

Appraisal of the Nigerian Red Cross Society's Intervention on the Protracted Refugee Situations of the Displaced Bakassi People

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Abstract

Protracted refugee situations have constituted serious welfare and security challenges for displaced persons especially in Nigeria. Most of the time, government show little or no concern in providing their basic needs. As such, non-governmental organisations intervene to assuage the associated humanitarian crisis. Unfortunately, the government often relax in their responsibilities when non-governmental organisations intervene, pretending that their basic needs have been met. It is in the light of this circumstance, that it was deemed necessary to appraise the intervention of the Nigerian Red Cross Society on the protracted refugee situations of the displaced Bakassi people and ascertain the basic needs met and the ones that still need the serious attention of the government. The findings showed that although the Nigerian Red Cross Society intervened in the areas of food supply, social services, medical care, and skill acquisition, they are not sufficient for government to ignore the pathetic conditions of the displaced Bakassi people. It is therefore recommended that the Nigerian government should partner with non-governmental organisations in attending to the basic welfare and security needs of the displaced Bakassi people.

1. Introduction

The **Nigerian Red Cross Society** (NRCS) was founded in 1960 with its headquarters in Abuja. It has over 500,000 volunteers and 300 permanent employees. The Nigerian Red Cross Society was established by an Act of Parliament in 1960 and became the 86th Member – National Society of the League of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies now known as International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies on 4 February 1961. Its driving principles are based on humanity, impartiality, neutrality, independence, voluntary service, unity and universality. The core tasks of the society are:

- to monitor compliance of warring parties with the Geneva Conventions
- to organize nursing and care for those who are wounded on the battlefield
- to supervise the treatment of prisoners of war and make confidential interventions with detaining authorities
- to help with the search for missing persons in an armed conflict
- to organize protection and care for civil populations
- to act as a neutral intermediary between warring parties

It was in view of the task of protecting and caring for civil populations and following the inadequacy of government efforts to cater for the needs of the displaced persons in the resettlement process; that the Nigerian Red Cross Society (NRCS) intervened. Hence, it is important to appraise how the Nigerian Red Cross Society assisted the displaced Bakassi people and identify the areas that the displaced population is still lacking. The intervention of the Nigerian Red Cross Society was mainly in the supply of healthcare materials, relief materials, and skill acquisitions (Abasi, 2007; Aquah, 2013).

2. Distribution of Non-Food Items to the Displaced Bakassi People

The Nigerian Red Cross Society distributed items that could help the displaced persons work out their living, rest to reduce stress, as well as improve their welfare in their protracted displace situation. These items are presented in table 1 thus:

Table 1: Non-Food Items Distributed by the Nigerian Red Cross Society (NRCS)

No	NFI	Total Quantity	Beneficiaries
1	Wheel Barrow	10	2/Camp
2	Shovel	80	20/Camp
3	Lantern	280	1/household
4	Kitchen Set	280	1/household
5	Blanket	840	3/household
6	Sleeping Mats	840	3/household
7	Hygiene Kits	840	3/household
8	Bucket	280	1/household
9	Jerry Can	560	2/household
10	Water Guard	3360	12/household
11	Soap	4200	11/household
12	ITN	840	3/household

Source: Nigerian Red Cross Society (2009)

The non-food items procured and distributed to the 1,400 target beneficiaries in the four camps contributed greatly to improving the living conditions of the returnees. Cases of outbreak of epidemics related to poor living conditions were not recorded in the camps. The sensitization and demonstration carried out by the trained Red Cross volunteers assisted the beneficiaries in having a better understanding of the importance of the use of bed nets and keeping good hygiene practices. With the volunteers carrying out regular monitoring visits to the camps, beneficiaries were able to make good use of the nets. The situation in the four camps became tidy as the beneficiaries made use of the sanitation tools provided to them by the Red Cross to keep their environment clean. They engaged in regular sanitation exercise in the camps. The training organized for the Red Cross volunteers enhanced the capacity of the branch in the techniques of the best practices in the distribution of relief items. The local branch also enhanced its knowledge in procurement standards and procedures of the International Federation.

