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CAMP CLOSURE AND THE FRAGILITY OF POSITIVE PEACE IN NORTH-EAST NIGERIA: ASSESSING DURABLE SOLUTIONS FOR INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS IN BORNO STATE

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ABSTRACT
The conflict involving the Nigerian government, Boko Haram, and the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) has created one of Africa's largest internal displacement crises. Borno State, the centre of the insurgency, hosts the largest number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Nigeria. In recent years, the Borno State Government has closed many camps and supported people to return home as part of efforts to recover and develop the area. While these steps are seen as progress, it remains unclear whether closing camps fully meets international standards for lasting solutions. This study examines the link between camp closures, return processes, and durable solutions in North-East Nigeria. Using Johan Galtung's ideas of negative peace (the absence of violence) and positive peace (the presence of fair conditions for a good life), the research examines whether improved security and the physical return of people also bring the social, economic, and institutional support needed for people to settle permanently. The study reviews policy documents, humanitarian reports, and peer-reviewed literature through qualitative thematic analysis. The findings show that while security has improved and many people have returned, serious challenges remain with earning a living, accessing basic services, housing, land and property rights, and protection. The study argues that closing camps is only one part of finding lasting solutions, not proof that displacement has ended. For returns to last, people need safety, services, ways to earn a living, and the chance to rebuild their lives with dignity.

Keywords: Internally Displaced Person(s), Positive Peace, Protracted Displacement, Camp Closure, Durable Solutions, Borno State, North-East Nigeria.

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Introduction

The armed conflict between the Nigerian government and Boko Haram and the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) has changed life in North-East Nigeria since 2009. What began as a localised insurgency has become a long-running conflict affecting millions of people in Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe States. Beyond the direct human suffering, the conflict has forced many people from their homes, destroyed ways of making a living, weakened public services, and limited long-term development (Borno State Government, 2024; IOM et al., 2023).

Although the military has recovered much of the land once held by these groups, displacement remains one of the conflict's most lasting effects (Omogunloye et al., 2023). By 2025, millions of Nigerians were still displaced, living in camps, similar settlements, host communities, or towns. Borno State continues to have the largest number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the country (IOM, 2025; Borno State Government, 2024).

In this situation, the Borno State Government has made closing camps and helping people return a priority (Camp Coordination and Camp Management Cluster et al., 2024; Matazu, 2025). Officials have said that staying in camps for a long time is socially and economically undesirable and can slow the return to normal life. Closing camps has therefore been presented as an important step toward recovery and rebuilding (Borno State Government, 2024).

However, humanitarian organisations, researchers, and protection workers have asked whether closing camps means lasting solutions have been achieved (Amnesty International, 2021; The New Humanitarian, 2024). Many displaced families want to return home, but there are still concerns about security, basic services, ways to earn a living, housing, and rights to land and property in return areas (IOM et al., 2023; OCHA, 2024).

These issues raise an important question: does closing camps mean displacement has been solved, or can problems continue long after people return? This question matters especially in Borno State, where many returns are happening while insecurity and uneven recovery continue in many places (IOM et al., 2023).

Using Galtung's (1969) distinction between negative peace and positive peace, this study looks at camp closure policies and durable solutions in North-East Nigeria. It argues that reducing violence is important, but does not automatically create the conditions needed for people to settle back permanently. The study therefore examines whether current return processes include the support required for a real move from displacement to lasting recovery.

Research objectives

This study assessed the extent to which camp closure and return efforts in Borno State contribute to lasting solutions for internally displaced persons. It examined the reasons for camp closure policies, how well return processes match national and international standards, the conditions returnees face regarding security, services, livelihoods, and protection, and how negative and positive peace help explain the outcomes. The study also identified steps that could improve lasting reintegration in North-East Nigeria.

Statement of the problem

Finding lasting solutions is one of the biggest challenges in long-term displacement. In North-East Nigeria, more than fifteen years of conflict have forced many households to move repeatedly between camps, host communities, and return areas (IOM et al., 2023).

In response, the Borno State Strategy for Durable Solutions to Internal Displacement (2025–2027) aims to move from emergency help toward recovery and development (Borno State Government, 2024). Camp closures and returns are central to this plan and are meant to help people reintegrate and become self-reliant.

However, questions remain about whether camp closures meet international standards for durable solutions. Official numbers may show fewer people in camps and more returnees, but humanitarian reports still highlight concerns about security, basic services, livelihoods, housing, and protection in many return areas (IOM et al., 2023; OCHA, 2024).

