

ASSESSING THE PERCEIVED EFFECTIVENESS AND IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES OF LIVELIHOOD SUPPORT PROGRAMS AMONG IDPS IN BORNO AND YOBE STATES

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ABSTRACT

The global displacement crisis continues to affect millions worldwide, with refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) experiencing severe socio-economic challenges. In Nigeria, the insurgency in the Northeastern states of Borno and Yobe has led to substantial internal displacement, heightening the need for sustainable interventions. Livelihood programs have emerged as a central strategy to reduce reliance on humanitarian aid and enhance resilience among IDPs. This study adopted a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) conducted across displacement camps in both states. Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS, while qualitative data were transcribed and thematically examined with NVivo. Findings identified key livelihood initiatives vocational training, microfinance, agricultural support, entrepreneurship, and cash transfers that contributed to improved food security, income generation, and skills development. However, program effectiveness was constrained by insecurity, inadequate funding, weak coordination, limited market access, and gender disparities, particularly affecting women and persons with disabilities. The study highlights the need for a comprehensive policy framework, sustainable financing, improved security, expanded vocational and digital training, inclusive financial services, and stronger multi-stakeholder collaboration. Strengthening livelihood opportunities is essential for fostering long-term self-reliance, stability, and socio-economic development in conflict-affected regions.

Keywords: refugee, support programs, internally displaced persons, livelihood, sustainability.

Introduction

The global displacement crisis has intensified over the past decades, with millions of people displaced due to conflict, persecution, and natural disasters [1]. As of mid-2024, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reported approximately 122.6 million forcibly displaced individuals worldwide [2], including 32 million refugees under its mandate and 6 million Palestinian refugees under the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA). Notably, 71% of displaced persons are hosted in low- and middle-income countries [3]. In Nigeria, internal displacement remains a serious issue, particularly in Borno and Yobe, which are states located in North-Eastern Nigeria. As of June 2024, an estimated 2,084,063 internally displaced persons (IDPs) were recorded in Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe states, with 92% displaced due to insurgency and 6% due to communal violence [4]. These populations often face acute challenges, including poverty, limited access to education and healthcare, and restricted livelihood opportunities, all of which hinder their socio-economic reintegration. To mitigate these challenges, the Nigerian government, in collaboration with international organizations, have implemented livelihood interventions, including vocational training, cash transfer programs, and agricultural support [5]. However, questions remain about the long-term sustainability, scalability, and overall impact of these programs.

Globally, internally displaced persons (IDPs) outnumber refugees and asylum seekers. Of the 82.4 million forcibly displaced persons worldwide [6], 55 million are IDPs—48 million displaced by conflict and violence, and 7 million due to natural disasters [7]. Unlike refugees, who are protected under international law, the responsibility for IDPs lies primarily with national authorities. Displaced populations often endure prolonged periods in temporary settlements that evolve into permanent dwellings, resulting in long-term vulnerabilities such as poor health, food insecurity, and psychological distress [8].

Recognizing the need for durable solutions recently, humanitarian agendas have shifted from traditional camps to settlement models that promote resilience and sustainable development. The International Organization for Migration (IOM)'s Progressive Resolution of Displacement Situations (PRDS) framework (2022) provides strategic guidance for addressing the complexities of displacement [9]. Hence, emphasizing collaborative action among communities, governments, and humanitarian actors to foster long-term recovery and integration. Displacement due to conflict and disaster disrupts livelihoods, leading to a loss of income sources and support systems. Livelihood programs have become critical tools for fostering self-reliance, reducing dependency on aid, and promoting socio-economic inclusion. Despite the existence of numerous interventions including entrepreneurship development, skills acquisition, and microfinance many programs face limitations in effectiveness and scalability. Despite the expansion of livelihood interventions targeting internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Northeast Nigeria, there remains limited empirical evidence on their actual effectiveness beyond beneficiary perceptions. Many existing studies rely heavily on descriptive accounts without critically examining implementation gaps, sustainability concerns, and contextual constraints. Furthermore, there is insufficient theoretical grounding to explain how and why such programs influence livelihood outcomes. This creates a gap between policy assumptions and measurable development outcomes. Therefore, this study seeks to critically assess the perceived effectiveness, implementation challenges, and sustainability of livelihood support programs in Borno and Yobe States.

