

MY NAME IS AISHA

A COLLECTION OF STORIES FROM INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS



Written by

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MY NAME IS AISHA
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Stories and pictures used in this book have been published with the permission of individuals and leaders at Area I, IDP Camp, Abuja, Nigeria. All images belong to My Internally Displaced Persons. Some of the discussions and interviews were translated from the Hausa language to the English language.

All figures published in this book with regards to Internally Displaced Persons are from the IOM UN Migration, Displacement Tracking Matrix, Nigeria, Round 25 Report for October 2018. This holds true unless otherwise stated.

Disclaimer: This book is a collection of real-life stories. It reflects the people's recollection of their experiences over time. Some events have been compressed and summarised. No names have been changed, no characters invented, no events fabricated. Aisha is a representation of people who have been displaced by armed conflict.

The objective of this book is to bring you on a short journey to view the world through the eyes of people that have been forced to flee their homes as a result of armed conflict. It aims to educate and create awareness on the plight of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), who are victims of the BokoHaram Insurgency in North-East Nigeria. It chronicles real-life stories of people displaced from Borno, Adamawa and Yobe States in 2014 who now live in the Area I IDP Camp, Durumi, Abuja. A large number of people living in this camp have been displaced from Bama and Gwoza communities in Borno State, Nigeria.

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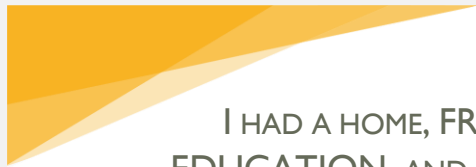
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I HAD A HOME, FRIENDS, FAMILY,
EDUCATION, AND A COMMUNITY -
ONE DAY, ALL OF THAT CHANGED.

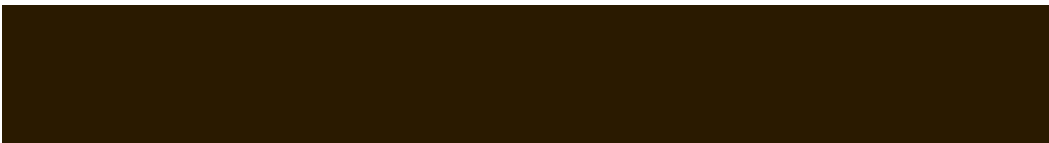
AISHA

AISHA REPRESENTS A PEOPLE WHO HAVE BEEN DISPLACED BY ARMED CONFLICT.

Internally Displaced Persons refer to persons who have been forced to leave their homes as a result of armed conflict, situations of violence, violations of human rights or natural disasters who have not crossed an internationally recognised state border¹

¹ Internal USAID document: USAID Assistance to Internally Displaced Persons Implementation Guidelines.

MORE THAN A STATISTIC



2,026,602 displaced individuals in North-East Nigeria as at October 2018.

91% of displacements are due to the ongoing conflict in North-East Nigeria.

3 States have the largest IDP population; Adamawa, Borno, and Yobe.

60% of the IDP population live in host communities.

40% of the IDP population live in IDP camps and camp-like settings.

54% of the IDP population are females.

46% of the IDP population are males.

79% of the IDP population are vulnerable women and children.

27% of the IDP population are children under 5 years.

Sources: IOM UN Migration, DTM, Nigeria, Round 25 Report, October 2018.

“If the numbers were faces, they would look just like you and me.”



A cross-section of people at the Area I IDP Camp, Abuja.

INTRODUCTION

It started off as a typical day in Gwoza, located in a Local Government Area of Borno State, in North-East Nigeria. The rocky and hilly terrain, providing beautiful scenery. My parents were at home, and my siblings were playing outside as usual. I was washing my clothes inside the house when I started hearing gunshots. I called out to everyone, and we tried to see what was going on. That was when we noticed men moving into our village in large groups. At first, we thought they were soldiers who had come to protect us because they came in trucks, but later, we realised that the gunfire was coming from BokoHaram militants who were engaging soldiers in battle. Everyone was running, and we knew it was no longer safe to stay in the house. So, I left with my siblings and parents; we ran to the hills and stayed there hoping that the militants will retreat, but they did not – they had taken over our town. They killed our men, destroyed our property, farmlands and went away with valuable items. Living in the mountains, we ran out of food and water and survived by eating dry Guinea corn and Millet. It was not long before we realised that we would not survive much longer if we continued to stay, so we decided to leave the village. We had heard of people being killed as they tried to flee town, but we were left with no other choice.