Most research on displacement in North-East Nigeria has focused on humanitarian needs, the conflict itself, and return numbers. Although recent studies have begun to examine resettlement and return conditions (Abdu & Yunusa, 2026; Bøås et al., 2025), less attention has been paid to whether camp closures are accompanied by the social, economic, and institutional conditions needed for people to settle permanently. This leaves a gap between official measures of progress and the real experiences of returnees.

The literature distinguishes the administrative closure of displacement camps from the substantive achievement of durable solutions. Abdu and Yunusa (2026), in a qualitative desk-based review covering 2021–2024, identify persistent insecurity, limited livelihood opportunities, food insecurity, and inadequate access to education and healthcare in Borno State's resettlement areas. Bøås et al. (2025) complement this account through a foresight study combining previous research with ethnographic data and field observations collected around Maiduguri in October 2024. Their analysis highlights repeated displacement and uncertainty about households' futures after camp closure. However, its indicative scenarios are not statistically representative and should not be interpreted as predictions of outcomes for all displaced households. Amnesty International (2021), drawing on 38 interviews with returnees and camp residents, reports pressure to leave camps, continuing attacks in resettlement areas, and inadequate access to essential services. These sources differ in method, timeframe, and purpose; their convergence identifies recurring concerns but does not establish their prevalence across all return locations. Read through Galtung's (1969) distinction between negative and positive peace, the evidence suggests that reduced direct violence may enable return without removing structural barriers to secure and dignified reintegration. This study therefore examines unequal access to livelihoods, services, housing, and decision-making as potential manifestations of structural violence, rather than assuming that every instance of deprivation establishes its presence. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee's (IASC, 2010) durable-solutions framework provides complementary rights-based criteria for assessing these conditions. Together, these perspectives shift attention from camps closed and people relocated towards sustained safety, equitable access to resources, participation, and effective remedies. Longitudinal, location-specific research is consequently needed to establish whether these conditions improve after closure; the reviewed evidence does not itself demonstrate that positive peace has been achieved.

This study addresses that gap by examining how far camp closure and return efforts in Borno State match national and international standards. It looks at whether current approaches support lasting reintegration and positive peace, or whether many problems linked to displacement continue after return.

Research questions

This study is guided by the following questions: What factors have shaped camp-closure policies in Borno State? How well do the Borno State Government's return initiatives match recognised standards for durable solutions? What challenges do returnees face after camp closure and return? How does Galtung's idea of positive peace help us understand reintegration outcomes in North-East Nigeria? What steps could strengthen lasting solutions for internally displaced persons?

Conceptual clarifications

Camp closure

Camp closure is understood in this study as the formal cessation of an organised displacement site and the associated transition in accommodation, assistance, and protection arrangements. It is an administrative process, not a durable solution in itself: departing residents may return home, integrate locally, or settle elsewhere, while displacement-related needs can persist after movement (Inter-Agency Standing Committee [IASC], 2010). In Borno State, reported pressure to leave camps, continuing insecurity, and inadequate services in some resettlement locations illustrate why closure must be assessed alongside its consequences for affected households (Amnesty International, 2021; Bøås et al., 2025). The Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement require conditions enabling voluntary return or settlement elsewhere in safety and dignity, with displaced persons participating in the planning and management of their reintegration (United Nations, 1998). Linking these requirements to Galtung's (1969) positive peace, this study assesses whether closure reduces exclusion and displacement-related deprivation rather than merely changing where people live. Relevant indicators include informed choice, sustained safety, adequate housing, equitable service access, sustainable livelihoods, and participation in decisions. A fall in camp population therefore records an administrative change; it does not establish that structural barriers to reintegration have been overcome (Galtung, 1969; IASC, 2010).

Borno State

Borno State, located in Nigeria's North-East geopolitical zone, is the geographical and institutional case through which this study examines camp closure and durable solutions. Its Strategy for Durable Solutions to Internal Displacement 2025–2027 places displacement responses within a longer-term development framework and commits to respecting individual and community rights and choices (Borno State Government, 2024). The state is therefore considered not simply as a location, but as a policy setting in which security, reconstruction, public services, livelihoods, and participation interact. The strategy expresses intended outcomes rather than evidence that those outcomes have already been achieved. Research on return and resettlement identifies continuing insecurity and uneven access to livelihoods and services, making local implementation central to evaluating progress (Abdu & Yunusa, 2026; Bøås et al., 2025). Through Galtung's (1969) positive-peace lens, the analysis asks whether recovery institutions reduce exclusion and enable equitable access to opportunities for displaced and receiving communities. State-level closure or return totals are consequently insufficient on their own: settlement-level conditions and displacement-related inequalities must also be examined against durable-solutions criteria (IASC, 2010).

