

TRANSLATING EVIDENCE INTO POLICY: A TRANSITIONAL SETTLEMENT FRAMEWORK FOR IDPS IN NORTH-CENTRAL NIGERIA

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Abstract

Internal displacement has become a persistent humanitarian and development challenge in North-Central Nigeria, where recurrent farmer–herder conflicts, communal violence, and climate-related disasters have resulted in prolonged displacement and inadequate living conditions among internally displaced persons (IDPs). Despite the adoption of Nigeria’s National Policy on Internally Displaced Persons and the ratification of the African Union Kampala Convention, gaps remain in the implementation of sustainable resettlement and durable solutions. This study developed an evidence-based Transitional Settlement Framework (TSF) for internally displaced persons in North-Central Nigeria by translating empirical evidence into actionable resettlement policy. Specifically, the study examined the influence of housing adequacy on living conditions, assessed the effect of overcrowding, determined spatial variations in living conditions across Benue State, Plateau State, and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), evaluated institutional coordination and camp management practices, and developed a framework for sustainable resettlement planning. A mixed-methods research design was adopted. The quantitative component involved 480 household heads, comprising 160 respondents each from Benue State, Plateau State, and the FCT, while qualitative data were obtained through key informant interviews, focus group discussions, and field observations involving relevant stakeholders. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics, multiple linear regression, one-way analysis of variance

(ANOVA) with Tukey's post hoc test, and thematic analysis at a 5% level of significance. Findings revealed that housing adequacy significantly influenced the living conditions of IDPs ($\beta = 0.584$, $R^2 = 0.341$, $F(1,478) = 247.163$, $p < 0.001$), explaining 34.1% of the variation in living conditions. Overcrowding also had a significant negative effect on living conditions ($\beta = -0.542$, $t = -13.958$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that increasing overcrowding was associated with poorer welfare outcomes. Significant spatial variations were observed, with Plateau State recording the highest mean living condition score ($M = 3.48$, $SD = 0.512$), followed by the FCT ($M = 3.02$, $SD = 0.485$) and Benue State ($M = 2.84$, $SD = 0.521$). Institutional assessment further revealed weaknesses in government coordination, transparency in aid distribution, IDP participation in decision-making, and government-NGO coordination, although NGO service delivery and responsiveness to complaints received relatively higher ratings. Based on the empirical and qualitative evidence, the study developed a four-pillar Transitional Settlement Framework comprising structural shelter upgrading, density-sensitive spatial planning, multi-level institutional coordination, and durability and exit planning. The study concludes that sustainable improvement in IDP welfare requires a shift from emergency-driven humanitarian responses towards evidence-based resettlement planning that integrates adequate housing, effective spatial management, coordinated institutional action, and durable settlement strategies.

Keywords: internally displaced persons, transitional settlement framework, housing adequacy, overcrowding, institutional coordination, resettlement planning, North-Central Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Internal displacement has emerged as one of the most pressing humanitarian and development challenges of the twenty-first century. The increasing frequency of armed conflicts, communal violence, climate-related disasters, and socioeconomic instability has resulted in unprecedented levels of forced internal displacement, particularly across low- and middle-income countries. The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) reported that more than 83 million people were living in internal displacement at the end of 2024, with conflict, violence, and disasters continuing to drive large-scale population movements, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, where protracted displacement has become a persistent development concern rather than a temporary humanitarian emergency. Unlike refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs) remain within the borders of their own countries and therefore rely primarily on national governments for protection, assistance, and durable solutions. The effective displacement governance requires not only humanitarian interventions but also coherent public policies capable of translating empirical evidence into practical planning and implementation. Recent international policy frameworks increasingly advocate integrated approaches that combine emergency assistance with long-term settlement planning, institutional coordination, livelihood restoration, and sustainable recovery for displaced populations.

Nigeria continues to experience one of Africa's largest internal displacement crises. Persistent farmer–herder conflicts, communal violence, banditry, insurgency, and recurrent flooding have displaced millions of people across different geopolitical zones, with North-Central Nigeria remaining one of the most severely affected regions. Benue State, Plateau State, Nasarawa State, and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) have witnessed repeated displacement resulting from violent resource-based conflicts and environmental shocks, forcing thousands of households into camps and host communities where displacement frequently extends over several years. These prolonged conditions expose affected populations to inadequate housing, overcrowding, poor sanitation, limited livelihood opportunities, insecurity, and restricted access to essential social services (Anierobi et al., 2024; Ekoh et al., 2023; Nwankwo, 2024).

