



## Article

# **United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and Management of Refugee Crisis in the Nigerian Section of Lake Chad Basin (2011-2023)**

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## **Abstract**

Africa and the Nigerian state have received a fair dose of the refugee crisis. For Nigeria, Borno, Adama and Yobe, the (BAY) states are home to over 1.9 million Internally Displaced Persons, a figure regarded as the seventh largest Internally Displaced population in the world. The study examined efforts of the UNHCR in the management of the refugee crisis in the Nigerian section of the Lake Chad Basin (2011-2023). The study adopted Michael Barnett's Humanitarian Governance Model as a theoretical base. Methodologically, it adopted the ex post facto research design and collected data through documentary sources and Key Informant Interviews. Content analysis was adopted as preferred tool for data analysis. The findings indicate the fact that although the UNHCR has rendered numerous humanitarian assistance and services in the region, these efforts have been eclipsed by the growing number of IDP's, refugees, refugee returnees, internal security threats and social discontents in the region understudied. The study therefore recommends the need for government and all relevant stakeholders to assist in the fight against insurgency in the region; more humanitarian services in the area to complement the ongoing work by the UNHCR and proper funding and security of UNHCR staff and other humanitarian workers in the region.

## **Keywords**

Nigeria, Refugee, Refugee Crisis, Refugee Management, Humanitarianism.

## **Introduction**

The refugee crisis is an ongoing global humanitarian concern. Globally, people have been made to flee their homes in great numbers as a result of war, persecution and other forms of crisis. The UNHCR Global Trends (2020) posits that 82.4 million people in the world were forcibly displaced at the tail end of 2021 by factors such as persecution, conflict, violence, human rights violations or events seriously perturbing public order. According to the Global Report on Internal Displacement (2021), the number of people internally displaced globally amounted to 55 million before the end of 2020, during a year that witnessed extraordinary storms and relentless clashes, 40.5 million new displacements were set off across the globe by disasters and clashes, the most noteworthy figure recorded in ten years. Indeed, the dangers associated with the global refugee crisis have relationship with many other threats that arise as a result of civil wars and fragile states; massive displacements are bound to occur when states lose grip over territory or are involved in civil wars (Lischer, 2017). The UNHCR (2015) reported that the number of individuals that are forcibly dislocated from their homes rose to 24 per minute-four times the everyday rate in the year 2005 and Africa is at the forefront of conveying a great conflict and refugee burden.

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In the African continent, the Lake Chad Region stands as a hotbed for the refugee crisis which is Africa's fastest growing displacement crisis. As one of the world's poorest and most vulnerable areas, it includes Northeast Nigeria, the far north of Cameroon, Southeast Chad, and Western Niger. There, about 11 million people-including 7.2 million who lack access to food- are in need, and three to four people die in the region every day on average (UNDP, 2017). The Reuters (2016) describes this crisis in the Lake Chad Basin as the world's most neglected humanitarian crisis where over 2.6 million people have been forcibly displaced from their homes as a result of violent acts by a group called *Jama'atu Ahlies Sunna Lidda'awati wal-Jihad* (commonly known as Boko Haram) and the resulting military operations.

The figure of displaced people tripled in the worst-hit areas over a couple of years. Not less than 1.9 million of these people are Nigerians displaced in their country's north-east – the seventh largest internally displaced population in the world. A further 427,000 people are internally displaced in the neighbouring countries of Cameroon, Chad and Niger, which also plays host to 155, 000 Nigerian refugees (OCHA, 2016). The Lake Chad region is a crisis hot spot suffering from a wide variety of related problems, including the lack of essential infrastructures like water, food or energy, and multiple drivers of social and political fragility, such as poverty, unemployment, inequality or exclusion of communities. (Idika-Kalu, 2020). Together, these factors contribute to insecurity, violent conflict and forced displacement, providing a fertile ground for armed groups like Boko Haram to leash out mayhem in the area (Kamta et.al 2020; Idowu et.al, 2021).

