

# Their Views and Voices: A Photovoice Documentation of Resettled Persons' Experiences in Sabon Gari, Maiduguri-Borno State, Nigeria

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## Abstract

The post-insurgency phase typically leaves displaced persons with the following options: voluntary repatriation, integration, or resettlement. Each option requires the support of governmental and non-governmental actors for successful execution. Arguably, the post-insurgency phase in the context of the Boko Haram-driven conflict in Northeast Nigeria has given more attention to the repatriation of the displaced population, to the neglect and disadvantage of the integrated and resettled displaced population. Following the official closure of all formal Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps in Maiduguri sometime in December 2021, a significant fraction of the Displaced Persons chose the integration and resettlement option. Hence, they moved to new settlements within and around Maiduguri metropolis to begin life afresh. Sabon Gari is one such community in Maiduguri, where displaced persons choose to settle. This community, located on the outskirts of Maiduguri, the capital of Borno State, is one of the communities that witnessed the influx of a sizable number of IDPs who chose to integrate or resettle. It is against this background that this paper employed an art-based research approach, with a specific focus on the photovoice methodology, to explore the experiences of these resettled displaced populations in the Sabon Gari community, aiming to assess their general well-being following the insurgency. The findings of this paper will highlight the challenges these individuals face and the interventions they desire to improve their overall well-being from their perspective. From their perspective, such identified interventions will contribute meaningfully to their resettlement and align with their cultural orientation. The overarching goal of this activity and paper is to create a platform for the voices of the resettled population to be heard while simultaneously empowering them as advocates for their community.

**Keywords:** Post-insurgency, Resettlement, Photovoice, Well-being, Culture

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## 1. Introduction

Approximately three million people have been displaced from their original communities due to the Boko Haram insurgency in Northeast Nigeria (IOM, 2022). Out of this figure, about 1.8 million are from Borno State, the epicentre of the Boko Haram insurgency (Human Rights Watch, 2022). IDPs affected by the insurgency were sheltered in official and non-official camps located within and around Maiduguri. In contrast, others were sheltered in informal, camp-like settings within various host communities, primarily in the capital of Borno State.

The experiences of the IDPs during the period of protracted displacement varied widely. While some IDPs faced challenging situations in terms of their welfare, others had life-transforming experiences that positively impacted their financial and general well-being (Shallangwa, 2021). This, therefore, resulted in various decisions when the official closure of the camp was announced and subsequently implemented by the Borno State government beginning in December 2021. As of November 2022, the IOM Data Tracking Matrix indicates that approximately 898,942 IDPs have been returned to their original places of residence in Borno State. On the other hand, although the exact figure is unknown, thousands of IDPs chose to remain in Maiduguri (Humangle, 2023).

Sabon Gari, located in the outskirts of Maiduguri, along the Jiddari Polo/Molai axis, is one of several communities in Maiduguri that hosts a large number of resettled IDPs. The decision by these displaced persons, who have been uprooted from the camps, to pitch their tents in Sabon Gari is primarily due to the emerging status of the community, which is currently populated by average-income earners who have been able to afford land and build houses to live in, as well as rent. Other reasons contributing to the large number of persons resettling in communities within Maiduguri are tied to the largely still insecurity in locations that still harbour or are frequently attacked by the insurgents. However, in the case of Sabongari, what makes it a favourable community to resettle in is the abundance of several uncompleted buildings and open spaces within the community. Owners of such properties have been described as often willing to offer these spaces and unfinished

buildings to the IDPs to help alleviate their challenges and accommodation needs. Some IDPs who have encountered some form of prosperity are also among those able to acquire properties within the community. Sabon Gari, therefore, presents a unique community with many complexities due to the mix of people residing there. The majority of the IDPs who reside in Sabon Gari are from camps around the area, like the Bakassi IDP camp, St. Hillary IDP camp and Jiddari IDP camp.

The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is the UN-led agency responsible for refugee and IDP protection and assistance. In line with this responsibility, they have proposed three solutions for IDPs, also known as "Durable Solutions". These solutions aim to help IDPs attain self-sufficiency, thereby eliminating their reliance on aid and enabling displaced people to participate fully in socio-economic life, either at their new place of residence or their place of habitual residence. For IDPs, durable solutions can be achieved through sustainable reintegration at the place of origin (return), Sustainable local integration in areas where IDPs take refuge (local settlement) or sustainable integration in another part of the country (settlement elsewhere in the country) (UN, 2011). It is essential to note that displaced persons have the right to make a voluntary choice from the available options. Additionally, each of the options requires that a significant amount of support and assistance be rendered to the affected persons over time until they can rebuild their lives. This is what determines the sustainability of the durable solutions.

