

Economic Security of Returnees and Its Role in Fostering Sustainable Development in Baga, Borno State

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DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2024.803165>

Received: 26 February 2024; Accepted: 14 March 2024; Published: 19 April 2024

ABSTRACT

The persistence of terrorism, notably exemplified by the actions of extremist groups like Boko Haram, continues to pose significant threats to global peace and security. In the aftermath of conflict, the return of displaced individuals to Baga presents both challenges and opportunities for the community's economic recovery and sustainable development. This study investigates the economic security of returnees in Baga and its pivotal role in fostering sustainable development in the region. The objectives of the study include assessing the physiological needs satisfaction, safety and security perceptions, willingness to stay, and livelihoods/economic security of returnees. Using a descriptive survey approach, data was gathered from a sample of 400 returnees, employing both qualitative and quantitative methods. Structured questionnaires were administered to capture information on various aspects of returnees' economic security and well-being. Descriptive statistics, including means, medians, and frequency distributions, were computed to summarize quantitative data, while thematic analysis was employed to identify common themes in qualitative responses. The findings reveal diverse challenges faced by returnees in meeting their physiological needs, including housing security and access to clean water. Despite these challenges, the majority of returnees report feeling safe and express satisfaction with safety and security initiatives in Baga. However, a significant proportion still grapples with concerns about their future residency and livelihood opportunities, highlighting the importance of tailored interventions to support their reintegration and economic empowerment. Moreover, the study underscores the importance of addressing barriers to economic integration, such as limited job opportunities, access to financial services, and market inclusivity. Government assistance programs and access to natural resources like land and fishing grounds play crucial roles in supporting returnees' economic well-being and community resilience.

Keywords: Returnees, Boko Haram, Economic security, Sustainable development

INTRODUCTION

Terrorism poses a formidable challenge to global peace and stability in the contemporary era (Global Terrorism Index, 2021). This is particularly evident in Africa, where extremist violence has assumed a particularly insidious form through the emergence of Boko Haram (IOM, 2019). In Nigeria, Boko Haram's insurgency has wrought widespread devastation, particularly affecting the northeastern region, including the town of Baga in Borno State (International Crisis Group, 2022). Baga, which was historically known for its thriving fishing and farming communities, has become a focal point of conflict due to its strategic location, leading to significant hardships for the community, including loss of life, displacement, and destruction of infrastructure, resulting in a profound humanitarian crisis (UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian

Affairs, 2020). Boko Haram's insurrection, which began in the early 2000s, has caused a wave of terror across Nigeria's northeastern region, resulting in widespread devastation and displacement (Council on Foreign Relations, 2021). The effects of Boko Haram's activities extend beyond mere violence, sparking a profound humanitarian crisis that deeply impacts economic development and societal stability in the region (IOM, 2019). The humanitarian crisis has had a particularly severe impact on communities like Baga, situated along the shores of Lake Chad (UNHCR, 2020). Once known for its vibrant fishing and farming population, Baga has become a battleground due to its strategic location, making it a prime target for Boko Haram attacks.

The consequences of Boko Haram's insurgency on Baga have been dire (International Crisis Group, 2022). The community has endured relentless assaults that have resulted in loss of life, widespread displacement, and the decimation of infrastructure (UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 2020). The ongoing conflict in Baga has created a perilous situation for its residents, leading to displacement and insecurity that have eroded the community's resilience and prospects for recovery. Those who have returned to Baga to rebuild their lives face numerous challenges, including unmet physiological needs, insufficient safety measures, and a daunting economic landscape filled with obstacles to livelihood opportunities (IOM, 2019). In light of these pressing issues, this study aims to investigate the economic security of returnees in Baga and its impact on the community's overall economic development. Specifically, the study seeks to evaluate the extent of returnees' physiological needs in Baga, assess the level of returnees' safety and security needs satisfaction in Baga, gauge the willingness and unwillingness of returnees to continue staying in their former place of habitual residence, and examine the evidence base related to livelihoods and economic security faced by returnees in Baga. The study's objectives aim to examine the complex dynamics at play in post-conflict settings and inform interventions that can contribute to a more resilient and sustainable post-conflict environment, in line with the findings of Fagerberg et al. (2013), IOM (2019), and the insights from the International Crisis Group interview in 2022.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study Area

