

Bakassi IDPs and Livelihood Coping Strategies in Yenagoa

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Abstract

The paper examined the evacuation and resettlement of Bakassi returnees from Cameroon to Yenagoa, Bayelsa State, Nigeria. The overall objective was to critically look at the resettlement challenges and livelihood coping strategies of these internally displaced persons. This study adopted the descriptive survey design, with a sample population of 558 out of an estimated 4,000 returnees. The questionnaire structured in a Likert scale format served as the primary instrument for data collection. The data was analyzed using basic descriptive statistics such as; percentages, mean and standard deviation. Findings from the study revealed that the returnees are generally not happy with their plight having been lured back home by federal and State governments with far reaching promises, which are yet to be redeemed years after. The paper indicated that the World Court judgment and implementation had severe implications on these hitherto Bakassi residents as many are subjected to untold hardship in urban Yenagoa where knowledge in fishing activities does not count. The study revealed that to survive, the returnees adopted whichever occupation came their way to which some have done well while others are not. It also showed that the new trades adopted have consequences as many of their children no longer go to school, some lured into crime, there is high rate of divorce/separation and many regretted coming back to Nigeria. Based on the findings it was recommended that government should urgently provide palliatives and resettle the IDPs to avoid another IDP crisis in the country.

Keywords: Bakassi, IDPs, Livelihood, Coping Strategies, Yenagoa, Bayelsa State, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

In the year 2002, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in The Hague ruled that Nigeria should hand off sections of the Bakassi peninsula. Nigeria and Cameroon in 2006, subsequently signed an agreement in Green Tree, U.K. wherein the Nigeria government agree to withdraw both her security forces and citizens from the Cameroon side to Nkang in the Nigeria side of the Bakassi territory. State governments in association with National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) embarked on the relocation of identified citizens to their states of origin for proper settlement. The Bayelsa State government evacuated over 1,500 persons from Nkang, Cross River State to Yenagoa for settlement in their home communities. The evacuation exercise was made possible only when the Federal and State governments made varying promises to the people. The Bayelsa State government made specific promises that:

- All heads of households of Bakassi returnees will be provided with a permanent house – a 1-bedroom apartment in their home towns;

- All returnees will be safely transported to their home towns;
- Financial support for trading will be provided for all those willing to take to trading;
- Basic household items, e.g. foams, cooking utensils, etc. will be provided for Bakassi returnees;
- Skill acquisition training will be given to returnees willing to go into gainful skills; and
- Children of Bakassi returnees will be admitted into schools (NEMA, 2008).

Affirming the commitment of the Federal Government to properly resettle the people, Essien Ayi, Bakassi Representative in the Federal House of Representatives noted:

Bakassi returnees are entitled to federal housing and resettlement help. It is the duty of the states, in conjunction with the federal government, to find a way to resettle all returnees because when the handover took place, the government said Nigerians had two options: to come back and be resettled, or remain as Nigerians in Cameroon. So those who opted out should be resettled as soon as possible (IRIN, 2009).

Despite the above reassuring promises, not much has been done to better the lives of the returnees. What has happened to the lofty promises and what coping strategies have been adopted by the people to make ends meet are some of the questions the paper hopes to provide answers.

Wood (1994) defines migration as a permanent or semi-permanent change of residence, usually across some form of administrative boundary. Migration is the movement of individuals and groups from one society to another for the purpose of residing either temporarily or permanently (Ekpenyong, 1999). Migration is a worldwide phenomenon. In Africa migration generally has historically been important (Abasiokong, 2010; Ojua, Oru & Atama, 2014).

Tracing the historical emergence of migration worldwide, Wikipedia notes thus:

Historically migration of human populations began with the movement of Homo erectus out of Africa across Eurasia about a million years ago. Homo sapiens appear to have colonized all of Africa about 150,000 years ago, moved out of Africa 70,000 years ago, and had spread across to Australia, Asia and Europe by 40,000 years ago. Migration to the Americas took place 15,000 years ago, and by 2,000 years ago, most of the Pacific Islands were colonized. Later population movements notably include the Neolithic Revolution, Indo-European expansion, and the Early Medieval Great Migrations including Turkic expansion.

Migration is arguably one of the most important social risk management instruments of mankind. It is a strategy by which individuals, families and whole populations can escape exposure to risk by moving from a risk prone region to a safer region. This may be in response to natural disaster, physical conflict or poverty, the risk of destitution and other economic shocks. At the same time migration does not eliminate the need to handle the many other risks of life (such as sickness or unemployment). In other words, migration can be seen as a form of social protection, but it also necessitates social protection (DRC, 2003).