Recognising the growing displacement burden, Nigeria adopted the National Policy on Internally Displaced Persons in 2021 to strengthen prevention, protection, humanitarian assistance, and durable solutions for displaced populations. The country had earlier ratified the African Union Kampala Convention, the first legally binding regional instrument addressing internal displacement in Africa. However, despite these institutional commitments, implementation remains constrained by inadequate funding, fragmented institutional responsibilities, weak coordination among government agencies and humanitarian actors, and the absence of comprehensive domestication of the Kampala Convention within Nigeria's legal framework (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2021; Urhibo, 2022). These institutional limitations continue to undermine the effectiveness of resettlement programmes and sustainable reintegration efforts.

The existing empirical studies on internally displaced persons in Nigeria have generated substantial evidence regarding the socioeconomic conditions, humanitarian needs, protection challenges, and livelihood vulnerabilities experienced within displacement camps (Ekezie, 2022; Ekoh et al., 2023; Anierobi et al., 2024). Similarly, recent studies have highlighted the influence of housing quality, environmental conditions, institutional capacity, and social support systems on the welfare of displaced households. Nevertheless, much of the existing literature remains primarily descriptive, concentrating on documenting living conditions and humanitarian deficiencies without systematically translating empirical findings into operational policy frameworks capable of guiding settlement planning and resettlement interventions. Consequently, an important gap persists between research evidence and policy implementation, limiting the capacity of governments and humanitarian organisations to prioritise interventions based on statistically established determinants of welfare.

Bridging this evidence-to-policy gap is particularly important within the context of protracted displacement, where camps increasingly function as long-term settlements rather than temporary emergency shelters. In such settings, decisions concerning housing provision, spatial planning, infrastructure development, institutional coordination, and livelihood restoration should be

informed by empirical evidence identifying the factors that most strongly influence household welfare. Evidence-based policy frameworks offer greater opportunities for improving resource allocation, enhancing institutional accountability, strengthening coordination among stakeholders, and promoting durable solutions than conventional emergency-driven approaches.

The present study develops an Evidence-Based Transitional Settlement Framework (TSF) for internally displaced persons in North-Central Nigeria by synthesising quantitative and qualitative evidence obtained from 480 IDP households across Benue State, Plateau State, and the Federal Capital Territory. Specifically, the study integrates statistical evidence on housing adequacy, overcrowding, spatial disparities, and institutional coordination with stakeholder perspectives to develop a structured framework capable of translating empirical findings into practical resettlement policy. By providing a systematic mechanism through which research evidence informs settlement planning and displacement governance, the study contributes to the growing literature on evidence-based humanitarian policymaking and offers practical guidance for strengthening durable solutions for internally displaced populations in Nigeria.

Internal displacement in North-Central Nigeria has become a prolonged humanitarian and development challenge driven by recurrent farmer–herder conflicts, communal violence, and climate-related disasters. Despite the adoption of the National Policy on Internally Displaced Persons (2021) and Nigeria's ratification of the African Union Kampala Convention, many internally displaced persons (IDPs) continue to experience inadequate housing, overcrowding, poor environmental conditions, weak institutional coordination, and limited livelihood opportunities, indicating persistent gaps in resettlement policy implementation. Although previous studies have documented the living conditions and humanitarian needs of IDPs, they have largely focused on describing challenges rather than translating empirical findings into practical policy frameworks for resettlement planning (Ekezie, 2022; Ekoh et al., 2023; Anierobi et al., 2024). Consequently, evidence-based decision-making remains limited, and resettlement interventions are often fragmented and inadequately coordinated.

This study addresses this gap by developing an Evidence-Based Transitional Settlement Framework that translates empirical evidence from IDP households in Benue State, Plateau State, and the Federal Capital Territory into actionable policy recommendations for sustainable resettlement planning and improved displacement governance. The main objective of this study is to develop an evidence-based Transitional Settlement Framework for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in North-Central Nigeria by translating empirical research findings into actionable resettlement policy.

The specific objectives are to:

1. Identify the influence of housing adequacy on the living conditions of internally displaced persons in North-Central Nigeria.
2. Assess the effect of overcrowding on the welfare and living conditions of internally displaced persons.
3. Determine spatial variations in the living conditions of internally displaced persons across Benue State, Plateau State, and the Federal Capital Territory.
4. Evaluate institutional coordination and camp management practices influencing internally displaced persons (IDPs) resettlement and welfare.
5. Develop an evidence-based Transitional Settlement Framework (TSF) that translates empirical findings into practical policy recommendations for sustainable resettlement planning in North-Central Nigeria.

The study sought to answer the following research questions:

5. What extent does housing adequacy influence the living conditions of internally displaced persons in North-Central Nigeria?
6. What effect does overcrowding have on the welfare and living conditions of internally displaced persons?
7. Are there spatial variations in the living conditions of internally displaced persons across Benue State, Plateau State, and the Federal Capital Territory?
8. Do institutional coordination and camp management practices influence the welfare and resettlement of internally displaced persons?
9. Can empirical evidence be translated into an evidence-based Transitional Settlement Framework for sustainable resettlement planning in North-Central Nigeria?