The desirability of managing the refugee catastrophe with a view to protecting, caring and managing the affairs of refugees, refugee returnees and internally displaced persons cannot be over emphasized. This could explain why the Nigerian government established the National Commission for Refugees, Migrants, and Internally Displaced Persons (NCFRMI), formerly referred to as the National Commission for Refugees (NCFR), established by Decree 52 of 1989 now Cap. N21, Laws of the Federation of Nigeria, 2004 (NCFRMI Act) with the mandate of managing the affairs of refugees, migrants, internally displaced persons in Nigeria. It is one of six agencies under the aegis of the Federal Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs, Disaster Management and Social Development (Emmanuel et al, 2022). Nnadi et al (2020) state that the Nigerian government also set up the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) by Act 12 as amended by Act 50 of 1999. Additionally, the government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria has worked with various Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs), international partners and other relevant stakeholders to provide support for refugees, migrants and internally displaced persons (Nnadi et al (2020). One of such international partners is the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

The (UNHCR) mandated by the 1951 *Convention relating to the Status of Refugees* and its 1967 *Protocol* (hereinafter jointly referred to as the *1951 Convention*) to provide international protection and to work for solutions for refugees and asylum-seekers, among others began her interventionist role in Northeastern Nigeria in 2014 and have functioned in so many areas of humanitarian interventions since then (Nnadi et. al 1999). This study sets out to interrogate as it were, the activities of the UN Refugee agency in this troubled zone and how it has fared in managing the on-going refugee crisis in the aforementioned region.

## Conceptual Clarifications

### The Refugee Question

The refugee question is one that has raised a lot of contention both in the academic and international communities. According to the UNHCR's mandate, a refugee is someone who has left his place of origin due to a "well-founded fear of prosecution" (Steiner K. et al, 2003). Article 1 of the *Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees* (1951) defines a refugee as someone who:

owing to well-founded fear of being prosecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of (their) nationality and is unable or, unwilling to avail (themselves) of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of (their) former habitual residence, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it. UN Convention on the Status of Refugees (1951).

The definition above has been criticised by scholars from different disciplines, such as management (Lee et al, 2020), Law (Shacknove, 1985) and sociology (FitzGerald and Arar, 2018), on the basis that it is narrow and outdated. More so, the definition is deemed to have Eurocentric colouration as it was largely informed by happenings and circumstances in Europe after the Second World War. The circumstances of the most recent global displacements are not well reflected in the use of the concept today (Betts and Collier, 2018), due to the fact that a huge number of these refugees are from developing countries (UNHCR, 2022) and are compelled to escape (civil) wars (Betts and Collier, 2018). By definition, the Convention's language excludes many of the fugitives who need our attention today, including those who run from civil wars or fear persecution by non-state actors like rebels and militias (Haddad, 2008).

This could vividly explain why the UNHCR *Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees* (1967) removes the geographical and time-based restrictions inherent in the 1951 Convention, making it generally applicable and capable of providing protection for all those fleeing from conflict and prosecution. Another self-developed description provided by Baranik et al. (2018, p.116), concludes the statement that "individuals who have fled their homes because of threats to their safety, which may include war, disaster, or persecution" can be described as refugees. However, this definition lacks precise conceptual boundaries as it is unclear what the phrase "fled their homes" (territory), actually means. This is because those who have been internally displaced and fled their homes but have found safety elsewhere in their nations may fall under this category in particular. Nonetheless, researchers on refugees and refugee studies clearly point out the significant distinctions between those who are domestically displaced and those who are displaced internationally (Loescher, 2021; Malkki, 1995). For instance, because they continue to be subject to their home country's laws, internally displaced persons do not obtain any special status under international law or rights that are relevant to their circumstances, unlike refugees who petition for asylum (Loescher, 2021). This position is maintained by Haddad (2004) that being able to cross an international border should not define a person as a refugee because millions of people today are part of the 'refugee problem', which is essentially the same precarious situation as Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) who stay inside their own country's borders and are denied international protection because they are unable to physically cross into a neighbouring state.

Furthermore, Zetter, (1988) states that the label on refugees connotes humanitarianism, yet it creates and imposes an institutionalised dependency; it assigns an identity, yet this identity is stereotyped; it is benevolent and apolitical, yet at the same time highly politicised; and it has the potential to threaten the sovereignty of states and the autonomy of the designated individuals, whilst simultaneously helping protect state sovereignty and granting the individual rights. Haddad (2004) props up of the view expressed by Zetter by quipping that a consensus on what the term 'refugee' actually denotes has become problematic since there is definitional crisis stemming from many different contexts and disciplines, making it hard for one all-encompassing definition to emerge and the problem becomes even more pronounced because the concept is 'labelled' differently according to context and discipline.