Conceptual Framework

The diagram in Figure 1 provides a roadmap for the study, showing how implementation, challenges, and demographics interact to influence perceptions of program effectiveness.

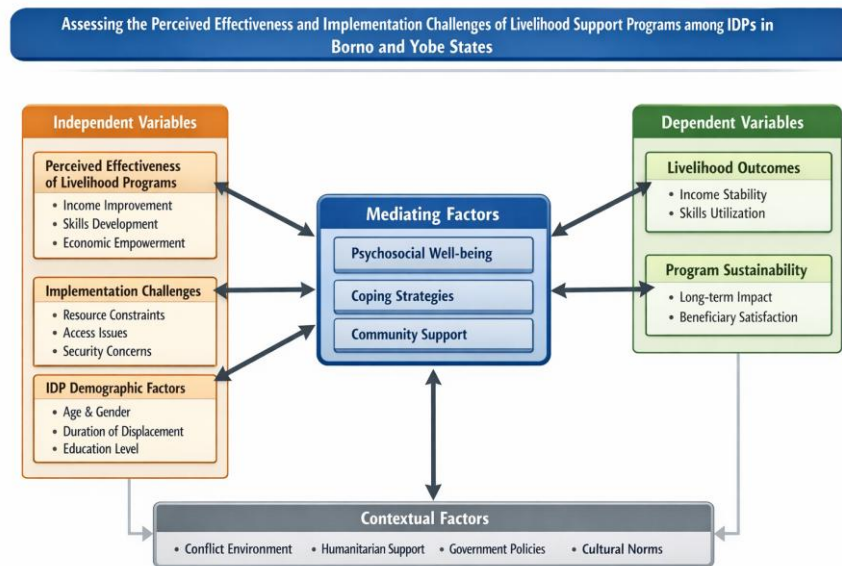


Figure 1: Schematic diagram for conceptual framework.

The conceptual framework for this study is designed to examine the factors influencing the perceived effectiveness of livelihood support programs among internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Borno and Yobe States. It illustrates the interplay between program implementation, implementation challenges, and contextual factors, and how these collectively shape the outcomes experienced by beneficiaries. The independent variables in the framework include program implementation factors, implementation challenges, and IDP demographic characteristics. Program implementation factors refer to the manner in which livelihood support initiatives are delivered, encompassing the adequacy of resources, relevance of program activities, accessibility, and timeliness of interventions. Implementation challenges capture the barriers that may hinder program effectiveness, such as resource constraints, limited access, and security concerns. IDP demographic characteristics, including age, gender, education level, and duration of displacement, are also considered as factors that can influence beneficiaries’ experiences and perceptions of program outcomes.

The dependent variable is the perceived effectiveness of livelihood support programs, measured through indicators such as improvement in income, skills development, economic empowerment, long-term impact, and beneficiary satisfaction. This variable reflects how IDPs evaluate the success and utility of the livelihood support initiatives provided to them. The framework also incorporates mediating factors—psychosocial well-being, coping strategies, and community support—which help explain the mechanisms through which program implementation and challenges affect perceived effectiveness. These mediators highlight the importance of individual and community-level responses in shaping the outcomes of livelihood support programs. Additionally, contextual factors, including the conflict environment, humanitarian support, government policies, and cultural norms, are integrated into the framework as moderating influences. These factors do not directly determine program outcomes but can strengthen or weaken the relationships between independent variables and

perceived effectiveness, reflecting the complex realities within which IDPs live and programs are implemented.

Related Works

Several studies have examined the complexities surrounding livelihood support for displaced populations, highlighting both progress and persistent challenges in intervention design and implementation.