The study focuses on Baga, a town situated in the northeastern Nigerian state of Borno, within the Kukawa Local Government Area. Baga is approximately 196 kilometers from Maiduguri, the capital of Borno State, and lies in close proximity to Lake Chad. Historically known for its vibrant fishing industry, the town has experienced shifts to subsistence farming due to the diminishing size of Lake Chad. Since December 2018, Baga and its environs have been under the control of the Islamic State's West Africa Province. The study area has a population of 352,594 individuals in 2022, extrapolated from a population growth rate of 2.4% per annum (National Population Commission, 2006).

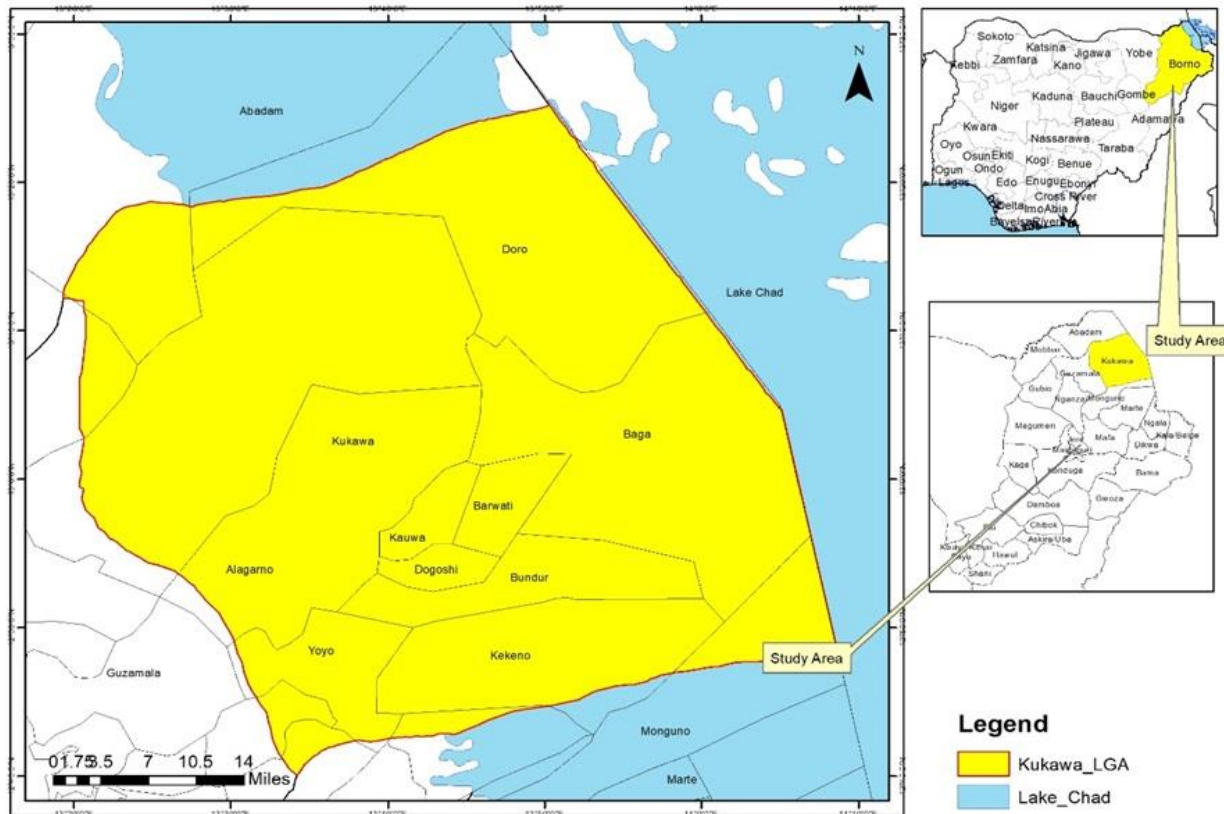


Fig. 1: Study Area

Source: GIS Unit, Department of Geography, Borno State University

Study Design

A descriptive survey approach is employed to gather data, capturing information at a specific point in time to characterize current situations or ascertain specific information (Kombo & Tromp, 2006). This approach was selected for its efficiency in capturing data comprehensively within the study’s constraints. Both qualitative and quantitative methods are utilized to provide nuanced insights into prevailing circumstances. Convenience sampling is utilized to select participants from the returnee population in Baga. Key locations such as community centers and marketplaces serve as sampling points. The sample size was determined using the Yamane formula, yielding a recommended sample size of approximately 400 individuals.

Research Instruments and Procedure

Data collection is facilitated through structured questionnaires administered to returnees residing in Baga. The questionnaire comprises sections addressing physiological needs, safety and security perceptions, willingness to stay, and livelihoods/economic security. Open-ended and closed-ended questions are included to facilitate comprehensive responses. Fieldwork is conducted in Baga, with questionnaires administered via face-to-face interviews using the Kobo Collect platform. Interviews are supplemented by document analysis of relevant humanitarian reports. Participants have the opportunity to share their experiences freely, contributing to a rich dataset.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics, including means, medians, and frequency distributions, are computed to summarize quantitative data. Thematic analysis is employed to identify common themes in qualitative responses.

Additionally, the breakdown of respondents' willingness to stay and primary sources of income is analyzed categorically.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Returnees' Physiological Needs in Baga

