

NIGERIA: THE GATHERING STORM

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We have been reporting on the ongoing violence and land occupations by Fulani in the South East of Nigeria. During the first two weeks of September DHPI sent a representative to Nigeria to assess the situation. The IDP camp at Benin City was visited – IDP's there are mostly from Borno State and have fled Boko Haram attacks. Villages in the Diocese of Ekulobia were also visited – the Diocese falls in Anambra State – one of the areas most affected by Fulani attacks. Below is the report – interviews were transcribed literally, to give full voice to those interviewed.

1. Visit to IDP Camp in Benin City

Interview 1:

Name: Jeraiva (22-years old)

Interviewed at: 10:15am on 1 September 2021

IDP Camp: Benin City IDP Camp



His Story: “My name is Jeraiva, I am originally from Bauchi the northern part of Nigeria. I am one of the IDP's staying in Home for the Needy here, I came here in 2014 and I will be here now for over 8 years and I am 22 years old. How I got here was a miracle, in 2014 the rate of insurgency in the Northern part of Nigeria was high, seriously high, then was a time of attacks by Boko Haram and attacks by different insurgencies. My entire house, not only me but many people's houses were raided and burnt and we didn't have any safety anymore. Me and my family members fled to different directions, as well as many members of the community. So everyone flees to a different direction, so your mother will not be close to you, because she flees for her safety and you flee for your safety; so everybody was now on their own. Now, particularly about me, they burnt my house and two of my younger ones who were burnt alive in the house, because when everybody fled, the two of them were still sleeping in the house. So they set fire on the house and the two of them got burnt to death. Then when I flee, after not long I heard that they kidnapped my mother and they kidnapped some of my siblings and took them away to Sambisa Forrest. While for me, I was trying to survive, I didn't know anybody, I was moving from place to place, anything I could find to eat, I would eat, anywhere I can sleep, even if it's in the bush I would sleep.”

“I was out of money and I don't have anything to eat anymore, so I am looking for help. In the process of looking for help anywhere I go, if I leave this particular community and go to another community, they will still come and attack that community. So I didn't have a permanent place to

stay, I kept moving from different places. With this movement, I have seen a lot, especially dead bodies and a lot of traumas, I have been seriously traumatised. In fact it goes as far to say, I thought I would turn insane after what I have seen. For a long period of time, I wake up at night and have flashbacks of what I have seen, making me very afraid. I didn't hear from my family, any sibling or relative, I was on my own. I got to know about this place from a Pastor, where you can sleep, you can be safe, you can be free from all the traumatising passing through. So I got interested, because here I can be safe, as it is my ultimate desire. I didn't know how I could get here, I didn't have a phone, I didn't have any means of communication, it was only the Pastor. So I decided to come close to the Pastor and tell him that I want to go with to the place. He said that the bus that is going to bring people here is already filled up and there is no more space. So I decided to tell him that even if it is inside the boot of the car, I will still go. He said there's no space, so I had to squeeze myself into a space in the car. Then we started our journey and I arrived here on 10 October 2014. So for that period of time, our leaders of the camp, the camp coordinator, the staff; we gave them serious problems because we can't sleep. If we all sleep at night, everyone wakes up and starts shouting, dreams and the traumas are coming at night, everyone starts shouting "they are coming, they are coming", which caused a lot of problems at the camp. But over my 8 years of being here, the traumas have begun to drop with all the encouragements from the camp coordinators, the camp leaders, the walkers and the staff in this camp. With everything they have at their disposal, they decide to speak with us. Currently in the camp, it is not that we have food scarcity, we don't have food, and that is the issue. We sometimes beg for sick help from people, come to our aid come help us, we don't have food to eat. When people come to the camp and bring a little food, that is what we use to eat for the whole camp. The main problem we have in the camp currently is food and funding for our education. In the midst of our lack of food and lack of materials that we are seriously facing in the camp then in that issue, we are still going to school. So the issue of combining school and funding is two different challenges. So for the camp coordinator, they hardly sleep, all of them, because all day and night they are walking up and down, speaking to people, trying to find a way for people to come and help us. Our big issues now is, food, school funding and health facilities. We have thousands of people here, so regularly people fall sick with malaria and fevers, because with all the mosquitos around camp there is a high rate of malaria. If you look at our small health centre we have, which we don't even have medicine in it, it isn't really a health centre, but the small children, women and youth fall sick and we don't have the facilities to treat all of them. We don't only need a hospital at this time now, we need a very big hospital and we need professionals that will come and treat us, because currently if you give us a hospital, we don't have professionals or qualified volunteers to treat us.