In the Borno context, the reintegration or return of internally displaced persons (IDPs) to their original homes is arguably the government's most preferred solution. However, such returns should only take place once the root causes of displacement have been fully addressed (Teferra, 2012); this has not been done or achieved to any appreciable degree. This is likely why a significant number of IDPs have chosen to remain in Maiduguri rather than return to their communities of origin, which are either still occupied or prone to periodic attacks from and by the Boko Haram insurgents.

It is important to emphasise that IDPs have the right to make voluntary decisions regarding their resettlement. Regardless of the option they choose, whether to return, integrate locally, or relocate elsewhere, they are entitled to support, assistance, and protection from the appropriate authorities, as outlined in the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement (*citation needed*). In the context of the Sabon Gari community, this goal has not been achieved, which is why the community was purposefully selected as the ideal location for this study.

This paper seeks to capture the lived experiences of integrated IDPs in the Sabon Gari area of Maiduguri through their voices and perspectives. To achieve this, the study employs the Photovoice methodology, which enables participants to document their realities visually. This approach underscores their hopes and aspirations for their community, providing them with a platform to express how their experiences in displacement impact their holistic well-being in their "new home." Additionally, it serves to amplify their voices, empowering them as advocates for themselves and their community and fostering dialogue that could lead to improvements in their needs and rights.

### *1.1 Problem Statement*

While the UN Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement and the framework for durable solutions clearly state that IDPs are entitled to support, assistance, and protection, a critical gap has emerged following the closure of official IDP camps in Borno State. Attention from both the government and non-governmental organisations has increasingly shifted toward returnees, often at the expense of those who have chosen to integrate locally in areas such as Sabon Gari.

This shift is evident in the diversion of aid projects by both governmental and non-governmental organisations to communities in local government areas (LGAs) outside Maiduguri, the capital of Borno State. While prioritising returnees is commendable, the challenge lies in neglecting those who have opted for local integration. Having lost their livelihoods and the support systems that existed within the camps, integrated IDPs are now left to fend for themselves with little to no assistance to help them rebuild their lives.

The exclusion of integrated IDPs from aid and support mechanisms directly undermines the goal of durable solutions, as it delays, weakens, or completely obstructs their chances of full recovery and reintegration. This neglect compromises their overall well-being, limiting their access to essential services such as:

- Free healthcare services
- Education
- Psychosocial support

- Water and sanitation
- Food supplies

These are services they previously had access to while in the camps (Humanangle *citation needed*).

As such, this paper seeks to amplify the voices of integrated IDPs, allowing them to tell their stories in their own words. Specifically, the paper focuses on their well-being and examines how their lives have changed since deciding to remain in Maiduguri.

The study responds to three key questions:

1. What defines a community?
2. What aspects of their new communities do they wish to preserve?
3. What changes do they want to see?

## 2. Literature Review

The concept of well-being has frequently been linked to and influenced by economic thinking, often measured by the increase in real Per Capita Gross Domestic Product (GDP), and it is often reflected by income (Throsby, 2017). Unfortunately, this reduces the concept of well-being to being financially well-off or materially affluent, which indirectly translates to “well-having” or “having much” (cf. Fromm 19, cited in Gasper 2004). This approach to well-being overlooks the social, cultural, and environmental factors that influence human existence, such as peace, health, nutrition, inclusion, social connections, and individual fulfilment, among many other factors that vary from society to individual parameters. These are and should be considered of equal importance if societies must thrive. While the authors of this paper generally align with the above definition and description of well-being, for this study, well-being is and will be understood as what is suitable for an individual or a group of persons with unifying qualities, such as are possessed by the displaced and integrated persons in this study, with the recognition that the affected individuals themselves should determine such definitions. In this context, well-being is considered the extent to which these individuals perceive and describe how well their lives are going. Well-being is widely accepted as a central goal that drives personal aspirations and endeavours. However, it is essential to acknowledge that well-being, in the context of this article, is inherently considered subjective based on the experiences of the study participants. Therefore, the definition adopted in this study is not presented as a universal standard but rather as one that is specifically tailored to the context of this research and its participants.

According to Hill et. Al. (2023) suggests that human beings strive to live meaningful lives of value, which they would want to achieve even in the face of challenges. It is in trying to find this value and meaning that human life becomes complex. The complexity of human life revolves around four main aspects: the subjective, the social, the moral, and the material components of things. These components have been summarised under the term “well-being”. The term “well-being” is used to describe the processes involved in people's efforts to lead good lives that are valuable and meaningful. These, of course, must align with public policy (Lough et al., 2023). This assertion, however, is more objective in its understanding of well-being. By indicating that the well-being process should align with public policy, the operationality of well-being begins to seem less in the control of the individual and more a phenomenon that the state or society can influence. The premise of this article is, however, a state of well-being that is supported by external forces such as the state government and or non-governmental organisations, well-meaning individuals through the provision of basic amenities such as health care, water, good roads, affordable housing, security, livelihood sources etc. to the benefit of less off individuals such as the integrated persons in this study.

