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Effects of Minefields on Livelihood Access of Resettled Internally Displaced Persons IDPs in Borno State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Minefields remain significant threats to civilian populations in post-conflict regions, particularly in areas affected by insurgency. This study examines the impact of minefields on the socio-economic activities of resettled Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in selected Local Government Areas of Borno State, Nigeria. The study adopted a mixed-methods approach involving household surveys, Key Informant Interviews (KIIs, and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). A total of 384 questionnaires were administered to resettled IDPs, while geospatial analysis was used to map landmine and ERW hotspot areas. Descriptive statistics, spatial analysis, and inferential statistics were used for data analysis. The findings reveal that landmine and ERW incidents are concentrated in areas such as Gwoza, Bama, Jere and Kaga Local Government Areas. The presence of explosive hazards has significantly restricted agricultural activities, movement, and livelihood opportunities among resettled IDPs. Risk perception analysis shows that most respondents perceive landmines and ERW as a major threat to their safety and economic recovery. The study concludes that landmine contamination continues to hinder sustainable resettlement and economic recovery in post-conflict communities. The study recommends intensified mine clearance operations, improved mine risk education, and livelihood support programmes for affected populations.

Keywords: *Minefields, Landmines, Explosive Remnants of War, IDPs, Socio-Economic Activities, Post-Conflict Recovery.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Minefields constitute one of the most persistent threats to civilian populations in post-conflict societies. These explosive hazards often remain active long after the cessation of hostilities, posing serious risks to human life and limiting access to land and economic resources. In many conflict-affected regions, landmine contamination restricts agricultural production, disrupts transportation routes, and undermines efforts aimed at rebuilding livelihoods and restoring normal socio-economic activities. Nigeria's North-East region, particularly Borno State, has experienced over a decade of insurgency which resulted in widespread displacement of populations and destruction of infrastructure. As security conditions gradually improve, many internally displaced persons (IDPs) are being resettled in their communities. However, the presence of landmines and ERW in previously contested areas continues to pose significant threats to the safety and livelihoods of returning populations. Resettled IDPs depend heavily on agriculture, petty trading, livestock rearing, and small-scale enterprises for survival. When farmlands, grazing areas, and access roads are contaminated by explosive hazards, these livelihood activities become severely constrained. Consequently, the presence of landmines and ERW not only threatens physical safety but also prolongs poverty and economic vulnerability among affected populations. Despite growing concern about explosive hazards in post-insurgency communities, limited empirical research exists on how these hazards influence the socio-economic activities of resettled populations in Borno State. This study therefore assesses the spatial distribution of landmine incidents, examines risk perception among resettled IDPs, and evaluates the socio-economic implications of explosive hazards on livelihood activities.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Previous studies have demonstrated that landmines significantly affect post-conflict recovery by restricting access to land, infrastructure, and economic opportunities. According to Bottomley (2003), landmine contamination often leads to the abandonment of agricultural land and increased poverty among rural populations. Similarly, Ghobarah et al. (2003) argue that explosive remnants of war contribute to long-term humanitarian and economic challenges in conflict-affected regions.

In Africa, landmine contamination has been documented in countries such as Angola, Mozambique, and Somalia, where explosive hazards have impeded agricultural production and infrastructure development. In Nigeria, the insurgency in the North-East has resulted in the widespread deployment of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and other explosive hazards.

Recent humanitarian reports indicate that explosive hazards continue to threaten returning populations in Borno State, particularly in rural communities where agricultural activities are concentrated. These hazards have been linked to casualties, displacement, and economic disruptions.

Theoretical explanations for risk behaviour in such contexts can be understood using Protection Motivation Theory (PMT), which explains how individuals respond to perceived threats by adopting protective behaviours. In the context of landmine contamination, individuals may avoid certain areas, change livelihood activities, or adopt safety strategies to minimize risk exposure.

3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

3.1 Study Area

The study was conducted in selected Local Government Areas of Borno State, Nigeria, including Bama, Gwoza, Jere and Kaga. These areas experienced significant insurgency activities and subsequent population displacement.