We left in the rain carrying only some of our belongings and followed a path that had some people on it. We dressed my brothers in female clothing and covered their heads because if they were identified as men, they would have been killed. We helped to disguise many other men, but some of them were discovered and killed - my brothers were able to escape. We were stopped twice along the way by militants; they collected our identity cards, phones and the little money we had and were allowed to continue our journey. At some point, they started chasing us, and we ran for our lives.

Many men were killed, and some died of hunger while hiding from the militants. Young girls and women were taken away.

Finally, we got out of the village trekking by foot from Gwoza to Madagali, a local government area about 15 miles away in Adamawa State; we were tired, thirsty, hungry and dirty. Our feet were swollen and pierced by thorns. We stayed there for two days and did not have money to continue our journey. Later, a bus was sent, and we were brought to the Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) Camp in Area 1, Abuja. The story is not very different for many of us. My family and I have been displaced since 2014.

CHAPTER 1

SHARING THEIR STORIES



I want to share my story, I want my voice to be heard.



"We were living peacefully in Gwoza before Boko Haram arrived. I was able to escape, but my father and brothers were killed. My friend was taken away into the forest - I still don't know if she is dead or alive." -**Hafsatu**.

"My husband went into hiding, and by the time we found his hideout, he was dead – he died of hunger. I also lost my daughter to hunger, and I cried. There was no food, no water, and no soap to wash our bodies. There was nothing good around us." -**Hadiza**

"We ran out of food on the mountain and sometimes ate dry millet to survive. There was a woman who used to bring us cooked beans on the mountain, but she got shot and died from her wounds. We were left with no help." -**Halima**

"There were very few men alive in the town. The women were left to bury the dead. For those who are still missing, we look forward to hearing from them, but we have heard nothing. If security is guaranteed, I want to go back to my village." -**Halima**

"I was three months pregnant when they came to my village and killed my husband. They destroyed our lives and property. We have nothing left." -**Zara**

"I came to the camp because of the problems in Borno State. I don't have a job, and my husband has nothing to do as well. Sometimes, I find it difficult to feed my children." -**Aisha**

“I moved to the camp because of the crisis in Maiduguri. I lost my parents and siblings – I am alone and have nobody to call my own. I was depressed when I first arrived, but now, I feel better. I want to be trained so I can go to school and feed myself.” -**Amidu**

“I moved to the camp with my parents and five siblings because of the insurgency in Maiduguri. I am no longer in the crisis, and this makes me very happy. This means I can now go back to school and learn.” -**Elizabeth**

“I felt helpless when I first arrived at the camp. I had sleepless nights and feared the unknown. To make it worse, my husband lost everything – But now, I can see things getting better because I am acquiring skills. I still worry a lot.” -**Fatima**

“I came to the camp because of the crisis in Maiduguri. Now, I need to be empowered – we need people to help us. Currently, I sell fuel in litres to people around the camp. I also run errands for the camp leader.” -**Buba**

“I am here alone with my children because my husband went to Lagos to look for a job. I have no job, and I worry about feeding my children. I am happy to be receiving some training now.”

-**Blessing**

“I lost my parents, and I have not had a job since I came to the camp. I have nothing to do.”

-**Hamza**

CHAPTER 2

DISPLACEMENT IS NOT A CHOICE



I will go back to my village if security is guaranteed.



“I liked life at home, it was very peaceful before the attacks.”

Life was peaceful at home before Boko Haram invaded our town and I look forward to going back home someday. We had to leave everything behind, enduring a long and dangerous journey to escape our attackers. The first few years living in the camp were very tough; we were exhausted, frequently experiencing flashbacks, feelings of isolation, depression, and hopelessness. It was hard to understand why this happened to us - we did not choose to be here. We were faced with our new reality which was hard to accept; everyone had lost someone or something they loved dearly in the violence, and many of us had lost the zeal to go on with life. Here we were, several miles away from home and expected to start all over again.

This was not the life we imagined. Everything was going on fine at home, we were in school and happy but now, our education has been disrupted, and our lives seem to have been put on hold.

“I was in class 4 when I fled my village, I have not been to school since then. Last year, I got married, and now, I have a 5 months old baby. I still dream of going back to school.” - Fatima

We stayed here for many months before people knew our camp was located here in Area I. It was challenging for us, and we suffered very much but now, people know about us, and we receive support. We rely on donations from private individuals and organisations to survive. When we receive relief materials, the camp chairman keeps it in the storeroom until distribution day when we are organised in groups of twenty with each person representing a household. Our camp is close to the town which makes it easier to access, and I know that there are people in other IDP camps in Abuja and the North-East that are not getting as much support as we do in Area I because they are not easily accessible due to poor road access or distance.