Among the returnee population in Baga, there is a significant gender disparity, with males constituting 75.8% and females 24.3% of the total sample of 400 participants. This observation aligns with findings from UNHCR (2020), which reports similar gender disparities among returnee populations in conflict-affected areas. Returnees in Baga exhibit diverse age distributions, with the majority falling within the 19-64 age range (68.5%). According to research by IOM (2019), returnee populations in post-conflict settings often consist of individuals within the working-age range, emphasizing the importance of addressing their specific needs for successful reintegration. Variations in marital status among returnees reveal distinct social dynamics, with the largest portion being married individuals (59.5%). The World Bank's report on "Understanding Returnee Reintegration Dynamics" (2020) emphasizes the significance of marital status in influencing access to resources and support networks among returnees in conflict-affected areas. Returnees in Baga present a diverse range of educational backgrounds, with the majority (67.25%) having attained secondary education. This underscores the correlation between educational attainment and various physiological needs among displaced populations, as highlighted by UNESCO's research (2020), which recognizes the necessity for tailored interventions based on educational backgrounds. While a majority of returnees have successfully secured housing (81.5%), attention is needed for the 18.5% facing challenges. Save the Children's studies (2021) on housing challenges among displaced populations align with these findings, emphasizing the need for targeted interventions to address housing insecurity among returnees. Most returnees in Baga (79.5%) report regular access to clean drinking water, although a significant minority (20.5%) faces challenges in this regard. Oxfam's research (2019) advocates for improved water infrastructure and targeted support in conflict-affected areas, recognizing the crucial role of clean drinking water in enhancing the overall well-being of displaced populations. Integration of these findings with supporting evidence from various studies provides a comprehensive understanding of the physiological needs of returnees in Baga and the importance of tailored interventions for their successful reintegration and overall well-being.

Evaluation of Returnees' Safety and Security Needs Satisfaction in Baga

The majority (93.75%) of returnees in Baga reported feeling either "Safe" (50.5%) or "Very safe" (43.25%), indicating a generally favorable environment for reintegration. However, a minority expressed feeling "Unsafe" (5.5%) or "Very unsafe" (0.75%), highlighting the importance of addressing concerns of this subgroup. These findings are consistent with research conducted by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) (2019), which emphasizes the significance of addressing safety and security concerns among returnee populations to ensure successful reintegration.