North-East Nigeria

North-East Nigeria is one of the country's six geopolitical zones and includes Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Taraba, and Yobe states. Since 2009, the zone has been the area most affected by the Boko Haram insurgency and its ISWAP offshoot. Borno State is recognised as the centre of both the conflict and the humanitarian crisis. The three most affected states—Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe—are known as the BAY states and account for most of the displacement and humanitarian needs in the country (OCHA, 2024; IOM, 2024).

Protracted displacement

Protracted displacement means people have been forced from their homes for a long time without a clear solution through return, local integration, or resettlement elsewhere. Humanitarian actors often use five years or more as a practical measure (Sustainability

Directory, 2025, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], 2004, p. 2). Many IDPs in Borno State camps have now been displaced for more than a decade. This long period raises questions about whether focusing only on return is enough as a lasting solution.

Internally displaced persons (IDPs)

Internally displaced persons are people forced by armed conflict, generalised violence, human rights violations, or disasters to leave their homes but who remain inside their own country (OHCHR, n.d.). Unlike refugees, IDPs do not gain a special legal status simply by being displaced. The 1998 UN Guiding Principles treat internal displacement as a factual situation, not a change in legal rights (United Nations, 1998). Because IDPs stay in their country, they retain the same rights and entitlements as other citizens, and the national government has the main duty to protect them. When government capacity is limited, international humanitarian organisations often help through coordinated systems (Deng & United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2004).

The United Nations Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement

Presented to the UN Commission on Human Rights in 1998 by Francis M. Deng, then the UN Secretary-General's Representative on Internally Displaced Persons, the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement are the main international guide for how countries should treat people displaced inside their borders. They are not legally binding but carry strong moral and practical weight because they are based on existing human rights, humanitarian, and refugee law (Ferris & Bergmann, 2017). The 30 Principles cover protection from forced displacement, rights while displaced, access to help, and conditions for lasting solutions. They clearly state that return, resettlement, and reintegration must be voluntary, safe, and dignified, and must not put people at renewed risk (United Nations, 1998). These standards are used in this study to assess Borno State's camp-closure process.

The Kampala Convention

Adopted by the African Union in 2009 and in force since 2012, the AU Convention for the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa (the Kampala Convention) is the first legally binding regional agreement dedicated solely to internal displacement (African Union, 2009). It turns the ideas in the UN Guiding Principles into binding duties for African states. States must prevent forced displacement, protect IDPs, and pursue lasting solutions through voluntary return, local integration, or resettlement. Importantly, return must be free from pressure and based on guarantees of safety, shelter, services, livelihoods, and clear information. Nigeria is among the 40 African countries that signed the Convention on 23rd October 2009 and ratified and deposited it with the African Union on 17 April 2012 and 22nd May 2012, respectively, making it the 34th African country to do so African Union, 2024). In 2025, it domesticated it through the Kampala Convention (Domestication & Enforcement, 2025) Act, which received presidential assent in February 2026.

Durable solutions

A durable solution is achieved when internally displaced persons no longer have displacement-specific protection and assistance needs and can exercise their rights without discrimination arising from displacement (IASC, 2010). The three recognised pathways are sustainable return to the place of origin, sustainable local integration in the area of displacement, and sustainable settlement elsewhere in the country. Assessing progress requires attention to eight criteria: long-term safety, security, and freedom of movement; an adequate standard of living; livelihoods and employment; effective mechanisms for restoring housing, land, and property or providing compensation; personal and other documentation; voluntary family

reunification; participation in public affairs; and access to effective remedies and justice (IASC, 2010). These are substantive outcomes, not consequences that follow automatically from relocation. Durable solutions take time, depend on the local context, and should involve the active participation of affected communities. Durable solutions and positive peace are complementary but not identical concepts: the former addresses displacement-specific needs and rights, whereas Galtung's (1969) positive peace concerns the wider reduction of structural violence and the advancement of social justice. This study uses the durable-solutions criteria to examine how reintegration may contribute to positive peace through reduced deprivation, equitable opportunities, participation, and accessible remedies. Voluntary and informed choices among the three pathways, meaningful community participation, and conditions monitored over time are essential; neither return nor camp closure alone establishes a durable solution (IASC, 2010; United Nations, 1998).