For many of us, the camp has provided relief from the attacks and violence we fled but more has to be done to ensure that we don't stay in this place for too long. We need economic opportunities to enable us to earn a living and become financially independent.

We also have to help ourselves; the female camp leader assists the women in the delivery of babies in their homes. She serves as a community health extension worker supporting women mostly with her own resources. Sometimes she says to us, *“My birthing kit is finished, I no longer have gloves, but I have to go on. The women need me.”* She is selfless in her service to others in spite of her situation.

It is hard not to think about home. BokoHaram took away some of our people, and we still don't know where they are. Also, we left some of our people who were too old to run in the town. We keep hoping to receive news about them, but up until now, we have no information.

It has been five years since we fled our homes to safety. So many times, I dream about going back home - people have tried, but they had to come back...I wait for the day when it is safe enough for us to return.

“Displacement is not a choice.”

My name is Idris Ibrahim. I am 65 years old, and I have been displaced in Abuja since 2011. I am the camp coordinator in Area 1, IDP Camp. I was born in Adamawa but brought up and lived in Adamawa, Borno and other States in Nigeria.

I am a trained teacher and also taught in administration. I attended clerical school and worked with Ministries (the Public Service) in Maiduguri. After this, I went on to study Television Journalism – I am an ex-student of the school of journalism.

I was a pioneer staff of Nigerian Television (popularly known as Nigerian Television Authority) when it was founded in 1976. I was also into public relations and lived and worked in Lagos State for 17 years.

I voluntarily retired home in 2005 by which time, BokoHaram had reared its ugly head. I had no choice but to find a way to escape the insurgents – this is how I found myself in Abuja. Displacement was not my choice.

CHAPTER 3

WHERE IS MY HOME?



A place I must call home



"We have been here for many years."

We have a place to lay our heads, but it is not comfortable. Sometimes, you have two or three families sharing a shelter. The weather brings its challenges too, and we need better materials to build stronger structures. The spaces are overcrowded with poor ventilation. During the wet season, some of the shelters get destroyed, and it gets very hot in the dry season.