Interview 2:

Name: Hassan Manga

Interviewed at: 10:41am on 1 September 2021

IDP Camp: Benin City IDP Camp

His Story: “My name is Hassan Manga and I come from Borno State, Nigeria. So the reason why I left, run from a place to come here, is because we had no inner peace in the place that we were, because Boko Haram used to trouble us, killing many people, raping women, disturbing us. That’s because they don’t want any Christian, they don’t want Christian. They even say, that they are still coming, it’s because they’ve already killed one of our members, Christians and members of the community. So now they come and say they will slaughter with a knife and when they come like this, they want every Christian to turn into a Muslim. This is why they take our farms, they burn our houses, all of our ashes they scatter it, we don’t have anything and we don’t have anywhere to go. This is the reason why we run, we live here and we have to come to this place to save our lives. I am here in this camp for 6 years now. I heard about this camp in Borno state in camp centre Maiduguri, so from there we are living inside the camp. Before I just hear a story of this place, that is IDP here. I hear the story of this place, because it’s one person who knows this story and discover it to me, so I quickly get money, so I find way to come here. Because of that place I was staying, even inside the camp you can see many many, many weapons that are used to shoot, you can see the weapons that come out inside the camp and killing many people. So this is the reason why I leave that place and come here, because this here is safe. Nobody can go to the farms from my community, it is not safe, definitely, definitely. See me, I am a citizen right here and I can plant, but I never not even one because they destroy the farms.”

James: Do you think it is a strategy that they are using to starve the people?

Hassan Manga: “yes, it is a strategy because no one can go to the farms, they don’t want farmers, we are too afraid.”

James: What are the challenges in the camp that you are facing?

Hassan Manga: “all the clinic, the food, the school are all needed, because we lack all these things now. We have more than 4000 children that are here, which is supposed to be training in a school and we are feeding them. Without food, education cannot do. Children cannot sleep on the ground, they are supposed to bring mattress, there is supposed to be care for the children to maintain the future for the children. There will be more children that are coming in the future, so we need food, we need hospital, we need school and the rest.”



Interview 3:

A mother living in Benin City IDP Camp who left her village after a Boko Haram attack.



James: What happened in your village concerning Boko Haram and why did you leave?

“Because of Boko Haram we run and reach this place, we find it because of the Pastor that communicate with us, a man of God. It is because of Boko Haram Matah, the Arabic people learn of

this place, we see white men and they begin to buy our people. They want to make this Nigeria a Muslim land and they want to kill all Christian men and force the women and girls to marry them and become Muslim. That is what they want this war, to displace the people. They walk up and down and when they enter a village like this, they begin to shoot and people will begin running and then they will pack everything that we have. Then they begin to kill men and taking the women, the ones they leave behind the kill, even if its women or children. That is how they behave, they sharing this blood all over. They killed my son, and even my husband. Before they asked them to change and become Muslim, but when they refused that’s why they shoot them and kill my son and husband. So they left me with the small small children, even when they come and attack us, I lost my baby of 5 and a half months. All my children was going somewhere after the attack and God saved them, I even saw some of my children after 5 years before I see them, some after 3 years before I see them, but some of them I have never seen again.

Interview 4:

Pastor Solomon Folorunsho: Coordinator of Home for the Needy

Name: Pastor Solomon Folorunsho

Interviewed on: 1 September 2021

IDP Camp: Benin City IDP Camp

His Story: “My name is Pastor Solomon Folorunsho, I am the coordinator of ‘Home for the Needy’ foundation, that is taking care of more than 3000 displaced persons and children. We started ‘Home for the Needy’ in 1992 to care for street children, vulnerable children, orphans. From 1992-2012 we had more than 700 persons living with us and it was quite challenging to feed them, they were barely eating once a day and then we created a school for them, they are going to school hungry. And the 2012-2013 we got calls from displaced Christians in the Northeast of Nigeria who were displaced from their homes by terrorists called Boko Haram, their parents were killed, mothers raped and murdered. And the ones who were able to escape ended up in the bush, forests and some drowned in the rivers, others eating sand and leaves to survive after walking for hundreds of kilometres. From that time 2012-2014 we have more than 3000 IDP’s that have flocked down to this place from the northeast. When they came, they were so traumatised, they were afraid, they