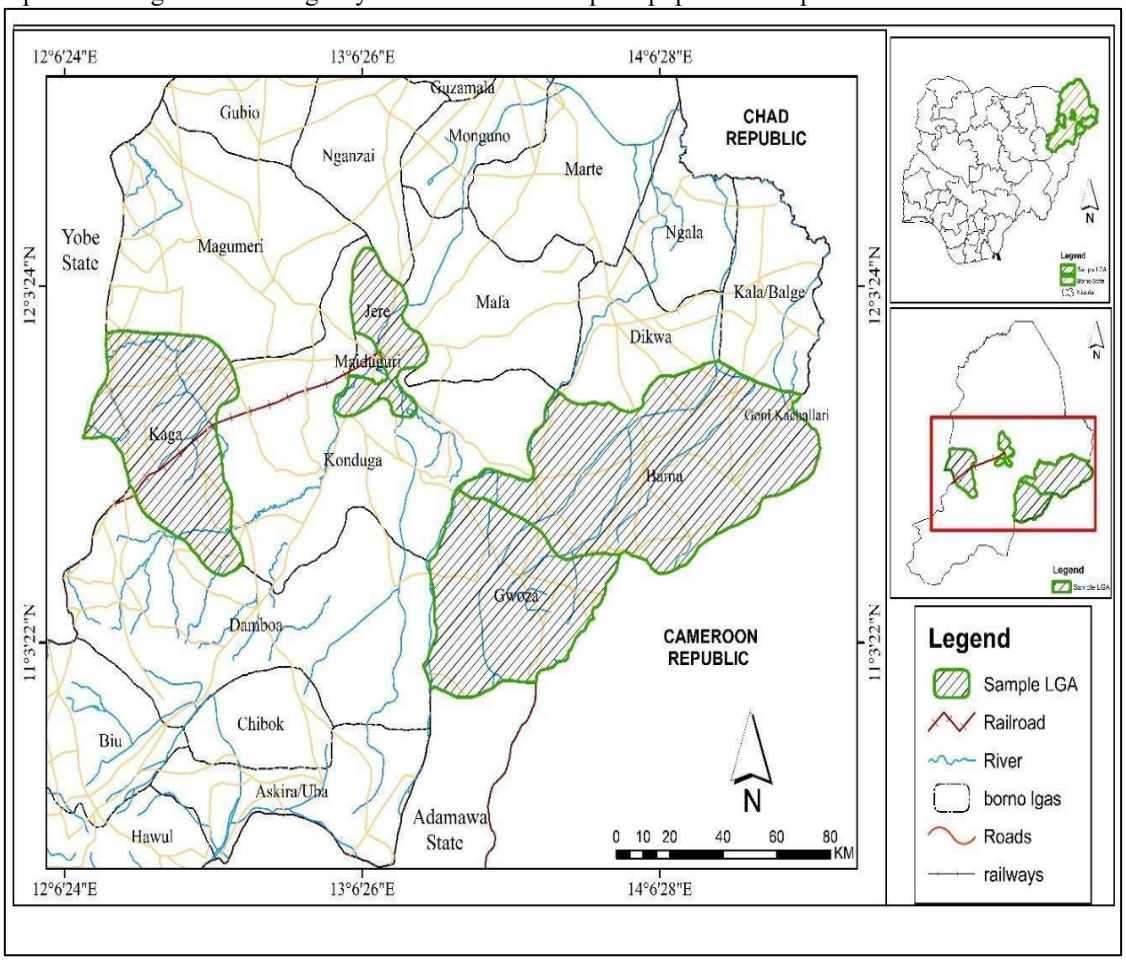

Figure 1: Map of Borno State showing the study areas

3.2 Research Design

This methodological approach employed to investigate the impact of Minefields on the socio-economic activities of resettled internally displaced persons in Bama and Jere Local Government Areas. Grounded in interpretive philosophy and employing qualitative case study design, the research used Focus Group Discussions and Key Informant Interviews to gather rich accounts of community experiences with explosive hazards. Sampling procedures ensured inclusion of diverse participant categories relevant to research objectives. Data collection instruments were carefully developed and validated, with attention to cultural appropriateness and language accessibility. Analysis employed systematic thematic procedures, enabling findings to emerge from participant accounts while remaining organized around research objectives. Ethical considerations were central throughout, with attention to informed consent, confidentiality, sensitivity to trauma, and community feedback. Trustworthiness was addressed through strategies enhancing credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Reflexive attention to researcher positionality enabled awareness of how personal characteristics and assumptions might shape the research process. While challenges arising from the conflict context affected implementation, procedures were adapted to maintain quality while ensuring participant and researcher safety. The methodology, with its strengths and limitations, was appropriate for research purposes, enabling rich understanding of how communities in Bama and Jere experience and respond to explosive hazards.

