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International Humanitarian Aid in Maiduguri Metropolitan Council and Jere Local Government Areas of Borno State, Nigeria, 2015 - 2023

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Abstract
International humanitarian aid remains vital for alleviating suffering and promoting recovery in conflict-affected regions, notably through the efforts of organisations delivering essential services such as food, shelter, healthcare, and education. This study assessed the effectiveness of humanitarian aid in Maiduguri and its environs using a mixed-methods design, combining quantitative data from 342 valid questionnaires with qualitative insights from 12 key informant interviews with non-governmental organisation staff. The findings reveal that while humanitarian interventions adequately addressed immediate survival needs, improving healthcare outcomes, reducing hunger and malnutrition, and supporting economic reintegration, several systemic obstacles persist. Security threats, corruption, mismanagement, lack of beneficiary transparency, and inefficient coordination between government and NGOs undermined the overall effectiveness of aid distribution and reduced its long-term impact. The study highlights the necessity for humanitarian aid strategies to evolve from predominantly reactive, emergency-focused responses to more integrated, strategic approaches that foster socio-economic recovery and empowerment in conflict-affected communities. Only by adopting such comprehensive frameworks can humanitarian interventions truly support the reconstruction of resilient, self-reliant, and peaceful societies in Maiduguri and similar contexts, moving beyond short-term relief towards sustainable development and long-term stability.

Keywords: Humanitarian Aid, Maiduguri Metropolitan Council, Jere Local Government Areas, Borno State, Nigeria.

Introduction

International humanitarian aid has long served as a crucial mechanism for mitigating suffering and fostering recovery in regions devastated by conflict. Prominent organisations such as the United Nations, International Red Cross, and various NGOs have led global efforts, providing essential provisions, food, shelter, healthcare, and education—to populations affected by war and disaster (Bahadory et al., 2019; Aall & Helsing, 2021; James, 2018; Welsh, 2018). In the Americas, humanitarian aid has addressed crises triggered by natural disasters and armed conflicts, notably in Haiti after the 2010 earthquake, where agencies such as USAID and the UN coordinated large-scale relief and reconstruction (Dupuy, 2014). Despite these interventions, persistent challenges, corruption, inefficiencies, and dependency, cast doubt on the long-term impact of aid.

Similarly, in Colombia, humanitarian assistance has been vital for populations displaced by decades-long conflict, with organisations like the UNHCR and ICRC ensuring access to shelter,

food, and psychosocial services (Betancur, 2019). In Europe, humanitarian responses during the Balkan Wars and in the ongoing Ukraine conflict have provided critical support to millions, although coordination, security threats, and bureaucratic obstacles remain significant hurdles (Chandler, 2006; Humanitarian Policy Group, 2023).

Africa remains a major recipient of humanitarian aid due to recurrent conflicts, political instability, and natural disasters (Kabemba, 2013; Karbo & Mutisi, 2011). In Nigeria, particularly Borno State, the Boko Haram insurgency has led to widespread displacement and humanitarian needs. International and local agencies have delivered emergency aid, improving nutrition and healthcare but also facing barriers such as insecurity, poor coordination, and donor fatigue (UNOCHA, 2021; ICRC, 2020; Shehu & Abba, 2020). The effectiveness of aid in Maiduguri and environs thus depends on coordinated, resilience-focused strategies that balance immediate relief with long-term recovery (NRC, 2020).

Conceptual Clarifications

Conflict is an unavoidable aspect of human society, arising from the diversity of individuals' ideas, desires, perceptions, and needs. It is commonly conceptualised as an antagonistic state of opposition, disagreement, or incompatibility between two or more parties (Wilmot & Hocker, 2001; Patzak, 2012). Conrad (1991) asserts that conflict results from interactions among interdependent individuals who perceive their interests as incompatible or in tension, while Leung and Brew (2013) describe conflict as a clash of values and interests, reflecting the tension between what exists and what certain groups believe should be. Such conflicts can propel social transformation, driving the emergence of new economic systems, technologies, and institutions. Robbins (2005) further defines conflict as a process initiated when one party perceives another as negatively affecting something important to them, highlighting the centrality of perception.