Moreover, the majority (80.25%) of returnees feel adequately protected, while a significant minority (19.75%) does not. Understanding reasons for insecurity is crucial for improving security measures and ensuring all returnees feel safe. Similar sentiments are echoed in the report by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (2020), which emphasizes the importance of identifying and addressing the root causes of insecurity among returnee populations.

The security measures adopted by returnees in Baga primarily focus on personal security arrangements (85.25%), with a smaller percentage engaging in community watch initiatives (3.75%) and relying on law enforcement (2.25%). These findings align with research by organizations such as the Geneva Centre for

Security Policy (GCSP) (2021), which underscores the importance of empowering returnee communities to take active roles in ensuring their own security.

Furthermore, the majority (94.75%) of returnees express satisfaction with the security measures in place, with only a minority (5%) reporting dissatisfaction. Identifying areas of dissatisfaction is crucial for improving existing initiatives and ensuring comprehensive safety measures. This notion is supported by findings from the International Crisis Group (ICG) (2022), which advocate for ongoing evaluation and adaptation of security measures based on feedback from returnee populations. These findings stress the importance of addressing the diverse safety and security needs of returnees in Baga to foster a secure environment conducive to successful reintegration. Tailored interventions and ongoing collaboration between returnees and relevant stakeholders are essential for enhancing overall safety and security in the community.

Examination of the Willingness and Unwillingness of Returnees to Stay in Their Former Place of Habitual Residence

The assessment of returnees' willingness to remain in their former places of habitual residence is a pivotal aspect of understanding their reintegration process. According to a study by the International Organization for Migration (2019), returnees' intentions to stay in their former places of residence are influenced by various factors, including economic opportunities, security, and access to services. This aligns with the findings in Baga, where a substantial majority, encompassing 82.5% of respondents, exhibited positive inclinations towards continuing their stay in their current locales. However, a noteworthy proportion, constituting 17.5% of the sample, conveyed reluctance towards perpetuating their residency.

Furthermore, the examination of satisfaction levels with the current place of residence elucidates the multifaceted nature of returnees' sentiments. Studies by organizations such as the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (2020) have found that satisfaction with living conditions significantly impacts returnees' decisions to stay or relocate. Similarly, in Baga, while a significant portion, accounting for 74.25% of respondents, expressed contentment with their current residential situation, a substantial minority, representing 25.75% of the sample, conveyed varying degrees of dissatisfaction.

The receptivity to potential relocation provides further insight into the dynamic preferences of returnees regarding their residential arrangements. Research by the International Rescue Committee (2021) suggests that returnees often consider factors such as job opportunities, access to education, and social networks when contemplating relocation. With 56.75% of respondents in Baga indicating a willingness to consider relocation in the near future, the data underscores the divergent trajectories in returnees' residential aspirations.

Moreover, the array of support systems available to facilitate the integration of returnees into the community is essential. Studies by humanitarian organizations such as Save the Children (2019) emphasize the importance of comprehensive support systems in promoting successful reintegration. However, the prevalence of respondents (41.75%) reporting a lack of access to any specified support systems in Baga underscores the need for robust interventions to address potential gaps in assistance mechanisms.

Additionally, the perceived difficulty in accessing employment opportunities highlights a substantial challenge faced by returnees in achieving socio-economic stability. Research by the International Labour Organization (2020) indicates that returnees often struggle to find sustainable livelihoods upon returning to their communities. With 91.5% of respondents in Baga indicating varying degrees of difficulty in securing employment, there exists a pressing imperative to enhance job accessibility and foster economic empowerment among returnees.