## Refugee Crisis

The phrase "refugee crisis" refers to either domestic or international displacement of persons from their natural environments or habitats to a new environment alien to them due to circumstances beyond their controls such as wars, violence or natural disaster, as well as the challenges and risks that refugees face while travelling. A crisis might be seen from the viewpoint of the refugees, the nation they escape to, or,

frequently, from both perspectives (World Vision, 2021). The largest number of displaced people since World War II stood at 65.3 million as reported by the UNHCR. These numbers, which are only exceeded by the combined populations of 20 of the most populated nations on earth, demonstrate the gravity of the humanitarian problem that the refugee regime is part of. The staggering 40.8 million Internally Displaced Persons (IDP's), the 16.1 million refugees recognized under the UNHCR's protective mandate, and the additional 5.2 million Palestinian refugees protected by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) all lend credence to the global refugee and displacement crisis (Bazirake, 2017). According to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, there were 70.8 million displaced people worldwide as at January 2019 (41.3 million internally displaced and 25.9 million registered (under UNHCR and UNRWA), and 3.5 million seeking refuge. This figure has risen to 108.4 million people forcibly displaced worldwide as at 2022 (UNHCR Global Trends, 2022). Leopold and Harrell-Bond (1994) support the notion that the number of displaced persons worldwide is on the high side but cautions that the yardsticks used to determine these numbers could be potentially misleading. In their opinion, when it comes to refugee related issues, two major factors can be readily employed to determine the rate of global refugee crisis- the high level of displacements globally and unequal distribution of refugees.

In the view of Sharma (2016), the European continent has had an overwhelming influx of migrants who turn out to become refugees, especially individuals fleeing areas ravaged by wars and conflicts like North Africa, Middle East and Syria, most especially. Baerwaldt (2018) adds that the term 'European refugee crisis' gained widespread usage in April 2015 following the sinking of five boats carrying almost 2,000 individuals in the Mediterranean with an estimated 1,222 fatalities. A UNHCR, Global Trends Report (2016) reveals that the recent spike in the number of refugees is unmatched in contemporary history and if current trends continue, one in every hundred people will be displaced in the near future. According to a UNHCR global trends report (2017) 65.6 million people were forced to flee globally by the end of 2016 due to acts of violence, persecution, conflict or violations of human rights. Among these individuals, 22.5 million were refugees. In the view of Esses et al (2017), the number of refugees worldwide is at an alarmingly high level, and it is anticipated to keep growing for the next couple of decades. (Guo et al, 2020) corroborate this position and opine that the number of refugees is expected to rise steadily throughout the 21st century.

In the African continent, the crisis in the Lake Chad has been described as Africa's fastest growing displacement crisis (UNHCR, 2015). According to a report by the Médecins Sans Frontiers-MSF (2020), as at 31 August 2020, 299,314 Nigerian refugees were living in Chad, Cameroon, and Nigeria. Overall, it is estimated that the crisis in the Lake Chad has resulted in around 192,000 refugees across the region (Oyewole, 2015). Jacob et al (2022) contend that Cameroon's restrictive governance system, which privileges Francophone Cameroonians over their Anglophone counterparts, is to blame for the Ambazonian separatist movement, which has forced Cameroonians to migrate and thus create a humanitarian disaster for Cameroonian refugees in Nigeria.

### **UNHCR's Humanitarian and Refugee Services in the Nigerian Section of the Lake Chad Region.**

A vast majority of Africans live in abject poverty and hunger. About 70% of Africa's poor population are rural dwellers. A large proportion of them experience very limited access to electricity, income, education, healthcare and nutrition. For decades, poverty and hunger have posed a pervasive and growing threat to the states of the world, of which African states are no exceptions and this challenge cuts across the various regions (Phogole, 2010). The Lake Chad region according to Tar and Mustapha (2017) is at a crossroads, facing enormous security challenges from terrorism with significant implications for regional stability. Since 2009 when the Boko Haram sect in the northeast region of Nigeria began its terrorist onslaught, the Lake Chad region has found itself enmeshed in a socio-economic malady which now threatens the viability of the once flourishing economic hub of Africa.

The largely porous borders provide a haven for terrorist activities to thrive. It was for this reason that US officials in April 2016 declared in N'Djaména, the Chadian capital, that the Lake Chad region has become 'Ground Zero' in Africa's war on terrorism and warned of deepening links between Islamic State and Boko Haram (Klapper, 2015). Poverty and hunger have made settlers around the region economically vulnerable as a result of the encroachment of the Boko Haram and Islamic State of West Africa Province (ISWAP) terrorist groups. (Aguilera, 2023). Aguilera (2023) further notes that the havoc terrorism have wreaked in the Lake Chad region has triggered a severe humanitarian crisis affecting every aspect of the economy, leading to growing insecurity and food shortages as productive and trading activities are interrupted. All of these complex causes affect regional livelihoods (WFP, 2016).

It is noteworthy to state that the crisis around the Lake Chad region has been considered one of the worst and most neglected. Recent reports on the situation in the Lake Chad region suggest that 7.1 million people are severely food insecure, and a total of 2.3 million are displaced. The people in need amount to a staggering 10.7 million. Nigeria is by far the country in need of most aid and account for most of the displaced people (OCHA, 2017). Interestingly, the international response to the Lake Chad crisis has been a robust one. The UN and its partners have been working assiduously to coordinate the delivery of humanitarian assistance to millions of people affected by the crisis. (Aguilera, 2023).