Contributing factors include differences in goals, resource competition, and personal attributes, which are particularly evident in organisational contexts (Folger et al., 2021). Borisoff and Victor (1998) add that conflict is an expressed struggle between interdependent parties who perceive incompatible goals and scarce resources, underscoring its complex and multidimensional nature.

Humanitarian and Humanitarian Aid

A humanitarian is a person who actively promotes human welfare and social reform, often through philanthropic efforts. Humanitarian work aims to alleviate suffering, protect life and health, and ensure respect for human beings. According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (2011), the four key principles of humanitarian action include: Humanity - addressing human suffering wherever it is found, with particular attention to the most vulnerable; Neutrality - providing aid without favouring any side in an armed conflict or dispute; Impartiality - delivering aid solely based on need, without discrimination; and Independence - maintaining autonomy of humanitarian objectives from political, economic, military or other objectives.

Humanitarian aid can take many forms, such as providing food, shelter, medical care and other life-saving assistance to populations affected by disasters, conflicts, and other crises. It is distinct from other activities like political, religious, ideological, or military actions (Gotz, 2014). Organisations like the United Nations, European Union, and U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) have humanitarian programs to assist those in urgent need of aid and protection. Prominent humanitarians include individuals who have made significant contributions to improving lives and reducing suffering around the world (Erturk, 2015; Claes, 2021).

Conflict Zones

A conflict zone is an area where there is an active armed conflict or dispute between opposing parties. It is a designated region where the rights of neutral parties are not respected by the belligerents engaged in the conflict. In such a scenario, it often results in significant risks to civilians and non-combatants as they face casualties, displacement, psychological trauma, and disrupted services. Conflict Zones could arise from various causes like political power struggles, economic disparities, social tensions, historical grievances, and external influences (MacGinty and Williams, 2016). Characteristics of conflict zones include widespread violence, humanitarian crises, displacement, economic disruption, infrastructure damage, human rights violations, and restricted access to aid organisations (Vayrynen, 2023).

The Nexus between Conflict and International Humanitarian Aid

Conflicts frequently result in the displacement of large populations, generating urgent needs for shelter, food, water, sanitation, and healthcare. Humanitarian organisations play a crucial role by providing essential aid and supporting local services to address these needs. However, the destruction of infrastructure such as hospitals, schools, and water systems intensifies crises, leading to disease outbreaks and rising malnutrition rates. Accessing conflict zones presents significant challenges for humanitarian agencies, including security risks, roadblocks, and bureaucratic obstacles (Kurtzer, 2019). Maintaining neutrality and impartiality is essential for operational safety, yet perceived biases can undermine access. Furthermore, damaged infrastructure complicates efficient aid distribution in volatile environments (Oloruntoba & Kovács, 2015).

Humanitarian aid may also be manipulated as a political tool by governments and non-state actors seeking leverage or advancing specific objectives, complicating aid delivery. Donor priorities and geopolitical interests can affect the allocation and distribution of assistance, sometimes resulting in biased outcomes (Gulrajani, 2017). Legal and ethical considerations, grounded in International Humanitarian Law (IHL), guide civilian protection and conduct during hostilities. Violations of IHL exacerbate humanitarian crises and demand accountability. Aid can also have unintended consequences, including diversion by armed groups, targeting of beneficiaries, or health and security issues from overcrowded distribution centres (Greig, 2021).

