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# ECONOMIC COPING STRATEGIES IN RESETTLED MALARI COMMUNITY AFFECTED BY BOKO HARAM INSURGENCY IN NORTH-EAST NIGERIA: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

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## Abstract

This study explored economic coping strategies adopted by victims of Boko Haram insurgency in Malari community, Borno State. Qualitative method of inquiry was used in collecting data for the study through face-to- face interviews and focus group discussions with 8 purposely selected informants to explore their experiences of economic coping strategies. Findings of the study revealed that the returnees being predominantly farmers have continued with faming activities at subsistence level to cushion the shocks of general destruction occasioned by the insurgency. Apart from reliance on friends and families as sources of credit, engagement in illicit/illegal economic activities were found to be flourishing in the resettled community. Based on the findings of the study, the paper particularly, recommended for reinvigoration of the security apparatus to adequately meet up with the existing security concerns, rigorous skill acquisition training to empower youth and proper enforcement and effective monitoring of existing forestry laws to tame indiscriminate felling of trees to process cooking charcoal in the community.

**Keywords:**
Qualitative,
Economic, Coping,
Malari, Boko Haram.

## Introduction

In 2022, The Borno State government announces its intention of gradual closure of all Internally displaced persons (IDPs) camps across the state, with view to resettling affected persons back to their ancestral communities. This implies the resettlement of communities displaced by the Boko Haram insurgency and whose significant number of their populations are living in camps established across the state.



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The Boko Haram insurgency, which began in 2009, had significantly impacted on the population of the Northeast region of Nigeria, leading to deaths and significant destruction of infrastructure, including schools, hospitals, homes and widespread displacement and resettlement of communities. According to the World Bank report, over 20,000 lost their lives with over 2.7 million becoming either internally displaced refugees in camps or in neighbouring countries (FGN, 2016). Similarly, it is noted that 90 percent of the IDP (internally displaced person) camps can be attributed to the incessant attacks from the Boko Haram sects, while less than 10 percent attributed to natural disasters, mostly in the northern part of Nigeria (Mustafa and Helda, 2017)

Consequent upon the closure and subsequent resettlement of the IDPs back to their communities, observers have variously lamented on the timeliness or otherwise that necessitated such decision. For instance, The Protection Sector Northeast Nigeria (2023) observed that the closure of these camps and relocation of the population to towns- areas with insecure nearby surroundings, and government designated sites has often exacerbated IDPs' exposure to protection risks, among them increased cases of attacks on civilians by Non- State Armed Group (NSAG), unsolved housing, land and property (HLP) issues, as well as injuries and fatalities due to mine contamination. A lack of safe access to farmland and livelihood opportunities amidst the ongoing reduction of food aid continues to create new protection risks while perpetuating humanitarian needs. Farmers are pushed further into lands that are unsafe, putting their safety at risk. Nevertheless, violent conflicts put people in precarious situations where livelihoods are lost and means of survival become a struggle especially after being displaced (Maxwell et al, 2017).

Studies on the nature of coping experiences in conflict affected regions varied from one context to another. Particularly, economic coping strategies in these resettled communities affected by the Boko Haram insurgency is limited. However, available literature (Granville, 2020) on coping strategies in communities affected by Boko Haram insurgency has its limitations. The context-specific nature of the study reported an understanding of coping strategies adopted by the conflict affected persons within a particular context which may not necessarily, reflect the experiences of similar areas affected by the same insurgency. This has left a literature gap for further and deeper understanding of economic coping strategies of other areas affected by the insurgency. It is against this backdrop that this study aimed at exploring the experiences of economic coping strategies of Malari Community with a view to contributing yet another perspective to existing literature.

Malari community was entirely sacked by boko haram insurgents in the heights of Boko haram attacks and later resettled back to their ancestral community in 2022. This is consequent upon the recent closure of IDP camps in Borno State. An understanding of

economic coping strategies in these communities is certainly, important in providing insights on future policy directions and types of interventions necessary to ensure sustainable livelihoods and lasting peace and security. In addition to these, the study provides yet another perspective within the context of the study area to existing literature.