Forced migration flows result from a variety of causal factors. These include wars, persecution, natural disasters, location of new industries or other infrastructures, environmental degradation, ethnic discrimination, boundary adjustment, etc. Forced migrations are commonly classified/discussed under two topics of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs). While

much more attention is placed in the analysis of the situation of refugees than IDPs, yet both are subjected to the same condition – deprivation. While explaining the differences between refugee and IDPs, the Forced Migration Guide online explained IDPs as:

Persons or groups who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence in particular as a result of/or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalized violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and have not crossed an internationally recognized state border (Forced Migration Guide 2009).

Displacement is often associated with myriad of problems and brings about suffering to the displaced. Amos (2012) notes that despite the efforts of humanitarian organizations displacement often leads to hunger and illness, both physical and mental. There is loss of dignity as individuals and families become dependent on others for survival. Deng (1999) notes that there is growing awareness within the international community of the magnitude of the crisis of internal displacement that affects between 20 and 25 million people worldwide. While the responsibility for the protection of IDPs falls first and foremost on national governments and local authorities, it is vital that the international community provide protection and assistance for IDPs in cooperation with the governments concerned. International protection and assistance especially become needed where governments lack the will or the capacity to provide for their own displaced populations, which is tragically often the case in conflicts caused by, or resulting in, acute crises of national identity.

The resettlement of IDPs has, recently, been treated as a peripheral issue in the field of forced migration studies (Muggah, 2003). The reasons for this includes the absence of international attention, the marginal status of the displaced populations prior to displacement, and the limited attention devoted to the subject matter by social scientists (Cernea, 1997).

Wet (2002) also noted that the fact that the States serves both as implementer and referee in resettlement issues puts it in a powerful position. However, reluctantly, a state responds to pressures, the question becomes one of how to integrate resettled people into their national, political and economic systems so that they can put pressure on their government and increasingly participate as equal citizens. He notes further that poorly informed and planned, non-consultative and badly implemented resettlements projects continue to result in impoverishment and social disruption and provokes resistance. Displaced persons may resist resettlement if they fear that the new location may not be advantageous to them or it is far from the present site.

Lazarus (1966) defines coping as the process of perceiving a potential response to a threat and executing the response. His work is based on two distinct theories about the ways in which people cope. The first, *problem-focused coping* is focused on doing something to change the source of stress. This occurs among people who feel they can do something constructively to minimize the stress. The second, *emotional-focused coping* manages or reduces the emotional distress that results from the stressful situation. This occurs among people who feel that they can endure the situation that brings on stress.

Statement of the Problem

IDPs are people who are generally in need of resettlement and assistance, and when governments and NGOs visit or take them away from their camps or areas considered life threatening, it is often believed that a better alternative was being provided. The Bayelsa State government made

far reaching promises before relocating them from Cross River State to Bayelsa State in Nigeria. What has happened to these reassuring and soothing promises, and why are they still in a temporary camp in Yenagoa, years after; what coping strategies have been developed by the people to make ends meet and what are the implications of these strategies on the people.

Purpose of the Study

The major objective of this article is to examine the livelihood coping strategies of the Bakassi returnees. The specific objectives are (1) to find out if the lofty promises made to the people have been redeemed or not, (2) to examine the livelihood coping strategies adopted, and the implications thereon, and (3) to make suggestions to authorities, where necessary on possible options for timely and effective resettlement of the people.

Research Questions

- What has happened to the promises made to the returnees before their evacuation from Nkang to Yenagoa and ultimately to their home towns?
- What coping strategies have been adopted by the returnees to survive in Yenagoa?
- What are the implications of the livelihood coping strategies adopted by the returnees?

METHODOLOGY

The descriptive survey design was employed to determine the level of redemption of the promises made to the returnees, the coping strategies adopted and the implications of the strategies on the returnees. A total of 558 returnees were randomly interviewed from about 3,000 returnees covering both male and female. The instrument used for the data collection was a 35 item questionnaire. The cross tabulation method of data analysis was found useful in finding out the presence or absence of a relationship.

Study Area

The Azikoro temporary resettlement camp situates along Azikoro Road in the capital city of Yenagoa is the study area. The returnees who on arrival from Bakassi in Cross River were initially camped in three government institutions, but later moved to the new site, where government provided make-shift houses to accommodate the returnees for a short period.

