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July 1st, 2022

Do Nigerian regions receive disproportionate humanitarian policy attention?

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Does humanitarian funding in Nigeria need to shift from the North East to the Middle Belt in line with conflict trends? Conflict databases reveal, rather, that the impact of violence on populations in the North East is worsening with an impending threat of famine. Nengak Gondyi argues that policy interventions must be informed by research anchored on often lacking data.

Nigeria's conflict landscape is changing with new hotspots, new actors and new grievances continuously emerging. It is therefore important that some conflicts are not overlooked as peacemakers, governments and donors scramble to respond to others. At the same time, a poor response to one conflict does not mean that the response to another is disproportionately greater.

A recent article in [Africa at LSE](#) has questioned conventional wisdom on the severity of conflicts in Nigeria. Comparing the Boko Haram insurgency in the North East to the conflict between farmers and herders in the Middle Belt, the

article concludes that communities in the later region have experienced more violence and killings, with the region hosting the highest percentage of internally displaced persons in the country. Based on **data published** in *Small Wars and Insurgencies*, this comparison is used to argue that the less debilitating conflict in the North East is receiving a greater share of needed humanitarian aid and policy attention. Consequently, the article warns that greater aid funding to victims of conflict leads to more research in the region, and more research in turn influences greater funding.

Available data in my research, however, suggests that the North East remains the most urgent emergency. The **ACAPS** database rates the Middle Belt conflict lower than the North East in terms of severity (3.2 compared to 4.2 out of a maximum of 5), impact (3.0 compared to 4.2) and humanitarian conditions (3.2 compared to 4.5). In terms of fatalities, from 2011 to the present the **Nigeria Security Tracker** has reported 8,265 deaths in Benue, Plateau and Nasarawa States compared to 43,095 deaths in Borno Adamawa and Yobe States.

According to the **IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix**, there are 969,757 displaced persons in the North Central and North West compared to 2.17 million displaced persons across the North East.

Assessing the volume of humanitarian aid received in each conflict zone is not easy, but it is possible to state with some accuracy the needs that remain unmet for northeast Nigeria. The United Nation's 2022 Nigeria **Humanitarian Response Plan** acknowledges 8.4 million persons in need in the region. However, current programming targets 5.5 million persons – if the humanitarian actors are able to raise \$1.1 billion in funding. By mid-2022, **only 14%** of this appeal has been realised, and the UN has **issued an alert** that 4.1 million people risk starvation.

Further, prior to the recent UN famine alert, the *Cadre Harmonisé* framework **estimated** that between June and August 2022, 39 communities in the North East, four in the North Central and 39 in the North West will experience phase 3/5 (crisis) of food and nutrition insecurity. Only Borno State will have three additional communities on phase 4/5 (emergency), which is one phase short of famine. While some data on humanitarian aid programmes may be available, we lack the analysis and disaggregation to inform discussions of humanitarian need versus available aid across zones of Nigeria.

But if the conflict in the Middle Belt is more severe, is there evidence to suggest a greater receipt (or absence) of humanitarian aid correlates with an influence on research agendas? A causality is unclear, and greater data on research programming is needed.

Humanitarian support to victims of conflict is far from adequate across Nigeria. The country is presently ranked the **6th most terrorised nation** globally, with its military deployed in **peace support operations** in all 36 states of the country. Meanwhile, **95 million Nigerians** live below the global poverty line. Attempts to garner more support in aid of communities in conflict must be guided by a dispassionate analysis of the situation on the ground, even where establishing facts is challenging. Emphasising the severity of the conflict in one region should not depreciate the severity of conflict in another. It is essential that research informing funding policies maintains utmost fidelity to the available evidence.

Photo: Oslo Humanitarian Conference on Nigeria and the Lake Chad region.

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