3.4 Method of Data Analysis

Data analysis proceeded through systematic steps consistent with qualitative research traditions. Audio recordings of FGDs and KIIs were transcribed verbatim and, where necessary, translated into English. Transcripts were checked against recordings for accuracy, with corrections made as needed. Analysis employed thematic analysis, a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns within qualitative data (Barbour, 2007). The process began with familiarization reading and re-reading transcripts to develop intimate knowledge of content. Initial coding followed, attaching labels to segments of text relevant to research objectives. Codes

were developed inductively from the data rather than imposed from pre-existing frameworks, enabling findings to emerge from participant accounts.

4. RESULTS

This study presents the findings derived from Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) conducted in Bama, Gwoza, Jere and Kaga Local Government Areas of Borno State. The presentation follows the study's two research objectives, offering qualitative insights into how Minefields affect the socio-economic activities of resettled internally displaced persons. Throughout this chapter, the voices of participant's farmers tending contaminated fields, traders navigating restricted markets, transport workers traversing hazardous roads, Civilian Joint Task Force members patrolling dangerous areas, traditional leaders holding fractured communities together, and humanitarian personnel struggling to respond reveal the lived realities behind statistical abstractions.

4.1 Identifying Effects on Livelihood Access

4.1.1 Agricultural Disruption

Agriculture, the foundation of rural livelihoods in Borno State, has been profoundly disrupted by explosive contamination. Farmers described how landmines and ERW restrict their ability to cultivate, with consequences extending from individual households to entire communities.

A farmer leader explained:

Landmines/ERW seriously affected our farming activities because not everywhere will allowed us to do our farming due to the danger in the areas.

The passive construction "not everywhere will allowed us" captures the experience of constraint without identifiable agent. No authority has formally prohibited farming in contaminated areas; the prohibition resides in the land itself, in the knowledge that certain fields may contain devices that will kill or maim those who enter. This is governance by hazard, regulation through risk.

NGO workers elaborated:

ERW affected farming e.g. farmers find it difficult to assess their farmland due to planted IEDs by OAGs and then loss of life of farmers as well accessibility.

The term "assess" is revealing. Farmers do not simply cultivate; they must first evaluate whether cultivation is possible, whether the land can be safely accessed, whether the season's work will end in harvest or tragedy. This assessment process, repeated daily and seasonally, consumes time and energy that could otherwise be devoted to productive activity.

The seasonal nature of agriculture compounds the impact:

Farming is a seasonal activity; by the time farmers not given ample time that will affect the yields.

Delayed access to fields waiting for military clearance, waiting for information about hazards, waiting for courage to overcome fear compresses already tight agricultural calendars. Planting occurs late; weeding is rushed; harvesting proceeds under pressure. Each delay reduces yields; each rushed activity increases risk. The cumulative effect is diminished production and heightened danger.

4.1.2 Market Access and Trade Disruption

Beyond direct agricultural impacts, explosive hazards disrupt the market systems on which farmers depend. Traders described how movement restrictions affect their ability to buy, transport, and sell goods.

A trader leader noted:

It really affected the ability to carry out our business activities.

This general statement, offered without elaboration, suggests impacts so pervasive they require no specification. Business activities traveling to markets, negotiating purchases, transporting goods, maintaining customer relationships all depend on mobility, and mobility depends on safety. When safety cannot be guaranteed, every business function becomes compromised.

NURTW members provided specific details about movement constraints:

Sometimes the military cannot allow us to go out until 9:00am or 10:00am after scanning the roads and also the road will be closed by 3:00pm; this can have reduced our socio-economic activities.

The six-hour window between 9am and 3pm defines the temporal boundaries of economic possibility. Within this compressed period, traders must complete journeys that previously occupied full days, farmers must transport produce that cannot wait, and everyone must conduct business under pressure that compromises judgment and increases risk.

The impact on perishable goods proved particularly severe:

Explosion seriously affected us in the area of small business especially perishable goods traders were mostly affected; sometimes the security cannot open the gate until 12:00pm or 1pm and therefore this can cause traders to lost economic assets.

Delayed departure means delayed arrival; delayed arrival means goods spoil; spoiled goods mean lost investment, lost income, lost livelihoods. For traders operating on thin margins, a single such loss can prove catastrophic. The compounding effect of repeated losses pushes households from precarity into destitution.