Procedure for Sample Selection

The study adopted cluster sampling technique where group discussions, and questionnaires were conducted with men, women and adolescents of different segments of the camp. The researcher first introduced himself to the leadership of the camp. This was followed with selection of persons for inclusion in the focus group discussion (FGD), which comprised of adolescents, male and female adults in all the five quarters of the returnees' camp. Each FGD comprised of 5 returnees and the leadership of the camp and other key informants. After conducting interviews with members of the camp, we also visited state officials who were directly charged with the evacuation and resettlement of the returnees. The researcher then administered questionnaires to adolescents and adult members not covered in the FGD.

Method of Data Analysis

In analysing the data gathered from respondents, the Statistical Package of the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 19 was used. Mean, Standard deviation and simple percentage (cross tabulation) method of data analysis was adopted for personal data. Mean was used to determine the strength of variables relative to the weakness of others and cross tabulation was used because it is one of the simplest and most common ways of demonstrating the presence or absence of a relationship.

RESULTS

Research Question One

What has happened to the promises made to the returnees before their evacuation from Nkang in Cross River to Yenagoa, in Bayelsa State all in Nigeria?

Table 1: Government's Promises to returnees and percentage of Redemption

Details	Redeemed	
	Freq.	%
Build Apartments for each adult	0	0
Money for trading	0	0
Scholarship/School for the Children	0	0
Skill acquisition programmes	31	5.56
Job Opportunities	0	0
Transportation to home towns	0	0

The Office of the Secretary to the State Government of Bayelsa State proposed to provide the above facilities for the returnees. Table 1 above reveals that government failed to redeem its promises to the returnees. All respondents said government has failed to meet their needs. This notwithstanding, 31 respondents (5.56%) said government provided skill acquisition training programme for a cross section of the people. It was observed that the government of Henry Seriake Dickson provided a borehole with treatment plant for the returnees at the Azikoro road temporary camp in Yenagoa. However, due to poor finishing and the resultant high iron content, the water is not suitable for drinking purposes. More so, the facility depended on erratic public power supply, and as no standby power is provided, coupled with lack of maintenance, the project has since become dysfunctional.

Also, in the absence of toilet facilities, the people defecate all around the camp as they all operate the well-known system of 'short put' – defecate into a polythene bag and throw into the bush, dustbin, gutters, or whatever space that was available. This unhealthy situation prevails; no wonder there is high death rate in the camp coupled with lack of health facilities. Noor (2007, p. 29) reports a similar situation in Somalia, when he said most IDPs have largely been left to their own devices, and information on living conditions and protection issues remain scarce. Morbidity, mainly from diarrheal diseases (due to consumption of unsafe water) and malaria, is on the increase in many places in the south and central Somalia where a marked increase in Acute Watery Diarrhea (AWD) and cholera was reported, mostly linked to post-flood conditions, and lack of safe drinking water and sanitation. This also agrees with Lidstone (2007, p. 63) who

found IDPs rate of mortality, morbidity and deprivation well above emergency threshold in Burma.

Research Question Two

What coping strategies have been adopted by the returnees to survive in Yenagoa?

Table 2: Coping Strategies adopted by Returnees

S/N	Variables on Livelihood coping Strategies	Mean	Std. Dev.	N	Remarks
1.	Hawking of food items	3.7473	.88207	558	Accepted
2.	Hawking of jewels/clothing	2.8423	.99741	558	Accepted
3.	Selling kiosks/beer parlour business	3.1165	1.23491	558	Accepted
4.	Massaging	3.7437	1.02251	558	Accepted
5.	Fishing/Farming	2.2151	1.18806	558	Rejected
6.	Menial/Daily paid jobs	3.4050	1.31860	558	Accepted
7.	Company worker	2.2111	.92697	558	Rejected
8.	Government employment	1.9957	1.13117	558	Rejected
9.	Commercial boat driving	1.9566	1.17157	558	Rejected
10.	Taxi/Okada/Keke Napep Driving	1.9348	1.09080	558	Rejected
11.	Mayguard (Security guard)	3.4287	.94131	558	Accepted
12.	Self Employed (Welding/Fitting/Hair dressing)	3.1219	.82488	558	Accepted
13.	Self Employed (Cloth making/weaving)	3.9910	.86729	558	Accepted
14.	Self Employed (Fishing gear making)	2.4351	1.25324	558	Rejected
15.	Self Employed (Boat carving/making)	2.1953	1.04281	558	Rejected
16.	Partisan politics	2.0448	.97166	558	Rejected
17.	Property Agent	1.9681	.65766	558	Rejected
18.	Reliance on kin networks	3.2151	.88806	558	Accepted
19.	Accepting various lovers	2.9419	.82488	558	Accepted
Grand Total		2.9419			Accepted