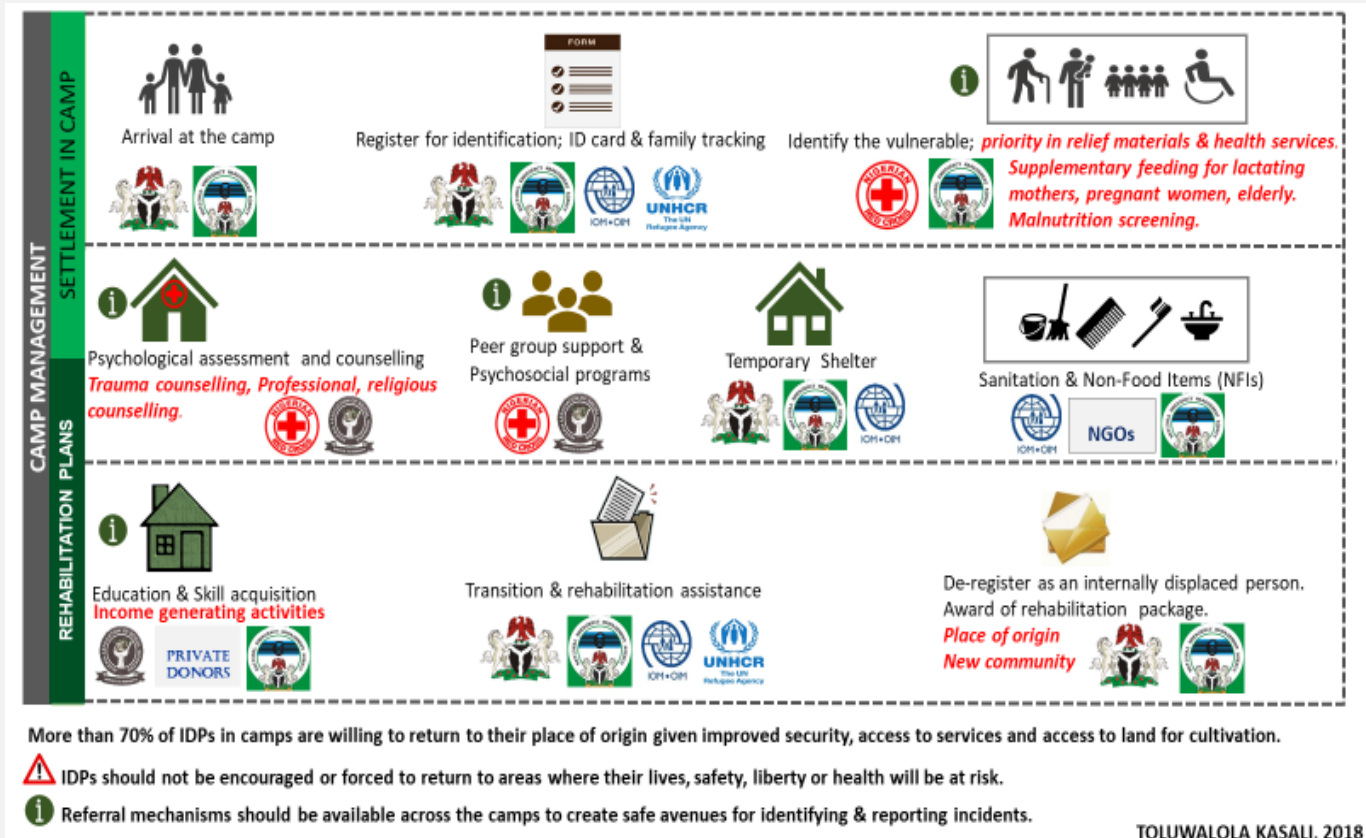


We know that this is a temporary arrangement. At the end of it all, we need a place to call our home.

Camps and campsites are intended to be temporary settlements until IDPs are resettled. However, some displaced persons have been living in camps for over three years because they are not skilled and/or adequately equipped to move on, highlighting the need-gap between the early phase of displacement and long-term reintegration into the society. The increasing number of IDPs is also putting pressure on existing facilities, negatively affecting living conditions and causing avoidable ill health amongst the people. A solution gap exists between the early phase of displacement and long-term rehabilitation and to close this gap, a multisectoral approach is required. The multisectoral approach focuses on the overall well-being of displaced persons during the period of displacement including meeting their mental and physical health, education and social needs. This is aimed at preparing and equipping them for reintegration into the society with dignity. Doing this effectively requires taking a holistic and coordinated approach, bringing together different organisations and agencies based on their mandate and expertise - humanitarian, social, governmental, and non-governmental organisations. This coordinated working system will reduce inefficiency, resource mismanagement, duplication and wastage.

When the period of displacement is prolonged as it is in many cases, a protracted phase of anxiety and uncertainty is created.

Camps should be run by professionals who understand the nature of the crisis and can provide ‘needs-driven’ solutions in responding to the specific needs of IDPs.



The drivers of insecurity and conflict must be addressed to make the issues of a potential return to the place of origin or other settlements sustainable.

CHAPTER 4

MENTAL HEALTH – THE INVISIBLE SCARS OF CONFLICT



Some scars cannot be seen.



“When I first arrived in the camp, I had nightmares about people that were killed...I sleep a bit better now.”

Even after fleeing to safety, I was afraid that BokoHaram will come back to kill me, but I am safe now. I experienced a lot of pain and suffering – they killed my people and our town was destroyed. I saw blood flowing everywhere, and the women were left to bury the dead. Those images keep playing back in my mind. I can tell you that some people are still grieving; they get angry and fight over little issues, and when you ask them what is wrong, you realise that they are dealing with other troubles they don't want to talk about. I think sometimes, all we need is someone to talk to and advise us.

“I like it when people come to the camp to talk and listen to me share my problems. It makes me feel like people care about me.” -Zainabu

The truth is that many of us don't even recognise that we need help. When you look at us, you cannot tell what is happening. Let me tell you a story...

...One of our women was going about her normal day, walking by the side of the road. Unknown to her, she had been talking to herself and making hand movements while walking. A man in his car was watching her from a distance and decided to intervene. He came to speak with her and explained what he noticed. She was in shock because she had no idea, she was talking to herself let alone, making hand movements while walking. She tells us that she lost her husband in the crisis and is responsible for taking care of herself and her children. She says the violence she experienced affected her, but she did not realise how much of an impact it had on her. This was happening to our female camp leader. She said, “see me, I am well dressed, you will never imagine I am going through this.” There are many more like me going through this stress.

Sometimes, we face problems we cannot tell anyone about.

“I have problems with my breast, but I have not told anyone because I am afraid of what people will think of me.” -Blessing.

Conflict and violence have an effect on mental health. Mental health is a subject many people shy away from, but it is critical to overall well-being.

We have similar stories from other people living in the camp.

“I came to the camp depressed and very sad because I lost my sons and husband. I also developed high blood pressure. I hope to learn skills that will help me earn a living.”

- Binta

“I lost everything, and I don’t have a job. Sometimes, I find it difficult to eat. The things I saw in the crisis keeps coming back to me – I find it difficult to sleep and feel dizzy when this happens.”

- Zainab

“I find it difficult to sleep at times. When I start getting worried or thinking, my blood pressure rises.”

