

# Internal displacement in Nigeria

CASE STUDY

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## Climate change in Nigeria is having a very real impact and needs urgent attention.

Nigeria is experiencing increasing incidence of disease, declining agricultural productivity, increasing number of heatwaves, unreliable or erratic weather patterns, flooding, declining rainfall in already desert-prone areas in the north causing increasing desertification, decreasing food production in central regions, and destruction of livelihoods by rising waters in coastal areas where people depend on fishing and farming. Climate change is making some land uninhabitable and affecting water supplies – threatening people's basic needs and triggering displacement. One of the easiest ways of adapting to climate variability in Nigeria is internal migration.

EM-DAT – the international Emergency Events Database<sup>1</sup> – shows that in 2007 about 5,650 people in Nigeria were displaced by floods, with 34 deaths reported. These floods contaminated unprotected water sources, exposing people to the risk of water-borne diseases, severely damaged crops and disrupted the planting season (which certainly affected the 2007 harvest). Some areas of the country were cut off, preventing more than 5,000 children from attending school and hindering access to health and other social services.

In 1999 and 2000, more than 200,000 people were displaced by floods in Niger State. In 1988, flooding in Kano State displaced more than 300,000 people. About a million people living in the low-lying plains of the River Niger are considered to be at risk. Flooding is recorded every year in all the states along the Niger River and its tributaries, frequently causing disasters. Moreover, two-thirds of Bayelsa State and half of Delta State are inundated by devastating floods for at least a quarter of each year. In districts under water, schools and markets are suspended for weeks at a time.

In the face of global warming there has been a paradigm shift in disaster management towards disaster risk reduction, preparedness and response within the context of the Hyogo Framework for Action (HFA).<sup>2</sup>

Nigeria is working to meet the HFA's five priorities for action.<sup>3</sup> Eight years after being set up, Nigeria's National Emergency Relief Agency (NEMA) has achieved great improvements in terms of structures put in place for managing disasters. However, it is obvious that in many cases there has been poor execution of responsibilities by the authorities at state and local government levels. Most flood victims do not get compensation or relief during flood disaster; if it comes, it usually comes too late or with strings attached. Even in the face of threatening disasters, there are no coordinated efforts to evacuate the population. Although these floods occur almost annually, local, state and federal governments appear to take no precautions, and their interventions are usually reactive rather than preventive.

Among the shortcomings of the Act establishing NEMA are its silence on the roles of local government in disaster management, non-listing of disaster and emergency matters in the 1999 Constitution of the country, and the inability of the federal government to impose any structure or directives on any state or local government. As a consequence, disaster and emergency matters are treated as peripheral.

When benchmarked against the guiding principles of the HFA, Nigeria seems far from achieving disaster resilience for vulnerable communities. For instance, policy commitment to and investment in disaster reduction are still low; there are no early warning mechanisms; and no efforts are being made to tackle or reduce underlying risk

factors. However, a National Policy on Disaster Management is currently being drafted. In order to be effective it must include measures to:

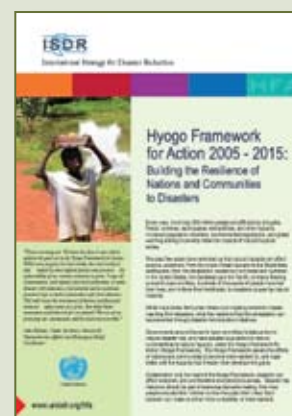
- ensure disaster management is backed up by national legislative and financial frameworks with clear, definite roles for all levels of governance as well as for local communities and NGOs
- facilitate collaboration with relevant meteorological and hydrological institutions for developing early warning systems and hazard prediction/forecasting
- use knowledge, innovation and education to build a culture of safety and resilience at all levels
- advocate and campaign for proper planning for land-use and house building at community, local, state and national levels.

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1. [www.emdat.be](http://www.emdat.be)

2. [www.unisdr.org/eng/hfa](http://www.unisdr.org/eng/hfa)

3. See previous article by Basher, pp35-6.



Brochure and key Hyogo documents are online at [www.unisdr.org/hfa](http://www.unisdr.org/hfa)