Methods and Materials

This study is anchored in the interpretivist research philosophy, which facilitates a nuanced exploration of the local context and the subjective experiences of individuals affected by conflict and humanitarian aid (Bryman, 2016). By adopting interpretivism, the research is designed to capture the perspectives of various stakeholders, including aid recipients, community members, and aid workers, thus enabling a comprehensive understanding of how humanitarian interventions impact the community from multiple viewpoints. Employing a mixed-methods research design, the study integrates qualitative approaches—such as key informant interviews, field visits, and case studies—with quantitative data gathered from questionnaires administered to residents, aid recipients, and humanitarian workers. Additional data were obtained from official reports and records of humanitarian organisations operating within Maiduguri metropolis, utilising both primary and secondary sources for triangulation. This combination of in-depth qualitative insights and quantitative evidence provides a robust foundation for evaluating the effectiveness, challenges, and outcomes of international humanitarian aid in conflict-affected areas (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Table 1: Key Informant Interview Participants

S/N	Participated NGOs	Description	NGOs Representatives
1	World Food Program (WFP)	Food Security and Nutrition	2
2	Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders)	Health Services	2
3	Oxfam	Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH)	2
4	Save the Children	Education	2

Source: Field Survey, 2025

For each of the humanitarian non-governmental organisations, which are carefully chosen based on their plausible contributions to the alleviation of humanitarian suffering over the years in the Maiduguri Metropolitan Council and Jere among others.

Population of the Study

The population of the study covers the entire group of individuals, objects, or measurements that are the focus of the research. The study population is broader than the actual sample that is selected for data collection. The study area which is the Maiduguri Metropolis comprised the Maiduguri Metropolitan Council (MMC) and Jere. According to the projected count of the National Population Commission, 2022, the population of the Maiduguri Metropolitan Council (MMC) is 791,200 while that of Jere is 306,400, hence the total population count to 1,097,600. For the interview conducted, the population of the study was drawn from the selected sets of International Non-Governmental organisations that offer humanitarian aid in the conflict zones of Borno Metropolis as shown in the Table 2.

Table 2: Population of the Study

S/N	Participated NGOs	Description	Population of the Selected NGOs
1	World Food Program (WFP)	Food Security and Nutrition	700
2	Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders)	Health Services	1,000
3	Oxfam	Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH)	500
4	Save the Children	Education	900

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Sampling Size and Sampling Technique

For the qualitative data gathered through Key informant interview with two representatives of various NGOs based on their significance and relevance to the study. Those sets of NGOs are registered and have a significant presence in Maiduguri metropolis. On the other hand, the sampling technique for the qualitative data is purposive as the participant NGOs are deliberately chosen as the central focus of this study based on their prominent contribution to alleviating the impact of humanitarian crisis over the years on the victims. Those considered NGOs are shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Sampling Size

S/N	NGO Groups	Description	Interview Participants
1	World Food Program (WFP)	Food Security and Nutrition	2
2	Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders)	Health Services	2
3	Oxfam	Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH)	2
4	Save the Children	Education	2
Total Participants			**8**

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Dynamics of Conflict in Northeast Nigeria

Over the past decade, northeast Nigeria has experienced a persistent humanitarian crisis, resulting in millions requiring urgent assistance (Brechenmacher, 2019). Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe states have been the most severely affected. Since September 2018, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimations indicate that 1.8 million individuals have been internally displaced, with an additional 5.8 million in need of aid. Notably, over 80% of internally displaced persons (IDPs) resided in Borno State, the epicentre of the crisis, with more than 60% living in host communities, thereby straining already limited resources (Mohammed, 2022). The numbers of IDPs have risen steadily since 2014, due largely to continued insecurity and repeated displacements (Eweka & Olusegun, 2016).

The root causes of this crisis are largely attributed to the insurgency of Boko Haram, a terrorist group notorious for violent attacks across Nigeria and its neighbouring countries (Kamta et al., 2020). The insurgency, and the subsequent counter-insurgency by the Nigerian state, has resulted in the gravest humanitarian crisis in Nigeria's history (Okoli & Iortyer, 2014). Socio-economic vulnerabilities, climate challenges, and governmental neglect have facilitated Boko Haram's emergence and expansion (Bello, 2022). The group capitalises on the region's strategic location and recruits from amongst disaffected youths, unemployed graduates, and destitute children, primarily from northern Nigeria (Kamta et al., 2020).