- Halima

“I lost my husband, and this has caused me pain and sleepless nights. I worry about what my two children will eat. I find solace in sitting with my neighbours and talking. I also pray.”

- Mariam

“I came to the camp depressed because my father was killed during the crisis and left me with my siblings. I have left everything to God. Now, I have hope. I am happy to be getting trained.”

- Zainabu

“I was heavily pregnant during the crisis but lost the baby after birth. I got pregnant but lost the baby again. Doctors advised me to stop thinking and take care of myself. I am now pregnant.”

- Sarah

“When I came to the camp, I had many fears and dreams, but I am doing better now.”

- Ladi

“I lost my brother in the crisis, and my father died because of what happened to my brother. I live in fear and cry sometimes. I am trying to let go because thinking gives me problems.”

- Zainabu

The pain and trauma do not disappear without a supported healing process – If allowed to linger, unresolved emotional and mental issues will cause greater harm in the future, for the individual and society at large.

The stigma and isolation that comes with speaking out creates a barrier and holds people back. Stop the stigma!



We can help by choosing first to understand their state of mind; where they have been and what they have been through and working with them to offer needs-driven solutions, not a one-size-fits-all offer.

WHAT DO THEY NEED?



Early mental health support and intervention – trauma counselling, professional and religious counselling, etc.



Trained health and community health extension workers.



Stigma



Peer group support and psychosocial support.



Follow-up and start again.

CHAPTER 5

REMEMBER ME TOO



I have invisible scars too.



“The soldiers fought the BokoHaram militants to protect us.”

The soldiers engaged the BokoHaram militants in a gun battle, but the rebels kept increasing in number. The soldiers suffered too...

When we talk about victims of conflict, it is easy to focus on lives that have been lost and the people who have had to flee their homes to safety but, what about the soldiers fighting to protect them? The soldiers live away from their families for many months and are also exposed to traumatic circumstances; they are engaged in armed conflict and have to fight. They go into battle with the knowledge that they might not come out alive. While the physical injuries sustained are obvious to the eyes, the emotional and mental scars are hidden and follow them around. If soldiers are redeployed to a non-conflict zone without receiving appropriate help, they carry the invisible wounds around, affecting the way they respond to their friends, families and communities. Many times, the people who return to their families are shadows of themselves. Their minds are troubled by what they have experienced; they remember the blood, dead bodies and can recall their faces. This is disturbing to many and lingers in their hearts and minds. It is not enough to deploy soldiers, there should be emotional and mental health support available to all soldiers both during and after deployment. There should also be a system to track and follow-up on soldiers who have been moved from a conflict zone to ensure their overall well-being. They fight for us in the battle, and we must fight for their welfare. The mental health of our Army personnel must be prioritised.

**THANK YOU TO ALL MEMBERS OF THE NIGERIAN ARMED FORCES
FIGHTING IN NORTH-EAST NIGERIA.**

CHAPTER 6

THEIR DREAMS ARE VALID TOO



I want to create a better future for myself.



“We lost our jobs, income, farmlands and businesses. We have to start all over again.”

Many of us don't have jobs, and the idleness is affecting us. Usually, when I get busy, it helps me to stop thinking. If we have something to do, then we can provide for ourselves and our families. Before now, some of the women were selling local caps, beans and groundnut cake. We need to be engaged and empowered.

“Being busy makes me forget about my problems.” -Aisha

“I was making and selling local caps when I was in Borno State, and I am happy to learn other trades.” -Hadiza

Individuals and organisations come to the camp sometimes to train some of us in skills like soap making, hair making, mechanic work, tailoring, and bead making. Some of the young men ride motorbikes to earn a living (carry passengers at a fee from one location to another). They are able to move outside the camp to find customers, but most of them want more out of life; equipping us means that we can realise our dreams and become whoever we want to be.

“I am currently in JSS3 and dream of becoming a fashion designer. I plan to take the Creative Art subject in senior school, so I can become a fashion designer”. I want to focus on dresses.” -Zara

When people come to help and train us, we feel very happy – it gives us hope for the future.

“If I can achieve my dream of being whoever I want to be in life, that will make me happy. I have hope when people come to help us.” -Adama

Rashida dreams of owning a salon in high-brow areas in Abuja.

“Now, I look forward to opening my hair salon in Asokoro or Maitama in Abuja; I will charge ₦500 only for everything including hair attachment.” - Rashida

"We are acquiring skills to prepare us for the future."



My name is Blessing Sunday, I am 29 years old. I can cut and braid natural hair and extensions. I used to sell beans cake, but now, I want to be a Hair Dresser.