For instance, [10] investigated the role of social infrastructure in shaping the return decisions of internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Northeastern Nigeria. Using a mixed-methods approach that included surveys of 866 IDPs across eight camps and focus group discussions in two camps. The study found a weak but positive correlation between the restoration of social infrastructure and IDPs' willingness to return home. This suggests that while rebuilding schools, hospitals, and roads can encourage return, other factors—such as security and economic stability may play a more decisive role. Hence, the study underscores the need for a multidimensional strategy that combines infrastructure development with broader socio-economic support. In a different context, [11] explores the emergence of digital livelihood programs in refugee settings. This approach aimed at equipping displaced individuals with digital skills and facilitating access to remote employment opportunities, including freelancing, online teaching, and coding. Digital livelihoods, by reducing barriers such as restricted mobility and legal constraints, provide viable pathways to economic self-reliance. However, the study identifies significant limitations, including poor digital literacy, unequal access to technology, and the volatility of digital labour markets. The study suggests context-sensitive programming, enhanced cross-sector collaboration, and stronger regulatory frameworks to protect displaced workers in the digital economy. The role of social capital and entrepreneurship in facilitating livelihood recovery among displaced populations in Northeast Nigeria was studied [12]. Through in-depth interviews with 15 displaced individuals, the study reveals how displacement catalyzes new social networks that foster entrepreneurial opportunities. The study proposed a conceptual shift from bonding capital, which characterized relationships before displacement, to bridging and linking capital that emerge in camp settings. This transformation facilitates access to resources and markets, enabling displaced persons to build resilient livelihoods. Hence, the study recommended policy interventions that go beyond humanitarian aid to promote self-reliance through entrepreneurship. Conventional livelihood programs that rely on isolated interventions, such as microfinance or vocational training, were examined [13]. The study advocates for integrated or graduation approaches that combine financial assistance with training, mentoring, and asset transfers. The findings suggest that these comprehensive strategies are more effective in fragile settings, promoting long-term economic resilience. The need for prioritizing livelihood support in the early stage of the humanitarian response, contributing to the socio-economic resilience, is emphasized [14]. The study argued that structural services such as housing, transport, and childcare are essential to enabling displaced populations to sustain economic activities. Furthermore, the study advocates for area-based approaches and municipal-level interventions, particularly in urban settings where service delivery is more feasible.

The UNHCR (2023) assesses the progress of the Global Compact on Refugees (GCR) in promoting sustainable livelihoods. While acknowledging notable achievements, the report highlights persistent gaps in policy implementation and calls for improved support for entrepreneurship among both host communities and refugees. The effectiveness of integrated livelihood programs that combine financial capital with education and skill development examined [15]. The results of the study aligned with those of [16], who demonstrate that unconditional cash transfers can significantly improve food security and household livelihoods. However, both studies caution that the size and consistency of support are critical for achieving sustained impact. The Technical and Operational Performance Support (TOPS) Uganda

Graduation Randomized Control Trial (2022) provides empirical evidence of early success in a graduation program targeting displaced communities. The program led to improvements in food security, nutrition, and self-reliance; although the specific contributions of individual program components remain unclear, indicating a need for further disaggregation in impact evaluation. A critical perspective on area-based approaches in remote settings was investigated [17]. Hence, argue that such interventions are less effective in underdeveloped rural economies and suggest prioritizing urban areas, where dynamic markets and existing infrastructure are more conducive to livelihood development. While existing studies provide valuable insights into livelihood interventions, most adopt descriptive approaches and focus on program outcomes without critically examining implementation processes or contextual limitations. There is also limited integration of theoretical perspectives to explain variations in program performance. This study addresses these gaps by combining empirical evidence with conceptual analysis to provide a more nuanced understanding of livelihood interventions in displacement settings.

Contribution of the Study

Despite the implementation of various livelihood programs targeting refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Nigeria, a significant gap persists between policy objectives and on-the-ground realities. In Borno and Yobe States, many displaced persons continued to face severe economic challenges, despite the efforts of government bodies and international organizations. Studies, such as those by the World Bank (2021), reveal that IDPs often lack access to stable employment, vocational training, and the resources necessary for sustainable livelihoods. The situation is exacerbated by ongoing insecurity, economic instability, and inadequate infrastructure, all of which hinder the effectiveness and long-term impact of these programs. Many initiatives suffer from inadequate funding, limiting their scalability and reach. Additionally, poor coordination among government agencies, NGOs, and other stakeholders results in fragmented implementation. Cultural and socio-political complexities further complicate program design and delivery, while a limited market, access—particularly in rural areas—prevents many IDPs from sustaining income-generating activities.