Theoretical framework

This study uses Johan Galtung's theory of peace, especially the difference between negative peace and positive peace. The framework has become widely used in peace and conflict studies because it looks beyond the simple absence of fighting (Galtung, 1969).

Negative peace means the reduction or absence of direct physical violence. In conflict areas, ceasefires, fewer attacks, recovered territory, and restored government control are often taken as signs of peace (Galtung, 1969). In North-East Nigeria, organised returns are often justified by the view that security has improved enough in some places for people to go back (Borno State Government, 2024).

Positive peace goes further. It includes the social, political, economic, and institutional conditions that allow people and communities to live with dignity, security, and fair access to opportunities. According to Galtung (1969), lasting peace requires addressing the deeper barriers that cause inequality and suffering.

This difference is useful when looking at solutions for displaced people. Less violence may allow returns, but it does not automatically mean communities can support returning families or provide what is needed for them to stay. Assessments must therefore look at physical security as well as housing, health care, education, livelihoods, infrastructure, justice, and social cohesion (IASC, 2010).

The framework also includes structural violence—harm that comes from social, political, or economic systems that stop people from meeting their basic needs (Galtung, 1969). In return areas, this can appear as ongoing poverty, poor public services, limited ways to earn a living, exclusion from resources, or difficulties getting land and property rights. These conditions can prevent successful reintegration even where direct violence has decreased (IOM et al., 2023).

Galtung's framework therefore offers a useful way to evaluate camp closure policies. It helps ask whether returns are only reducing the numbers of displaced people or whether they also support the wider conditions needed for recovery. This perspective is consistent with international standards, which hold that displacement is only resolved when people can enjoy their rights and live at a standard comparable to those who were not displaced (IASC, 2010; United Nations, 1998).

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative documentary review to examine the relationship between camp closure, durable solutions, and reintegration for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Borno State. The analysis draws on a wide range of secondary sources, including academic studies, government policy documents, humanitarian reports, and publications from international

organisations, with particular attention to displacement, camp closure, durable solutions, return and reintegration, and peacebuilding in North-East Nigeria. Key sources include the Borno State Strategy for Durable Solutions to Internal Displacement (2025–2027), reports by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC), and peer-reviewed literature. Humanitarian repositories (Refworld, ReliefWeb, etc.) and relevant government and agency websites were systematically searched, with the final search conducted on 31st August 2026 and covering the period from 1st January 2009 to 31st August 2026. The analytical framework included seminal theoretical and normative writings prior to this timeframe. Search terms combined location-specific terminology with terms on internal displacement, camp closure, return, resettlement, local integration, reintegration, and durable solutions; the references detail the exact search strings, filters, and retrieval dates.

Eligible documents were English-language full texts containing relevant empirical evidence on Borno State or policy and normative provisions directly applicable to the displacement response. Documents that were duplicates, unverifiable in terms of provenance, unavailable in full text, or outside the study's geographical or substantive scope were excluded. Nineteen documents were selected for thematic analysis. The materials were examined to identify key patterns and organised into categories such as camp closure, voluntariness of return, security, livelihood recovery, access to services, protection concerns, and outcomes related to durable solutions. These themes were then interpreted through Galtung's framework of negative and positive peace. As the study relies solely on secondary sources, no direct interviews or fieldwork were conducted, and returnees' lived experiences could not be captured. Consequently, the findings depend on the quality and availability of existing documents, and conclusions should be interpreted with these limitations in mind. Nevertheless, the use of multiple sources allowed for cross-checking and provided a reasonable basis for assessing the relationship between camp closure and durable solutions in North-East Nigeria. No human participants were involved, and only publicly available sources were used, so no special ethical approval was required.

Findings and discussion

Camp closure as a stabilisation strategy

The evidence indicates that the Borno State Government's camp closure policy emerged from humanitarian, political, and development considerations. After more than a decade of displacement, authorities increasingly saw long stays in camps as incompatible with recovery goals. Camp closures were presented as part of the state's stabilisation and reconstruction efforts. The Borno State Strategy for Durable Solutions to Internal Displacement (2025–2027) links lasting solutions to community recovery, self-reliance, sustainable development, and the goal of "Building Back Borno Better" (Borno State Government, 2024). Officials described returns as a way to restore normal life and rebuild affected communities. Improved security, repaired infrastructure, and the return of civil administration in some areas were identified as factors that made return possible (Borno State Government, 2024). At the same time, humanitarian assessments have noted that physical return should not automatically be seen as a lasting solution. An assessment in Bama Local Government Area found that successful reintegration depends not only on returning but also on access to basic services, livelihood opportunities, protection, and social cohesion in receiving communities (OCHA, 2024).