The "Oslo Humanitarian Conference on Nigeria and the Lake Chad Region" held in 2017 bared the need for better funding and cooperation in the region. Pledges for financial support by participants at the conference exceeded US\$ 672 million, and there has been a scale-up over the last years in humanitarian response. The conference acknowledged the need to establish durable solutions to support medium and long-term development plan (Kjeldsberg, 2017). The conference also emphasised the need for humanitarian assistance to align with government efforts, focus on vulnerable groups such as women, girls and displaced people, improved protection and increase self-reliance. Likewise, the importance of education was established in regard to promoting peace and development ("Chair's Outcome Statement," 2017).

Since the escalation of humanitarian crisis, the World Food Programme (WFP) has been working closely with governments, local authorities and a number of local and international organisations in order to provide the best possible assistance in the Lake Chad region. (Kjeldsberg, 2017). In January 2015, the WFP launched a regional Emergency Operation (EMOP) across the Lake Chad Basin countries—Cameroon, Chad, Niger, and Nigeria.

Similarly, the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) commenced a Lake Chad Basin crisis Response strategy for 2017-2019. The objectives include improving food security and resilience for vulnerable groups through livelihood support. Initiatives are implemented in coordination with partners like Ministries of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries, WFP and other UN agencies, national and international NGOs and the Lake Chad Basin Commission-LCBC (Kjeldsberg, 2017). Assessments by WFP in Nigeria revealed that 85% of registered households in Borno and Yobe States engaged in negative livelihood coping strategies (WFP, 2016).

In the long run, the agency also supports refugees in finding solutions through voluntary return to their country of origin, integration in host countries, or resettlement in other nations (UNHCR, 2023). In a similar development, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the UN Refugee Agency has responded to human rights violations in Nigeria by offering cash for business startups, business management and trainings to the displaced and vulnerable (Lahouelleur, 2021).

As part of measures to protect individuals and their rights, the UNHCR has made several calls for better protection of those who are being affected by increase in military activity against armed groups in the Sahel and Lake Chad Regions of West Africa, Nigeria inclusive (UNHCR Press, 2020). The Report of

the Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons on his mission to Nigeria 2017 states that the UNHCR has collaborated with relevant agencies like the National Emergency Management Agency, National Commission for Refugees, the National Human Rights Commission, among others to ensure that the rights of Migrants, Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons are protected as well as providing humanitarian aid and assistance to them (UNHCR, 2017). In order to ensure accountability and react to the on-going human rights violations in the Lake Chad region by Boko Haram insurgents, the UNHCR has gathered relevant information on abduction of civilians, intentional killings, targeting of protected civilian objects, the use of children in hostilities, rape and other types of sexual violence as well as ill treatment and torture by Boko Haram calls for urgent intervention by government and relevant stakeholders to protect these victims and ensure prompt investigation and prosecution of the violators ( UN Human Rights Council Report, 2015). Corroborating the above position, a special report by the International Crisis Group (ICG) on Nigerian Women and the Boko Haram Insurgency (2016) observed that the sufferings by women in North East Nigeria, and the rest of the Lake Chad Region in the hands of Boko Haram insurgents are legion, ranging from forceful abduction (the Chibok girls' abduction) being a case in point, violence and abuse, stigmatization and the conundrum of reintegration, among others. However, the efforts by the UNHCR to curb this ugly menace in the region were well applauded with adequate calls to other relevant stakeholders to step in.

Efforts by the UNHCR to curb suffering experienced by women in the region, especially due to the activities of the Boko Haram insurgents, have been applauded from different quarters with adequate calls to other relevant stakeholders to step in (ICG, 2016). According the UNHCR regional representative in Nigeria, Liz Ahua (2017), the Cameroonian government has made claims that Nigerian refugees constitute an economic and security threat and hence, forcefully repatriates them. As part of the UNHCR's mandate of protecting refugees and asylum seekers, the refugee agency has condemned this position and states that there is a convention that empowers the UNHCR not to allow anybody or government to flout the agreement concerning the plights of refugees. Until shelter, health care services, economic recovery, livelihoods, basic services, peace and security are fully restored in the affected places as in the Nigerian border communities, as enshrined in the tripartite agreement. (Liz Ahua, UN representative in Nigeria, June 2017).