This study aims to assess the effectiveness of livelihood programs targeting IDPs and refugees in Borno and Yobe States to evaluate current initiatives by the National Commission for Refugees, Migrants, and Internally Displaced Persons (NCFRMI) and the Northeast Development Commission (NEDC). Furthermore, the study seeks to identify key challenges and best practices to enhance program sustainability and impact, ultimately contributing to improved strategies for durable solutions for displaced populations.

The remaining sections of this paper are structured as follows: Section 5 outlines the methodology employed in conducting the study, detailing the data collection procedures and data analysis used. Section 6 presents and discusses the results, highlighting key findings and their implications. Finally, Section 7 offers the conclusion, summarizing the main insights of the study limitations and suggesting potential directions for future research.

Materials and Methods

Research Design: The study adopts a descriptive research design to explore and document existing livelihood programs for internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees in Borno and Yobe States. This design is appropriate for identifying patterns, behaviors, and relationships without manipulating variables. To ensure a comprehensive analysis, the study employs a mixed-methods approach, integrating both qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis techniques. This methodological framework enables the assessment of

program effectiveness by combining measurable outcomes with in-depth insights into participants' experiences.

Study Area: This research focuses on Borno and Yobe States, located in Northeastern Nigeria, both of which have been profoundly affected by the Boko Haram insurgency. The protracted conflict has resulted in widespread displacement, particularly in rural areas, leading to a significant population of internally displaced persons (IDPs) who depend heavily on humanitarian assistance and livelihood support. Borno State hosts one of the largest concentrations of IDPs in Nigeria. Its complex security landscape poses serious challenges to resource access and service delivery. The state accommodates numerous IDP camps and host communities, where various livelihood interventions are carried out by governmental and non-governmental organizations. Yobe State, also impacted by the insurgency, has experienced substantial displacement due to insecurity. Livelihood initiatives in the state are geared toward integrating IDPs into host communities through income-generating activities, agricultural inputs, and vocational training. Focus group discussions will be conducted in selected displacement camps across Borno and Yobe States to elicit diverse perspectives and examine group dynamics and shared experiences regarding livelihood interventions.

Table 1: IDP Camps and locations in Borno and Yobe enumerated in the study

Borno		Yobe	
IDP Camp	Location	IDP Camp	Location
AV-Ngala	Log. 12.35 Lat. 14.17	VC-Murfa Kalam	Log. 11.91 Lat. 11.72
GDSS-Monguno	Log. 12.67 Lat. 13.60	BBZ-Bunigari	Log. 12.02 Lat. 11.21
DCW-Gwoza	Log. 11.08 Lat. 13.68	AYBC-Damaturu	Log. 11.69 Lat. 11.94
ABC-Benisheik	Log. 11.81 Lat. 12.49	HV-Maisandari	Log. 11.73 Lat. 12.01
FC-Maiduguri	Log. 13.15 Lat. 11.89	Kukareta	Log. 11.76 Lat. 12.23
GSSSS-Bama	Log. 11.25 Lat. 14.14	UK-Yunusari	Log. 11.96 Lat. 12.98
OSC-Damboia	Log. 12.75 Lat. 11.16		

Population Study: The sample size of 300 was considered adequate for descriptive analysis and ensuring representation across key stakeholder groups. However, it is not intended for statistical generalization but for indicative insights. The study population comprises refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) residing in Borno and Yobe States, along with staff and beneficiaries of organizations implementing livelihood programs in the region. Specifically, it includes:

- i. **IDPs and Refugees:** Individuals and households displaced by conflict and currently residing in designated camps or host communities. These groups represent the primary recipients of livelihood interventions.
- ii. **Implementing Organizations:** Personnel from government agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and international bodies such as UNHCR and IOM involved in program design and delivery.