My name is Hafsat Usman, I am 23 years old. I can make jewellery using beads. If I am trained in tailoring, I will combine both skills. I want to be a Teacher in the future.



My name is Suleiman Nuhu, I am 15 years old. I recently acquired carpentry skills. I can make a bench, a stool, and a table. I want to join the Army in the future.



My name is Fatima Lawan, I am 22 years old. I can braid hair in plait and twist styles. I want to become a businesswoman and own a hairdressing salon.



My name is Zakariya Ibrahim, I am 14 years old. I recently acquired skills in mechanic work, and I can change a car's brake pad and tyre. I want to become an Architect in future.



My name is Adamu, I am 15 years old. I recently acquired skills in electrical repairs. I know how to repair a car's horn and headlights. I want to become an Engineer in future.

We should empower IDPs through education, skill acquisition and training to develop a sustainable means of livelihood, as well as regain dignity.



My name is Ali Usman, I am 15 years old. I used to be a mechanic and recently learned more about identifying faults in cars. I want to be a Mechanic in future.



My name is Fatima Babson, I am 20 years old. I sell snacks for a living. I can also cut hair and style braids. I want to become a Hair Dresser in future.



My name is Hadiza Zakari, I am 46 years old. I sell clothes for a living. I recently learned how to make reusable sanitary pads. I will teach young children this skill.



My name is Amidu Ali, I am 13 years old. I recently acquired carpentry skills and can cut wood and join benches. I am also skilled in mechanic work. I want to join the Army.



My name is Hauwa Ali, I am 25 years old. I know how to make jewellery including neck, hand and ear designs using beads. I want to be a Pilot.



My name is Muhammad A., I am 13 years old. I recently acquired carpentry skills. I know how to cut wood and make benches. I want to become a Soldier.

Internally Displaced Persons need to be prepared and equipped mentally, socially and economically while in camps for reintegration into the society.

"I am happy to be learning skills that will help me tomorrow." -Hauwa



My name is Fatima Sadiq, I am 24 years old. I make local caps and recently learned how to make the reusable sanitary pad. I want to be a Tailor.



My name is Mariam Buba, I am 30 years old. I sell local cake and recently learned how to make reusable sanitary pads. I want to start a business, selling reusable pads.



My name is Kabiru Amodu, I am 17 years old. I gained skills in mechanic and electrical repairs. I can walk-through a process of identifying faults in a car. I want to be an Electrician.



My name is Zainabu Umoru, I am 32 years old. I make the local cap and various types of jewellery using beads. I want to start a business.



My name is Fatima Abubakar, I am 16 years old. I can make fashionable jewellery for the hand, neck and ear using beads. I want to be a Lawyer in future.



My name is Ishaku Amadu, I am 15 years old. I can make local caps and recently gained electrical repair skills – I can repair a horn and battery. I want to become an Electrician.

When we invest in people socially and mentally, we improve their productive capacity - they become self-reliant and can support their families.

CHAPTER 7

NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

Displaced persons have suffered a great deal; witnessing the death of loved ones, destruction of lives and property and abuse. They endure long, dangerous journeys to escape their assailants and find themselves exposed and vulnerable. In many cases, children lose both parents in the process, becoming heads of families, providing for themselves and their siblings.

With such traumatic experiences, people report flashbacks and nightmares leading to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). The loss of loved ones usually leads to depression, feelings of isolation and hopelessness.

Too often, however, food, water and shelter are defined as the sole primary needs, ignoring the devastating effects of conflict and violence on mental health. Displaced persons experience grief, loss of economic opportunities and a sense of self, a breakdown of cultural identity and family structures. These socioeconomic stressors put an immense strain on the mental health of individuals. We can help to meet their basic needs while also preparing them to survive mentally, physically and economically.

In providing the help they need, access to mental health care is a major challenge – the high cost of services, the limited number of health professionals, remote locations, etc., create a treatment gap for mental disorders in IDP camps. The associated stigma and fear of isolation mean many cases are unreported. These factors raise the need for psychosocial support to be incorporated as part of the immediate humanitarian response.

From my experience, there are also social and behavioural effects of displacement. Their mindsets are shaped by past experiences and current circumstances. Their actions are a departure from what might be considered the norm. But how do we define “normal” in a situation where normal has ceased to exist for many? Using an example of two camps for displaced persons I visited, I observed that in the first camp, which is close to town and receives a

regular supply of relief materials, the people were conscious about safety and order and waited patiently for distribution of relief materials to be completed before collecting their share. However, at the second camp, with poor road access and irregular supply of relief materials, a fight broke out immediately after the distribution – there was a scuffle for available supplies, and their instinct was to fight for their basic needs. It was the "survival of the fittest" - desperation, hunger and need.

