



Enhancing Cultural Adequacy in Housing Internally Displaced Persons in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the integration of cultural elements into housing solutions for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Nigeria, focusing on Borno and Adamawa States. Despite the extensive presence of IDP camps—62 formal and 158 informal in Borno, and 3 formal and 22 informal in Adamawa—there is a significant gap in incorporating cultural considerations into resettlement interventions. The research employs the social exclusion theory to highlight the negative impacts of culturally inadequate housing on IDPs' dignity and well-being. Case studies of Kanuri cultural integration in Borno State and Fulfulde practices in Adamawa State provide insights into the effectiveness of culturally sensitive design. The Ngarannam IDP Settlement and Labondo Local Integration Pilot Project are analyzed to assess their potential as models for other IDP camps, noting that while these projects offer valuable lessons, the Labondo project needs refinement to better incorporate cultural elements. The findings suggest that, culturally tailored housing solutions can enhance the overall quality of life for IDPs by fostering a sense of community, reducing stress, and improving social cohesion. Recommendations include the need for deliberate cultural integration in future design and policy initiatives to address the unique needs of displaced populations.

Keywords: Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), Cultural Adequacy, Housing Design, Borno State, Adamawa State, Social Exclusion Theory, Kanuri, Fulfulde, Ngarannam.

INTRODUCTION

Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Nigeria, particularly in the northeastern region, face significant challenges in securing adequate housing. The Boko Haram insurgency, combined with communal clashes and environmental disasters, has led to the displacement of millions of people, with over 2.9 million IDPs reported as of December 2023 concentrated in Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa states (International Organization for Migration [IOM], 2023). These IDPs often

live in makeshift shelters or camps with inadequate infrastructure, which exacerbates vulnerabilities such as poor health, sanitation, and overcrowding (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], 2022). The provision of temporary housing has primarily been focused on immediate relief, but these solutions rarely meet the longer-term cultural, social, and psychological needs of the displaced populations (Roberts & Lawanson, 2023).

Efforts by the Nigerian government and international bodies, such as the Nigerian Red Cross, have helped address some of the immediate shelter needs (Nigerian Red Cross, 2021). However, the emphasis on short-term solutions has often neglected cultural adequacy, particularly in a region where cultural identity plays a vital role in daily life and community cohesion. This lack of cultural sensitivity in housing solutions leads to a diminished sense of belonging and increases psychological stress among IDPs (Modu *et al.*, 2024).

A critical gap in the current housing strategies for IDPs in northeastern Nigeria is the lack of culturally adequate housing designs. Displacement disrupts established cultural practices, and many of the housing solutions fail to account for the specific cultural preferences of ethnic groups like the Kanuri in Borno State and the Fulani (Fulfulde-speaking) people in Adamawa State. For example, the Kanuri have distinct cultural practices related to gender roles and communal living, which are not reflected in the generic shelter designs provided in IDP camps (Ekezie, 2022). This failure to integrate cultural elements into housing design leads to social disconnection and complicates the adaptation process for displaced populations (Sowale & Orogun, 2022).

This paper aims to explore the concept of cultural adequacy in housing for IDPs in Nigeria, with a focus on the Kanuri cultural elements in Borno State and the Fulfulde cultural elements in Adamawa State. It seeks to highlight the unique cultural, social, and economic needs of these displaced populations and the importance of incorporating cultural sensitivity into housing solutions. Drawing from case studies and literature, the paper will propose recommendations for designing culturally

appropriate housing that aligns with the needs, identities, and dignity of IDPs (Modu *et al.*, 2024).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: SOCIAL EXCLUSION THEORY

The theoretical framework that underpins this study is the social exclusion theory, which provides a lens through which the experiences of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in northeastern Nigeria can be understood. Social exclusion theory argues that certain individuals and groups are systematically marginalized and subjected to discriminatory practices that, lead to deprivation, alienation, and exclusion from the mainstream of society (Avincan, Aydin, & Ersoy, 2023). In the context of IDPs, this exclusion not only encompasses the lack of access to material resources, such as adequate housing and economic opportunities, but also extends to intangible aspects like cultural participation, social integration, education, and political power.

In northeastern Nigeria, IDPs, particularly those from ethnic groups like the Kanuri and Fulani, face compounded exclusions due to the absence of culturally adequate housing that reflects their traditional values and social structures. Social exclusion theory is particularly relevant because it highlights how these displaced populations are not only deprived of basic necessities but also alienated from their cultural identities, which exacerbates feelings of disempowerment and loss of dignity. This detachment from cultural and social participation further contributes to the systemic marginalization of IDPs, limiting their access to social services, education, and meaningful participation in society (Roberts & Lawanson, 2023; Modu *et al.*, 2024).

