

SGBV MONTHLY UPDATE



Women and children participating in an outreach activity in Bama camp, Borno © UNHCR Nigeria

KEY DEVELOPMENTS



Increased humanitarian access to civilian population previously trapped in remote areas

The general security situation in North East Nigeria especially in Borno State remains fragile and unpredictable. The Nigeria Armed Forces (NAF) counter insurgency initiatives continue with active fighting ongoing in the fringes of the Lake Chad Basin, inside Sambisa Forest and in isolated villages along the international borders with Cameroon and Niger. The “Deep Punch” operation has fuelled displacement of communities as well as rescue of civilians previously held by Boko Haram insurgents, further increasing persons of concern fleeing and seeking safety inside IDP camps.



Increased number of civilians (women and children) rescued from BH captivity

During the reporting period, **2,014** men, women and children were rescued by the NAF and handed over to the Department of Women Affairs and Social Development, LGA leaders and IDP camps in Borno State. UNHCR provided material assistance including sanitary materials to the victims to address their dignity needs.



Government is encouraging IDPs to return to their LGAs

According to assessments conducted by UNHCR in the newly accessible LGAs, the situation of children is of particular concern. The inter-agency Education Working Group estimates that between **70% - 80%** of IDP children are out-of-school. Due to extreme desperation, many are at risk of or already involved in child labour, street begging, and youth are increasingly under pressure to join fighting groups due to limited interventions aiming at preventing radicalisation. Other children are exposed to increased risk of abuse, violence, exploitation and bullying by peers at school, on the streets, and within the families.

1,500 
Individuals were reached through awareness raising on SGBV & PSEA

Awareness raising sessions and campaigns were successfully organized during the reporting period with over **1,500** community members including IDPs attending information sessions organized by the partners in Borno, Yobe and Adamawa States.

One of the key achievements during the reporting period has been the finalization of the assessment on the Adolescent Girls Pilot Project and the drafting of the curriculum for parents and adolescent girls. The curriculum will ensure that interventions targeting adolescent girls are structured, tailored and implemented to suit their needs and capacities.

Women returnees of reproductive age received dignity materials, including sanitary towels and solar lanterns to enhance safety and participation in household and community activities.

Emotional Support Groups (ESG) for women at risk of violence are being set up within existing Safe Spaces and Protection Desks in MMC and Jere LGAs. The ESGs aim to help ensure that women and girls who are at risk or have survived sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) benefit from immediate psychosocial support.

In line with the community based protection strategy, UNHCR engaged with existing community structures in Damaturu to capacitate them on SGBV/PSEA related issues. Current strategy focuses on timely reporting, service delivery and prevention of SGBV and SEA. However, limited availability of specialised services for SGBV survivors including medical and psychosocial support remains a concern.

As part of capacity building efforts, UNHCR and partners held training sessions for **35** case workers on basic SGBV concepts, case management and skills on handling child survivors of SGBV as well as the GBV Information Management System to improve case worker skills in case management and documentation. The system is designed to improve partner understanding of the SGBV situation in order to improve future programming and advocacy. In addition, case workers received on the job training, mentoring and coaching support.

Despite positive developments in SGBV programming, key protection concerns for IDP women and children in North East Nigeria continue to be rape of minors, domestic violence, sexual violence, sexual exploitation and early marriage. Protection monitoring reports reveal that parents are marrying off girls as young as **13** years old. UNHCR and partners are currently developing community mobilization strategies to address the situation, including working with adolescent girls and key influential women in the community

CONTEXT AND PROTECTION NEEDS

The ongoing insurgency in North East Nigeria is characterized by extreme levels of violence and destruction. The Boko Haram group was identified as the single deadliest terrorist group in 2014, surpassing ISIL, the Taliban, the Fulani militants and Al-Shabaab. Boko Haram's extremist ideology and its heavy reliance on tactics of indiscriminate terror perpetrated against a wide array of targets have significantly impacted social relations, further dividing and polarizing an already fragmented society. As the conflict intensified, the prevalence of SGBV has escalated drastically in the six (6) northeastern States of Borno, Adamawa, Yobe, Gombe, Bauchi and Taraba.

Women and girls abducted by Boko Haram are systematically victims of rape, forced marriage, labor and religious conversion. Physically, sexually and emotionally abused, they remain highly vulnerable, exposed to sexually transmitted diseases and often forced impregnation by their predators. In newly accessible LGAs, women and girls continue to experience deeply seated distrust of former captives and their children born as a result of sexual violence. This situation put survivors at further risk of stigmatization, rejection and abandonment.

According to assessments conducted by UNHCR and other protection actors, internally displaced women and children are disproportionately vulnerable to SGBV. Unaccompanied girls and adolescents, single heads of households, child mothers, child spouses, and women and girls living with disability are most at risk. Displaced communities report contributing factors such as separation from families, limited access to support and economic opportunities, and overcrowded living conditions which offer

minimal privacy and security. The worsening economic situation of most IDPs, particularly women and young girls exposes them to vulnerable environments making them susceptible to abuse, violence and exploitation.

