varying types have been utilized to cater for the needs of the affected persons in these troubled areas employing different approaches to the construction of transitory housing. Most of the designs incorporated a combination of timber frames, earth bricks, corrugated metal roofing sheets, plywood cladding or plastic sheeting which could be readily assembled within 24-72 hours and were designed to have a 2–5-year lifespan (AD Editorial Team, 2014). Based on the number of displaced persons and the availability of resources, 200-10,000 units of transitory housing units have been known to be provided on campsites to alleviate the plight of those seeking refuge. This has led to drastic changes in the environmental composition of affected areas, resulting in environmental degradation. The increase in the upsurge of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Nigeria has become a reoccurring topical issue and of serious concern to Nigerians and Geographers in particular regarding the effect that IDPs have on the environment in terms of environmental degradation. The issue of IDPs in Nigeria predates the colonial era and the causes of displacement are multifaceted, complex and often overlapping. Nigeria has been affected by episodes of internal conflicts and large-scale violence caused by ethnoreligious, inter-ethnic, intra

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and inter – communal conflicts which have resulted in the displacement of many innocent Nigerians across the geopolitical zones in the country (Deng, 1994).

According to the IDMC (2012) and DTM (2016), approximately 18.7% of all internally displaced persons end up in camps of which the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR, 2016) identified 5 (five) types of displacement camps, namely:

- 1. Dispersed Settlements:** The displaced individuals settle in houses of families who live in areas unaffected by crisis or on land or properties owned by individuals in rural or urban settlements. This arrangement means sharing existing accommodations (or setup temporary ones nearby), water, sanitary facilities, cooking areas and other services of the pre-existing households.
- 2. Mass Shelter in Collective Centres:** The displaced persons find accommodation in school buildings, barracks, community centres, warehouses, uncompleted buildings and a variety of other public buildings. This is particularly the case when there are significant flows of displaced persons into urban centres or towns with no familial connections.
- 3. Reception and Transit Camps:** These kinds of camps are quick response accommodations to the shelter needs of displaced persons in an emergency situation. It is usually for a short-term basis pending relocation to more suitable and safer long-term holding camps.
- 4. Self-settled Camps:** This is particularly the case when a displaced community settle in camps independent of government or private support. Self-settled camps are often sited on vacant state-owned, private or communal property.
- 5. Planned Camps:** They provide accommodation on sites specifically set up for displaced persons and they usually possess full infrastructural facilities such as water supply, food and non-food item distribution, education and healthcare. By 2016, there were 118 known displacement camps identified as collective settlement centres or self-settled camps in Nigeria, 36 of which were recognized as self-made tents, 32 were government buildings and 30 were schools (DTM, 2016).

IDPs Induced Environmental Degradation

It has to be mentioned that displacement itself has environmental influences, inflicting environmental degradation. Rapid urbanization or poorly managed refugee camps and IDP settlements can put pressure on water and water resources, energy and food resources, and lead to uncontrolled waste disposal. A research study carried out on the impact of IDPs on the forest and vegetation of Jere LGA, Borno State, Nigeria revealed that displaced persons exert an impact on the forest and vegetation which in turn impacts local host communities. IDPs engagement in deforestation was to meet their own survival needs for lumber to build shelter and firewood, and to earn money by selling firewood and charcoal in both camps and the local markets (Musa et al., 2019). The research also revealed that almost 4 square kilometers of forest were lost at the hands of 6,377 IDPs; the IDPs revealed that they have no other means of earning money than to engage in cutting trees for firewood and selling it.

The scale of the environmental degradation induced by the ‘boko-haram’ insurgency has led to the displacement of people of the Northeastern region, it can only be imagined considering the mass destruction of human and material resources perpetrated by the Boko haram insurgents. It is difficult to assess the level of environmental degradation related to the insurgency in statistical

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terms as the data on that aspect of the insurgency is scanty if not completely lacking; only oral evidence from participants, observers, and victims shades some light on the nature and dimension of the insurgency-induced environmental degradation (Usman, 2021). The destruction of the environment has been the result of direct and unintended consequences of military measures taken by the key players in the war. Environmental degradation manifested at different levels from the forests to the rural and urban centres and displaced person camps.