Hill et al. (2023), in their study on young people within the confines of Mae La and Nu Po refugee camps in Thailand, looked at well-being holistically with a focus on three main areas: the material (food, income and commodities), the subjective (how people interpret their material needs) and the relational (interaction with others and what they value). Hill et al. agree that, like most young people in the world, the youth of Mae La and Nu Po find meaning within ordinary aspects of life that are often overlooked, such as sports, cultural practices like ceremonies and events, and activities like weaving. They observed that in areas of restricted physical mobility, such as refugee camps, recreational areas are crucial for nurturing well-being, empowerment, and resilience among encamped youths. They also identified the importance of cultural events for overall well-being. For instance, events like the Karen New Year offered valuable opportunities to showcase their rich cultural heritage.

Hill et al. (2023) argue that preserving cultural events is crucial for the well-being of young people. Furthermore, connections to the natural world, such as mountaineering and fishing, also contribute to a sense of well-being. Their study suggests that well-being is closely linked to peace and freedom and that access to essential resources, such as water and sanitation, which are strongly tied to the natural environment, plays a significant role. In this context, Hill et al. (2023) connect humanitarian needs, particularly those related to Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH), to a broader understanding of well-being, especially in the Mae La refugee camp, where the availability of resources directly impacts the quality of life for residents.

Additionally, Hill et al. (2023) highlight the role of religion in overall well-being. Religious institutions and leaders play a crucial role in maintaining peace and order, particularly among young people, which significantly contributes to the well-being of the community. They argue that religion promotes tolerance among various faiths within the camp, fostering social cohesion.

This study aligns with Hill et al.'s findings, particularly in its emphasis on the connection between well-being and access to necessities. The participants in this study also identified access to water, housing, electricity, education, healthcare, and other essential services as key factors influencing their well-being. Many expressed dissatisfaction with their current conditions, noting that their well-being was better in the IDP camps, where they had free access to healthcare, education for their children, food, water, and security:

*"We enjoyed free access to healthcare, education for our children, food, water, and security." — Talatu, Female FGD participant.*

For integrated persons participating in this study, well-being is perceived as collective rather than individual—it can only be attained when everyone within their community has ample access to basic amenities. As such, many participants viewed the closure of IDP camps as a disadvantage to them but an advantage to the state government. Given this study's contextual definition of well-being, it is evident that the conditions of the integrated IDPs do not meet the criteria for well-being as defined by the participants themselves.

Regarding relational well-being as a survival strategy, Hill et al. (2023) note that refugees leveraged community networks both within and outside the camps as well as social media for material and psychological support. They also observed that refugees relied heavily on community networks for food assistance following the reduction in food rations by camp management in 2015.

Hill et al.'s findings align with the expectations and motivations that underlie the participants' decision to participate in this study. It is likely that, upon integrating, they anticipated support not only from the state and non-governmental organisations but also from the host communities themselves. They may have expected a welcoming environment that would ease their transition from encamped life to their new communities. However, this has not materialised to the extent they had envisioned.

To some degree, members of Sabon Gari have extended support, particularly in the form of temporary accommodation and limited access to basic amenities such as water and electricity. However, as the findings will reveal, this support was short-lived and ultimately unsustainable. Many hosts, while initially willing to assist, are also burdened by the need to provide these basic amenities from their earnings, making long-term assistance unfeasible.

In the context of the Boko Haram insurgency in Northeast Nigeria, studies that holistically examine IDP well-being are relatively rare. However, as a multifaceted concept, well-being is often explored through specific aspects such as health, education, and livelihood security. Several studies have touched on these dimensions, some of which are reviewed below.

For instance, Solawale and Orogun (2022) observed that the Dalori IDP camp in Maiduguri, Borno State, hosted approximately 10,000 IDPs. Despite this, IDPs in the camp faced persistent challenges related to food insecurity, inadequate medical care, poor accommodation, and lack of security. Children, who made up approximately 30% of the camp's population, had limited access to education, with formal schooling available only up to the primary level. Older children were, therefore, deprived of further education, as neither the state government nor non-governmental organisations made provisions for secondary education. This problematic situation negatively impacted IDPs, compelling many to leave the camp in search of better opportunities in nearby host communities. Solawale and Orogun (2022) argue that the efficiency of camp management and administration is crucial to IDP welfare. Their findings indicate a certain level of orderliness in camp leadership, planning, and coordination.

However, they emphasise the need for better-equipped officials to handle the complexities of camp environments. Strengthening camp administration could reduce the vulnerability of IDPs and mitigate the negative impacts on their overall well-being.