Moreover, the exclusion experienced by IDPs in northeastern Nigeria is multifaceted, affecting not only their social and cultural life but also their citizenship and socio-economic rights. The lack of culturally sensitive housing solutions alienates IDPs from the mainstream population, exacerbating their sense of isolation and weakening their ability to reintegrate into society (Ekezie, 2022). This dynamic perpetuates cycles of deprivation and humiliation, leading to broader socio-economic consequences for the Nigerian state as a whole, as the failure to adequately address the needs of IDPs threatens social cohesion and stability (Sowale & Orogun, 2022).

In a nutshell, social exclusion theory helps to explain the complex challenges faced by IDPs in Nigeria, particularly in terms of cultural adequacy in housing. It underscores the need for more inclusive approaches that go beyond

providing basic material needs and address the cultural, social, and political dimensions of displacement. By doing so, this study seeks to propose housing solutions that foster inclusion, dignity, and empowerment for displaced populations.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study Area

The study focuses on Adamawa and Borno States in Northeastern Nigeria. These areas have been heavily impacted by the Boko Haram insurgency, leading to a significant displacement of people. The research pays particular attention to the Kanuri ethnic group in Borno State and the Fulani (Fulfulde-speaking) population in Adamawa State. Both groups have distinct cultural practices that are essential to understanding the requirements for culturally adequate housing in these regions.

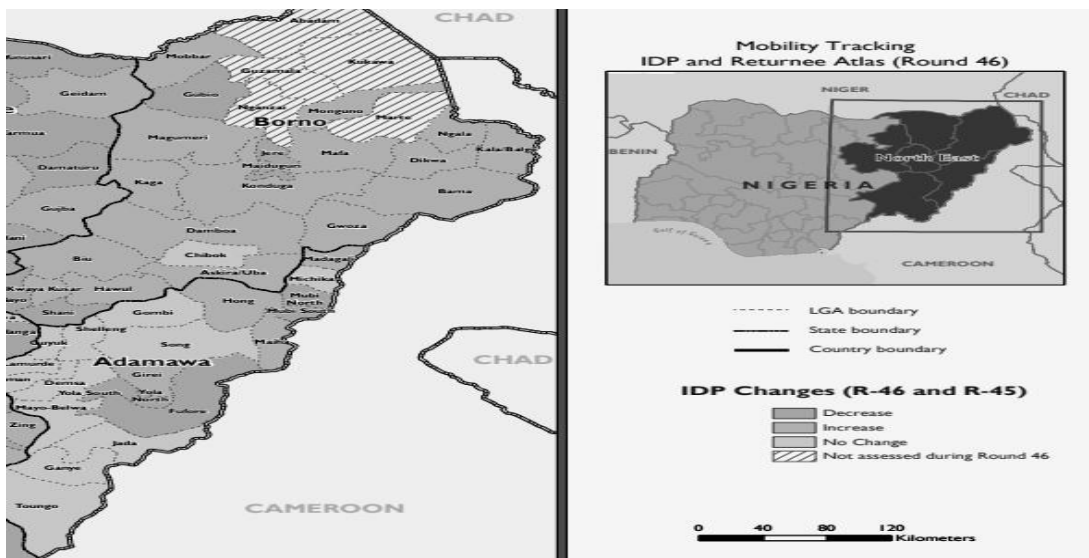


Figure 1: Study Area – IDP Changes in Borno & Adamawa State (IOM, 2024)

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative research design that combines a literature review and

case studies to assess cultural elements specific to the housing needs of IDPs in northeastern Nigeria. The literature review provides insights into the general housing

conditions of IDPs, while the case studies focus on culturally significant elements related to the Kanuri and Fulani people. The research aims to understand the intersection between displacement, housing, and cultural identity through an analysis of how existing resettlement solutions align or misalign with the cultural preferences of these ethnic groups. Data for this research was collected primarily through an in-depth review of existing literature and previously conducted case studies on culturally adequate housing solutions for IDPs. The sources include academic papers, reports from organizations such as the IOM (2023) and the UNHCR (2022), as well as relevant local studies that specifically address the cultural elements of housing for the Kanuri and Fulani people (Modu *et al.*, 2024; Ekezie, 2022). A thematic analysis was conducted to identify key themes and sub-themes related to cultural adequacy in housing for IDPs. These themes were subdivided into two categories: one for the Kanuri cultural elements in Borno State and another for the Fulani cultural elements in Adamawa State. The analysis included identifying specific cultural practices, values, and social structures that should inform housing designs for these populations.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Case Study I – Borno State