A Survey in one of the IDPs camp in Uganda showed that one of the greatest needs of all people in the IDP camps in the Pader district is firewood to cook their food, heat their homes, and treat water for drinking and food preparation (Joel, 2008). Therefore, trees within a radius of 7 km from the camp were completely cleared down to meet various families' demands. It has been estimated that 29% of youths in the IDPs are involved in cutting down trees for making charcoal (Human Rights Uganda, 2005). Because of threats from both the UPDF and LAR, youths could not move beyond 2-3 miles to collect wood resources. Considering the pressure exerted on the environment, it's evident that areas, where IDPs camps are set up, witnessed changes in vegetation and land cover, which depicted declining stands of vegetation along the river bank and debarking trees for medicinal purposes, an attempt to create alternatives to orthodox medicines, thereby destroying the natural forest habitat originally found in a particular place. Fuel wood for energy and heating, with its attendant consequence of deforestation and degradation of land cover, is one area in which IDPs exert a negative impact on the environment. This was buttressed by Sasseen and Shell (2013) in their study on human impacts on forest structure and species richness on the edges of a protected mountain forest in Uganda. A field survey in the Fariya area revealed that IDPs destroyed vegetation cover along River Ngadda, and trees were cut for firewood including economic trees such as the destruction of mango-orchard, debarking, and uprooted many trees to earn money. The excessive loss of trees and other vegetation can cause climate change, desertification, soil erosion, fewer crops, flooding, increased greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, and a host of problems for Indigenous people. All these attendant environmental problems are being faced in states that have IDPs camps.

Concept of Internally Displaced Persons

According to the United Nations Guiding Principles on Internally displaced persons (1998), Internally displaced persons are "Persons or group 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 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. Hence, an internally displaced person is someone who is forced to leave their home but who remains within their country's borders. The definition given by the United Nations Guiding Principles to IDPs is a true representation of IDPs in Nigeria. In this case, they have been forced to leave their homes or places of habitual residence in order to avoid the effects of generalized violence or conflicts in their original place of abode (Adedokun, 2019). In Nigeria, IDPs are created as a result of the forced relocation of people to new locations in the North Eastern part of the country due to the insurgencies caused by the extremist Islamic terrorist group popularly known as "Boko Haram".

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Concept of Environment

The term 'environment' has a broad range of meanings, definitions, and interpretations. In popular usage, the term 'environment' means the natural landscape together with all of its non-human features, characteristics, and processes. The environment is often closely related to denote wilderness and pristine landscapes that have not been tampered with - or, at least, that has been imperceptibly interfered with - by human activities. Nevertheless, in the real sense, individuals, objects, elements, and systems rarely exist in isolation; as an alternative, they tend to interact to varying extents with their surrounding entities. Consequently, it is not helpful to conceptualize the 'environment' without including in that conceptualization some idea of a relationship. Individuals, objects, elements, and systems influence - and are in turn influenced by - their surroundings. Indeed, the networks of relationships that exist between different entities may, in some cases, be extensive and highly complex. That way the 'environment' may be regarded as a 'space' or a 'field' in which networks of relationships, interconnections, and interactions between entities occur. For those who have studied the science of ecology, such a conceptualization will be familiar, since ecologists are concerned with both the biotic (living) and abiotic (non-living) components of environmental systems and especially with the interactions of those components. In fact, the term 'environment' is often used interchangeably with the ecological term 'ecosystem', which may be defined as a community of interacting organisms together with their physical surroundings. The notion of interrelationship is a central one in environmental science and management since many environmental issues have occurred because one environmental system has been disturbed or degraded - either accidentally or deliberately - as a result of changes in another.

Environmental Degradation

Environmental degradation is a process through which the natural environment is compromised in a few ways, lowering the biological diversity and the overall health of the environment. This process may be absolutely natural in origin, or it could be accelerated or as a result of human activities. It is described as any altering or disturbance to the environment seemed to be deleterious or undesirable. Environmental degradation is one of the ten threats formally suggested via way of means of the High-degree Panel on Threats, Challenges, and Change of the United Nations. The United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction defines environmental degradation as "the reduction of the capacity of the environment to meet social and ecological objectives, and needs". Environmental degradation comes in many types. When natural habitats are destroyed or natural resources are depleted, the environment is degraded. Efforts to counteract this problem include environmental protection and environmental resources management. Environmental degradation deals with environmental issues which threaten the natural environment. United Nations sees environmental degradation as one of the six clustered threats with which the world must be concerned now and, in the decades ahead (UN, 2004).