3. Environment-Related Activities by the Nigerian Red Cross Society for the Displaced Bakassi People

The activities carried out by the Nigerian Red Cross Society to enhance the environmental conditions of the displaced Bakassi People bordered on water, sanitation, and hygiene as presented in table 2.

Table 2: Water, sanitation, and hygiene promotion by NRCS for Bakassi Displacees

Objective: Four camp populations drink clean drinking water, and live in a clean environment	
Expected results	Activities planned
Safe drinking water is provided.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training of volunteers in use of water purification materials. • Distribution of water makers.
A clean living environment is achieved.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Construction and/or rehabilitation of latrines.
Target communities are aware of major illnesses and their prevention.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishment and training of 10 Mothers Clubs in health and nutrition promotional messages. • Conduct health and nutrition education sessions with beneficiaries. • Distribution of health information and education materials.

Source: Nigerian Red Cross Society (2009)

The procurement and distribution of water purification guards to the target beneficiaries contributed a lot to the prevention of the outbreak of water related diseases in the camps (NRCS, 2009). The sensitization and demonstration on water treatment also impacted on the returnees as many of them have enhanced their knowledge in water treatment. With the poor water sources in the camps, beneficiaries have made use of the water treatment materials to purify their water for drinking. This greatly contributed to the prevention of outbreak of water borne epidemics in the camps. The returnees in Esit Eket and the Technical College camps appreciated the efforts of the Red Cross in the construction of two boreholes and latrines. Indeed, the completion and running of the boreholes enabled them to have access to safe drinking water and not to go long distance to

source for water. The health and hygiene education carried out by the Red Cross volunteers has increased the knowledge of the returnees and the communities on proper use of latrines when completed. The returnees engage in regular sanitation exercise in the camps using the tools distributed by the Red Cross.

4. Health-Care Related Services by the Nigerian Red Cross Society for the Displaced Bakassi People

The health care related services provided for the displaced Bakassi people mainly focused on the use of Insecticide Treated Nets (ITN), prevention of diseases and ailments, and the components of good nutrition. This is presented in table 3 thus:

Table 3: Health and Care Related Services by the NRCS to Bakassi Displacees

Objective: Increase the resilience of returnees in four camps within Akwa Ibom State and surrounding communities that received Bakassi returnees within three months.

Expected results	Activities Planned
The population in the four camps know how to use insecticide treated bed nets (ITNs).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Procure and distribute ITNs for 2,500 returnees. • Training of volunteers in ITN instruction and distribution. • Distribution and sensitization of communities on the usage of ITNs. • Training Volunteers in returnee sensitisation
Volunteers are trained in sensitization activities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct health and nutrition education sessions with beneficiaries. Education sessions will be provided by the volunteers three times per week. A variety of topics will be reviewed (hygiene, malaria, drinking water, Immunizations, etc.).
Target communities are aware of major illnesses and their prevention.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distribution of health Information, Education and Communication (IEC) materials. • Advocacy for immunizations (measles, etc.) • Establishment of Mothers Clubs and Emergency First Aid Teams (EFAT) in target communities. • Training of mothers clubs and EFATs in health and nutrition. • Sensitization of beneficiaries on good nutrition.
Target groups are aware of the component of good nutrition.	

Source: Nigerian Red Cross Society (2009)

The Red Cross procured and distributed Insecticide Treated bed Nets (ITN) to target beneficiaries. A total of 840 pieces of Insecticide Treated Nets (ITN) were distributed at the rate of three per family (NRCS, 2009). The Red Cross volunteers had earlier received training in the distribution and how to sensitize beneficiaries on the use of the nets. They also carried out monitoring visits to ensure that the bed nets were properly put into use. A total of 8 education sessions in each of the target camps with the assistance of health educators and Red Cross volunteers were held as well. The sessions conducted twice weekly for 4 weeks focused on good hygiene, malaria prevention, good health nutritional habit, importance of immunizations, HIV/AIDS as well as purification of water for drinking (NRCS, 2009). Though Information Education and Communication materials were not produced due to funding constraint, the volunteers were able to reach the target population using local language and Pidgin English (common English spoken and understood by majority of Nigerians irrespective of level of education). The NRCS selected 20 Red Cross community women and trained them on health related issues as well as hygiene promotion (NRCS, 2009). They were deployed in the camps to assist the returnees. They assisted the returnees in the area of psychological counselling, good nutritional practice as well as sensitization on HIV/AIDS. Their activities contributed to the reduction of outbreak of diseases in the camps. The state branch of the NRCS planned to transform this group of women into mothers' club in their communities.