4.1.3 Loss of Productive Assets

Participants described multiple ways explosive incidents destroy the assets on which livelihoods depend. NURTW members offered tangible evidence:

Currently, as we are speaking now there is a car outside destroyed by explosive and also about 3 of our cars have been destroyed by Bombs.

The destroyed vehicle visible during the interview served as material evidence of claims made verbally. Transport workers who lost vehicles lost not only capital assets but their means of earning income. For drivers operating in informal transport sectors, vehicles represent life savings, borrowed funds, and future hopes. Their destruction compounds immediate loss with long-term indebtedness.

Farmers described broader patterns of asset loss:

Many people lost their life and properties due to explosion of IEDs on the roads like machines, cars, cows, goats, sheep etc.

The list encompasses multiple asset categories machinery for production, vehicles for transport, livestock for food and income. Each loss represents not only immediate value but future productive capacity. A farmer who loses a machine cannot cultivate as efficiently; a herder who loses livestock cannot reproduce the herd; a household that loses multiple assets cannot easily recover.

CJTF members noted similar patterns:

Due to explosion many people lost economic assets in our community such as tools, live stocks and grazing land.

The inclusion of "grazing land" in this list is significant. Unlike tools or livestock, land is not destroyed by explosion; it becomes inaccessible, transformed from asset into liability by the hazards it contains. This transformation represents a distinctive form of asset loss expropriation without transfer, dispossession without compensation.

Environmental consequences compound direct losses:

Even these current farming systems many farms have been burned due to explosion fire engulf the farm and lost their crops.

Explosions that occur during dry season can ignite fires that spread across agricultural areas, destroying not only the immediate field but neighbouring crops. A single incident can thus affect multiple households, creating cascading losses that extend far beyond the initial detonation.

4.1.4 Income Effects

The cumulative impact of agricultural disruption, market constraints, and asset loss manifests in reduced household income. NURTW members explained how fear affects their earnings:

It has affected our income, in the first-place people stopped following the roads due to the fear of mines; compare to before we have enough passengers but now drastically reduced.

Passenger numbers declined not because transport workers stopped operating but because potential customers stopped traveling. People who cannot afford to risk roads stay home, miss market days, forgo economic opportunities, and reduce the demand on which transport livelihoods depend. Each actor's rational risk avoidance collectively undermines the economic system.

A farmer described how households adapt:

Due to fear of mines many change from farming to other petty trading within the town.

This shift from farming the traditional livelihood, the preferred occupation, the activity for which households possess skills and equipment to petty trading represents a form of livelihood downgrading. Petty trading typically yields lower returns, offers less stability, and provides limited pathway to accumulation. Households that make this transition do so not because it improves their situation but because continuing to farm has become impossible.

Traditional leaders noted the daily income impact:

When explosion occurs, people were stopped from going to their farms and business place and therefore, it affects our daily income.

The word "daily" captures the frequency of disruption. These are not occasional shocks but regular occurrences that repeatedly interrupt economic activity. The compounding effect of multiple disruptions a day here, a week there, a season compromised produces cumulative income losses that undermine household wellbeing.

CJTF members observed broader economic effects:

People does not invest their money due to the fear of landmines and also people cannot go to their farm and other economic activities.

Investment requires confidence in the future; fear erodes confidence. Households that cannot predict their safety cannot plan their investments; households that cannot access farms cannot invest in agricultural inputs; households that face ongoing uncertainty cannot commit resources to activities with delayed returns. The result is economic stasis survival without accumulation, coping without progress.

5. CONCLUSION

This study examined the impact of landmines and ERW on the socio-economic activities of resettled IDPs in Borno State. The findings reveal that explosive hazards remain a major obstacle to sustainable resettlement and economic recovery in post-conflict communities. Landmine contamination restricts agricultural production, reduces mobility, and limits livelihood opportunities for returning populations. Addressing these challenges requires coordinated efforts in mine clearance, risk education, and economic support for affected communities.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

i. Government and humanitarian agencies should intensify mine clearance operations in affected communities.
ii. Mine Risk Education programmes should be expanded in resettled communities.
iii. Livelihood support initiatives should be introduced to support affected households.
iv. Improved geospatial monitoring systems should be developed to track explosive hazard locations.

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