Scholarly debates concerning the root causes of violence in the region highlight the interplay of environmental, socio-economic, religious, and governance factors (Mlambo, 2017). While some analyses, such as that by Pieri and Zenn (2016), have not reached consensus, they have shaped policy responses, including international deradicalisation strategies focused on religious reintegration. The historical context, especially the legacy of the Sokoto Caliphate in the nineteenth century, is also significant; the emergence of Boko Haram draws upon these antecedents, linking the current conflict to past configurations of Islamic governance in northern Nigeria.

Despite ongoing violence and humanitarian distress, there remains a paucity of research on the specific drivers of conflict in northeast Nigeria. Existing literature has explored environmental change and socio-economic conditions, as well as the region's historical development up to the nineteenth century. However, more comprehensive and current analyses are required to better understand the complex and evolving causes of violence, with the aim of informing effective humanitarian and policy interventions.

Socio-economic Impact of the Conflict in Borno Metropolitan Council

A study by Sowunmi et al. (2012) revealed that northeast Nigeria had the nation's highest poverty index at approximately 49%, whereas the southwest reported the lowest rates, ranging from 21.5% to 26.6%. Regional disparities in poverty are partly attributable to uneven natural

resource distribution (Raheem et al., 2014). Education's pivotal role in national development is well documented; Fägerlind and Saha (2016) assert that education is fundamental to nation-building. One of education's main goals is to provide learners with essential skills for meaningful participation in national development (Ololube et al., 2012). Nonetheless, northeast Nigeria faces extremely limited access to education, with secondary school attendance at just 31% in 2015, compared to the national average of 56% (Mohammed et al., 2019).

The relationship between education and poverty is firmly established in existing literature. Unemployment statistics in Nigeria illustrate the influence of education on economic outcomes (Okorie & Anowor, 2017). Higher unemployment rates, strongly correlated with poverty, are most pronounced in northern Nigeria, where educational attainment is lowest. World Bank reports highlight that, as of 2004, northern Nigeria was the country's poorest region, with the gap between north and south widening from 2006 to 2016 (World Bank, 2014; Metu & Kalu, 2020). In the northeast, poverty reduction stagnated, with rates remaining particularly high at 47.6% (World Bank, 2014).

According to the World Bank (2016), 75% of chronically poor Nigerian households are located in the north, with only 25% found in the south. Chronic poverty is especially prevalent in the northeast, at 22.2%, the second highest nationwide, followed by North Central at 19.3%. In contrast, all southern regions display chronic poverty rates below 10% (World Bank, 2014). The persistent disparities between northern and southern Nigeria underscore the critical need for targeted interventions, particularly regarding education and economic opportunities, to mitigate structural poverty.

Addressing socioeconomic imbalances is essential for sustainable peace (Distler et al., 2018). Hurst et al. (2016) emphasise the necessity of tackling inequality and poverty to resolve conflict. Societies with deep-rooted economic contradictions struggle to achieve peace. While poverty and unemployment are frequently cited as drivers of terrorism, research remains inconclusive (Piazza, 2011; Adelaja & George, 2020). Demographic pressures also exacerbate northern Nigeria's challenges. Dr S. Onazi, Ministry of Labour, stated, "Poverty indices in Nigeria indicate that the poorest people are in the north. As such, poverty can be considered as a push factor for the crisis" (personal communication, May 6, 2024).

Discussion of Findings and Validation of Assumptions

First, analysis of 342 valid questionnaires and 12 key informant interviews in Maiduguri Metropolis (MMC) and Jere LGAs (2015–2023) reveals that humanitarian aid has largely addressed urgent survival needs. Notably, 83.33% strongly agreed and 16.67% agreed that aid interventions in food security, shelter, and healthcare were effective. Aid also included vital services, with 71.35% agreeing and 13.16% strongly agreeing on the inclusion of healthcare, food, shelter, and psychosocial support (Médecins Sans Frontières, 2024).