5. Capacity Building, Skill Acquisition, and Disaster-Risk Management

Efforts were also made by the Nigerian Red Cross Society to assist the displaced Bakassi population have access to alternative means of livelihood has lost their initial jobs and occupations which were more environment-specific in their riverine ancestral home. Besides, the displaced population were also guided on how manage displacement-related risks in their environment. These capacity building and risk management trainings are captured in table 4.

Table 4: Capacity Building and Disaster Risk Reduction by NRCS

Objective 1: Contribute to building the safety and resilience of returnees in Akwa Ibom State.

Objective 2: Increase the capacity of the Akwa Ibom and Cross River State branches to manage disaster response and longer-term programmes.

200 Bakassi returnees are earning an income through skills acquired	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consultation with communities regarding areas for skills development.
Akwa Ibom branch has increased logistic capacity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identification of beneficiaries for skills training. • Develop partnership with skills providers. • Procurement of tools for income generating activities. • Income Generating Activities (IGA) for 200 beneficiaries in specific skill areas. • Distribution of IGA tools to beneficiaries.
Akwa Ibom and Cross River branches have increased disaster management (including disaster risk reduction) capacity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Replenish Akwa Ibom State branch stock. • Procure operational assets for the branch to facilitate their work to implement the project. • Post-training follow up of IGA skills. • Training of existing volunteers to implement the relief effort. • Recruit and train 40 new volunteers in the community. • Procurement of two four-wheel drive vehicles, two laptops and printers to increase the logistical, and information processing and communications capacity of the branches.
Branches are managing the programme in line with the programme plan.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct Monitoring and Evaluation training for branches and those supporting them. • Report writing training for Team Leaders, Coordinators, Branch Secretary and Zonal Coordinators. • Regular reporting from the field to the branch and the Federation

Source: Nigerian Red Cross Society (2009)

It was observed in all the camps that some of the returnees especially the male went out during the day to do some menial job to sustain themselves and their families. Although NRCS trained some of the existing volunteers, it could however not strengthen the capacity of the branch in recruiting new volunteers at the community. With the replenishment of its stock, the state branch has strengthened its preparedness for any other potential disaster. The trained Red Cross volunteers have enhanced the capacity of the state branch at the community level. The capacity of the Red Cross women in the host communities was enhanced in the area of health and hygiene sensitization. In logistics, the state branch increased its capacity with the training of one of its drivers by the West Coast regional office. However due to the low appeal coverage, the National Society could not carry out its skill development and income generating activities aimed at assisting the 200 returnees (NRCS, 2009). It could not either realize the procurement of two vehicles and other office equipment for the state branch.

Nonetheless, the intervention of the Nigerian Red Cross Society only offered temporary relief in the various Camps. The displaced people still decried their woes and expressed their grievances over the shortcomings in the resettlement process by different means especially on the part of the government (Cobham, 2013).

6. Discussion

A combination of the identified inadequacies on the part of government to properly resettle the displaced Bakassi people and the insufficiency of the Nigerian Red Cross Society's intervention efforts, resulted in several agitations and demonstrations, court actions, and petitions even to the United Nations. For instance, the National Association of Bakassi Students (NABAS) took to the streets of Calabar on June 28, 2006, to protest the handover of their land to Cameroun without adequate alternative resettlement measures (Agbo, 2006); Ita-Giwa led peaceful protests in Cross River state, Lagos, Abuja and to international communities to make case