Livelihoods and Economic Security of Returnees in Baga

The assessment of livelihoods and economic security among returnees in Baga reveals several critical insights into the economic circumstances and challenges faced by the community. Firstly, concerning income distribution, the data indicates that nearly half of the returnees, constituting approximately 45.75%, reported incomes within the range of 0-30,000. This suggests a significant portion of returnees grappling with economic challenges and potential financial constraints. Conversely, a substantial proportion, around 51.5%, fell within the income range of 35,000-100,000, indicating a comparatively stable economic situation for this segment. Furthermore, a smaller but notable percentage, approximately 2.75%, reported incomes of 110,000 and above, implying higher economic security within this minority group.

Secondly, in terms of access to financial services, the findings reveal that a considerable percentage, approximately 62.5%, reported encountering difficulty accessing financial services such as banking and credit facilities. These highlights potential challenges in banking and credit accessibility, which can hinder returnees' ability to manage finances effectively and invest in economic activities. Conversely, around 29.5% found financial services very easily accessible, indicating a significant portion experiencing relatively smooth access. Moreover, 6% reported somewhat easy accessibility, while 2% encountered difficulties in access. Thirdly, primary challenges to economic integration were identified, with limited job opportunities being the most frequently reported obstacle, identified by approximately 79.5% of respondents. This underscores the critical need to address the availability of employment opportunities within the community. Additionally, around 14% cited a lack of skills as a primary challenge, emphasizing the importance of investing in skill development initiatives tailored to the needs of returnees. Other challenges, including discrimination, were reported by smaller percentages, but their significance in fostering an inclusive economic environment cannot be overlooked.

Moreover, government assistance programs play a significant role in supporting returnees' economic well-being, with approximately 77.75% of respondents receiving financial support from such initiatives. However, around 22.25% reported not benefiting from these programs, indicating potential gaps in awareness, eligibility criteria, or administrative barriers that need to be addressed to ensure broader access. Furthermore, access to land and property for agricultural or residential purposes is crucial for returnees' economic and residential stability. Approximately 85.5% of returnees reported having access to such resources, while 14.5% did not. This underscores the importance of addressing barriers to access, such as land tenure issues or displacement challenges, to promote equitable opportunities for all returnees. Similarly, access to markets for selling products or services is essential for economic viability. While around

42% found market access very easily accessible, approximately 48.25% encountered challenges in accessing markets. Addressing these challenges and building on successful practices can enhance market inclusivity and support the economic success of the returnee community.

Finally, access to fishing resources, particularly Lake Chad, is crucial for the livelihoods of fishermen and women in Baga. Approximately 91.5% reported being able to access the lake for their fishing activities, highlighting a favorable situation for the majority. However, around 8.5% reported not being able to access Lake Chad, indicating potential disparities in resource access that need to be addressed to promote sustainable economic development and community resilience.

CONCLUSION

The assessment of livelihoods and economic security among returnees in Baga provides valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities facing the community. The data highlights the diverse economic circumstances among returnees, with significant proportions facing financial constraints while others enjoy

comparatively stable incomes. Access to financial services, employment opportunities, skills development, government assistance programs, land, markets, and fishing resources are crucial factors influencing economic integration and resilience. Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach that includes tailored interventions to support returnees across income levels, improve access to financial services and employment opportunities, enhance skills through training programs, ensure equitable access to resources such as land and markets, and promote sustainable fishing practices. Additionally, efforts to raise awareness about government assistance programs and address barriers to access are essential for ensuring that all returnees benefit from available support mechanisms. By addressing these challenges and leveraging existing opportunities, policymakers, local authorities, and relevant stakeholders can contribute to creating a more inclusive and supportive environment for returnees in Baga. Ultimately, fostering economic integration and resilience among returnees not only enhances their well-being but also contributes to the overall socio-economic development and stability of the community.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data supporting the findings of this study are available upon request to the corresponding author.

ETHICAL STATEMENT

Prior to conducting each interview, explicit consent was obtained from all participants involved in this study. Participants were informed about the nature of the research, its objectives, and the intended use of their responses. They were assured of confidentiality and their right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

FUNDING STATEMENT

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

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