Voluntariness and decision-making in return processes

International standards say that return should be voluntary, safe, informed, and carried out with dignity. The Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement state that internally displaced persons should take part in decisions about their return, resettlement, and reintegration (United Nations, 1998). According to the DTM Nigeria - Household Intention Survey Report (April 2024) - Borno State, 67% of internally displaced households intended to return to their places of origin, 11% intended to locally integrate in their current locations of displacement, 1% intended to relocate to another LGA or state within Nigeria, and 1% preferred relocating to another country (Cameroon), while 20% remained undecided about their future intentions (IOM, 2024). Security, livelihoods, housing, and family or community networks were important factors in these decisions (IOM, 2025). However, decisions are also shaped by wider conditions. Uncertainty about future assistance, changes in camp conditions, and official announcements about camp closures can influence choices. Media and advocacy reports similarly indicate that some IDPs have resisted closures and relocation over safety concerns (Amnesty International, 2021; The Cable, 2025). Earlier assessments in the BAY States have similarly shown a complex relationship between what people say they prefer and the actual conditions needed for lasting reintegration (IOM et al., 2023). The findings suggest that voluntariness exists on a spectrum rather than as a simple yes or no. Some households actively seek to return, while others make decisions in constrained situations. This highlights the continued importance of protection-focused approaches in return programmes (IOM, 2024; United Nations, 1998).

Security improvements and continued protection concerns

Security remains essential for durable solutions. Evidence shows important progress in restoring government authority and supporting civilian return in parts of North-East Nigeria. The March 2026 Nigeria North-East displacement report (52) details 2.36 million IDPs and 2.28 million returnees driven by conflict, insecurity, and natural disasters (IOM, 2026). Most IDPs reside in host communities, camps, or on pathways to durable solutions. Improved security has increased returns, with displacement largely concentrated in Adamawa and Borno. Displacement tracking data record more than two million returnees across Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe States, reflecting improved access and perceptions of relative security in some areas. However, security gains are uneven. Humanitarian assessments continue to note remaining protection risks, movement restrictions, and concerns about civilian safety in several return locations (OCHA, 2024; IOM et al., 2023). These issues affect people's ability to farm, reach markets, earn a living, and move freely. The findings also suggest that security should not be understood only in military terms. Lasting reintegration depends on confidence in future stability, freedom of movement, and the ability to carry out everyday activities without fear of being displaced again (United Nations, 1998).

Access to basic services and living conditions

Access to essential services is one of the most important factors for successful reintegration. Government authorities and humanitarian partners have made considerable efforts to repair infrastructure and restore public services in conflict-affected areas. The Borno State Strategy for Durable Solutions identifies education, health, water, sanitation, housing, and public service delivery as key parts of lasting solutions (Borno State Government, 2024). Despite these efforts, assessments still find significant gaps in many return locations. In several communities, returnees face difficulties accessing adequate healthcare, education, clean water, and sanitation (OCHA, 2024). These findings matter because international standards define successful reintegration not only as physical return but as a situation in which formerly displaced people

can access rights and living conditions similar to those of people who were not displaced (IASC, 2010; United Nations, 1998). Restoring services is therefore a basic indicator of whether problems linked to displacement have truly been resolved (IOM et al., 2023).

Livelihood recovery and economic reintegration

The ability to earn a living consistently appears as a major factor in both return decisions and long-term reintegration. Recent intention surveys found that economic opportunities rank among the most important considerations for return or local integration (IOM, 2024, 2025). Many returning households want to restart farming, livestock rearing, fishing, and small trade. However, conflict-related damage, disrupted markets, limited access to farmland, and lack of productive assets continue to hold back recovery in many areas (IOM et al., 2023). IOM's assessment of sustainable solutions in Nigeria also identifies poor infrastructure, limited livelihood opportunities, and difficulties accessing land as persistent barriers (IOM, 2023). Successful reintegration cannot therefore be measured only by the number of people who have returned. Restoring sustainable livelihoods is central to reducing dependence on aid, building resilience, and supporting self-reliance among returnees (Borno State Government, 2024; IOM, 2023).

