



# The Need for Protection of Civilians in North East Nigeria

## Protection Analysis Update | April 2024

BRIEF

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Fourteen years into the conflict, the humanitarian crisis in North East Nigeria remains profound and widespread. Approximately 2.7 million people, 1.8 million IDPs, and 0.9 million returnees are residing in Borno state which is considered as the epicenter of the crisis across the BAY states (Borno, Adamawa and Yobe). The ongoing conflict between the Government of Nigeria (GoN) and Non-State Armed Groups (NSAG), as well as among NSAGs continues to pose serious protection risks for the IDP, refugee/IDP returnees and host populations of Borno.

The search for livelihood opportunities and access to farmlands, especially within Borno state is increasingly becoming difficult, and endangering the lives of the affected population at the cost of attacks and fatalities. NSAGs illegally stop, **attack, abduct, and kill civilians indiscriminately, especially those going about livelihood activities**, thereby creating significant protection risks for the affected population that is already experiencing high levels of vulnerability. This makes it difficult for the population to be self-reliant or sustainably re-start their lives, despite their will to do so. Protection partners reported protection incidents of attacks on civilians between 1st January and 29th April 2024, affecting a **total of 413 individuals, including 207 attacks on civilians and unlawful killing of IDPs, returnees, and host community members; as well as 206 abductions, kidnappings, and forced disappearance of men and girls and boys.**

The protection risks requiring immediate attention in the period covered by this analysis are:

1. **Attacks on civilians and other unlawful killings and attacks on civilian infrastructure.**
2. **Abduction, kidnapping, and forced disappearance.**
3. **Theft, extortion, eviction, or destruction of personal property.**

### URGENT ACTION NEEDED

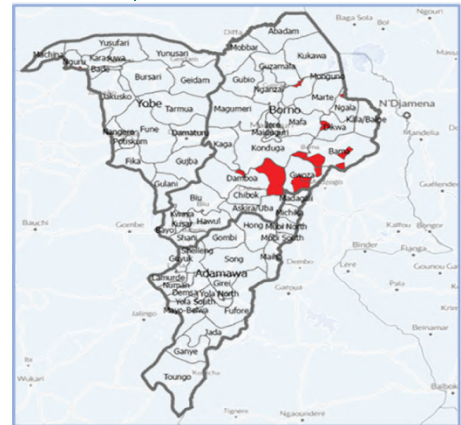
Urgent action is needed to stop emerging negative coping strategies, driven by the increased violence, conflict, food insecurity, and unprecedented rising of abuse and exploitation that has been identified. It is of utmost importance that:

- Government-led return and relocation must consider safe livelihood and meaningful access to the means of livelihood.
- Ensure consistent security and safety of the locations of return/relocation as a precondition for relocation.
- Mine clearance in surrounding areas of communities receiving the returned/relocated population and safe access to farmland should be a priority.

## CONTEXT

| IDP POPULATION | RETURNEE POPULATION | THEFT & DESTRUCTION OF PERSONAL PROPERTY | ATTACKS & KILLINGS | ABDUCTIONS, KIDNAPPINGS AND FORCED DISAPPEARANCES |
|----------------|---------------------|--|--------------------|---|
| 1,804,850      | 898,942             | 183                                      | 207                | 206   |

Farmers and other civilians going to livelihood activities continue to be illegally stopped, attacked, abducted, harmed, and killed primarily by NSAGs, Fulani herders, and occasionally by forces associated with the military and government forces across Borno state. Notably affected areas are the Bama, Damboa, Gwoza, Mobbar, and Ngala Local Government Areas (LGAs). High levels of insecurity coupled with ongoing displacement, limited freedom of movement and livelihood opportunities, and low levels of government and humanitarian services have worsened the situation of the displaced population across Borno state.