trusted nobody, they were afraid of everything, every sound made them run. Sleeping at night was a big, big, big challenge in fact in the night, they would dream and see the things that happen to them before and then they start to run, thinking they are still in the places and there would be commotion. So we taught ourselves to nightguard, we are not sleeping, we watching over, in fact for more than one year

even two years it was terrible for all of us that were caring for them. Nothing prepared us for this, we had been caring for children that were raped, neglected, rejected but nothing prepared us for children, who saw bloodshed, who saw murder, who saw rape, who saw abduction or burning of their houses. So nothing prepared us for it, but along the way we learnt how to cope with them, how to adapt them and slowly by slowly they started coming out of their trauma. Then 2 challenges we still faced, one is what do we do with them and the second one is how do we feed them? So we are able to create a school, not a standard school you could imagine and we saw that they were all eager to learn. Initially when they came they were comfortable communicating in English language but with time they pick up and eager to learn. You will see 20 children over one textbook, reading night and day. Out of these children today, we have 97 in various Universities in Nigeria who are studying medicine, law, engineering courses, so many courses, and every one of them want to become something. Some want to become missionaries, some want to become doctors, lawyers, but now the challenge is how we will feed them? Hunger is a major problem at this centre, to feed the children is a challenge. I mean with more than 3000 persons that is a challenge. The other thing is funding their education, school fees, books, hostel accommodation, these are the challenges we have at this center. We don’t have a proper health center or the drugs, also all the communities around here do not have a health center, they all come here to seek for treatment. We need drugs, we need the equipment, because we have some nurses around here that are working here but we have nothing to work with. That is the challenges, sometimes it makes us discouraged because for you to get from here to the hospital we don’t even have an emergency number to call, so these have been our challenges in this place.”

James: Are you afraid if you have something like a health hazard that it will be a catastrophe?

“We do not consider what we have here as houses, we just set up makeshift structures that are emergency structures because we don’t have the means to build standard houses. We find any

materials like wood, slabs just to accommodate persons and have somewhere to sleep, but they are



all overcrowded and congested. It has caused a lot of problems with outbreaks such as scabies, cholera, chickenpox, and others, it has been a big, big challenge. We need houses, mattresses, blankets, pillows, in fact there are so many needs here. The guests that are of age need the sanitary pads regularly, they need clothes, pants, and bras to wear, you know there is a lot of everything that is needed to care for someone.”

James: A lot of the kids are malnourished, how do you handle nutrition?

“I must tell you, these are the things we need, sometimes when you don’t even eat at all we do not talk about nutrition. So when we can have this, it will be a big boost for the health system, to their immune system, but for us there is not even enough to put in their hands to eat. We would be very happy if we can have enough and have nutritious meals that will improve the health systems, especially for the women and children

Photos Below Show the Conditions of Benin City IDP Camp





This is where the IDP's and children are currently surviving. There are no formal hospitals, houses, food sources or schools. The hygiene conditions are poor there are no adequate cooking facilities. They are surviving in the forests, making them vulnerable to numerous insanitary and security circumstances.



Sleeping Conditions in Benin City IDP Camp:

Beds made by IDP's to sleep – They have to make bunkbeds as a way to fit everyone under the shelter, and others just find an open space on the floor. As seen there are bags filled with sand and loose bricks holding up a piece of wood to form the second bed on top. Any materials available are used to sleep with for warmth. This shows the desperate need for housing services.



The Children:



Above: Children living in Benin City IDP Camp – There are over 4000 children surviving without sufficient food and no formal education in Benin City IDP Camp. Also due to the lack on hygiene and medical facilities many are dying.

James Impressions:

Visiting the camp was a heart-breaking experience, as it is completely overcrowded with between 3000 to 5000 IDP's trying to fight for survival after the armed militia forced them to leave their homes abruptly. There are health hazards everywhere, as seen there are only 6 toilets for everyone to share with no clean water and only a few boreholes. Secondly, there are no formal houses and everyone is forced to make sleeping arrangements with materials they can find and all fit under the few roofs available in the camp, increasing the risk of infections and health hazards. There is a health centre, however, there are no medical supplies or treatments available, including the fact that no one is qualified with the appropriate training. There is a desperate need for training programs and volunteers to be implemented into the camp for both medical and teaching requirements, as there is a lack of teachers, leaving the children without access to basic education. Camp coordinators also need training in psycho-social care, as many people arrive at the camp with trauma and PTSD from past experiences and need the relevant care. Additionally, the need for water purification systems to be implemented will allow the IDP's to access clean water, as a major cause of death in Nigeria is cholera and malaria. Lastly, there is a considerable struggle for food, as most people only get a handful of whatever they can get every few days.