Durable solutions and the limits of negative peace

Viewed through Galtung's (1969) distinction between negative peace and positive peace, the findings show important progress in reducing direct violence in parts of North-East Nigeria. Improved security, greater state presence, and growing numbers of returnees indicate movement away from the most acute phase of the crisis (IOM, 2023, 2024). However, ongoing challenges with livelihoods, services, housing, and protection suggest that the wider conditions of positive peace are not yet evenly established. Durable solutions frameworks similarly emphasise that displacement cannot be considered resolved until people have lasting access to rights, safety, services, and economic opportunities (IASC, 2010; United Nations, 1998; IOM et al., 2023). The findings therefore highlight the difference between return and reintegration. Return is an important step, but it does not automatically mean lasting solutions have been achieved. Sustainable reintegration depends on whether returnees can rebuild their lives in conditions of safety, dignity, inclusion, and long-term stability (Borno State Government, 2024; IOM et al., 2023).

Conclusion and recommendations

This study examined camp closure and return policies in Borno State through the lens of durable solutions and Galtung's concept of positive peace. The findings suggest that while camp closure has become a central part of the state's recovery efforts, the extent to which closures lead to lasting solutions varies across locations.

At the same time, challenges continue. Many return areas still have limited access to essential services, fragile livelihood opportunities, housing difficulties, and ongoing protection risks. Humanitarian assessments across North-East Nigeria show that these issues continue to affect the quality and sustainability of reintegration for returning populations (IOM et al., 2023; OCHA, 2024).

The study therefore argues that durable solutions are best understood as long-term processes with measurable outcomes rather than single administrative events. Camp closure may form part of a lasting solutions process, but it should not be seen as proof that problems linked to displacement have been resolved. Lasting reintegration depends on whether returnees can access safety, services, livelihoods, and opportunities to rebuild their lives with dignity and self-reliance (IASC, 2010; United Nations, 1998).

A key implication is the need to shift attention from return numbers alone toward what happens after return. Indicators such as access to education, healthcare, livelihood opportunities, housing security, social cohesion, and freedom of movement may give a more accurate picture of progress than the number of camps closed or households relocated (IOM et al., 2023).

The experience of North-East Nigeria shows that progress toward durable solutions requires balancing recovery goals with internationally recognised protection standards. Camp closure initiatives are most likely to contribute to lasting peace when they follow, rather than come before, the establishment of conditions that allow people to return voluntarily, safely, and sustainably. Viewed through Galtung's (1969) framework, the move from negative peace to positive peace remains essential if return is accompanied by real reintegration rather than simply moving people to places where vulnerabilities continue.

The study makes the following recommendations:

i. The Borno State government and development partners should place greater emphasis on monitoring what happens after return rather than focusing mainly on return figures. Monitoring should include indicators on security, access to services, livelihoods, housing conditions, education, healthcare, and social cohesion. This would give a fuller picture of reintegration outcomes and progress toward durable solutions.

ii. Federal, state, and local governments should focus on improving livelihoods in areas where people have returned. Lasting reintegration depends heavily on households being able to support themselves economically. Investments in agricultural recovery, vocational skills, small-business support, market access, and financial inclusion should remain central. Livelihood programmes should target both returnees and host communities to reduce competition over limited resources.

iii. Development actors should support principled returns by making essential services available. Returns are more likely to last where communities can access quality education, healthcare, water, sanitation, and other public services. Continued investment in service infrastructure and staffing should accompany return and relocation efforts, especially in heavily affected areas.

iv. Governments at all levels and traditional institutions should work to resolve housing, land, and property issues. Unresolved disputes over housing, land, and property can hinder lasting reintegration. Authorities should strengthen land administration, documentation, dispute-resolution mechanisms, and legal assistance to protect returnees' rights and reduce the risk of future conflict.

v. The Borno State government should maintain a principled approach in all return initiatives. Returns should continue to be guided by voluntariness, safety, dignity, and informed decision-making (Global Protection Cluster, 2024). Displaced people should receive accurate and timely information about conditions in potential return areas and should be meaningfully involved in decisions that affect their futures. Implementation should also be aligned with the obligations that Nigeria's domestication of the Kampala Convention places on federal and state authorities.

vi. Researchers should assess durable solutions beyond the number of camps closed or households returned. Greater attention should be given to indicators linked to positive peace, including economic inclusion, service access, community participation, perceptions of safety, and long-term resilience. These indicators provide a clearer measure of whether problems linked to displacement have truly been resolved.

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