Concept of Ecosystem

By design, the ecosystem is both a structural and functional unit of ecology where the living organisms interact with each other and the surrounding environment. Simply put, it is a chain of interaction between organisms and their environment. The term "Ecosystem" was first coined by A.G. Tansley, an English botanist, in 1935. It refers to any spatial unit which includes the biotic and abiotic components interacting with each other and producing an exchange of materials between the two (Asthana & Asthana, 2006). Abiotic components are non-living chemical and

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physical factors in the environment that affect ecosystems. Biotic on the other hand describes a living component of an ecosystem such as plants and animals. Natural energy is the flow of energy via living things within an ecosystem. All living organisms can be categorized into producers and consumers, and those producers and consumers can be further categorized into a food chain. The various levels within the food chain is a trophic level. However, the natural energy flow with an ecosystem or environment is being disrupted through an increase in human activities which is a result of an increase in the human population. This study is conceived to argue that the increase and concentration of IDPs in various IDPs camps in Nigeria will impact the ecosystem and that one fundamental resultant factor may be environmental degradation.

IDPs Growth Trend in Nigeria 2018 – 2020

World over, there are over 41.3 million IDPs, the highest number ever recorded. The leading three countries with the largest internally displaced populations due to conflict and violence in 2018 were Ethiopia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), and Syria. Over 3.2 million individuals are displaced, including more than 2.9 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) in northeastern Nigeria (OCHA, 2017). 28 million new individuals add up to the number of internally displaced people by conflict and disasters worldwide in the course of 2018. 10.8 million of these were displaced by violence and conflict, and 17.2 million by natural disasters. In all, there are more than 41.3 million IDPs worldwide, the highest number ever recorded (OCHA, 2017). The three countries with the largest number of IDPs due to disasters in 2018 were Myanmar, Kenya, and Afghanistan. An overlap of conflict and disasters repeatedly displaced people in Afghanistan, Nigeria, Somalia, and other countries. 2015 saw Boko Haram beginning its campaign of terror against the Nigerian state, several people have been forced to flee their homes for areas of safety in the states of Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Taraba, and Yobe.

Table 1: Number of IDPS in North-eastern Nigeria

| State of Location | Number of IDPs |
|--------------------------|-----------------------|
| Adamawa | 220,159 |
| Bauchi | 60,555 |
| Borno | 672,714 |
| Gombe | 24,655 |
| Taraba | 74,125 |
| Yobe | 135,810 |
| Grand Total | 1,188,018 |

Source: Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) (2015).

Table 1 shows that the total number of IDPs in Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Taraba and Yobe is 1,188,018 IDPs. A breakdown analysis of the table above reveals that Borno state has the highest number of IDPs which is placed at 672,714, followed by Adamawa with 220,159 IDPs and Yobe that has 135,810 IDPs. Other three states of the region such as Taraba, Bauchi, Gombe have 74,125 IDPs, 60,555 IDPs and 24,655 IDPs respectively. In Borno, Maiduguri LGA is hosting the highest number of IDPs (432,785) whereas most of the internally displaced persons in Adamawa have been identified in Yola South (41,275), Girei (38,495) and Yola North (35,293). In Yobe the majority of IDPs are in Damaturu (36,855) and Potiskum (21,400). In Gombe, the Gombe LGA is hosting the highest concentration of internally displaced persons (13,472). In Taraba, most IDPs have been identified in Gassol (20,641) and Gashaka (10,322) LGAs.

Cite this article as

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Recently, Boko Haram insurgency has displaced nearly 2.4 million people in the Lake Chad Basin. Although the Nigerian military has regained control in parts of the country's north-east, civilians in Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad and Niger continue to be affected by grave violations of human rights, widespread sexual and gender-based violence, forced recruitment and suicide bombings. According to the report released by International Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC, 2021) established that there are about 2,730,000 IDPs in Nigeria as at 31st December, 2020. This figure is based on the assessment conducted by IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix Team in 207 Local Government Areas spreading across 13 states of Nigeria. Abuja has long-standing conflict between Fulani pastoralists and Hausa farmers in the north-western states of Katsina, Sokoto and Zamfara states triggered around 7,900 new internal displacements. The violence also led tens of thousands of people to flee across the border into the Maradi region of Niger. About 23,000 such movements were recorded in April alone. Violence between farmers and pastoralists also increased in the Nigeria's central regions, commonly known as the Middle Belt, but the lack of monitoring made it difficult to assess the number of new displacements triggered. Flooding in Adamawa, Akwa Ibom, Benue, Borno, Delta, Lagos, Kano and Kebbi states triggered at least 8,800 new displacements. Some of those forced to flee in Adamawa and Borno had already been displaced by conflict. 59 Many people who flee disasters in Nigeria return to damaged or destroyed homes unable to withstand further rains and floods. 60 Disasters also increase the risk of diarrhoea, respiratory infections and water-borne diseases such as cholera in displacement camps. Covid-19 was also reported in some camps in Borno.