EnviroNews Nigeria (2019) stated that following a rise in insecurity in Nigeria's North East, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has urged for improved protection of Internally Displaced Persons in the Lake Chad Region. In terms of asylum protection, the UNHCR continues to urge neighbouring nations to maintain open borders, grant access to their territory, and facilitate the asylum process for people escaping the crisis in search of safety as well as delaying the compulsory repatriations of nationals or long-term residents to northeastern Nigeria, including those whose applications for asylum have been denied, until the situation in terms of security and human rights has substantially gotten better (UNHCR Update II,2016).

The UNICEF Sub-regional Child Protection Strategy for Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad, and Niger (2015) outlined that given the dangers children in the region face as a result of the conflict, the UNHCR has prioritized protection to ensure that children at risk, including those who have experienced severe human rights violations are quickly identified and receive the necessary proactive, adaptable and restoring services.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **Humanitarian Governance Model**

The model of Humanitarian Governance was advanced by Michael Barnett, a professor of International Relations and Political Science, George Washington University, USA. According to Barnett (2013)

humanitarian governance draws insight from the concept of global governance which focuses on attempts by peoples and states to build long-term institutions to foster collaboration, coordination, and cooperation in order to attain more desired, positive-sum outcomes (Keohane and Nye, 2000). Barnett however emphasizes the specific purpose of saving lives, reducing suffering, and improving the condition and quality of lives of the world's most disadvantaged and ignored communities. Humanitarian governance or the global governance of humanity is spectacular in focus as it aims to save lives, specifically the lives of the poor demographics. Although, earlier attempts have been made by some scholars to espouse the model of humanitarian governance, it was Barnett who was the very first to in details unpack and unveil this model at least in terms of its specific attributes..

The highpoints and key thesis of the humanitarian governance model as advanced by Barnett are contained in the six research questions he raised in his study. They include: What kind of world is being imagined and produced? What accounts for the tremendous growth of humanitarian governance over the last century? Who governs? How is humanitarian governance organised and accomplished? What are the principal techniques of control? By what authority do humanitarians govern and what do they do with the authority?

Responding to the question 'who governs'? Barnett (2013) opines that humanitarians actually govern but that with the growth of Information and Communication Technology, humanitarian governance is now diversified among several fronts. Traditional Western players like Doctors without Borders, ICRC, Save the Children CARE, World Vision International, Oxfam and other large western-based NGOs; the UN system that enjoys celebrity status by housing the World Food Program, UNICEF (the UN Children's Fund), UNHCR (the UN refugee Agency) and so on, have now gotten new contenders in the humanitarian business. There are new donors, including the Gulf states, Brazil, China and India. Southern-based NGOs, including BRAC (Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee), Mercy Malaysia, Bangladesh's and Turkey's IHH (InsaniYardimVakfi), ASEAN, etc. As to who governs, with the present reality, it is obvious that international humanitarian governance is now spread among many actors.

Because organizations come together to achieve specific and clearly defined results, humanitarian governance can be regarded as a network. In recent years, the aid community has been relying more on new information and social technologies to better aid delivery. Barnett (2005) asserts that humanitarianism also has elements of hierarchy and that much of this hierarchy is created via the implementation of rules designed to provide a level playing field and over the last two decades, codes of conduct, professional norms, effectiveness metrics and accountability mechanisms have arisen. Barnett (2013) believes that humanitarians govern by rules-bureaucracies, bodies of information, standards, indices, and other measures designed to standardise response and enhance efficiency.

In answering the question, 'by what authority do Humanitarians govern? Barnett & Finnemore (2004) identified some kinds of authority, including rational-legal, delegated, expert, and moral authorities. Barnett (2013) maintains that while all four types of authorities are present in humanitarian governance, moral and expert authority are undoubtedly predominant. Authority to do what?

The foregoing discussion reveals how relevant this model is to this study. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) as an agency of the United Nations charged with the mandate of protecting refugees, displaced and stateless individuals by advocating for their rights, obviously employs the model of humanitarian governance in her activities. The agency is part of the governing process of humanitarianism and performs the role of rendering humanitarian services with other actors in the same business. One can rightly say that the UNHCR is part of the humanitarian network. This is as a result of the fact that the mandate establishing it makes it a humanitarian actor- a conglomeration of actors that seek to provide succor to most vulnerable communities in the globe. As such, the agency has the authority to declare humanitarian emergencies and out rightly situate the category of individuals that can

be referred to as refugees, stateless persons, internally displaced persons and so on and as such, render the needed humanitarian services deserving for such individuals.

More so, as Barnett (2013) believes that humanitarians govern by rules-bureaucracies, bodies of information, standards, indices, and other measures designed to standardise response and enhance efficiency. The agency is not left out in employing these metrics in her activities globally. The UNHCR maintains a network of staff, employs measures as well as standard indices in her response to the on-going global refugee crisis. The agency has also in recent times, extended these measures and actions in her activities in the Nigerian section of the Lake Chad Basin.