**Literature Review**

It is noteworthy to mention that literature on economic coping strategies of communities affected by Boko Haram insurgency is limited and context-specific. However, in general terms, empirical evidences show that economic coping strategies can take variety of economic activities. In Nigeria where conflict has disrupted traditional economic activities and food supply chains, subsistence agriculture offers a means of survival and resilience for local communities (FAO, 2021). It is noted that intensive labour and small-scale subsistence farming are the primary source of income for the poor and food insecure in rural parts of developing nations. Similarly, in conflict affected areas, Subsistence agriculture allows households to produce food directly for their consumption, reducing dependency on external and potentially unreliable food sources (Onakuse, 2012).

The adoption of subsistence agriculture as a coping strategy in conflict affected areas has not been without challenges. Badewa & Dinbabo, (2023), observed that though subsistence farming is often used as a coping strategy in conflict affected regions, it is not enough to provide sustainable livelihood. In most cases, the produce hardly sustain household feeding demands. The study recommended complimentary economic activities alongside subsistence farming to ensure sustainable livelihood. In addition to these challenges, conflicts usually results in widespread looting of farm produce that greatly limits land for cultivation and forced farmers to abandoned their farmlands (Eke-Okocha, 2023) and inaccessibility of agricultural inputs and services (Babagana, 2022)

Available literature also showed that access to and utilization of credit facilities are means of mitigating economic shocks that usually accompany violent conflicts (Johnson, S.W. 2021; Udry and Czukas, 1998). In their analysis on the impact of micro credits in conflict affected regions, (Emmanuel & Kaka, 2018; Alcira et. Al, 1998) have reported a positive relationship between access and utilization of credit facilities and improved economic status of victims of conflict. However, the effectiveness of credit facilities as a coping strategy has its challenges. Availability and affordability of credit facilities due to low outreach and high operational costs has been reported by Johnson (2021) as part of the challenges in accessing and utilization of credit facilities in mitigating shocks associated with violent conflicts. The paper argued that when credit facilities are absent or limited, the ability to respond positively among persons affected by the conflict in order to

mitigate the impact of the crisis and to sustain means of livelihood becomes extremely difficult. Similarly, high operational cost of credits facilities became hindrance to access and utilization of credit facilities in mitigating shocks of conflict destruction. The need to provide micro credit to victims becomes imperative if sustainable livelihood in these affected areas is ever desirous.

In areas where existing economic activities are disrupted by conflict, individuals may engage in illicit economic practices as a survival mechanism (Kergna et al, 2014). While examining the challenges and gaps in providing sexual and reproductive health services, Isokpan (2019) reports sexual violence against women by the insurgents and forced prostitution among displaced women in order meet livelihood demands. The paper recommended further, as a way of mitigating the shock of displacement, the involvement of the affected women in the design and implementation of interventions.

**Research Methodology**

**The Study Area:** Malari village is situated within Latitude 11.6539° or 11° 39' 14" north, Longitude 13.4216° or 13° 25' 18" east (mapencarta.com) along Maiduguri-Bama-Banki highway and it is one of the villages under Konduga local Government Area. The town of Malari is located close to the town of Konduga under the hamlet of Yaleri Kurnawa and it was one of the many villages that suffered from the attacks of Boko Haram, a militant Islamist group that has been waging a violent insurgency in the region since 2009 (punchng.com, 2023)

According to reports, Malari was attacked by Boko Haram several times between 2014 and 2015, resulting in the deaths of hundreds of residents and the displacement of thousands more (punchng.com, 2012). The insurgents also burned down houses, looted properties, and abducted women and children. Many of the survivors fled to nearby towns or camps for internally displaced persons (IDPs) established across the state to support victims.

In February 2022, the Borno State Government, flagged off the safe resettlement of 619 households who had been internally displaced from Malari for more than seven years. The government directed the allocation of N100,000 (USD 112.29) to each of 500 community members whose houses were not part of the 803 houses already rebuilt by the state government. The state government also supported households returning to rebuild homes, which were made of 240 male returnees that got N20,000 (USD 22.458) each, while 379 female returnees receive N10,000 (USD 11.229) each with a wrapper. The government also announced the distribution of food and non-food items contributed by the North-East Development Commission meant to support all returnees.