Similarly, the findings of this study align with those of Solawale and Orogun (2022) in emphasising the critical role of access to basic amenities in determining the well-being of displaced persons, whether inside or outside the camps. Both studies suggest that inadequate access to necessities such as food, healthcare, education, and security has driven some IDPs to relocate to host communities in search of better living conditions. Furthermore, considering this study's assertion that well-being is a subjective phenomenon, it follows that well-being should be defined by individuals or groups based on their lived experiences. This interpretation challenges Throsby's (2017) conceptualisation of well-being as being primarily linked to material or financial gains. Such a definition may fail to capture the realities of populations whose experiences have been shaped by extreme hardship, such as those displaced by the Boko Haram insurgency.

Although Adewale (2016) does not explicitly refer to well-being, he notes that IDPs in Abuja face challenges such as threats of eviction, inadequate shelter, food insecurity, and limited access to water and sanitation. This study argues that such challenges pose a significant threat to the overall well-being of displaced persons, regardless of their location or the nature of the crisis that led to their displacement.

Similarly, Barau (2018) observes that IDP shelters in Nigeria do not meet the minimum standards recommended by international instruments on internal displacement. In addition to the need for adequate shelter, food, healthcare, and education (as also highlighted by Adewale (2016) and Solawale & Orogun (2022)), Barau (2018) identifies key protection concerns, particularly for women and children IDPs in Maiduguri and Kano. These concerns include limited access to fundamental rights, safety, and security, as well as inadequate provisions for IDPs with special needs.

Furthermore, Barau (2018) notes that the assistance provided by NGOs remains insufficient, given the large number of IDPs in need. While some of his study participants acknowledged acts of kindness from host community members, such as food and temporary accommodation, these forms of support were often inconsistent. They required the IDPs to seek or even beg for assistance actively.

The issues raised in the reviewed literature directly relate to the holistic well-being of IDPs and refugees, which encompasses:

- Material well-being (access to food, income, and necessities),
- Subjective well-being (how individuals perceive and interpret their material conditions) and
- Relational well-being (social interactions and the ability to engage with others in meaningful ways).

Within the context of the Boko Haram insurgency, these well-being challenges have persisted despite the Borno State government's implementation of durable solutions for IDPs. There is limited documentation on the plight of locally integrated IDPs and those who have resettled in other parts of the country; a gap that has primarily been covered only by media organisations like HumAngle, as referenced in the introduction of this paper.

It is this study's opinion that there is a significant gap in scholarly research on the conditions of locally integrated IDPs and those resettled elsewhere in Nigeria, particularly regarding their overall well-being. This study aims to fill this gap by providing an in-depth exploration of their experiences, challenges, and perceptions of well-being in their new communities, with the hope of equipping them to advocate for the changes they desire to see in their new settlements.

### **3. Methodology**

This paper employed an art-based research approach, specifically the photovoice methodology, to explore the experiences of the resettled population in the Sabon Gari community, focusing on their general well-being following the insurgency. The goal is to provide them with a platform where they can share their stories, thereby becoming advocates for their communities. Photovoice (Wang and Burris, 1994, 1997) is a type of participatory action research that empowers participants with basic photography skills to capture images in their natural settings, reflect and discuss these images to bring to the fore the strengths and weaknesses within their communities as they advocate for social change (Kenny, 2009).

The photovoice data collection for this study began with a workshop that informed study participants (both males and females) about the project's overall aim and introduced them to the photovoice method of data collection. This session was conducted by the researchers with the help of a male and a female research assistant. A brainstorming session followed this. The male and female groups were separated to allow the women to express themselves freely. Keeping them in the same group as the men can hinder them from speaking their minds. After the brainstorming session, the participants took walks around their communities to capture images that best describe their situation with a focus on their well-being. The image capture session was followed by a discussion on the images selected and what they represent. This was also done based on the male and female grouping for the same reason mentioned above.

Sufficient time was given to the participants to express their views, highlighting the challenges in their community that impact their well-being. The researchers ensured that they asked follow-up questions for clarity where necessary. A total of twenty participants were selected for this study (ten men and ten women). The snowball sampling technique was employed by a community member with whom the researchers are familiar from previous studies. The recruitment criteria require a participant to be an adult aged 30 and above, a resident of the Sabon Gari community, and a former resident of an IDP camp prior to the official closure of the camps by the Borno State government. This is because the researchers believe that participants in this category have a clear memory of life before displacement, as well as the experiences in the camp and within host communities after the Borno State government implemented durable solutions for the IDPs. Sabon Gari was also selected because of the diversity it offers in terms of class, ethnicity and religion. The researchers believe this will better highlight the nuances and complexities of the phenomenon under study.

#### 4. Descriptive/Thematic Analysis of FGDs

The discussions from the focus groups reveal deep, intersecting vulnerabilities affecting the daily lives of displaced resettled communities, particularly in areas such as housing and shelter insecurity, water, education, healthcare, food security, and many more. Each theme is intricately linked to persistent poverty, displacement, and limited access to essential services.