Due to the fluid and evolving nature of displacement, however is difficult to determine the exact size of the study population. However, approximate figures can be inferred from available data provided by humanitarian agencies operating in the areas.

Sampling Technique: Stratified random sampling will be used to select IDPs and refugees from camps and host communities, ensuring proportional representation across relevant demographic categories. Within each stratum, participants will be randomly selected

to minimize selection bias. For organizational staff, a purposive sampling technique will be applied to target key personnel directly involved in the design and implementation of livelihood programs. This approach ensures adequate representation of key subgroups within the population, including male and female IDPs, various age groups, and beneficiaries of different livelihood programs. A sample size of 300 respondents will be drawn from internally displaced persons (IDPs), refugees, and staff of implementing organizations across Borno and Yobe States. Specifically, the sample will comprise 200 IDPs and refugees—100 from each state—and 100 organizational staff, with 50 selected from each state.

Data Collection and Analysis: Quantitative data obtained through questionnaires will be analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages to provide insight into the types of livelihood programs available to IDPs, participation rates, and their perceived impact. Data entry and analysis will be conducted using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). Qualitative data from interviews and focus group discussions will be transcribed and subjected to thematic analysis to identify implementation challenges and assess their influence on the livelihoods of IDPs in the study areas. The study relies primarily on descriptive statistics; therefore, findings should be interpreted as indicative rather than conclusive evidence of program effectiveness.

Ethical Consideration: This study adhered to ethical research standards. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all respondents. Confidentiality and anonymity were ensured throughout the data collection and reporting process. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any stage. No personal identifiers were recorded

Results and Discussion

The collected data were systematically analyzed across several key dimensions, including the demographic characteristics of the respondents, the nature and scope of the livelihood programs implemented, the extent and frequency of beneficiaries' participation in these initiatives, and the perceived socio-economic outcomes resulting from program engagement. This analytical framework facilitated a nuanced understanding of both the effectiveness and limitations of livelihood interventions within the context of displacement. Although 60% of respondents rated the programs as highly effective, this finding should be interpreted with caution, as it reflects perception rather than objectively measured outcomes. The relatively low participation in microfinance programs (10%) suggests structural barriers such as access to credit and financial literacy gaps. Furthermore, gender differences in participation indicate potential inequalities in program access

Summary of the responses

The study sampled 300 participants, including 200 displaced persons (100 each from Borno and Yobe States) and 100 staff from implementing organizations. Table 6.1 presents their demographic characteristics and the perceived effectiveness of support programs.

Table 2: Demographic profile of respondents and perceived impact of support.

Variable	Description	Respondents	Percentage
Age	18-30yrs	120	40%
	31-45yrs	105	35%
	46-60yrs	45	15%
	Above 60yrs	30	10%
Gender	Male	135	45%
	Female	165	55%
Education/ Qualification	Non-Formal Education	60	20%
	Primary Education	90	30%
	Secondary Education	105	35%
	Higher Education	45	15%
Livelihood Programs	Agricultural Support Program	120	40%
	Vocational Training	90	30%
	Cash-for-Work Program	60	20%
	Micro-Finance/Small Business Program	30	10%
Program Effectiveness	Highly Effective	180	60%
	Moderately Effective	90	30%
	Ineffective	30	10%

Source: Field Survey, 2025

The demographic characteristics of the respondents reveal a predominantly youthful population. The largest age group is between 18–30 years, comprising 40% of the sample (120 respondents), followed by those aged 31–45 years (35%, or 105 respondents). Respondents aged 46–60 years account for 15% (45 individuals), while those aged above 60 years represent the smallest group at 10% (30 respondents). In terms of gender distribution, females make up the majority of the sample at 55% (165 respondents), while males account for 45% (135 respondents). Although the gender distribution is relatively balanced, the data reflect a slightly higher female representation, with females outnumbering males by 30 individuals. Educational qualifications of respondents show varying levels of formal education. A total of 60 respondents (20%) reported having no formal education, while 30% of the respondents had attained primary education. The largest group, 105 respondents (35%), had secondary education, and 45 respondents (15%) had attained higher education. These figures suggest that a significant portion of the population possesses lower levels of formal education, which possibly influences their access to livelihood opportunities.