IDPs Demographic Profile

The IDPs Demographic profile as revealed in the Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) assessment a report by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) aims to improve the understanding about the scope of internal displacements, returns and the needs of affected populations in conflict-affected states of northeastern Nigeria. The report covers the period 15th January to 15th February, 2020 and reflects trends from the six most affected north-eastern states of Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Taraba and Yobe. In the recently released assessment of DTM for Round 31, 2,046,604 or 420,072 households were recorded as displaced, an increase of 7,512 persons against the last assessment conducted in December 2019 when 2,039,092 internally displaced persons (IDPs) were identified. Also, a total of 1,673,862 returnees were recorded in the DTM Round 31 assessment, an increment of 62,186 or 4 per cent from the 1,611,676 persons that were identified as returnees in the last round of assessment that was conducted in December 2019. The increase in number of IDPs indicates a continued plateauing in numbers of displaced persons in the region over the last couple of rounds. As per the Round 29 assessment that was published in November 2019, 2,035,232 IDPs were recorded. A similar trend was observed in previous rounds of assessment since August 2019.

The number of displaced persons in the region is now well above the number recorded in Round 25 (2,026,602), which was conducted before escalating violence was observed in October 2018 even though accessibility remains lower. During Round 25, a higher number of Local Government Areas (LGAs or districts) and wards were accessible. Given that the numbers of IDPs is increasing slowly although accessibility remains low, it can be inferred that the actual displacement figures could be much higher. To gain insights into the profiles of IDPs, interviews were conducted with 4 per cent of the identified IDP population 86,268 displaced persons during this round of assessments. The information collated and analyzed in this report includes the reasons for displacement, places of origin and shelter types, mobility patterns, and unfulfilled needs of the

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Degradation : The current situation, *THE COLLOQUIUM*, 10(1), 140 - 150

displaced populations. Additionally, site assessments were conducted in 2,372 locations (down from 2,375 in the last round of assessment, conducted in December 2019). The purpose was to better understand the gaps in services provided and the needs of the affected population. These sites included 290 (down from 293 in the last round of assessment) camps and camp-like settings and 2,082 locations (no change since the last assessment) where IDPs were residing with host communities. Site assessments included an analysis of sector-wide needs, including shelter and non-food items, water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), food and nutrition, health, education, livelihood, security, communication and protection.

Lastly, this report includes analyses of the increasing number of returnees, profiles of their initial displacement, shelter conditions of returnees, and health, education, livelihood, market, assistance and WASH facilities available to the returnees. Notably, as the north-eastern State of Borno is the most affected by conflict-related displacements, this report specifically emphasizes the related analysis and data.

Table 2 : Displacement rate of IDPS in North-eastern Nigeria

| State | Count of LGAs | R30 Total (November 2019) | R31 Total (January 2020) | Status | Difference | % Change |
|-------------|---------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|----------|------------|----------|
| ADAMAWA | 21 | 204,699 | 206,422 | Increase | 1,723 | 0.8% |
| BAUCHI | 20 | 64,791 | 64,436 | Decrease | -355 | -0.5% |
| BORNO | 21 | 1,496,871 | 1,506,537 | Increase | 9,666 | 0.6% |
| GOMBE | 11 | 37,039 | 37,028 | Decrease | -11 | -0.03% |
| TARABA | 16 | 101,181 | 98,998 | Decrease | -2,183 | -2.2% |
| YOBE | 17 | 134,511 | 133,183 | Decrease | -1,328 | -1.0% |
| GRAND TOTAL | 106 | 2,039,092 | 2,046,604 | Increase | 7,512 | 0.4% |

Change in Internally displaced population by States (Source: Nigeria Displacement Report 31, February, 2020)



Fig 1 :Internally displaced population by LGA (Source: Nigeria Displacement Report 31, February, 2020)

Internal displacement of persons until recently bore little significance to national environmental studies largely due to the fact that effective monitoring and tracking systems were non-existent