**Research Design**

This study utilized Qualitative research method. Qualitative research method is best suited to a study that aimed at exploring live experiences and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem or phenomenon (Creswell,2007). Hence, the alignment and appropriateness of qualitative methods in exploring the experiences of people who were victims of Boko Haram insurgency on their economic coping strategies after resettlement back in their ancestral homes became imperative in this study

Qualitative study that seeks to explore experiences does not require initial determination of sample size because findings are not meant to be generalized, but to understand how individuals ascribe meaning to perceived social phenomenon within a particular setting (Cresswell, 2007). What matters in the sample is the appropriateness of the study informants that have the necessary knowledge of answering the research questions (Morse, 2004). For this reason, informants of this study were purposely selected using snowballing technique to ensure that those selected as the study informants are people who were affected by the insurgency, and have been resettled back into the community after seven years of taking refuge at various IDP camps. Additionally, they were willing to participate in the study having made aware of its purpose and their confidentiality assured throughout the study by the researcher. Consequently, 8 informants who have met the selection criteria participated and provided information in answering the research question. All informants were adults and whose ages are within 35-60 years' bracket.

In-depth face-to-face interview and focus group discussion were employed in the process of data collection for the study. As noted by Patton (2002), face-to-face interview is best suited for a study that aims to understand how a group of people lived and organized their lives and the meanings they attached to their experiences which otherwise, other techniques like direct observation will not provide. Focus group was not used to elicit different information. Rather, it was used to confirm information obtained through face-to-face interviews and more importantly, to give informants more opportunity to air what they might have forgotten to say during the individual in-depth interviews (Karen et al, 2014). Two separate focus group discussions that lasted for one hour thirty minutes' sessions were conducted with four participants each while the researcher served as moderator, guiding the session and taking notes. All Interviews were conducted in Kanuri language – being the dominant language of the study area and guided by interview prompts already drafted in English and translated into Kanuri language by a specialist at the Linguistics department of the University of Maiduguri. All individual interviews and the focus group sessions were recorded and played back the recorded versions to the informants to confirm it actually represents their views.

According to Kampira (2021) thematic analysis is premised on the view that all information is conveyed with meaning and this meaning can be deduced from identifying a central idea or a cluster of ideas that gives it a comprehensive meaning. It is on this basis that this study adopted thematic analysis method to make meaning on the information obtained from informants and to identify central ideas that gives comprehensive meaning on economic coping strategies of resettled Malari community affected by Boko Haram Insurgency.

**Results**

This study was carried out to explore economic coping experiences of malari community of Konduga Local Government area, Borno State. The community had on several times, attacked by Boko Haram insurgents, community members forced to flee and take refuge in internally displaced people's camps and later resettled back to their ancestral community by the Borno State Government in 2023.

All the 8 study informants were males between the ages of 35-60 years with different formal and informal educational backgrounds; all have varying levels of Quranic education, one attained secondary school certificate and two out of the 8 informants had primary school leaving certificates. All the 8 informants were fully engaged in farming activities before the advent of the insurgency, born and grew up in the community and have witnessed all the attacks carried out on the community by Boko Haram insurgents between 2015-2019. They are now part of the persons resettled back to the community since 2023. To ensure utmost confidentiality of the study informants, their real names were substituted with pseudonyms. Thus, each of the study informants was assigned a popular name meaning a brother, uncle, a town name or colour name as they are commonly found in Kanuri language.