Methodology

This study adopted a mixed-methods research design, integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches to examine the living conditions of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and develop an evidence-based Transitional Settlement Framework (TSF) for North-Central Nigeria. The quantitative component provided measurable evidence on the determinants of living conditions,

while the qualitative component enriched the findings through stakeholder perspectives and contextual explanations. The study was conducted in selected internally displaced persons' camps located in Benue State, the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), and Plateau State, three of the most displacement-affected areas in North-Central Nigeria. The study comprised internally displaced households residing in selected IDP camps across the three study locations. A total of 480 household heads participated in the survey, with 160 respondents selected from each state. In addition, qualitative data were obtained through key informant interviews and focus group discussions involving government officials, humanitarian agencies, community leaders, and IDP representatives. A stratified multi-stage sampling technique was employed. The three study locations were purposively selected because of their high concentration of internally displaced persons. Selected camps were subsequently sampled, after which household respondents were selected using systematic sampling procedures to ensure adequate representation of the study population. Qualitative participants were purposively selected based on their roles and experience in displacement management. Primary data were collected using structured questionnaires administered to household heads, complemented by focus group discussions, key informant interviews, and field observations. The questionnaire elicited information on housing adequacy, overcrowding, environmental conditions, institutional coordination, camp management, and overall living conditions. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, means, and standard deviations, were used to summarise respondents' characteristics and perceptions. Multiple linear regression analysis was employed to determine the influence of housing adequacy and overcrowding on living conditions, while one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) with Tukey's post hoc test examined spatial differences across the three study locations. Qualitative data were analysed thematically and integrated with the quantitative findings to strengthen interpretation and support the development of the Transitional Settlement Framework (TSF). Statistical analyses were conducted at a 5% level of significance.

RESULTS

Research Question One: *To what extent does housing adequacy influence the living conditions of internally displaced persons in North-Central Nigeria?*

Table 1. Regression Summary of the Influence of Housing Adequacy on the Living Conditions of Internally Displaced Persons

Predictor	β	R^2	F	p-value	Decision
Housing Adequacy	0.584	0.341	247.163	<0.001	Significant

Dependent Variable: Overall Living Condition Score.

The results in Table 1 indicate that housing adequacy significantly influenced the living conditions of internally displaced persons in North-Central Nigeria ($\beta = 0.584$, $R^2 = 0.341$, $F(1,478) = 247.163$, $p < 0.001$). The model explained **34.1%** of the variation in living conditions, indicating that improvements in housing adequacy were associated with better welfare outcomes among internally displaced persons.

Research Question Two: *What effect does overcrowding have on the living conditions of internally displaced persons in North-Central Nigeria?*

Table 2. Regression Coefficients for the Effect of Overcrowding on the Living Conditions of Internally Displaced Persons

Variable	Unstandardized Coefficient (B)	Standard Error	Standardized Coefficient (β)	t-value	p-value
Constant	4.105	0.142	—	28.908	<0.001
Overcrowding Index	-0.321	0.023	-0.542	-13.958	<0.001

Dependent Variable: Overall Living Condition Score.

The results in Table 2 show that overcrowding had a statistically significant negative effect on the living conditions of internally displaced persons ($\beta = -0.542$, $t = -13.958$, $p < 0.001$). The negative regression coefficient ($B = -0.321$) indicates that an increase in the overcrowding index was associated with a corresponding decline in the overall living condition score. These findings suggest that overcrowding significantly reduces the welfare of internally displaced persons in North-Central Nigeria.

Research Question Three: *Are there significant spatial differences in the living conditions of internally displaced persons across Benue State, Plateau State, and the Federal Capital Territory?*

Table 3. Mean Living Condition Scores of Internally Displaced Persons by State

State	N	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)
1 Benue State	160	2.84	0.521
2 Federal Capital Territory (FCT)	160	3.02	0.485
3 Plateau State	160	3.48	0.512
Total	480	3.11	0.506

The results presented in Table 3 show the mean living condition scores of internally displaced persons across the three study locations. Plateau State recorded the highest mean score ($M = 3.48$, $SD = 0.512$), followed by the Federal Capital Territory ($M = 3.02$, $SD = 0.485$), while Benue State recorded the lowest mean score ($M = 2.84$, $SD = 0.521$). The overall mean living condition score for the respondents was 3.11 ($SD = 0.506$), indicating variations in the living conditions of internally displaced persons across the study areas.