With the conflict ongoing, return and relocation taking place at the same time, safety in several areas of return and relocation remains a serious protection concern. Humanitarian actors do not have access to many of these insecure locations where return/relocation has taken place, and the Borno State Government is not providing continuous assistance given that the goal is to ensure dependency is reduced and self-sufficiently enhanced. On the contrary, the population who are predominantly farmers cannot engage in safe farming or any meaningful livelihood activity due to safety concerns in areas surrounding the towns of return/relocation. The desire to search for livelihood opportunities and access farmlands within Borno state continue to endanger the lives of the affected population at the cost of attacks and fatalities. NSAG unlawful attacks, abduction, and killing of civilians, as well as theft and destruction of property especially those going about livelihood activities have become prevalent protection concerns.

## PROTECTION RISKS

**RISK 1** Attacks on civilians and other unlawful killings and attacks on civilian infrastructure.

A significant increase in attacks on civilians were recorded between 1st January and 29<sup>th</sup> April 2024 in Bama, Damboa, Gwoza, Mobbar (Damasac), and Ngala LGAs of Borno state – a total of **207** attacks on civilians - a significant increase from **71** incidences recorded in the last quarter of 2023. The attacks affected a total of **413** individuals, resulting in the death of **77** civilians and injuries of **74** individuals. The reported attacks targeted civilians in the bushes whilst they were fetching firewood, on the way to their farmland, and in search of mangoes, tamarinds, and baobab fruits. All incidents roughly 5-20 kilometers from Bama, Damboa, Gwoza, Mobbar (Damasac), and Ngala towns, and were mainly perpetrated by NSAGs, while the military committed one incident at the Firgi farm outskirts of Pulka town.

The NSAGs are aware that many people are not receiving food assistance in return areas, and the only option for most people is to engage in farming, search for metal scraps for sale, collect firewood for sale and domestic use and collection of fruits as the only means of subsistence. NSAGs appear to be primarily interested in pursuing civilians, notably men and women between the ages of 24 and 45 as well as adolescent boys and girls between the ages of 10 and 17. They encircle public spaces where the host community and IDPs have access to frequently gather fruit or firewood from various locations. Tree cutting also seems to be an additional trigger, with NSAGs using them as hideouts, putting populations cutting trees at particular risk.

Many families rely on venturing into the bush daily to gather firewood, both for their own household needs and to sell for income to support their families. Without adequate support, these communities are trapped in a cycle of vulnerability, forced to endure risks to their safety and well-being simply to meet their family's basic needs.

The IDPs living in camps and the returnees living in the host communities have become fearful because of the increasing insecurity incidents, with community members expressing fears of being raped, or killed, or because of the threat of IEDs. Some of the victims are traumatized and in psychological and emotional distress, while some of them have engaged in negative coping mechanisms, such as begging, hawking, and survival sex. Women and adolescent girls have been reported to engage in survival sex, especially IDPs, to be able to meet their basic needs, as they fear attacks and killings if they try to engage in farming or search for livelihood outside of the towns. The attacks and associated fears and safety risks resulted in the secondary displacement of IDPs to other nearby villages and LGAs that they consider safe, with over 600 individuals seeking safety in neighboring camps, wards, and LGAs.

In some LGAs many civilians continue to access the bushes regardless of the security threat because cutting firewood is their only means of livelihood. Those who are unwilling to risk going into the bushes find it difficult to meet their most basic needs. Some men, women, and adolescent boys and girls (9-17 years) engage in other jobs, such as cutting stones for sale, and other hard labour, including carrying loads at the border to cross to Cameroon, where they are exploited and are paid NGN 500 (less than \$0.50) or less per day, whereby increasing the risks of trafficking and exploitation.

## **RISK 2** Abduction, kidnapping, and forced disappearance

During the reporting period, 195 abductions, kidnappings, and forced disappearance of men, girls, and boys were recorded, with the abductions increasingly targeting adolescent girls between the ages of 12 to 17 years. When NSAGs encounter civilians within the age range of 13 to 40 years boys, girls, men and women, the NSAGs tend to abduct the youngest ones, particularly selecting boys and girls between 13 to 25 age range and releasing the others, which would appear to be linked to forced recruitment and use of children into NSAGs. Abductions targeting children between the age of 10 to 17, particularly girls, exposes them to heightened risks of gender-based violence. The community members are observed to be living in fear of losing a family member, a neighbor, or an acquaintance. The pervasive fear of abduction also hinders economic activities, with individuals expressing reluctance to engage in livelihood pursuits and resorting to negative coping mechanisms.