for her people (Eze, 20013); members of the Cross River State House of Assembly also led peaceful protests to register their grievances over the Federal Government's delay in resettling the Bakassi returnees (Eze, 20013). The Bakassi people also took court actions as a way of seeking redress through legal means. Alleging poor implementation of the Green Tree Agreement (GTA) and faulty resettlement scheme put in place, the people of Bakassi Local Council of Cross River State went to court after waiting for a long time without adequate response from the government authorities (Edem, 2013). Their demands in the court included: compensation for the property abandoned in Bakassi peninsula, provision of adequate accommodation, proper resettlement on a virgin land similar to their previous environment in their ancestral home, that the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) should be restrained from conducting elections in areas affecting the displaced population until their proper resettlement, as well as the provision of infrastructures and social amenities etc (Etene, 2007). Even as at 2013, the dissatisfaction of the Bakassi people with the efforts of the government to resettle them compelled them petition the United Nations (Ene, 2013). In the petition, the people stated that The Mixed UN Commission (West Africa) was still left with the following mandates to be accomplished:

- (a) Demarcation and delimitation of the maritime boundaries between Nigeria and Cameroon.
- (b) Development of projects to be aimed at promoting the economic joint ventures between the two countries and cross border cooperation.
- (c) Protecting the rights of the populations concerned.

Consequently, the petition was directed at the apathetic manner in which these mandates were undertaken by the Mixed UN Commission (West Africa). The Commission was said to have failed to convert the vague mandates into policies, procedures and actions with a time frame for their completion. As a result, the displaced Bakassi people still requested as follows in the interest of humanity especially as it concerns their welfare and security:

- i. A "Stakeholders Summit" should be convened in New York, where the modalities and a time table for implementing the three remaining mandates and other issues arising from the ICJ judgment on the Bakassi Peninsula can be discussed and realistic resolutions adopted.
- ii. The European Union and the African Development Bank should be persuaded to allocate and disburse funding for the development of a deep sea port on Kwa Islands with rail link to the Cameroun Republic and other parts of Nigeria. This would serve as a hub for international trade within the region, encourage private enterprise, provide an infusion of capital and know-how needed by the area, and consequently lead to the promotion of economic joint ventures between the two countries and cross border cooperation.
- iii. The implementation of the remaining UN mandates should include components designed to educate the displaced people of Bakassi, and answer questions on the impacts of the transition and the resources available to them using the media, town hall meetings and individual counseling. A good example of such a resource would be to establish manned community centers which would assist indigenes who cannot read or write, complete and process their application for citizenship. They recommended that these centers be equipped with mental health professionals who would be available to provide counseling, therapy and other types of rehabilitation to Bakassi residents who suffer trauma resulting from the loss or imminent loss of their homes, property, friends and neighbours due to relocation.
- iv. The creation of an independent system of accountability designed to monitor, evaluate and report on Bakassi projects in order to minimize waste, misappropriation and embezzlement of resources and the exploitation of the displaced indigenes of Bakassi Peninsula who have been left unprotected due to ignorance and non-existent or inadequate representation.
- v. That the Cameroon government should exercise patience, understanding and restraint in its dealings with these innocent victims of Bakassi Peninsula who had no say as to which country they belong and are not different from the people who live in the Manyu Province of the Cameroon Republic. These affected people do not know, nor are they interested in the oil wealth of the region. All they ask is to be allowed to go about their business and earn an honest livelihood without persecution.

vi. That the Nigerian Government should stay action on the Cobham Report until the development of a comprehensive and effective implementation strategy that embraces all remaining aspects of the UN mandates is cobbled together to resolve all contentious issues in the best interest of the people affected once and for all.

Conclusion

The intervention of the Nigerian Red Cross Society in supplying relief materials, rendering social and medical services, as well as providing skill acquisition opportunities actually assuaged the challenges faced by the displaced Bakassi people. However, the assistances only provided temporal relief to the displaced persons and cannot grant them durable solutions. Hence, it is recommended that the Nigerian government should go into partnership with the Nigerian Red Cross Society in addressing the refugee situations of the displaced Bakassi people in the various Camps. The partnership may go far in ensuring that the resettlement provisions made by the government gets to the targeted displaced Bakassi people instead of being hoarded and diverted by some government functionaries.

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