As Barnett & Finnemore (2004) rightly pin-point, various forms of authority-rational-legal, delegated, expert, and moral authorities exist with which humanitarians govern. It is an indubitable fact that the UNHCR in her activities is guided by all these levels or forms of authority. For instance, her use of rational-legal authority stems from the fact that her actions are codified in the UN resolution establishing it: see Article 1 of the *Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees* (1951) and it conducts its actions within the ambits of international humanitarian laws. The agency delegates authority to its workforce and other allied agencies whose missions are in keeping with hers. Expert authority is also utilized by the agency as it employs professionals possessing all-round intellectual capital who help organize its activities. Lastly, moral authority premised on fundamental truths, and humane principles guide the agency's actions in its right and responsibility to protect and advocate the rights of individuals within its mandate. Although this model has been critiqued for not rightly interrogating and situating the boundaries and jurisdictions that each humanitarian agency's operation should orbit around, thus creating overlaps amongst humanitarians, it is still considered the most reliable model for investigating the activities of the UNHCR.

## Research Methodology

The research design adopted for this study is the **ex post facto** research design. This design is allowed the researcher to examine the UNHCR's actions and interventions towards the refugee crisis between 2011 and 2023 without manipulating the independent variable.

The data collection for this study relied primarily on documentary sources and interviews with UNHCR officials and other relevant humanitarian agencies like the ICRC. The combination of these methods provided a comprehensive understanding of the UNHCR's actions and interventions in addressing the refugee crisis in the Nigerian section of the Lake Chad Basin. Documentary sources serve as the foundation for gathering historical data and information related to the UNHCR's activities and the refugee crisis. These sources include: official reports and publications by the UNHCR, government reports and publications, academic literature and research studies, media reports and news articles. In addition to the documentary sources, primary data were collected through semi-structured interviews with key officials from the UNHCR involved in managing the refugee crisis. These interviews allowed for in-depth exploration of the UNHCR's strategies and approaches in managing refugee crisis in the Nigerian section of the Lake Chad Basin. The study further employed content analysis of both documentary sources and interviews. The research adhered to ethical guidelines for research involving human subjects, respecting the dignity, rights, and privacy of interviewees.



## Discussion of Findings






The UNHCR, in collaboration with other humanitarian networks like the Red Cross, *Médecins Sans Frontières* (MSF-Doctors without Borders), Federal Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs and Poverty Alleviation (FMHAPA), National Commission for Refugees, Migrants, and Internally Displaced Persons (NCFRMI), the World Food Programme (WFP), etc has embarked on and implemented several refugee assistance and services to the displaced and vulnerable demographics in the Nigerian section of the Lake Chad Region. These efforts- intervention and protection activities of the UNHCR are geared essentially at improving living conditions of IDPs and Refugees and Refugee Returnees and reducing the refugee and humanitarian crisis.

The UNHCR has implemented several humanitarian and refugee services in the Nigerian section of the Lake Chad. For instance, Nigeria is a kind host that permits refugees to travel freely and work lawfully with the assistance of the UNHCR and like nationals, the refugees are eligible for primary health care, and their kids can attend neighbourhood schools ( UNHCR Nigeria Report, 2022,) Also, in the face of obstacles, UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, works with partners and government agencies to support refugee women and girls in rebuilding their lives and achieving self-sufficiency UNHCR Report (2023). The UNHCR Protection Unit reacting to the question: **As a representative of the UNHCR, can you provide an overview of the humanitarian assistance and developmental aid by your organisation in the Nigerian section of the Lake Chad Region?** Observed that the UNHCR assistance and services activities in the Nigerian section of the Lake Chad can be summarized into four key areas-Protection, Livelihoods, Shelter and advocacy and further averred that:

in policy and legislative matters relating to refugees, stateless people and internally displaced persons, UNHCR partners with Nigerian authorities, especially, the National Commission for Refugees, Migrants, and Internally Displaced Persons.( NCFRMI ); works with stakeholders and the parliament to domesticate certain policies, provide legal assistance, shelter provision identity card issuance, on-food items, psycho-social support, livelihood, registration assistance, voluntary repatriations, and a wide range of protection services.

The table below shows protection activities rendered by the UNHCR to 17 LGA's in the BAY states of Borno, Adamawa and Yobe in 2017 to 57,520 vulnerable households. The run down indicates that 14,231 vulnerable households received protection-based material assistance including solar lanterns, energy saving charcoal and stoves, and dignity kits while 7,375 of them got sustainable livelihood support that included cash awards. In the same vein, 11,772 of these households received appropriate shelter support both in kind and cash-based while 17,966 got birth certificates for all children and/or national identity cards. Lastly, 6,176 households were referred for specialized protection services (including CP, SGB, legal services, nutrition and health).