Cite this article as

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and as such, evidence of the impact of such movement could not be documented. The 1916 Iseyin-Okeho uprising in south-western Nigeria and the 1929 Aba women's riot in south-eastern Nigeria against policies of the colonial British administration resulted in earliest documented human collateral damage, massive internal displacement and loss of infrastructure (Falola, 2008; Stapleton, 2011; Klieman, 2012; Heerten & Moses, 2014). Another earlier recorded mass internal displacement occurred during the 1967-1970 Nigerian civil war in which 2 (two) million people reportedly died and 10 (ten) million people, largely of south-eastern origin were displaced mostly from northern Nigeria. The turn of the millennium till date witnessed increased numbers of sectional, ethno-religious and communal clashes brought about by disputes over access to land, citizenship and broader questions of ethnic identity in sections of the nation's middle belt which hosts most of the settlers from the different parts of the country (Osaretin, 2013; Adesote & Peters, 2015). The change in political structure from post-independence military rule to fledgling democracy came along with the struggle to tolerate differing views, ideologies, opinions, goals and ambitions through which dissention and violence became the most frequently expressed means of discontent. Resultant internal displacement of people from dissention is one of the greatest human tragedies confronting national development these days. The wanton destruction of property and infrastructure and the loss of lives do more to impede national growth than slow development planning (Matera et al., 2013). By August 2016, the number of identified IDPs stood at 2,093,030 (approximately 370,389 households) across Adamawa, Bauchi, Benue, Borno, Gombe, Taraba, Yobe, Nasarawa, Plateau, Kaduna, Kano, Zamfara states and Abuja: 1,878,205 IDPs appear to have been displaced by insurgency. Thus, through displacement monitoring efforts, it has been observed that over 89% of all displacement occurs as a result of insurgency and are seeking protection from violence, less than 9% occurs as a result of communal clashes and just under 2% results from forced relocation due to natural disasters (Je'adayibe, 2008; Okpanachi, 2010; DTM, 2016). Often, the displaced head for villages where they have family or where their ethnic groups are in the majority. Those without family or friends in close enough vicinity are forced to seek refuge in spontaneous camps filled with women, children and the aged or invalid since the younger, healthier males prefer to keep vigil in their abandoned villages over their belongings and ancestral land (Idowu, 1999).



Fig 2: Map of Nigeria showing intensity of displacement across the states by 2021 (Source: DTM, 2021)

Cite this article as

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Conclusion

Displacement of persons is a social ill that requires a multifaceted approach to resolution. Emergency response and strategic planning to deal with the accommodation needs of those in need of transitory housing should not come at the expense of harming the environment whether ecologically, financially, socially, or physically. This paper has looked at the connections between the increase in the number of IDPs and environmental degradation. Planning for settlement camps involves the input of a team of professionals and stakeholders where architects as custodians of space creation and managers of the physical environment should play a dominant role. It is important for architects to tap into their problem-solving ability and experience in both design and planning, to come up with sustainable solutions to the seemingly complex nature of transitory shelters which will be serviced by effective waste management systems. The health and well-being of the residents of these displacement camps will constantly be under the very real threat of fire outbreaks, the spread of communicable illness, inclement weather, and further violence so long as the physical environments in which they exist suffer appreciable degradation. The very nature of internal displacement and the problems it creates for urban infrastructure suggests the need for deliberate action from designers, planners, social psychologists, and environmentalists in order to prevent exacerbating the conditions of the community and the camp residents.

The nature of the accommodation provided for the internally displaced persons in Nigeria are in deplorable physical states, with their housing being grossly insufficient and incapable of providing the necessary amount of comfort required to enable these post-disaster populations to recover from the physical and psychological loss they have experienced. Consequently, significant findings made from the study of the selected IDP camps in Nigeria also reveal the inadequate waste management systems employed and suggest the acceleration of urban degradation if the situation remains unchecked and not remedied. The study recommends public awareness and support from well-meaning citizens who may be less knowledgeable about the onset of urban degradation caused by displacement camps aimed at receiving donations for specific needs such as waste management. This paper suggests increased participation by humanitarian/sustainable designers and environmentalists to develop climate-responsive and eco-friendly schemes for transitory housing that reflect the cultural leanings of displaced persons. The study also proposes the incorporation of age, gender, and diversity approaches by organizations such as NEMA for equal access to waste management facilities/services by all residents of displacement camps as prescribed minimum global benchmark standards.

Recommendations

It is an understatement that the increase in the number of IDPs and the eventual creation of IDPs camps has caused untold stress such as environmental degradation in the environment where they have been relocated to. Hence, there is a need for a sustainable ways to reduce the stress this has caused on the environment in terms of environmental degradation if we were to maintain and sustain the well-being of our environment. Government and Non-governmental Organizations must adopt strategies that will entail moving away from the current "survival-focused" model, and moving towards a focus on greater self-reliance. For example, NGOs can help IDPs gain decent employment through interventions such as vocational training. Businesses can focus on hiring IDPs. Humanitarian actors can expand protection outside camps. Governments can lower policy barriers, such as requiring legal permission to reside and work in certain areas of countries (as in Iraq). Donors can invest in the broader development agenda by supporting effective urban

Cite this article as

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planning. The government and the Nigerian populace need to address problems that stem from the loopholes in our constitutions. A localized version of the “Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement” should be developed and activated in the country so as to serve as environmental protection guidelines against environmental degradation in IDP camps at various locations in the country.

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