## **RISK 3** Theft, extortion, eviction, or destruction of personal property

Theft, extortion, eviction, and destruction of personal property emerged as pervasive protection risks in the community. Reports revealed 183 reported cases of theft, extortion, and eviction, including the looting and burning of 77 bicycles, 5 tricycles, and 1 truck and the stealing of 170 livestock belonging to IDPs, IDP returnees, and the host community. Based on the community perceptions, the main reasons for the increased attacks are related to the harvest season. Indeed, NSAGs use the stolen bicycles and tricycles for transport and loot the harvested crops such as beans, maize, ground nuts, and rice, planted by the civilian population over the past months to trade them in Cameroon and Madagali.

These protection risks affecting vulnerable civilians have led them to resort to negative coping mechanisms. The impacts of property-related protection risks extend to economic losses, food insecurity, and displacement. The destruction of personal property, theft, and restriction of farmers to access their lands, impacts their ability to sustain their livelihoods and exposes them to various protection risks. The forced payment demanded by NSAGs to access farmland adds an economic burden, and the NSAGs have been reported to attack and seize the harvests produced, farmers' bicycles, and other properties that particularly affect vulnerable households. There has been an increase in criminality (stealing of livestock, bicycles, foodstuff, and humanitarian community assistance such as solar panels at water points) within the camps.



## RESPONSE

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### PROGRESS MADE ON PROTECTION

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Protection partners and the Protection Sector North East Nigeria have carried forward **advocacy on the alarming trend of attacks on civilians** and unlawful killings, abduction, kidnapping, and forced disappearance and theft, extortion, and destruction of personal property. The government and partners alike acknowledge the fact that security is a challenge and remains a priority undertaking for them. The need for protection is echoed in their sentiments but the appreciation of the degree of the state of security is what may be differently appreciated. This in essence enables a common ground of action for all actors concerned.

Support for families/individuals with protection concerns continues but at a limited scale to population that are accessible. Protection partners continue to use different methodologies including direct protection assistance and through the usage of cash for protection response where applicable.

Protection partners are conducting continuous sensitization on safety and security, and **Explosive Ordnance Risk Education (EORE)** for the affected population. Mental health and psycho-social support, legal support, support to women and children, and limited-scale livelihood support are provided by Protection partners in Bama, Damboa, Dikwa, Gwoza, Ngala and Monguno LGAs. Partners are also undertaking referrals and creating linkage with other service providers for cases requiring multisectoral services including food, shelter, and health services.

Protection partners continue with other core protection activities such as protection monitoring, protection assessments and surveys, engaging in community-based protection discussions, production of qualitative and quantitative data, and ensuring system strengthening of core protection areas such as child protection, GBV, HLP rights, Land/Mine Action.

### ACCESS-RELATED CHALLENGES AND ACTIONS

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The primary access challenge identified pertains to the **abduction of IDPs**. These incidents notably impact the safety, well-being, and mobility of the affected communities, thereby hindering their access to essential services and resources such as food, firewood, and healthcare. They also impact on the trust of communities to buy into durable solutions and to what extent they can rely on any additional support from anywhere. Civilians exposed to abduction and kidnapping also face obstacles such as extortion, threats, and harassment on their way to farms, and experienced threats and demands for payment to access their farms. Access impediments are also exacerbated by **widespread risk of IEDs planted by NSAGs in farmlands or route to farmlands**

Addressing access-related challenges requires a multi-stakeholder approach, involving security forces, community leaders, and humanitarian organizations to ensure safe passage and protection for civilians, including farmers.