Table 4. Mean Ratings of Respondents on Institutional Coordination and Camp Management

S/No.	Institutional Coordination Indicators	Mean (M)
1	Government support and coordination	2.96
2	Transparency in aid distribution	2.96
3	Inclusion of IDPs in decision-making	2.94
4	Coordination between Government and NGOs	3.06
5	NGO service delivery	3.39
6	NGO responsiveness to complaints	3.32
7	Cluster Mean	3.11

Discussion

The findings of research question one in table one revealed that housing adequacy significantly influenced the living conditions of internally displaced persons in North-Central Nigeria, indicating that improved housing contributes substantially to better welfare outcomes. This finding is consistent with Ekezie (2022), who reported that adequate shelter enhances the health, safety, and resilience of internally displaced populations. Similarly, Ismail et al. (2024) found that poor housing conditions and inadequate settlement planning increase the vulnerability of displaced communities. The findings further support the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework, which recognises physical capital, particularly housing, as a key determinant of household well-being. The present study extends existing knowledge by demonstrating that housing adequacy is the strongest predictor of living conditions among internally displaced persons in North-Central Nigeria. This evidence underscores the need for governments and humanitarian organisations to prioritise structural shelter upgrading as a central component of sustainable resettlement planning and displacement governance.

The findings of research question two was presented in Table 2 and revealed that overcrowding had a significant negative effect on the living conditions of internally displaced persons in North-Central Nigeria ($\beta = -0.542$, $p < 0.001$). This indicates that increased overcrowding was associated with poorer living conditions. This finding is consistent with Ekoh et al. (2023) and Anierobi et al. (2024), who reported that overcrowded settlements increase the vulnerability of internally displaced persons by limiting access to basic services and reducing overall well-being. The present study further demonstrates that overcrowding is a significant determinant of living conditions, highlighting the need for density-sensitive spatial planning and camp decongestion to improve the welfare of internally displaced persons.

Research Question Four, the findings presented in the results revealed that respondents expressed low satisfaction with government coordination, transparency in aid distribution, inclusion of internally displaced persons in decision-making, and coordination between government agencies and humanitarian organizations. Government coordination received a mean rating of 2.96, transparency in aid distribution 2.96, IDP participation in decision-making 2.94, and coordination with NGOs 3.06, indicating weaknesses in institutional coordination. In contrast, NGOs received relatively higher ratings for service delivery ($M = 3.39$) and responsiveness to complaints ($M = 3.32$), although respondents noted fragmentation among humanitarian actors. This finding is consistent with ShittuRaji et al. (2021), who reported that weak institutional capacity and poor coordination among emergency management agencies reduce the effectiveness of humanitarian interventions for internally displaced persons. Tseer et al. (2023) found that effective multi-agency collaboration enhances service delivery and improves humanitarian response outcomes. The present study reinforces these findings by demonstrating that inadequate institutional coordination

remains a major challenge to effective resettlement in North-Central Nigeria, highlighting the need for stronger collaboration among government agencies, humanitarian organisations, and internally displaced communities.

Summary

This study developed an evidence-based Transitional Settlement Framework (TSF) for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in North-Central Nigeria by translating empirical findings into actionable resettlement policy. The results revealed that housing adequacy significantly improved the living conditions of IDPs, while overcrowding had a significant negative effect on their welfare. Significant spatial differences were observed across the study areas, with Plateau State recording better living conditions than the Federal Capital Territory and Benue State. The findings further revealed weaknesses in institutional coordination, transparency in aid distribution, and IDP participation in decision-making. Based on these findings, the study proposed a four-pillar Transitional Settlement Framework comprising structural shelter upgrading, density-sensitive spatial planning, multi-level institutional coordination, and durability and exit planning to strengthen evidence-based resettlement and displacement governance.

Conclusion

The study concludes that improving the living conditions of internally displaced persons in North-Central Nigeria requires a transition from emergency-driven humanitarian responses to evidence-based resettlement planning. Housing adequacy, overcrowding, spatial disparities, and institutional coordination were identified as key determinants of welfare and should therefore constitute priority areas for policy intervention. The proposed Transitional Settlement Framework provides a practical mechanism for translating empirical evidence into sustainable resettlement policies capable of enhancing the welfare of internally displaced persons and strengthening displacement governance in Nigeria.

Recommendations

1. Government should prioritise the provision of adequate and durable housing for internally displaced persons as a key component of resettlement programmes.
2. Camp planning should incorporate density-sensitive spatial designs to reduce overcrowding and improve access to essential services.
3. Federal, state, and humanitarian agencies should strengthen institutional coordination through clearly defined roles, transparent resource management, and active participation of internally displaced persons in decision-making.

4. Resettlement policies should adopt the proposed Transitional Settlement Framework to promote evidence-based planning, equitable resource allocation, and sustainable durable solutions for internally displaced populations.

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