**Figure 1: North-East Nigeria: Vulnerability Screening Report. Protection Activities Per LGA (2017)**

PROTECTION ACTIVITIES PER LGA					
	 # of vulnerable households who received protection-based material assistance including solar lanterns, energy saving charcoal and stoves, and dignity kits	 # of vulnerable households who received sustainable livelihood support	 # of vulnerable households who received appropriate shelter support (including in kind and cash-based)	 # of vulnerable households who received birth certificates for all children and/or national identity cards	 # of vulnerable households referred for specialized protection services (including CP, SGBV, legal services, nutrition and health)
BORNO	BAMA (INCLUDING BANKI)	2,258	1,434	2,258	327
	BIU	591		11	137
	CHIBOK		50	10	600
	DAMBOA	300		12	684
	DIKWA	1,576		23	672
	GWOZA (INCLUDING PULKA)	4,055	100	452	1,324
	JERE		661	91	
	MAIDUGURI	3,531	1,168	800	315
	MOBBAR (DAMASAK)	500	546	4,974	66
	MONGUNO		100	1,600	655
	NGALA (INCLUDING RAN/)		2,400	8,434	732
YOBE	DAMATURU	1,321	827	1,153	63
	GUJBA		500		29
	GULANI		200		21
ADAMAWA	MADAGALI		60		141
	MICHIKA		550	80	387
	MUBI SOUTH	99	250		23
<b>Total</b>		<b>14,231</b>	<b>7,375</b>	<b>11,772</b>	<b>6,176</b>

The UNHCR North-East Nigeria Operational Update (2023) summarises UNHCR's roles in the Nigerian Section of the Lake Chad Basin- the BAY states to include:

1. Delivery of life-saving humanitarian assistance and protection services to IDPs, IDP returnees and refugee returnees in the North East

2. Assistance delivery, real-time response and evidence-based advocacy to protection needs of the vulnerable population in the BAY states
3. Screening of IDPs, IDP returnees and host communities in large numbers ( to the tune of over 14,000) to determine vulnerability status and devise effective humanitarian planning and targeted assistance
4. Sensitisation workshops to IDPs, IDP returnees, Refugee returnees and host communities on child protection, human rights, sexual exploitation and abuse and referral platforms for several services, among others.

On the question of **specific programmes or initiatives implemented by the UNHCR to alleviate poverty and hunger in the region**. The agency reels out some of its efforts in Borno state in 2018, to include:

- i) In Maiduguri, the capital of Borno state, two mobile courts established in Bakassi and Gubio Road IDP camps are enabling access to justice for persons of concern. Since the beginning of the year, more than 250 cases have been heard and determined.
- ii) UNHCR trained 20 Nigerian immigration officers from Borno state on registering refugee returnees. These officers will be deployed to Pulka to assist with registering spontaneous refugee returnees arriving from Cameroon.
- iii) UNHCR is working with Nigerian authorities to print and distribute 100,000 national ID cards to IDPs and refugee returnees. To date, 30,000 IDs have been printed and 2, 500 distributed across ten IDP camps in greater Maiduguri, etc.

The UNHCR's Protection Unit while commenting and commending the efforts of other donor agencies like the WFP in assisting her render humanitarian services in the area under review concludes that:

Along with the Federal Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs and Poverty Alleviation (FMHAPA), WFP facilitated stakeholder working groups to streamline standard operating procedures for shock-responsive social protection programmes, acting as crucial partner and enabler for food security outcomes nationwide...the WFP-led Common Services kept up its air transport vital logistics, and telecom provision, enabling the humanitarian community in the northeastern Nigeria to effectively supply Life-saving need to those in need.

In 2022, the UNHCR carried out specific projects in areas such as status determination of refugees, access determination, registration and documentation, protection policy and law, mitigation of gender-based violence, among others. The table below is on status determination of refugees and asylum-seekers and the outcome in the intervention area indicates that as Nigeria continued to recognise Cameroonian refugees on a prima facie basis, no individual Refugee Status Determination (RSD) interviews were conducted to confirm and establish recognition. Additionally, the Nigerian Federal Government, however, only grants Convention Travel Documents after an individual RSD process. In 2022, a small margin of Cameroonian refugees applied for Refugee Passport to participate in international events and workshops, as well as a few students who needed travel documents after receiving scholarships to study abroad. In the instances above, NCFRMI, with UNHCR's support, expedited the RSD process.

