



## **THE CHALLENGES AND PROSPECT OF NIGERIAN NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS IN DISASTER MANAGEMENT: REVIEW**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This paper attempts to examine the challenges and prospect of the Nigerian Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in disaster management with a view to proffer possible solutions. The literature had revealed that the consequences of disasters in Nigeria do not affect only its citizen's lives and property alone but also the members of the NGOs who are there to assist the victims. NGOs are non-profit organizations constituted with an aim to uplift the poor, marginalized, underprivileged, unprivileged and vulnerable groups among any other things. Because of their desire and capacity to pursue participatory and people centred forms of development to fill the gaps left by the failure of the government in meeting the needs of their poorest citizens. However, various findings from the academics literature pertaining Non-Governmental organizations are discussed in order to generate a more holistic understanding of the challenges and prospect of Nigerian NGOs in disasters management.*

**Keywords:** NGOs challenges and prospect, law and structure, coordination and disasters

### **1. Introduction**

Disaster of any kind can be described as a sudden calamity or events that bring great damage, loss, or destruction. Disasters fall into two major categories; these are man-made and natural disasters. There is a major difference between these two and each one has its features that need to increase knowledge on the occurrence and causes of each and hence to ensure that

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disaster preparedness is heightened. Natural disasters are brought about by change in natural phenomenon or what is known as acts of God. The extent of loss experienced is dependent on the vulnerability of the population. As such, this means that this can only occur in areas that are susceptible to vulnerability. On the other hand, man-made disasters are influenced by humans and they are often as a result of negligence and human error among other factors [1], [2]. However the challenges posed by any one of these disasters will bring a serious disruption for basic functioning of life.

The aims of this paper is to demonstrate the humanitarian situation and how NGOs are doing their best in Nigeria to address the challenges posed by the disasters, especially the current challenges of Boko-Haram terrorists group in the North-Eastern part of Nigeria, the agitation for Biafra's state by the Igbos tribe or the south-Easterners and the unprecedented flooding that swept across 32 out of 36 states of the federation beginning August 2012 to date as indicated in the National Emergency Management Agency report [4]. While another reports by United Nation High Commission For Refugees report in 2015 has indicated that most of the Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) are returning to their communities of origin empty handed to start a fresh life, and the lessons from the management of the humanitarian consequences, insecurity and human right abuses, poor coordination, inadequate funding, lack of community awareness and sensitization and the problems to existing guidelines in managing the disasters [4], [2].

Some of the challenge faced by NGOs in Nigeria is how to cater for the plight of thousands of persons who are displaced as a result of the recurrent minor conflicts across the country [3]. Unfortunately, despite the existence of large-scale internal displacement, there is little information about the size and the conditions of the Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) population in different parts of the country. This is as a result of weak commitment of stakeholders, poor coordination and poor implementation of humanitarian imperatives and lop-sidedness in government response to emergencies, especially in a country that have over 2.5 million Internally Displaced persons (IDPs), but little or no efforts has been done to address those challenges effectively [3], [4].

## **2. Related works**

In Nigeria and abroad, several studies have been made on Non-Governmental organizations working in urban and rural areas. But, much of the literature on these NGOs in Nigerian setting has come from traditional humanitarian work. According to [8], the challenges faced

by Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in disaster management in Nigerian context shall include lack of functional guideline, bureaucracy, lack of funds, transparency, functionality and capacity of NEMA/SEMAs, and other stakeholders (1, 2, 3,4,5,6,7,8,9 &10).

It is also important to point out that most of the challenges faced by the NGOs are heightened by the nature and types of the disaster's itself, the geographical location of the incident, and the ability to contain the disaster, e.g. natural disasters may be different from one place to another, it's depend on structures such as drainage against floods and hospital equipment's against outbreaks, road traffics signs for protection against road accidents and resources mobilization for intervention will definitely reduce the impacts of natural disasters and the level for exposure to certain dangers. On the other hand [9] have described man-made disaster as a disaster caused by human beings. Some examples of man-made disasters include hazardous material spills, explosions, chemical or biological attacks, nuclear blasts, traffic collisions such as train accidents, plane crashes, etc. Most of these disasters cause deaths, injuries, and loss of property. Just as natural disasters are influenced by human activities, man-made disasters too can be influenced by nature. For example, the massive earthquake and tsunami (natural disaster) in Japan in 2011 also caused nuclear accidents and that can be described as human-induced disaster [22].

[11] Have mentioned that whether the disaster is natural or man-made, the manner in which action is taken goes a long way to determine how the severity can reduce the effects on the lives of the people [12]. For instance, casualties should be experienced in both natural and man-made disasters and the best way to cope with the challenges pose by any one of these disasters is to understand their nature by putting the necessary mechanism in place for quick respond to emergency situation as both these types of disasters can have a major impact on the society [4]. Therefore, the challenges associated with managing the disasters vary from issues associated with the organization's managing the disasters itself to issues outside the organization [18]' [17].