Although early marriage was commonly practiced among different communities in North East Nigeria before the conflict, the number of forced/early marriages among IDPs is reported to have tripled because of the socio-economic difficulties faced by families in the camps. Help seeking behavior by SGBV survivors remains a challenge despite the efforts developed through the Protection Sector Working Group (PSWG) and other Sub Sector Working Groups to build adequate prevention and response programmes. Most SGBV survivors are reluctant to report due to restrictive cultural values and stigma. Survivors are often not willing to seek support due to the shame, fear and “dishonor” to their families and the possible risk for their physical safety.

Federal and state government capacities to address SGBV-related issues are overstretched, and IDPs need support for SGBV prevention and response. In order to encourage SGBV survivors to seek assistance, the availability of specialized services and safe spaces is essential. Survivors also need emergency and life-saving services, including medical care, which are often inadequate or lacking in most camps and host communities. Psycho-social and legal support services need systematic and institutional support to strengthen capacity. Above all, these services need to be available and accessible to IDPs and host communities.

Displaced women and girls are in need of livelihood programmes to provide them with requisite life skills, and help establish support networks and opportunities through which women can access information on SGBV response services. Community mobilization initiatives, including the engagement of men and boys, remain critical to addressing the root causes of violence.

KEY CHALLENGES

- With approximately 80 percent of the displaced population living outside official camps with host communities, many encounter difficulties in accessing basic services including education, shelter, health and food assistance. Coupled with the current economic situation and the socio-economic disruption resulting from the insurgency, the capacity and resources of host communities have been weakened. Tensions between IDP and host communities have significantly increased.
- Movement outside the camps continues to be restricted due to insecurity and shrinking protection space. The Nigerian military plays a predominant role in the newly accessible areas, presenting challenges to the humanitarian and civilian character of IDP camps. This has implications on the ability of displaced women and girls to access specialized services and engage in available livelihood activities.
- Limited access to economic empowerment opportunities coupled with high costs of living in IDP camps are causing families to resort to negative coping mechanisms (early marriage, child labor, substance abuse and survival sex) which expose young girls and boys to increased risk of violence, abuse and exploitation.
- The existing culture of impunity coupled with weak justice system hampers prevention of and response to violations against women and children. Most survivors do not report SGBV incidents for fear of reprisals by perpetrators and stigmatization by their own communities, as well as having no confidence that the authorities will hold perpetrators accountable.
- Inadequate shelter in IDP camps and collective sites within LGA HQs in newly accessible areas has contributed to overcrowding leading to lack of privacy. In most of the camps, children are forced to sleep outside in open spaces within the camps in order to avail space for their parents and younger siblings. This situation contributes to further protection and health risks.
- The prevailing lack of lighting and physical infrastructures to prevent SGBV and SEA continues to negatively impact on the protection of women, girls, men and boys living in IDP camps and protected sites in newly accessible LGAs.
- Women and girls formally associated with Boko Haram (either pregnant or with babies born from Boko Haram) face risk of not only rejection and stigmatization but also violence in some communities. There is need to scale up programmes targeting this group of women and girls to facilitate their integration.
- The limited capacity of national partners continues to affected delivery of quality response services to SGBV survivors.



A group of IDP women and girls participating in knitting class in Bakasi Camp, Borno ©UNHCR Nigeria

STRATEGIC PRIORITY INTERVENTIONS

UNHCR and partners employ the inter-related multi-sectoral and multi-level SGBV programming in North East Nigeria. In particular, activities being pursued in close cooperation with local and international organizations, government entities (Department of Women Affairs and Social Development), security and legal institutions, spanning prevention, mitigation and response. Such efforts include the scale up of safe spaces, educating the public at large, including men and boys on the human rights of women and girls, the risks they face as well as the establishment of emergency hubs where those who have experienced violence and harassment can access medical assistance, psychological counselling, legal counselling and material support in a timely and accessible manner.

In 2016, UNHCR made significant progress towards enhancing the capacity of its staff, partners and IDP community based structures to effectively identify and refer SGBV survivors to available service providers. In 2017, UNHCR will prioritize the following:

- Strengthening existing specialized services for SGBV survivors such as psycho-social, medical, safety and security and legal services. In Borno state, UNHCR will consolidate existing GBV prevention and response services while gradually establishing SGBV prevention and response services in newly liberated areas.
- Enhancing community participation in SGBV programmes through initiating innovative prevention strategies that support active participation and engagement of women, girls, men, boys, and other diverse groups.
- Improving awareness raising activities targeting displaced communities through outreach sessions on gender equality and SGBV related issues, thus promoting positive change in attitude and practices of community members to prevent SGBV.
- Empowering communities through livelihood programmes that support SGBV survivors and those at risk to become self-reliant and less susceptible to abuse and exploitation.
- Addressing shelter and energy needs of families to reduce vulnerabilities.
- Capacity building and mainstreaming of SGBV into other sectors such as CCCM, Shelter and NFIs, Food Security, Livelihoods and Cash, WASH, Education in Emergencies and Health and Nutrition to mitigate the risks.
- Working closely with child protection and education to promote integrated programming such as prevention and response to child marriage.
- Working with UN agencies, government and NGOs, communities to strengthen SGBV prevention, response and coordination mechanisms for effective service delivery.

UNHCR PARTNERS



Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development (MoWASD), International Rescue Committee (IRC), Sanitation and Hygiene Education Initiative (SAHEI), Family Health International, USA (FHI 360), Nigeria Bar Association (NBA) and American University of Nigeria (AUN).