##### 4.1 Housing and Shelter Insecurity

Across all FGDs, housing insecurity was reported to be a persistent and critical issue. Participating FGD members reported that they continue to reside in unfinished buildings and makeshift shelters, often exposed to harsh weather conditions with minimal protection. The male respondents particularly emphasised how their temporary shelters are grossly inadequate during the rainy season,

*"Because it is not waterproof, especially during the rainy season, it leaks a lot." (Male Adult FGD respondent, Sabon-gari, Maiduguri, 2024).*



Figure I, *Uncompleted Building with Makeshift Shelter*, Image by Male FGD Group, February 2024, Sabon-Gari Community of Resettled Persons, Maiduguri, Borno State, Nigeria

Female participants similarly described their dependence on incomplete building structures, expressing bittersweet gratitude for simply having a place to lay their heads despite the discomfort and poor conditions—a reality also observed by the research team during the field engagements. Both male and female groups consistently stressed the urgent need for dignified and secure housing solutions to alleviate the long-term burdens of displacement.



Figure 1, *Uncompleted Building used as temporary Shelter*, Image by Female FGD Group A, February 2024, Sabon-Gari Community of Resettled Persons, Maiduguri-Borno state, Nigeria.

A key concern raised, particularly by the female participants, was that their current living conditions were not an improvement over life in the IDP camps. They acknowledged that, while camp life was restrictive, it provided a greater sense of security. In their present communities, the makeshift shelters lack protection and are constantly vulnerable to petty theft. This insecurity has forced families to make difficult choices, as someone must always remain at home to guard their possessions, preventing full household participation in livelihood activities.



Figure 2, *Temporary Makeshift Shelter*, Image by Female FGD Group A, February 2024, Sabon-Gari Community of Resettled Persons, Maiduguri-Borno state, Nigeria



Figure 3, *Temporary Makeshift Shelter*, Image by Female FGD Group B, February 2024, Sabon-Gari Community of Resettled Persons, Maiduguri-Borno state, Nigeria

Male respondents also expressed anxiety about their precarious tenancy. Many of them live in abandoned or incomplete buildings without formal rental agreements, which creates a constant fear of eviction by property owners who can ask them to vacate at any time. This uncertainty further compounds their instability and emotional stress.

Although many participants expressed a deep desire to return to their villages, ongoing insecurity has made this impossible. One participant captured this harsh reality, thus,

*"If we get a place to lay our heads, we thank God because we do not have a place of our own in our villages; that is why we are here" (Female Adult FGD respondent, Sabon-gari, Maiduguri, 2024)*

This highlights the dire nature of displacement and the precarious shelter arrangements that many have reluctantly accepted as their new normal. Across all discussions, there was a clear and unified call for government and non-government support to provide safe, stable housing or facilitate secure resettlement in their original communities. The shared experiences and concerns across male and female groups reinforce the urgent need for long-term shelter solutions that prioritise both safety and dignity.

#### *4.2 Water Insecurity and Scarcity*

Water access challenges across Borno State remain widespread due to the absence of institutionalised and government-managed water sources. The majority of the population relies on privately owned boreholes, hand pumps, or purchasing water daily from local vendors. These challenges are even more severe in resettled communities, such as the assessed Sabon-Gari area, where the influx of internally displaced persons (IDPs) has placed additional strain on already limited water sources.

The situation is further complicated by the disconnection of previously free water sources and the inability of many households to afford metered water. Both male and female FGD participants described their increasing reliance on distant water points or on purchasing water daily. One female participant lamented:

*"We had one [water source] that was free, and now it has been disconnected by scavengers... now all those without meters have been disconnected, and there is no money to pay."*

*(Female Young Adult FGD respondent, Sabon-Gari, Maiduguri, 2024)*



Figure 4, *Previous Unmetered Water Pump destroyed by Metal Scavengers*, Image by Female FGD Group A & B, February 2024, Sabon-Gari Community of Resettled Persons, Maiduguri-Borno state, Nigeria



Figure 5, *Protected but Dried Well*, Image by Young Male FGD Group, February 2024, Sabon-Gari Community of Resettled Persons, Maiduguri-Borno state, Nigeria

Beyond the financial burden, participants emphasised that water collection now poses significant protection risks, particularly for women and children who must travel long distances, often through unsafe or conflict-prone areas, to fetch water. The community reflected on how the loss of affordable and nearby water access has drastically changed their daily routines, consumed valuable time and energy, and further depleted already stretched household resources.

Water insecurity in these resettled communities is, therefore, not only a question of affordability and availability but also one of safety and long-term sustainability. The repeated accounts from both focus groups clearly illustrate the urgent need for reliable, affordable, and protection-sensitive water solutions in these high-need areas.