Access to some return communities is also not feasible for many protection partners due to insecurity. The lack of protection support to individuals in need of continuous protection response in return areas has seen an increased in vulnerability and further exposure of individuals with protection needs. Given the limited freedom of movement experienced in some return locations, community members do not have access to protection services and protection partners also do not have access to the population. As a way forward, community-based protection structured are being empowered to support in the absence of protection partners.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

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### GOVERNMENT and PARTIES TO THE CONFLICT

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- To ensure the safety and security of IDPs and returnees in the areas they are residing particularly in Bama, Damboa, Gwoza, Mobbar (Damasak), and Ngala LGAs. Not only in the LGA capitals but the entire LGAs.
- Given the insecurity in surrounding towns of the LGA capitals, ensure an analysis of safety and freedom of movement before relocating civilians to areas with unsafe surroundings and a prone to attack by NSAGs. This remains important for a sustainable return as the returnees/relocated population is continuously facing intensified killing and abductions and will eventually relocate to safer locations.
- Ensure the IDPs and returnees' access to basic services and safe livelihood opportunities to reduce the protection risks of the displaced community including the intensified abductions and killings across different LGAs as well as to find permanent solutions.
- There is a need to continue upholding basic protection minimums with respect to solutions and take a periodic resilience assessment to inform on future return and relocation plans, to strengthen this aspect and ensure sustainable and impactful returns that enable people to positively transform their lives.

### HC and HUMANITARIAN COMMUNITY

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- Advocacy and provision for safe livelihood opportunities and income-generating activities apart from farming and fetching firewood and local fruits in the bushes.
- Advocacy to CMCOORD for engagement in bilateral dialogues with the military commanders in the LGAs affected to address the increased tension and the military role to reduce the civilian's exposure to NSAG attacks.
- Ensuring that the centrality of protection remains a key feature of humanitarian engagement in the NE of Nigeria

### DONORS

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- Increase their support to Protection partners particularly Child Protection and GBV partners to reach a large number of IDPs and returnees in need of CP and GBV services including those particularly affected by recurrent NSAG abduction and killings.
- Support for the Protection Sector and partners to ensure the provision of targeted safe livelihood options to reduce the affected population's exposure to NSAG attacks, killing, and abductions.
- Reinforce HDP nexus linkages for a comprehensive response and sustainability of solutions.
- Support investments in security as a corollary of IDP protection and solutions.

### PROTECTION SECTOR and PARTNERS

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- Advocacy and provision for safe livelihood opportunities and income-generating activities apart from farming and fetching firewood and local fruits in the bushes.
- Advocacy to Mine Action partners to organize additional EORE sessions and provide training for security personnel and community members on mine action, as the NSAGs could plant IEDs in farmlands or route to farmlands and have updated maps on locations that are at risk.
- Advocacy to the Food Security sector for food assistance to the persons affected by the NSAG attacks as the reduction of food beneficiaries and lack of assistance is a pushing factor for the households to rely on firewood collection and farming in insecure areas to feed their families.

- Sensitization and awareness-raising sessions on the effects of child labor and child/forced marriages, parenting behaviors, positive coping mechanisms, and effects of theft in the community as a mitigation measure.
- Evidence-based qualitative periodic reports on the evolving protection situation in the NE of Nigeria.

### Methodology

Protection Incident Reporting, Protection Monitoring Reports, Focus Group Discussions, and Key Informant Interviews conducted by Protection partners were utilized to analyze the incidents affecting civilians. Protection Incident Reporting and Protection Monitoring Reports are major protection tools that provide rich information on the detailed description of the incident, persons affected and situation/impact of those affected, their primary protection needs, and support required, plus recommendations to help mitigate related harm witnessed and reported.

To reinforce the analysis of the information gathered through the reporting tools, Protection Monitors conducted different FGDs and KIIs on the protection incidents that have been occurring during the reporting period.

### Limitations

Protection monitoring data and information obtained in this Protection Analysis Update is limited to areas that are currently accessible by humanitarian actors in Borno state Northeast Nigeria. The qualitative data predominantly focused on information related to the attack on farmers and its related Protection risks and impacts specifically to Bama, Damboa, Gwoza, Mobbar, and Ngala LGAs in Borno state, Northeast Nigeria. Expert opinions and data analysis and consultations with key Protection actors were carried out to ensure accurate and evidence-based data.



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