Second, aid improved healthcare access, with 64.9% strongly agreeing and 32.16% agreeing. Médecins Sans Frontières' maternal health initiative reportedly reduced maternal mortality by 18% in Maiduguri, managing 1,200 complex deliveries in 2024. Regarding food assistance, 74.85% agreed and 25.16% strongly agreed it reduced hunger. The World Food Programme provided food to 1.1 million people monthly, yet moderate and severe malnutrition admissions rose by 40% and 70%, respectively (World Food Programme, 2024).

Third, while 73.98% agreed and 26.02% strongly agreed that aid facilitated economic reintegration, only 23% of vocational training beneficiaries established businesses, and just 12% of displaced households regained sustainable income. Systemic barriers persisted: 65.79% strongly agreed and 34.21% agreed that security threats disrupted operations; 67.54% agreed and 11.70% strongly agreed that corruption hindered aid distribution; and 50.88% agreed and

31.87% strongly agreed that coordination inefficiencies reduced effectiveness (UN OCHA, 2024).

Fourth, funding shortfalls, camp closures, and logistical issues further constrained aid. Abrupt withdrawal of support increased hunger and forced negative coping strategies, such as transactional sex and child labour. Camp closures displaced up to 50,000 children, with 33% experiencing educational disruption and facing heightened exploitation risks (UNICEF, 2024). These findings highlight the need for addressing both immediate and structural challenges in humanitarian interventions.

The first assumption that international humanitarian aid in Maiduguri Metropolis consists mainly of food, healthcare, shelter, and educational support is validated by survey results and NGO data, confirming systematic deployment of these services to IDPs and host communities (Médecins Sans Frontières, 2024; Save the Children, 2024; World Food Programme, 2024). The second, while aid has enhanced access to basic needs and economic opportunities, sustained socio-economic recovery remains limited; only a minority of beneficiaries achieved stable livelihoods, indicating that humanitarian aid has improved immediate conditions but has not fully enabled long-term transformation (World Food Programme, 2024; Médecins Sans Frontières, 2024). The third assumption is strongly validated, as insecurity, logistical barriers, and bureaucratic inefficiencies, including corruption and erratic policy changes—were consistently identified as major constraints, hindering the timely and effective delivery of aid to conflict-affected populations (UN OCHA, 2024; Médecins Sans Frontières, 2024; World Food Programme, 2024).

Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

This study assessed the effectiveness of international humanitarian aid in conflict-affected Maiduguri Metropolis from 2015 to 2023, highlighting the impact of the Boko Haram insurgency. Analysis revealed that interventions by agencies such as the World Food Programme, Médecins Sans Frontières, and Save the Children provided critical support in food, shelter, healthcare, and education, significantly stabilising internally displaced persons (IDPs) and host communities (World Food Programme, 2024; Médecins Sans Frontières, 2024). While quantitative data showed widespread acknowledgement of improved access to basic needs, challenges such as insecurity, corruption, and inadequate coordination persisted, frequently disrupting aid delivery and limiting longer-term impacts (UN OCHA, 2024).

In light of these findings, policy recommendations emphasise shifting from short-term relief to resilience-building and sustainable development. Greater local ownership, strengthened inter-agency coordination, and comprehensive long-term planning are vital for enhancing the transformative impact of humanitarian interventions (UNICEF, 2024). Aid strategies should integrate economic empowerment, capacity-building, and community participation to move beyond emergency response. Addressing systemic barriers—particularly insecurity, bureaucratic inefficiency, and corruption—is essential for timely, equitable aid distribution and sustainable recovery. Such a strategic reorientation is necessary to ensure humanitarian assistance contributes not only to crisis mitigation but also to the enduring socio-economic recovery of Maiduguri Metropolis.

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