**Background.**

In Nigeria, with special reference to Northeast Nigeria, Internally Displaced Persons who do not own Civil Documents are exposed to several risk, including but not limited to denial of access to services, education and employment. They also face some form of intimidation and violation of their right to freedom of movement by security forces at checkpoints while travelling form one State to another. They are delayed, made to undergo some form of physical dehumanization such as sitting on the ground by the roadside or even extorted by being made to pay “fines” before they are allowed to proceed on their journey. This is a pointer to the fact that Internally Displaced Persons without Voters cards would also be prevented from voting or taking part in the voting process. Many of these Internally Displaced Persons lost their voters cards while fleeing from their places of habitual residence, others reported that their voters card got burnt when their homes were destroyed by AOGs. Many of them struggle to survive and cannot meet basic needs, so obtaining Voters cards is sometimes the last thing on their minds.

Some of the challenges faced by Internally Displaced women, girls, Persons living with disabilities and other marginalized groups, include:

* Lack of access to civil documentation such as National IDs and Birth certificates.
* Denial of access to education.
* Lack of access to aid and services.
* Restriction of movement as a result of lack of civil documents.
* Lack of access to health facilities.
* Discrimination by host community members.
* Physical violence.
* Gender based violence.
* Limited access to financial or economic resources.

**Government Policies and Legislation.**

The National Policy on Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Nigeria FRN August 2012, makes provision for the rights of Internally Displaced Persons in Nigeria.

The Federal Executive Council (FEC) has approved a new National Policy for Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in the country. The Minister of Humanitarian Affairs, Disaster Management and Social Development, Sadiya Farouq, disclosed this when she briefed State House correspondents on the outcome of the Federal Executive Council meeting, presided over by President Muhammadu Buhari at the Presidential Villa, Abuja, on Wednesday, September 1st, 2021.

She described the policy as a milestone in government’s determination to bring succor to displaced persons. “Today at Council, the Federal Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs, Disaster Management and Social Development, presented a memo for the approval of a draft national policy on Internally Displaced Persons in Nigeria…“The National Policy on Internal Displacements provides a platform for all relevant actors in the humanitarian and development space to key in and contribute towards a common goal,”. According to the minister, the overall goal of the policy is to strengthen the institutional mechanism and frameworks for the realization of the rights, dignity and wellbeing of vulnerable populations through the mitigation of impact and achievement of durable solutions to internal displacements.

She said: “With the approval of the policy, a multi-sectorial structure will fully emerge, which will ensure a coordinated, operational and strategic response to all the humanitarian challenges our great nation is facing.”

[[1]](#footnote-1)

The National Policy on Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Nigeria, 2012 makes provision for the protection of the General and Specific Rights of IDPs, their Rights to Protection from Displacement, Rights to Protection and Assistance during Displacement, Rights of Internally Displaced Children, Rights of Internally Displaced Women, Rights of Internally Displaced Persons with Disabilities, Rights of Internally Displaced Persons Living with HIV (PLHIV), Rights of Internally Displaced Elderly Persons and Rights of IDPs during Return, Resettlement and Re-integration. It also speaks about the impact of Internal Displacement on IDPs in Nigeria, and the impact of displacement on host communities of internally displaced persons. The Policy also enforces the Principle of Participation of displaced persons which states that: ‘Designing, planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of interventions targeting internally displaced persons, or their host communities must actively involve them at all stages. They must be carried along in decision-making processes and be duly consulted and informed on decisions related to their relocation, provision of relief, rehabilitation, return, resettlement, or re-integration. They must also be actively involved in the management of relief, resettlement and rehabilitation camps, and conscious effort must be made to include women and children in such decision-making processes’. This section of the Policy can serve as protection of the political participation of displaced persons regardless of their age, gender or health status, and their rights to vote and be voted for in elections in Nigeria.

[[2]](#footnote-2)

**Denial of Power.**

When Internally Displaced Persons do not participate in elections, that means the power to take control of their lives or to make decisions that affects their lives has been taken aware from them, and this is a violation of their rights. It has also been recorded that in times of relocation of IDPs, their opinions are usually not sought as to if they choose to return, remain, or reintegrate. Often a leader of the community sits with the government and takes decisions without further consultations with the displaced persons. This means that we can infer those durable solutions cannot be said to be durable in practice.

**Humanitarian Aid.**

Humanitarian and development organizations, peace and human rights actors can promote and support efforts for the participation of internally displaced persons in elections by holding town hall meetings and sensitization sessions with Host community members, IDPs and stakeholders, on the rights of IDPs in the society, how the socio-political rights of IDPs can be promoted. These actors and organizations can also build the capacity of IDPs on their Human, Social, Economic and Political rights as well as empowering them economically to have a voice that would speak, and the society would listen. A third strategy these actors and organizations can use is advocacy to the various levels of Government in Nigeria, for the formulation and implementation of policies that protect, and promote the rights of IDPs, including their rights to participate in elections, to vote and be voted for, from the LGA level, from which they get empowered to participate in elections all the way to the Federal level.

**ZAINAB OLUWABUKOLA ATTA ESQ, Northeast Nigeria.**

1. 1 <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2021/09/fec-approves-new-policy-on-internally-displaced-persons/> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. 2 <https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/5a7ae2324.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)