It is important to note that since all the individual interviews were conducted in Kanuri language, the recorded versions of both the individual interviews and focus group sessions were first translated into English language by the researcher. The original data recorded from interviews together with the translated version was submitted to a Kanuri language specialist at Kashim Ibrahim College of Education to proofread with a view to observing inconsistencies between the recorded and translated version. This was certified and the data analysed and transcribed. At the end of analysis, 3 themes on economic coping strategies emerged from the data as follows;

1. Subsistence farming
2. Felling of trees to make charcoal.
3. Borrowing and begging

**Theme 1: Subsistence farming:** As earlier noted, farming activities were the major sources of livelihood among the people of Malari before the advent of Boko Haram insurgency. However, as a result of displacement and subsequent resettlement of the community due to the crisis, farming has since ceased as a major means of livelihood since their resettlement in 2023. Most of the study informants lamented that farming activities are no longer attractive, they are only engaged in farming just for sake of doing, but not for any meaningful gain.

In their response to research question on 'how would you describe your means of livelihood since your resettlement back into Malari, such phrases as "small farming", "restricted" and "not enough" were the recurrent words used by the study informants to describe the nature of farming activities they are engaged since their resettlement in the community. According to one of the informants (Rawa) during face-to-face interview "*before the insurgency, I use to cultivate 5 times higher than what I got this year".* Another informant (K3rami) also described his experiences on farming activities as follows; "*farming has turned to something else. Imagine an able bodied person like myself, but I cannot now cultivate enough to feed my immediate family, talk less of producing surplus to cater for other essential needs".* Similarly, the lamentations of another informant (Baba Gana) also goes to confirm the views of other informants when he stated that "*we are constantly praying that normalcy returns to our community. We are predominantly farmers and in such a difficult situation we are now, it is extremely difficult to continue with our normal farming activities*"

When the researcher probed further to understand the underlying issue militating against their normal farming practices, informants generally mentioned lack of security as a major hindrance. Varying security concerns such as inaccessibility to farmlands due to insurgent's threats, vandalization and theft matured crops and possibility of kidnap for ransom payments are the reason why most of them cannot embark on full farming activities. Farming activities are generally confined to farmlands between 1-2 kilometres away from Maiduguri-Bama-Banki highway that stretches through the village. Most informants lamented that any attempt to go deep into the bush for faming activities may result into kidnap or in some cases, outright slaughter.

**Theme 2: Credit and assistance from family and friends:** Usually, displacement comes with attendant consequences of meeting basic needs such as feeding, the situation in resettled Malari community affected by the insurgency was not different. Most of the informants expressed similar experience that since their resettlement back into their community, farming activities which hitherto serves as their basic means of survival, is no longer reliable as they could no longer fully accessed their farmlands. This has substantially affected their income and had to resort to borrowing and assistance from

friends and families usually outside the community in order to sustain themselves. According to one of the informants (yaa'na) *"the financial assistance given to us by government and other philanthropists is not regular, and when available, it is nothing considering the high cost of food stuff these days. In most occasions, we have to visit relations outside the community to either seek for assistance or to borrow, which often time not successful"*

On access to formal micro-credit institutions that normally provide succour in such situations, while most informants stated that they knew nothing about the existence of such credit facilities, few that knew about it, expressed reservations on the legality of the lending terms or their perceived inability to repay since their major source of income – farming is substantially limited. As captured during the interview, some informants expressed the situation in statements like "*How would you expect me to pay the loan as I don't have anywhere to invest" (Tiu), "No, no, it is not possible, where will I invest the money, even if I get, it will be spent on food items completely (Ba Kura),* Ba Kawu simply questioned that "*who will give me the money and how much would I pay in return*"?.

In the absence of formal micro-credit facilities, most informants interviewed stated that when it becomes obvious, they have to resort to borrowing or seek assistance from friends or relations. Usually, the amounts borrowed are not enough to feed for a single day, talk less of investment.