**Table 1: Outcomes and Achievements: Status Determination of Refugees and Asylum-Seekers in Nigeria in 2022**

Indicators	Population Type	Baseline (2022)	Target (2022)	Actual (2022)
Average processing time (in days) from registration to first instance asylum decision (disaggregated by individual and group procedures)	Refugees and asylum-seekers	2.00	60.00	117.00
Proportion of individuals undergoing asylum procedures who have access to legal advice and representation	Refugees and asylum-seekers	20.00%	100.00%	100.00%
Proportion of individuals undergoing asylum procedures who have access to an effective appeal mechanism after first instance rejection of their claim	Refugees and asylum-seekers	30.00%	100.00%	100.00%

Source: UNHCR Annual Results Report, Nigeria (2022).

The UN Refugee Agency has implemented several humanitarian assistance and services with a view to abating the humanitarian catastrophe in the Nigerian section of the Lake Chad Region. The UNHCR has done this in collaboration with other agencies like the Red Cross, *Médecins Sans Frontières* (MSF-Doctors without Borders), Federal Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs and Poverty Alleviation (FMHAPA), National Commission for Refugees, Migrants, and Internally Displaced Persons (NCFRMI), the World Food Programme (WFP), etc.

The activities of the UNHCR in the area understudied takes four critical dimensions-protection, livelihoods, shelter and advocacy. The UN Refugee Agency has rendered protection services to the refugees, IDPs, IDP returnees and host communities in the BAY areas affected by crisis. The agency has also provided livelihoods support and shelter to people in need. Available records has it that the agency has engaged in the distribution of essential facilities like improved NFI kits and tarpaulins to IDP's, delivery of life-saving humanitarian assistance and protection services to IDPs, IDP returnees and refugee returnees in the North East (This involves providing shelter, cash based awards, miscellaneous assistance services, food support through collaboration with agencies like the WFP, FAO, etc). In terms of advocacy

and support initiatives, the UN Refugee Agency has offered real-time response and evidence-based advocacy to protection needs of the vulnerable population in the BAY states. Such services include, but not limited to, securing bails for IDPs in correctional centres that were held in custody for minor offences; working with relevant stakeholders and the parliament to domesticate certain policies, provision of pro bono legal assistance under the auspices of the Nigerian Bar Association, identity card issuance, etc.

The foregoing reveals the fact that given the data generated and analysed, that although much still needs to be done to reduce the humanitarian catastrophe in the region, that the timely humanitarian interventions by the UN Refugee Agency in the region has provided succour and a high level of support to refugees, refugee returnees, Internally Displaced Persons and community members affected by conflict in the region. The logical deduction from the above assertion is that the refugee crisis in the Nigerian Section of the Lake Chad region would have assumed an unimaginable and unmanageable proportion had the UNHCR not intervened.

## **Conclusion**

The UN Refugee Agency, with the mandate and special responsibility to safeguard refugees as well as seek lasting solutions to their suffering, especially welfare and security, has been performing this role in the Lake Chad basin area. Our study specifically singled out the most affected area in the region which is Nigeria's north east, housing the BAY states of Borno, Yobe and Adamawa. Emphasis was paid on the activities of the UN Refugee Agency in the management of the on-going humanitarian catastrophe in the region and unveiled the fact that the intractable conflicts in the region fuel the humanitarian and refuge crisis there; that the UNHCR's assistance and services has led to a reduction of the humanitarian crisis in the region but that these efforts have been eclipsed by the growing number of IDP's, refugees, refugee returnees internal security threats and social discontents in the region understudied

## **Recommendations**

In a bid to provide lasting solutions to the problems investigated in the study, we put forward the following recommendations.

1. Although the UNHCR's humanitarian assistance and services have tried to abate the level of hunger and poverty in the region, much still needs to be done. This is as the level of hunger, poverty and displacement is still high in the region. A total humanitarian emergency in that region by the UN and other allied agencies is sought for. This, it is believed, will bring in more humanitarian assistance and services and succour to IDP's. IDP returnees, refugees and host communities.
2. The UNHCR cannot go the road of providing the needed humanitarian assistance and services needed in the Nigerian section of the Lake Chad region. This therefore calls for all hands to be on deck. The Federal Government of Nigeria and other relevant key stakeholders should come on board to salvage the humanitarian crisis in the region
3. More enlightenment needs to be done about the humanitarian crisis in the Nigerian section of the Lake Chad-the fastest growing humanitarian and displacement crisis in Africa and how much it has been neglected over the years. Efforts in this direction, it is believed will definitely speedup the needed humanitarian assistance in the region.

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