Needs of the Population:

The need to access medical support is greatly required, as there are many illnesses and countless women die during labour, as there is no access to emergency services. There is a need for a proper transportation system to take the IDP's to the nearest hospital for treatment. Similarly, a major challenge is girls and women need to be educated on women's health and how to stay hygienic in their current conditions. Additionally, the crisis of food insecurity needs to be addressed, as they need proper nutrition programs to be taught, however firstly they need access to more food sources as all the IDP's are severely malnourished.



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2. Visit to Diocese of Ekulobia

Interview 5:

Name: Nkiru Ezedinuchi

Interviewed at: 17:28pm on 9 September 2021

Location: Diocese of Ekulobia, Anambra State



Nkiru Ezedinuchi: “My name is Nkiru Ezedinuchi and I belong to the Handmaids of the Child Jesus in the church. The mother started the congregation in 1923 and the health quarters are here in Calabar. I teach 30 children at a secondary school, I am in the heart of people and I am also a human rights activist, because I don’t like injustice. We need to stand up and be direct, direct, people who were not before me, we must fight for justice, because we have them, when such souls are in the mist. So that is all about me. The school where I worked, make our time to see that some children are being assisted because the problem we are having is poverty is at the highest point in our country this time around. The religious

are really suffering a lot because there is no money and there is no food. Many will want to go to school but there is no money for school, but if you want to send, good school is money and when you don’t have that money, the children will not be there. Then you have to see whether there’s a scholarship that is given, to the interest of treating the children well. I work with the women, I work with the women, I work locally with the necessary. I initiated new apostolic work in Ezima and Isuochi, Abia state, Nigeria. We share food, as you see what I am doing today, I said okay I am in, I intended to be cooking, I can serve it and I suspended it to Sunday, I do it every Sunday. So that is all about the handmaid sisters, all I have said is our measure of an apostolate in our congregation. Now coming towards what is happening around us, I just want to say God thank you, the experiences are not much as it is for death. They go to Benue, Jos, Middlebelt, coming down to Delta, coming down to Abia. People are suffering because of the new developments in our country. These herdmen, what do you call them herdsmen? They use their weapons to threaten people, to terrorise people, even here they are living in the bushes here, and because they are there living inside the bush we have a lot of fear. Women have fear, men have fear, everyone has fear to go inside their farms to farm, because of the attitude of raping women, everyone has the same problem, our men are being killed all around us because of the conflict between us and the herdsmen with their ammunitions. So, the church has been looking into that, the Bishop conference has been came out with some opinions channelled to the federal government that this



that is happening in our country is becoming too much, enough is enough. Nothing has been done about it, our brother, the head of state is not bothered about what is happening and that is why so many people are dying, there is no point. There is no money and no food. A cup of garri is ₦159, a cup of rice is ₦200. Now you can imagine a family of 3 buying a cup of rice is 200 naira, now where is the money to buy that food at that price, it is not there. So it becomes a problem and because of the situation of our country, some girls are not in school, some young men that are supposed to be studying, they are not in school and you know idol is the workshop of the devil and when they are not united you see them in all sorts of crimes, especially smoking and raping, staying out all hours of the night drinking because so on and so forth because they have nowhere to lay their heads. So it is common here, I tried to see what I can do, I draw them nearer to me, I spoke to them, I counsel them, I asked them what do you want to do, even a small thing? So that is the situation of our country, so we are in trouble, we are in a lot of trouble. Right for 2,3,4 days all of us we were kidnapped, right since Sunday, the reverend and a sister were kidnapped by the bandits. Four days today, but this morning she was released, we have not heard the story, let me check. You cannot travel, if you are traveling then you need to be careful, anything can happen. So that is the thing, our country is a mess and it is affected the people, so that's the thing."

James: Do you have any comment on the stories going around about making Nigeria an Islamic state? Or have you heard anything like that?