According to [15], "During ancient and medieval times, voluntarism operated freely and exclusively in the fields of education, medicine, cultural promotion and even acted as succour in crisis management. NGOs provide public services to the poor, it is argued that especially in countries where government lack public services, NGOs play the significant role in the direct provision of social and economic services. In general, NGOs emerge and play the role of service providers. Yet, the challenges and the problems as identified above, if not

managed in a systematic and professional manner would render the rescue operation as well as the NGOs involved in a suicide mission.

### **3. History of disaster management in Nigeria**

Organized Disaster Management in Nigeria can be dated back to 1906 when the fire Brigade was established with functions that went beyond fire fighting to the saving of lives and property and provision of humanitarian services during emergencies [20]. In the 1960s and 70s, this noble and systematic approach was replaced with ad-hoc arrangements domiciled in the offices of the Head of State and the State Governors. During this period, disasters response was considered as mere security issues [4]. In 1972/1973, Nigeria experienced a devastating drought which had negative socio-economic consequences and cost the nation the loss of many lives and property. This event amongst others led to the establishment of the National Emergency Relief Agency (NERA) in 1976 with the mandate of collecting and distributing relief materials to disaster victims [20].

According to [4], [5] reports, an inter-ministerial body was set up by the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) in 1990 to address the challenges posed by disasters, especially the natural disaster reduction strategies in line with the UN International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction (IDNDR) and to address the limited scope of National Emergency Relief Agency (NERA). In 1993, the FGN decided to expand the scope of managing Disasters to include all areas of disasters. This bold approach was backed up by Decree 119 of 1993 which raised the status of the Agency to an Independent body under the Presidency. In 1997, the management of NERA organized a National Workshop involving major stakeholders in disaster management in Nigeria to deliberate on critical factors for an effective disaster management system in Nigeria, and noted the need to:

- i. Expand the functions of NERA,
- ii. Amend the decree setting up NERA and
- iii. Change its name to National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA).

The new Agency is structured by putting into consideration appropriate policies and strategies such as; Search and Rescue, resource mobilization capabilities; Information, Education and Prevention strategies; Administration, Finance and Logistic systems; Relief and Rehabilitation, Research and Planning as well as Provide appropriate budgetary allocation for the operations of the Agency [20].

The acceptance of these recommendations by the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) led to the establishment of the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) in March 1999 by Act 12 of 1999 as amended by Act 50 of 1999 to manage the disasters in all its ramifications. In fulfilling of its mandate, NEMA developed several plans and guidelines: some of these are National Disaster Response Plan, the Search and Rescue/Epidemic Evacuation plan, the National Nuclear and Radiological Plan, the Early Warning System on Epidemic etc. Over the years, NEMA has encountered some challenges and learnt lessons in the implementation of the plans. This necessitated the development of the National Disaster Management Framework (NDMF) to correct implementation gaps and increase efficiency and effectiveness of disaster management in Nigeria, particularly with regard to anthropological disasters which is in the increase all-round the country [20], [21].

#### **4. The challenges faced by NGOs in managing the disasters in Nigeria**

Given a specific focus of this paper on the challenges and prospect of non-governmental organizations in managing the disasters in Nigeria, these challenges are similar to the challenges faced by other NGOs identified and highlighted in other part of the world that include lack of modus operandis such as (synergy or collaboration among various NGOs involved), lack of standards and indicators, inadequate training and the overwhelming influx of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), refugees or returnees, human response to natural hazards, lack of administrative support, medical intervention (neglect to psychosocial support), and lack of coordination [4], [20], [5], [8], [7]. In addition to that, [20] had also mentioned others challenge that include lack of capacity building trainings, funding, divergent laws and structures, environmental factors, lack of coordination, NGOs missions, politics and other anti-social behaviours among its members that can be seen as upheaval to the sight of those who are been assisted. All these are some of the factors discovered from literature that hinder the success of achieving the NGOs objectives in Nigeria [28].

Findings from early management theory assumed relative stability in both internal and external environments of organizations itself and, therefore, did not provide a firm foundation for coping with the challenges associated with managing disaster in Nigeria as majority of the long term operation is carried by NGOs as volunteerism work who can go from one operation to another without proper records [16]. But, the implication of NGOs work by comparison with the innovate activities carried by them that have direct bearings on the mind of those who are been assisted, especially during wars and conflicts and other disasters periods, often

we can see NGOs functions as important one particularly in the area of providing timely intervention and peace building in war affected zones is worth noticeable. One perspective of the nature of crisis is provided by [20], who refers to a crisis as “Any action or failure to act that interferes with an (organization’s) on-going functions, the acceptable attainment of its objectives, its viability or survival, or that has a detrimental personal effect as perceived by the majority of its members, clients or constituents”.