**Theme 3: Illegal/Illicit activities:** It is true as revealed by the findings of this study that the resultant effects of crises are wanton destruction of lives and properties. When communities are thrown into such situations, they may adopt any means of livelihood activity in an attempt to keep the body and soul together. One major illicit economic activity and which may have negative consequences on the environment was found to be in serious practice in the community. The study found the practice of indiscriminate felling of trees to process cooking charcoal to make additional income. Most informants said that most trees in the nearby surroundings have been processed into charcoal and mostly transported to Maiduguri for income generation. Responding to this , informants expressed this activity with phrases like "*Charcoal*". Awana, who is a 68-year-old returnee responded that *"My brother, you have seen our living conditions in this community, what option do we have than to use what we have, I think making charcoal is not a bad idea at this moment"*

Other illicit activities that surfaced in the resettled communities mentioned by informants are begging and prostitution due to the difficult conditions they found themselves. These illicit activities are flourishing since their resettlement. Informants reported that their youth and the aged are now turned into beggars. As noted by Kesai, "*our aged men and women have taken into begging, you can see them at transit stations waiting for passers-by*

*to beg for money"* and "*the aged have no option than continue begging those who can afford to give"* (Rawa).

One other illicit activity that may have serious health challenges was also found to be flourishing in the resettled community. According to informant's accounts, of recent, they have witnessing incidences of abortions. Although, informants were not explicit in their expressions of this illicit activity, however, certain phrases like "*girls selling their bodies*", "*women exchanging their womanhood for money"* and "*women using what they have"* to make additional income are pointers to either prostitution or commercial sex work for livelihood sustenance.

**Discussions**

Based on the thematic presentation of the results of the study, findings showed that; though the Malari community affected by the Boko Haram insurgency have upon resettlement continued with their traditional subsistence farming as a way of mitigating the shocks of displacement. However, have met with a major hindrances making farming activities extremely challenging. These challenges are manifest in form restricted farming spaces due to fear of being kidnapped and forceful imposition of taxes by the insurgents. This according to the informants have substantially affected their income which conversely, translates to inability to feed their families.

As reported by Badewa & Dinbabo, (2023), that subsistence farming is often considered as a coping strategy in conflict affected areas, is consistent with findings of this study. The study found that as result of limitations to access their farmlands due to fear of abduction or outright killings, farming activites are no longer sustainable in the resettled Malari community affected by the insurgency. The study also found that due to non-availability or ignorance of individuals in the community, micro-credit financial institutions have not made any impact or their presence have not been felt with a view to providing succour to the affected community. This is in agreement with the findings of Johnson (2021) where it was reported that availability and affordability of credit facilities are significant challenges to access and utilization of credit as economic coping strategy in conflict affected regions. Consequently, people in the community have as a means of credit, only to borrow from friends and families which according to them is becoming difficult to get.

As reported in previous studies that when communities are thrown into precarious situations where livelihoods are lost and means of survival become a struggle, people may adopt both illicit and illegal activities for sustenance. This study also found that illicit and illegal activities such as indiscriminate felling of trees to process cooking charcoal, begging and prostitution are becoming rooted as a coping mechanism in the resettled

Malari community. The attendant consequences of such illegal and illicit activities may adversely affect health, socio-economic and environmental well-being of the community.

**Conclusion and Recommendations**

It obvious that one of the major responsibilities of every government is to provide enabling environment for its citizenry to effectively harness social and economic opportunities. In realization of this important responsibility, the Nigerian government as well as non-governmental organizations have formulated and implemented various policy interventions with the aim of cushioning the effect of destructive activities occasioned by the Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria. However, the implementation of these policy interventions is usually confronted with challenges that often results in poor performance or inability to achieve the desired objectives of resettling communities affected by the insurgency as evidenced in the findings of this study. One major challenge that became manifest in the resettlement effort, is the inability to access farmlands and difficulty or lack of credits facilities to get soft loans by these communities to help them in coping with the shocks. It is against this backdrop that this study concludes that responsible organizations working to ensure resettling and integrating persons affected by the Boko Haram insurgency, to have a rethink in the nature of interventions if these communities are expected to benefit and sustain themselves from various resettlement programs being implemented.

Based on the findings of this study, we recommend as follows;

1. The total overhaul of the security apparatus to tackle the increasing security challenges in the region,
2. vigorous skill acquisition training to the teeming youth to ensure self-reliance.
3. Access to credit facilities to enable complimentary sources of income as farmlands are still not safe to fully engaged in farming activities.
4. Proper enforcement and monitoring of existing forestry laws with a view to taming the indiscriminate felling of trees that may have negative consequences in the future.

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