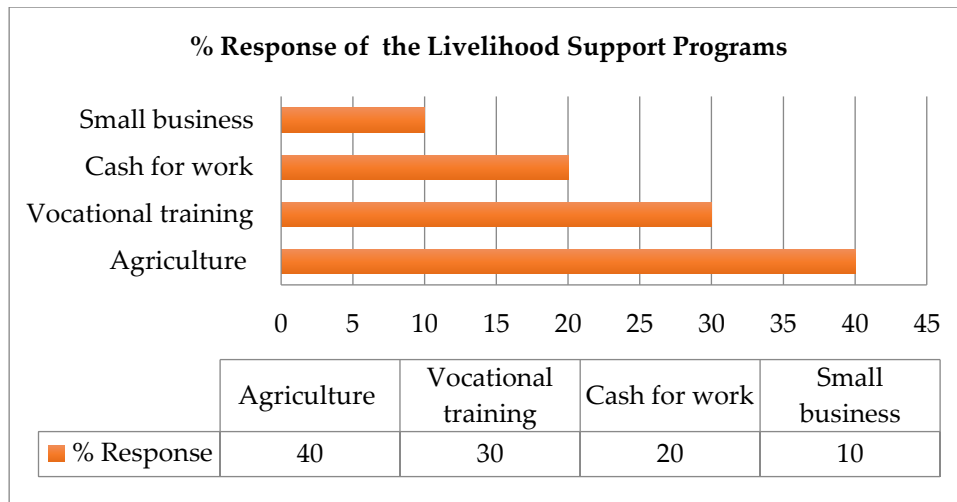


Figure 2: Livelihood and Support Interventions for IDPs and Refugees.

Participation in various livelihood support programs also varied. The Agricultural Support Program recorded the highest level of engagement, with 120 respondents (40%), providing resources, training, and assistance aimed at improving agricultural productivity. Vocational Training Programs involved 90 respondents (30%), equipping individuals with skills for specific trades and enhancing employability. Cash-for-Work programs, which offer temporary employment linked to community development, had 60 respondents (20%). The least participation was recorded in Microfinance and Small Business Support, with only 30 respondents (10%), targeting small business development through financial services and entrepreneurial training. The effectiveness of the livelihood programs was assessed based on respondent feedback, categorized into three levels: Highly Effective, Moderately Effective, and Ineffective. A majority of 180 respondents (60%) perceived the programs as effective, indicating a strong perceived positive impact on their livelihoods. While 30% of the respondents recorded moderate effectiveness of the program, suggesting it is beneficial, they did not fully meet all the expectations. A minority of 30 respondents (10%) rated the programs as ineffective, reflecting dissatisfaction or unmet needs within the intervention framework.