The above table indicates that the returnees adopted various occupations to make ends meet. The responses in items 1,2,3,4,6,11,12,13,18, were accepted because their mean scores were above 2.50. The mean score determine the acceptance of rejection of the rating items. In order to obtain results, the mean responses were computed: $4+32+1= 10/4 = 2.50$. Thus, the grand mean of 2.9419 illustrates that hawking of food items, jewels/clothing, selling kiosks/beer parlour, massaging, menial/daily paid jobs, security guard, welding/fitting, hair dressing, cloth making/weaving, reliance on kin networks and taking on various lovers simultaneously were some of the most adopted sources of livelihood coping strategies by the returnees, while other sources of livelihood coping strategies were not given full attention. Faced with challenges of survival, many Bakassi returnees turned to various trades which they hitherto never dreamt of to make ends meet.

The Help Age International (HAI) (2002) in her report noted that knowledge/skills and capacities of IDPs can and in fact do support relief efforts. Stigter (2008) also reported that to survive refugees often take up whatever job that was available. He specifically, notes the case of Afghans in Iran, who often filled ‘dirty, dangerous, demeaning jobs’ working at construction sites, digging ditches, cleaning wool, shelling pistachios, and sweeping streets. As Vincent (2001) noted, for urban IDPs, displacement may be exacerbated by the additional hardship of adopting to congested urban slums where public services do not exist or are underdeveloped and where IDPs feel they cannot access local authorities for assistance.

Jacobson (2002) also noted that in communities facing conflict and displacement, livelihoods comprise how people access and mobilize resources enabling them to increase their economic security, thereby reducing the vulnerability created and exacerbated by conflict and how they pursue goals necessary for survival and possible return.

Research Question Three: What are the implications of the livelihood strategies adopted by the returnees?

Table 3: Implications of adopted Livelihood coping methods

S/N	Implications of the Livelihood coping strategies adopted	Mean	Std. Dev.	N	Remarks
1.	Many children could not go to school	3.1900	.86677	558	Accepted
2.	Many returnees have become unproductive	3.0896	.90433	558	Accepted
3.	Many returnees have been lured into crime	3.3047	.84811	558	Accepted
4.	Some women have become commercial sex	2.8369	1.05347	558	Accepted
5.	There is an alarming number of deaths/illnesses	3.2219	.82488	558	Accepted
6.	There us high rate of divorce/separation	3.3351	.78806	558	Accepted
7.	Many see Government as deceitful	3.1277	.70778	558	Accepted
8.	Many regret returning to Nigeria	3.2547	.95304	558	Accepted
9.	Many families are going through hardship	3.2375	6.7289	558	Accepted
10.	Many people are unemployed/underemployed	3.1200	.61424	558	Accepted
Grand Total		3.2481			Accepted

In table 3, we simply tallied and analyzed along agree and disagree, and the result revealed that the research question was accepted since the scores were above 2.50. Thus, the grand mean Of 3.2481 was accepted, which shows the negative implications of the livelihood coping strategies adopted by the returnees. Many children of the returnees could not go to school but give helping hand to their parents in hawking or selling in the kiosks. Many men, women and children have in the process been knocked down by fast moving motor vehicles. Many cannot readily find jobs to do and so have come unproductive able bodied men and women, and some have been lured into crime in order to survive.

Face with hardship, some women have thrown morality overboard and have gradually gone into hitherto unthinkable commercial sex practice by going out with different men in turns with a view to make some money for sustenance. Also, through hawking some women have been raped and others have become unfaithful to marital vows. These acts have resulted in many divorce and separation cases.

Also, the alarming number of deaths may have been as a result of some unhealthy and risky odd jobs they perform to make ends meet. These jobs and habits have in themselves brought about regrets and the people see the action of government in bring them back from Bakassi as both deceitful and not commendable.

CONCLUSION

The World Court judgment and the follow up agreement signed between Nigeria and Cameroon have exposed many citizens of Nigeria into strains and stress. Many Bakassi returnees have lost their means of livelihood and have become dependent on others, helpless and powerless. More so, Bayelsa State government, which made comforting promises soon overlooked the plight of the IDPs, and never redeemed the promises made. To ameliorate their plights, many have adopted whichever occupation that came their ways, such as hawking, hair dressing welding and urban transportation. While many can be described as ‘managing’ their lives, others were not so

lucky. The government as a matter of urgency need to resettle these people before it becomes another IDP crisis in the country.

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