#### 4.3 Education Deprivation

Access to education is severely constrained in the assessed community. Female participants particularly emphasised that no government schools are available within the area, and although private schools exist, they are both unaffordable and located far from the community. This compounds both the protection risks and the

financial burdens already faced by displaced households. As a result, many, if not most, children, especially those from internally displaced families, are out of school. Instead, they are often engaged in petty livelihoods such as street hawking, cap weaving, or small trading activities that yield minimal profit and expose them to further risks.

The respondents reported their willingness to embrace even the most basic forms of education. One participant noted:

*“Even if it is the one that you can just keep a blackboard in the middle of the street or gather the children under a tree and teach them, and they would understand.” (Female Young Adult FGD respondent, Sabon-Gari, Maiduguri, 2024)*

This quote reflects not only the community's desperation for educational opportunities but also its openness to informal or mobile schooling interventions that can reach underserved areas with minimal infrastructure.

Further discussions revealed that educational deprivation is not just a service gap. It is a regression. Participants recalled that while living in IDP camps, their children had access to free education, school materials, and structured learning:

*“When we were in the IDP camp, our children all had access to some degree of education, and it was free. They were given books and writing materials, and we were happy with this. However, there is nothing here at all that we can afford to send our children to.” (Adult Female FGD respondent, Sabon-Gari, Maiduguri, 2024)*



Figure 6, *Books previously issued to children while in the IDP camps*, Image by Female FGD Group A, February 2024, Sabon-Gari Community of Resettled Persons, Maiduguri-Borno state, Nigeria.

The community also reported that even informal educational options, such as Islamiya (Islamic schooling), are unavailable. One respondent shared:

*“There was a time one of the men in this community started an Islamiya, but it was not free either, so after a while, he had to close it as many people could not afford to send their children.” (Adult Female FGD respondent, Sabon-Gari, Maiduguri, 2024)*

These narratives reveal not just the depth of educational exclusion but also the urgent need for low-cost, community-led, or mobile schooling solutions that can provide displaced and host community children with access to basic education. The desire for learning remains strong, but opportunities have become virtually non-

existent in their current settlement, leaving these children more vulnerable to long-term socio-economic disadvantage.

#### 4.4 Healthcare Gaps

One of the most telling revelations from the Photovoice sessions was that when participants were asked to capture an image representing their most urgent needs and desires, they could not identify or photograph anything that represented access to healthcare. This absence of visual representation speaks volumes and powerfully underscores the consistent lack and total absence of healthcare services in the entire community.

Across all focus groups, both male and female participants reported that there are no clinics, pharmacies, or accessible health centres in the area. This healthcare void leaves the community dangerously vulnerable, particularly in emergencies, where options for medical assistance are nonexistent.

As one participant plainly stated:

*"We do not have hospitals in this area, even patent stores are not available... in the night, only God can help you." (Adult Female FGD respondent, Sabon-Gari, Maiduguri, 2024)*

The above quote highlights the deep sense of helplessness and exposure that characterise the community's healthcare experience. Without access to even basic medical supplies or patent medicine stores, residents face life-threatening risks from treatable conditions, especially at night when travel to distant health facilities is not feasible.

The absence of healthcare is not just a service gap. It is a silent but critical factor shaping the community's everyday reality. It contributes to preventable health complications, deepens household vulnerability, and reinforces the overall deprivation experienced by displaced and host community members alike.

#### 4.5 Food Insecurity and Changing Consumption Patterns

Across all focus group discussions, food insecurity emerged as a persistent and painful reality for the assessed communities. Both male and female FGD participants were consistent and very vocal when describing their ongoing struggle to access enough food, with many households forced to rely on minimal harvests and stretch their food supplies through desperate coping strategies.

Women, in particular, described, almost casually, how mixing maize with chaff has become a common survival tactic. For the men, limited farming options due to insecurity and poor soil quality in the few accessible fields were emphasised as key drivers of the current food crisis. Even when small quantities of food are produced, male participants noted that adequate storage facilities are lacking, making it impossible to preserve food safely during the rainy season.



Figure 7, *Makeshift storage space*, Image by Male FGD Group Leader, February 2024, Sabon-Gari Community of Resettled Persons, Maiduguri-Borno state, Nigeria

One female participant explained:

*"You buy one measure of maize and one measure of chaff, combine and grind together so that you can make it last a bit longer for cooking."*

The third FGD provided additional, in-depth evidence of worsening purchasing power and deteriorating dietary quality. Participants highlighted the sharp increase in maize prices, explaining that ₦6,000 now buys barely four measures of maize, compared to ten measures previously:

*"You can buy up to ten measures with it [before]. Now, it is not even up to four measures."*

Faced with severe inflation and the absence of food assistance or voucher support, households have adopted even more precarious coping mechanisms. Some now scavenge for chaff at local milling shops or directly request leftover husks from maize millers. One participant shared:

*"Mostly if you find someone who went to mill his maize and he does not have anyone to help him blow away the chaff... You ask the person to help you with the chaff."*



Figure 8, *Proportion of Maize Flour to Proportion of Chaff to be mixed before cooking*, Image by Female FGD Group B, February 2024, Sabon-Gari Community of Resettled Persons, Maiduguri-Borno state, Nigeria

Beyond the quantity of food, the nutritional quality of diets has significantly declined. Households rarely consume protein-rich foods like eggs or milk items, which they previously accessed when humanitarian assistance was available. One community member captured the grim daily reality:

*"If you get to eat once a day, you thank God... you eat, you lick your hands and drink water at the end... because truthfully, we are seeing the consequences of life this year."*

Taken together, the narratives across all FGDs reveal a deepening of food insecurity, a shrinking of purchasing power, and the near collapse of diversified diets. Participants repeatedly linked these conditions to the cessation of humanitarian food aid, leaving them with little to no safety net. The combined pressures of inflation, limited access to farming, and discontinued food support have pushed households to the brink, with many now relying on survival strategies that compromise both their health and dignity.

#### *4.6 Livelihood Disruption and Small-Scale Adaptation*

Across all focus group discussions, participants consistently described the significant disruption to their livelihoods as a direct consequence of displacement and insecurity. Access to farmlands remains heavily

constrained, with persistent insecurity making it dangerous to venture into areas traditionally used for farming, particularly those with dense bush. One male participant noted:

*“We cannot go deep into bushy places to farm, so we have to use this field for farming.”*



Figure 9, *Nearby Accessible Farmlands*, Image by Male Adult FGD Group, February 2024, Sabon-Gari Community of Resettled Persons, Maiduguri-Borno state, Nigeria.

These accessible open fields, however, are not large or productive enough to sustain their families, a concern that closely aligns with the women's accounts of food insecurity and restricted livelihood opportunities. The men emphasised that the insecurity surrounding farmland access continues to perpetuate both economic vulnerability and chronic food scarcity.

Despite these challenges, the male FGD surfaced as an encouraging form of small-scale adaptation. Participants expressed satisfaction with their ability to rear chickens in their current settlement, a practice that was strictly prohibited while living in IDP camps:

*“We cannot rear our animals in the camp, but here we can, and we are satisfied with it.”*



Figure 10, *Evidence of Pastoral Farming by Participants*, Image by Male Adult FGD Group, February 2024, Sabon-Gari Community of Resettled Persons, Maiduguri-Borno state, Nigeria.

This small but meaningful recovery through poultry rearing now serves as a modest source of food and a potential source of income. It also signals a degree of adaptation and offers an important entry point for supporting community-led, self-managed livelihood activities. If adequately supported, such pastoral practices could significantly strengthen household resilience, especially in areas where access to larger markets or expansive farmlands remains unsafe or impossible.

The emergence of these small-scale livelihood adaptations provides a foundation for targeted interventions such as poultry support programs, small grants, and the distribution of farming inputs for use in safer, more accessible spaces. These strategies could improve food security, income stability, and overall household well-being within displaced and resettled communities.

#### *4.7 Displacement Fatigue and Complex Return Decisions*

The question of return remains highly complicated and deeply personal for many displaced community members. Although some formal IDP camps have been closed and return programs initiated, many participants expressed that returning to their hometowns is neither safe nor viable. Male participants, in particular, emphasised that places like Baga, from which most of them originate, remain too dangerous and unsuitable for key livelihood activities such as fishing or farming, which are essential to their survival and cultural identity.

One participant clearly articulated the dilemma:

*"Baga is not back to how it was... only for those living within the town, but even if you stay in town without going to the bush, it will not work."*

This statement underscores the protracted nature of displacement and highlights the complex barriers to voluntary return. For many, displacement is no longer a temporary condition. It has become an extended and, for some, a permanent reality. Even if security improves within towns, the continued loss of livelihood access in surrounding areas prevents meaningful resettlement.

The men's group added a layer of nuance, revealing that displacement fatigue is setting in; yet, the insecurity and collapse of economic foundations in their places of origin make return an impossible choice. These accounts reinforce the broader theme that displaced persons in Northeast Nigeria are not just waiting or refusing (as some outlets have suggested) to return home. They are navigating complex risks, trade-offs, and survival strategies in the face of prolonged uncertainty.

#### *4.8 Continued Lack of Social Services*

A consistent theme across all FGDs is the continued absence of essential social services. Both men and women strongly emphasised that critical services, such as healthcare, education, and access to safe water, remain either completely unavailable or too expensive to sustain.

Communities reported that they have become heavily reliant on self-managed, often unsafe or inadequate alternatives. Without formal support from government bodies or humanitarian actors, these informal solutions come at a high cost both financially and in terms of protection risks, especially for women and children.