Nkiru Ezedinuchi: "All this and that, that is happening now is still, Fulani's are not Catholics, they are not Christians, they are pure Muslims and the type of Muslim they are they want order even if people are resisting or not. Their end is to clear the Christians. Their mission is to clear and take over the country. So their main aim is the murders, which everybody is talking about and fighting against. You understand? And they want to do it like what's that country, Afghanistan. You understand, it is Muslims verse Christians. And because we got a lot of recognition from them, asking us to pray for the Christians and they captured all of them, I don't know if they released them or whether they were all killed.

James: So would you say the Church is in trouble?

Nkiru Ezedinuchi: "The church is not in trouble, but there is disgrace and horror that is existing. Many persons have been killed by Fulani's, kidnapped and killed. In the north over there, when I talk about the north, in Kaduna, when a man went back to the seminary school he was abducted with many others. Because he was from this sect, and he refused to deny it, his faith, he was killed. A priest was also killed, when he went to Mass, he was shot dead. So it, it is a problem we have. The UN is supposed to come, they are supposed to come and look into the problem, because we are part of Nigeria and Nigeria is part of that something, something, something. I don't know, but I know we are short of something and that is the problem."

James: Are my sources correct, that people cannot go back to their farms because they are scared of being killed?

Nkiru Ezedinuchi: "It is true, because even along this road, there were plants that were planted and they just come along with their cows, the cows went into that farm and destroyed everything. In my own town, they came and the youth reacted, and throw them out of the town. They wanted to colonise the open grazing, we said no, and the Anambra women said we don't want, because we don't want, we have our own animals, domestic animals and we don't leave them to destroy the livelihood and farms. We don't do that, you keep your own domestic animal in the house and look after it.

Photo's Showing: Houses destroyed by Fulani in Umuchukwu village, Anambra state



Photos Showing the Destruction in Owerre Ezukala Village



Above: Photo's showing Owerre Ezukala village in Anambra State, after being attacked by Fulani militia – A now deserted village shows houses that were severely burnt down and damaged after the armed Fulani militia attacked Owerre Ezukala village. According to local sources, houses are in a detrimental state and many of the roofs were

taken off, sinks stolen before being set alight. Most of the farms can be seen as overgrown and the ground is dry and hard, making it impossible to farm on. The people from the village cannot return to their farms in fear of being killed, thus leaving them displaced and severely traumatised.



Photo's showing Houses destroyed by Fulani in Umuchukwu village





Above: Sr. Nkiru Ezedinuchi sympathises with the homeless IDP's living and hiding on the streets around the Diocese of Ekulobia, so out of the goodness of her heart she volunteers and cooks food for them as often as she can. Sr. Nkiru has found all the locations of these IDP's that are hiding around the state on the streets as they fear for their lives and have nowhere to go. Nevertheless, she does not believe she is doing enough, as these people are severely sick and have become mentally unstable after all the trauma they have seen and the circumstances they have been through in their fight for survival. She seeks further support and assistance from volunteers as there is a lot to be done.

James Impressions:

In the visit to the Diocese of Ekulobia, there is no camp for the IDP's instead the people are scattered around the state and trying to survive on the streets. This is because they were forced to leave their houses unexpectedly when the armed Fulani militia raided their villages, destroyed their homes and livelihoods and murdered their loved ones right in front of them. These IDP's live in constant fear of being attacked and they are left hiding in bushes, sleeping

in abandoned houses and scavaging for what food they can find. The level of trauma these people have been through is incomprehensible, as they have watched family members killed, their bodies dismembered, women and children raped; leaving them mentally deranged, starving and fighting for survival on the streets as no counselling or support is provided. Their farmlands were taken away from them and destroyed as the Fulani militia flattened the land with cattle, leaving it barren and infertile. The Fulani's take over an area of farmlands and establish a station with a tent so that people are unable to enter the area where their farms are. This causes desperation and major food shortages across the whole of the Southeast of Nigeria.

Needs of the Population:

The needs and levels of intervention that is required in Nigeria are unfathomable. Firstly, rehabilitation programs are required to help with trauma and PTSD as many Nigerians are left mentally unstable, as they do not know how to deal with what they have been through and this affects their ability to create a better future for themselves. There is no access to education for children as they are not living in a camp, they cannot afford the school fees in Anambra state and the IDP's are spread out so there is no organised school system. Looking at the health needs of the community, girls need to be taught sexual health education and how to keep hygienic and make sanitary products, as there is no access or money to buy them. Similarly, programs need to be implemented to empower the community, for example teaching women how to sew to be able to make their living and not rely on anyone. This will create a poverty alleviation program to allow IDP's to become self-sustainable.