For the human mind, basic needs are for survival and safety. However, security can only matter when the basic needs of food, water and shelter have been met.

Insecurity in IDP camps where they should feel safe leaves them with little choice but to flee again, and as a result, many have been displaced more than once. For those living in host communities, conflicts arising between displaced persons and the host communities can be mentally and socially unsettling – many times, members of the host communities feel their needs are just as valid and want a share of relief materials, further raising tensions. This situation should not be allowed to linger, and for that to happen, we must provide economic opportunities that enable displaced persons to earn a living sustainably.

When the period of displacement is prolonged as it is in many cases, a protracted phase of anxiety and uncertainty is created. The drivers of insecurity and conflict must be addressed to make the issues of a potential return to the place of origin or other settlements sustainable.

Women and children represent a high percentage of this vulnerable group. The women suffer different forms of exploitation when in need of essential items, with very few channels of expressing or reporting these grievances and abuse. Increasingly, we have a duty to ensure that people are not held under a different form of oppression after fleeing violence and captivity. The effects on the mind

are unseen, but nevertheless, detrimental to their ability to recover and regain total freedom.

The issues of displacement are multifaceted, and as such, a multisectoral, comprehensive and collaborative approach is required; bringing together social and humanitarian workers, health workers, counsellors, psychologists, security agencies and governments.

Mental assessment and counselling sessions which include trauma counselling, professional, religious counselling, etc., must feature prominently in our solutions. Access to mental health services must also be prioritised for funding.

Unresolved mental health issues have dire consequences which if allowed to linger, can cause greater harm to the society in the future. We can help by choosing first to understand their state of mind; where they have been and what they have been through, working with them to offer needs-driven solutions, not a one-size-fits-all offer.

We must help rebuild their lives, so they are no longer viewed as burdens to the society. IDPs display characteristics of resilience, courage, and strength of mind to thrive, and have employed an admirable set of skills to survive. We must recognise and harness their potentials, empowering them to become contributors to social and economic development within their host communities and State. Dignity can and must be regained for our displaced population.

There are huge costs associated with internal displacement, which are not only to the individuals affected but also to the economy, political stability and security. The underlying causes of displacement must be addressed with a lot more effort put into preventing displacement, protecting people, and finding long-term solutions.

The road to full recovery and resettlement is long but achievable, and the process must begin urgently. There is no harm in falling, but there is great harm

in staying down. There is great potential in every individual, and they must be given the opportunity to realise their dreams.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

The future is here, and the difference between where they are now, and the actualisation of their dreams is dependent on what we do to lift them up today. I know that the statistics can be overwhelming, but we must start now. You do not have to look too far to find people who have been forced to flee their homes, and people who have moved to different states across Nigeria in search of help – someone in need might just be right next to you. Here are practical ways in which you can help:

- Learn more about the plight of displaced persons through online media, news reports, articles and help to create awareness.
- You can visit my website where you can find some of my articles, presentations and publications: <https://myinternallydisplacedpersons.org/>
- Similar reports to help create awareness include:
 - A Multisectoral Approach to Internal Displacement:
<https://myinternallydisplacedpersons.org/a-multisectoral-approach-to-internal-displacement/>
 - An Integrated Approach to Rehabilitating Internally Displaced Persons with Dignity:
<https://myinternallydisplacedpersons.org/rehabilitating-with-dignity/>
- Support the integration of the health, education, and social needs of displaced persons into broader socio-economic reforms in Nigeria.
- Adopt a child in any IDP Camp by supporting their dreams.

FOR INFORMATION

The Area I IDP Camp is located in Durumi, Area I, Abuja. It is situated close to the Federal Inland Revenue Service (FIRS) Training school.

To support any of the individuals in the story or provide general support to the camp's population, please contact the Camp Leaders Liyatu Ayuba on 07030536888 and Umar Gola on 08034498481.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to thank God for giving me the idea to put this together. I am grateful to my friends and new family at the Area I IDP camp for giving me the opportunity to spend time with them and get to know them better. I am thankful for the honour of sharing your story with me and giving us the opportunity to create awareness on the plight of IDPs. I am also grateful to Mrs Virginia Onyemowo Elempe who assisted in translating some of the discussions and interviews from Hausa to English.

For the cover page drawing, I wanted an original sketch to illustrate their life and capture a real expression - thank you Emmanuel Akor for doing a remarkable job and helping to bring my vision to life.

Thank you.

ABOUT MY INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS

My Internally Displaced Persons, is a cause, focused on persons who have been forced to leave their homes as a result of armed conflict, situations of violence and violations of human rights, who have not crossed an internationally recognised state border².