The collective frustration across groups was palpable. Participants expressed feeling abandoned and forgotten, notably as humanitarian assistance has significantly reduced or stopped altogether in their resettled communities. The gap left by the withdrawal of formal aid structures has exacerbated their vulnerabilities, making daily survival even more precarious.

The absence of coordinated, community-level social services continues to compound the hardships of displacement and signals a critical gap in long-term recovery and reintegration efforts.

#### *4.9 Summary of Integrated Findings*

The integrated findings from the male and female focus groups provide a clear, layered account of persistent displacement, deep vulnerability, and small-scale adaptation efforts. Across both groups, communities consistently emphasised the urgent need for dignified housing, reliable food sources, safe access to farmland, and critical social services. Access to essential sectors, including shelter, water, education, healthcare, and food, remains severely limited, forcing displaced households to depend on precarious, often unsafe alternatives.

A key insight from the male group highlighted small-scale poultry rearing as a positive adaptation point that is now feasible outside IDP camps. This practice provides an opportunity to support modest, self-managed livelihood recovery activities that can be scaled to enhance household resilience. Additionally, the men offered valuable insights into the complexity of return decisions. Despite displacement fatigue, returning home is not a viable option for many due to persistent insecurity and the loss of sustainable livelihood opportunities in their places of origin.

Communities across the discussions expressed openness to low-cost, practical interventions such as mobile schools, community-based water solutions, and support for small-scale farming and poultry. Cash-based assistance, livelihood recovery programs, and housing support were identified as particularly relevant and impactful responses that would address both immediate survival needs and medium-term recovery.

The focus groups also revealed a deep sense of abandonment. With reduced humanitarian presence and minimal government support, participants feel increasingly left to fend for themselves. However, despite these challenges, there is evidence of resilience, creativity, and a readiness to engage in adaptive practices if provided with the proper support, enabling environments, and sustained institutional backing.

## **5. Conclusion**

This Photovoice study provided a unique, community-centred lens into the lived experiences of resettled persons in Sabon Gari, Maiduguri. Through their voices and visual narratives, the study captured the persistent

challenges they face in securing dignified housing, reliable food sources, clean water, basic education, accessible healthcare, and sustainable livelihoods. These overlapping deprivations highlight an enduring humanitarian crisis despite the transition into the post-insurgency phase.

The research also uncovered a strong undercurrent of displacement fatigue, as participants expressed that returning to their ancestral homes remains impossible due to sustained insecurity and eroded livelihood systems—many now view displacement as a long-term, if not permanent, reality. The study further revealed that humanitarian support to resettled communities has significantly diminished, creating a sense of abandonment among those who still face urgent, unmet needs.

However, amid these layered vulnerabilities, there are clear signs of resilience and small-scale adaptation. Community-led poultry rearing, informal livelihood activities, and openness to low-cost education and water solutions highlight the adaptive spirit of the Sabon Gari residents. These emerging coping strategies offer valuable entry points for targeted support that could significantly enhance their recovery and long-term well-being.

### *5.1 Recommendations*

Based on the voices and priorities of the resettled persons in Sabon Gari, the following programmatic recommendations are proposed:

#### *1. Expand Cash-Based Interventions (CBIs)*

Cash transfers and voucher-based programs should be prioritised to help households meet immediate food, water, and health needs while restoring purchasing power in an inflationary environment.

#### *2. Support Livelihood Recovery through Small-Scale Poultry and Farming Inputs*

Targeted livelihood support, such as poultry starter kits, small livestock, farming tools, and drought-resistant seeds, can build on the community's existing coping strategies and foster economic resilience.

#### *3. Invest in Low-Cost, Mobile Education Options*

The absence of schools calls for urgent investment in mobile classrooms, community-based learning spaces, or temporary shelters for education, which would provide immediate, low-barrier access to schooling for displaced children.

#### *4. Improve Safe Water Access*

Establishing or rehabilitating boreholes, providing household water storage, and supporting community-managed water points would significantly reduce protection risks and financial burdens related to water collection.

#### *5. Strengthen Shelter and Housing Support*

There is a critical need for transitional or semi-permanent housing solutions to replace makeshift shelters and ensure security of tenure, thereby reducing anxiety over potential evictions.

#### *6. Reintroduce Community Health Outreach Services*

Mobile clinics, health education campaigns, and regular community health outreach programs should be prioritised to address the total absence of healthcare facilities.

#### *7. Incorporate Community Participation in Solution Design*

Future interventions should be co-designed with community members to ensure cultural relevance, local ownership, and sustainability. The community's openness to informal solutions should guide the design of appropriate services.

#### *8. Reassess the Return and Resettlement Framework*

Given the complex dynamics of displacement, return strategies must account for current security realities and the fact that many displaced persons no longer view return as a viable option. Policy approaches should incorporate long-term support for local integration and resettlement.

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