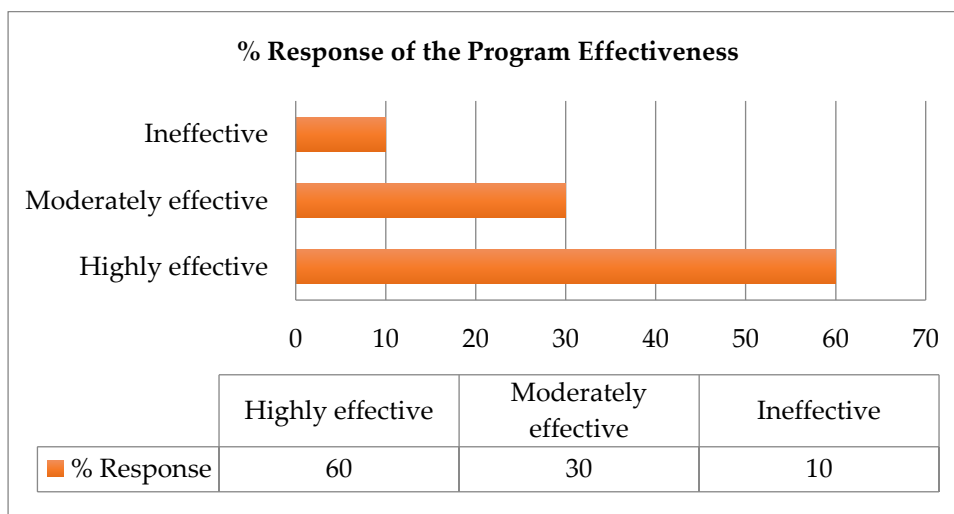


Figure 3: Evaluation of Livelihood Program Impact on Beneficiaries' Economic and Personal Development

The qualitative data obtained from interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) were transcribed and thematically analyzed using NVivo software. The analysis revealed four major themes. Firstly, the impact of livelihood programs on IDPs was widely acknowledged, with many participants reporting improvements in household income, food security, and living conditions, particularly through agricultural support and vocational training. For example, a female participant from Borno State noted that tailoring training enabled her to support both the nutritional and educational needs of her children. Secondly, the participants highlighted challenges in accessing livelihood programs, including limited information, security concerns, inadequate transportation, and bureaucratic delays. A male respondent from Yobe State observed that delays in disseminating information about training opportunities often caused them to miss enrolment deadlines. Third, concerns were raised regarding the sustainability of livelihood programs. Many IDPs feared that the benefits would diminish once external aid declined. As one NGO staff member emphasized, although programs were beneficial, ensuring long-term self-reliance required access to markets and financing, which remained a critical gap. Finally, the role of community-based organizations (CBOs) emerged as significant. CBOs were instrumental in facilitating access to programs by disseminating information, assisting with registration, and providing additional support. A community leader from Yobe affirmed that without CBOs, many IDPs would have lacked awareness of available opportunities.

Conclusion

The study identified a range of livelihood programs targeting internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees, including vocational training, microfinance schemes, agricultural support, entrepreneurship development, and cash transfer initiatives. These interventions, implemented by government agencies, international organizations (such as UNHCR, IOM, and the World Bank), and local NGOs, were designed to enhance economic resilience among displaced populations. Vocational training was particularly impactful in improving IDPs' employability in trades such as tailoring, carpentry, and mechanics. Microfinance initiatives enabled some IDPs to access capital for small business ventures, although limited funding constrained large-scale outcomes. Agricultural support facilitated engagement in farming but was hindered by insecurity, restricted access to land, and adverse climate conditions. Cash transfer programs provided immediate financial relief but raised concerns regarding long-term sustainability. Persistent insecurity and conflict constrained IDPs' ability to participate fully in economic activities. Funding shortfalls undermined program continuity, while weak coordination among government agencies, NGOs, and donors led to inefficiencies and duplication. Limited access to markets further restricted income-generating opportunities. Gender disparities were also evident, with women and persons with disabilities facing greater barriers to participation.

Recommendations

In line with the findings, the following are hereby recommended:

- a. **Strengthening Government Policies and Support:** Developing a national policy framework for sustainable IDP livelihoods, increasing budgetary allocations, and integrating IDPs into national development plans.
- b. **Enhancing Security and Stability:** Expanding protection in camps and host communities, promoting conflict resolution, and ensuring safe access to farmlands and markets.
- c. **Expanding Vocational and Entrepreneurship Training:** Scaling up skills development in high-demand and digital sectors, with a focus on youth and women.

- d. **Improving Access to Financial Resources:** Introducing low-interest credit facilities, grant-based support, and financial literacy programs to build resilience.
- e. **Strengthening Collaboration Among Stakeholders:** Establishing coordination mechanisms and monitoring frameworks, while engaging the private sector through corporate social responsibility initiatives.
- f. **Promoting Gender-Inclusive Programs:** Expanding women's access to training, finance, and business support, and ensuring inclusive opportunities for persons with disabilities.

Declaration

The authors declared that no conflict of interest.

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