However, it should be borne in mind that references to NGOs discussed in this paper are matters of concern that related to the current security challenges in the North-Eastern Nigeria and by understanding the various dimensions of the current conflict-drivers, triggers and escalators, ineffectiveness of the mechanism currently utilized in handling emergencies, conception, apparatus were initial described by [8], [4], [12] as the challenges faced by the NGOs.

## **5. Discussion**

Generally, the NGOs are tremendously working hard to provide relief assistance to the victims of emergencies in Nigeria [7]. It is obvious that the challenges identified in this paper have revealed some vital issues on how the NGOs are operating in real life. For instance, their inability to account for what is being donated by individual’s donors concurrently is discouraging other people from donating more. Though, because of their efforts for ensuring maximum survival of lives and property of innocent citizens at a time when many lives are spur into danger had clinically washed away their sins. [20] Has mentioned that NGOs are often able to reach segments of urban and rural populations that governments neglect or do not target as priority [16]. They also possess extensive knowledge of local conditions and use their long-term experiences in the target area to provide to form a small group for helping themselves [10].

The NGOs through their projects have implemented various activities such as finances, capacity building and self-reliance, peace building etc. [24]. NGOs do support community by given them abilities and chances to participate in developmental programmes, skill and knowledge that will motivate the community to participate in the project to improve the quality of their lives. Since the philosophy of community development is self-governing from outside agents thus, NGOs do assist them to discover their potentials and also mobilise them on self-reliant. Therefore, it was proven that the active presences of NGOs are for the benefit of the overall and social development of the country. [6]The NGOs have proven themselves

as the true associate/partners of the government in progress. Again, the presence of NGOs will led to the restoration of peace, security and reintegration programmes, and is also fostering cooperation even among the warlords [21], [27].

But, Nigeria as a party to implementation of Sendai framework for action 2015-2030 [27] which stressed that effort to reduced disaster risk must be systematically integrated into policies, plans and programmes for sustainable development and poverty reduction. To achieve these sustainable programs, challenges that were associated with poor implementation of policies on disaster management, weak commitment, non-proper use of early warning sign, failure to recognise the deferring needs of vulnerable groups and challenges they face in gaining support or denial during and after emergencies was properly managed by the Nigerian NGOs [4].

Other noticeable challenges as identified by [7] that goes beyond the NGOs control include leadership behaviour, traditional believe and cultural understanding of the disasters and it site effects to the people, especially in man-made disaster is commonly caused by certain activities of human beings, e.g. terrorist attacks, structural collapse, nuclear leak, transport accidents and environmental degradation while carelessness and disobedience to early warning sign is common problem that trigger disaster's [21].

But sometimes the NGOs are also compelled to submit to many challenges due to failures of the system that are inherent beyond their capacity [8], [16] e.g. lack of funding, lack of technical knowledge, coordination, planned response, community mobilization, sensitization, awareness, human right and security in and around the scene during operation, many problems that are traditionally inherited beyond their capacity [16]. Taking into cognisant that some of the sensitive matters related to security issues are being handled by the police and armies who may not be willing to share it with the NGOs [4].

## **Conclusion:**

While acknowledging the major contributions of these NGOs based on humanity. But the future study will focus on strong advocacy to the general public and the policy makers on the needs to institutionalize the NGOs works in the country in respective of where they come from as this paper had examines some of their achievements recorded so far. The adoption of Sendai framework as global best practice in managing the disasters through self-reliance, peace building, finance, sustainable community development are much better than the challenged they faced as they were able to developed the capacities of community through

skills acquisition trainings, abilities, knowledge, and motivation of the community to participate in the project to improve the quality of their lives. NGOs do assist the community to discover their potentials and also mobilize the community to be self-reliance [16].

Although, some of the limitation were observed in the NGOs effort of reducing the risk of disasters particularly partial beliefs that is self-indictment that is preventing many NGOs from working together as a team while they are on same mission and it was also observed that religious bigotry is a challenge that is causing sub-division during operation in the field, or supporting political parties and weak participation etc. are all outside target of achieving the aims and objectives of any NGO. If NGOs can overcome these limitations, then it can be surely hoped that they continue playing the role of saviour in Nigeria and it is clear from this study that NGOs are playing very significant and crucial role in assisting the victims and empowerment of vulnerable groups to regain their economy after loss hope.

Finally, the study have proven that NGOs are true partners of the government in disaster management who function for the betterment of the destitute and the helpless, the unattended to population of the society as well as partners in progress. Furthermore, it is essential to establish a warm and dependable working relationship by setting aside differences that exist as obstacles between NGOs themselves and relevant government agencies for the betterment of the wellbeing of the targeted populations.

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