It was born out of a desire to prepare IDPs to survive physically, mentally and economically upon reintegration into the society with dignity, having empathy for their trauma, pain, and suffering.

This is being addressed by empowering displaced persons through counselling, education & skill acquisition, humanitarian assistance as well as the establishment and implementation of livelihood-promoting activities that link up with longer-term social and development programs.

For sustainability, this purpose will also be driven by advocacy for a comprehensive policy response, that incorporates the humanitarian, social and economic needs of displaced persons, into broader socio-economic reforms.

I want to see a society where displaced persons are reintegrated into society with dignity. We must recognise and harness their potential, empowering them to become contributors to development within their host communities and State. We must help rebuild their lives, so they are no longer viewed as burdens to society – From the report on an integrated approach to rehabilitating internally displaced persons with dignity by Toluwalola Kasali.

² Ibid., 5

CONNECT WITH THE AUTHOR

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Toluwalola is the founder of My Internally Displaced Persons, a cause, focused on empowering Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), and preparing them mentally, economically and socially while in camps for reintegration into the society with dignity. She is passionate about social impact and dedicated to causes that support inclusive socio-economic development.



She is also an Author with her first published book titled, *“My Name is Aisha – A Collection of Stories from Internally Displaced Persons”*, which aims to educate and create awareness on the plight of IDPs. Toluwalola has also published several reports on IDPs including a report titled **“An Integrated Approach to Rehabilitating IDPs with Dignity”** which was featured on the World Bank Blog and Huffington Post in an article titled *“Mental health services in situations of conflict, fragility and violence: What to do?”*. She also wrote a report titled **“A Multisectoral Approach to Internal Displacement.”**

Toluwalola advocates for the overall well-being of IDPs. She was a speaker at a high-level meeting organised by the World Bank Group and the Public Health Agency of Canada on Mental Health Stories from around the World, where she

presented a summary of her report on rehabilitating IDPs with dignity focusing on Mental Health effects of Displacement. She was also invited to the Global Ministerial Mental Health Summit hosted by the UK Government where she presented a paper on an Integrated Approach to Rehabilitating Internally Displaced Persons with Dignity under a Multisectoral Investment Program.

Toluwalola holds a BSc (Hons) in Accounting from the University of Lagos, Nigeria and an MSc in Energy Studies with Specialisation in International Oil and Gas Management from the University of Dundee, Scotland. She is a Fellow Chartered and Certified Accountant and has passed Level II of the CFA examination.

She worked as a Special Adviser to the Honourable Minister of Finance, Nigeria on Macroeconomics, Research and Reporting. She is a well-rounded investment and finance professional with over eight years of experience in Nigeria and the UK.

Toluwalola intends to continue devoting herself to causes that make a difference in the lives of others and seeks to drive sustainable change by influencing government policy to achieve the desired impact.

YOUR COMMITMENT TO SUPPORTING INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS

I ----- commit to supporting Internally Displaced Persons by doing one or all of the following:

- a) Learn more about the plight of displaced persons through online media, news reports, articles and help to create awareness.
- b) Support the integration of the health, education, and social needs of displaced persons into broader socio-economic reforms in Nigeria.
- c) Adopt a child in any IDP Camp by supporting their dreams.
- d) All of the above

Name: -----

Date: -----

NOTES



There's something to be said about the haunting and harrowing nature of displacement by violence. The IDPs will forever live with the scars of those moments. That is not a premise to which we just throw our hands up and go "Oh, well... nothing to do now". We must help, salvage, rescue, uplift, and Toluwalola captures that idea brilliantly. We might have been failed by our Country an unbearable amount of times, but to fail our brothers and sisters will be a national travesty like no other.

– Oluwatosin

These are sad and touching stories. I had goosebumps and tears reading this. We need to put an end to this insurgency, and there is a lot of work to be done. There are also many people in need of help! This book is an eyeopener to the unseen wounds the IDPs are living with which can only be healed through all-round sustainable support. It also suggests ways you and I can help these IDPs.

I highly recommend this book to everyone - mental health advocates, governments, civil societies and everyone passionate about humanity.

– Ruth Akor

There is no better time or moment to bring to all our faces and minds the heart-breaking realities of Internally displaced persons. This book is another proof that ending the Boko Haram insurgency should not be the only focus of the Nigerian government or people. The work begins with rehabilitating, reintegrating and supporting the IDPs. Toluwalola's passion is undeniable, and It is heart-breaking to see the condition of IDP camps in Nigeria, and the horrible reality of the displaced.

- Laretta Ifediorah