Theme I: Housing Design and Cultural Practices – Kanuri

Traditional Kanuri architecture and spatial layouts are deeply intertwined with the social structures and cultural values of the Kanuri people (Mortada, 2019). Indigenous housing designs in Maiduguri typically reflect the social organization of the clan or kinship group residing in them. Although the arrangement of rooms and utilities may vary

according to personal preferences, the overall layout of spaces within a house reflects broader cultural norms. Generally, traditional Kanuri homesteads are divided into specific quarters: spaces for wives, children, and boys (usually near the entrance), with the head of the household's quarters positioned to command a view from the entrance. This reflects Islamic social norms, especially in polygamous families, where privacy and separation of gender roles are highly valued. The traditional dwellings, often designed as single-room structures, are made from simple materials and shaped in circular, square, or rectangular forms. In these homesteads, various activities are allocated to different areas, such as food storage, animal protection at night, and spaces for eating and socializing during the day. The open central courtyard serves multiple purposes, including domestic chores, laundry, night storytelling, and a space to sleep. This traditional layout fosters communal living and emphasizes family cohesion, which is central to Kanuri culture.

However, in the context of modern government housing estates in Maiduguri, cultural considerations have often been inadequately integrated. According to Jalam, Abubakar & Muhammad, (2011) government-provided housing estates in Borno State tend to disregard the cultural and spatial practices of the Kanuri people. The layouts of these modern estates rarely incorporate the traditional arrangement of spaces that emphasize family roles, privacy, and communal living. As a result, many Kanuri inhabitants of these estates express dissatisfaction, feeling that the designs do not accommodate their traditional ways of living. The failure to integrate culturally sensitive design elements in these housing solutions has led to a sense of disconnection between the provided spaces and the lifestyle patterns of the local population. This underscores the

importance of designing housing solutions for IDPs that are culturally appropriate and reflective of the social structures and values of the Kanuri people. Without such considerations, there is a risk of further alienating displaced populations, hindering their ability to rebuild their lives in a way that honors their cultural identity.

Theme II: Existing IDP Settlements in Borno State

A recent study (Modu, 2024) on Kanuri IDP resettlement homes in Monguno Local Government found that, redesigned homes, which incorporated cultural identity and values, greatly improved the physical, social, and psychological well-being of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). By integrating traditional architectural features, using local materials, and embedding cultural symbols, the resettlement homes created a stronger sense of community, cultural pride, and belonging among the IDPs. The study demonstrated that the redesigned homes not only improved the living conditions of the displaced Kanuri people but also had significant psychological benefits. The integration of familiar spatial layouts and cultural designs helped reduce stress and anxiety levels and enhanced the overall well-

being of the residents. Moreover, there was a noticeable increase in the feelings of safety and security, as the homes provided environments that aligned more closely with the Kanuri people's traditional way of life.

In a similar vein, the Ngarannam IDP settlement project, located in Ngarrannam, Borno State, and completed in 2022 under the direction of UNDP Nigeria, sought to design homes that respected and integrated Kanuri and Islamic culture. The architects and urban designers involved in the project emphasized human-centered design, tailoring interventions to the cultural, environmental, and climatic needs of the local population (UNDP, 2022). The resettlement town was conceptualized to address the deficiencies of earlier housing programs, which often ignored the cultural context of the people. By proposing buildings of appropriate scale, materiality, and design, the Ngarannam project aimed to restore dignity to the displaced population while being respectful of their pre-insurgency way of life. The design prioritized the Kanuri cultural practices in both layout and material choice, ensuring that the homes felt familiar and conducive to the traditional way of living, thus fostering a sense of belonging and pride among the displaced community.





Figure 2: Ngarannam IDP Settlement (Oshinowo Studio, 2022)

Case Study II – Adamawa State

Theme I: Housing Design and Cultural Practices – Fulfulder

The Fulbe (pastoral Fulani) are a predominantly nomadic group that inhabits the northern regions of Nigeria, including Adamawa State. Their lifestyle revolves around herding cattle, sheep, and goats, necessitating a continuous search for grazing land. Due to their high degree of mobility, the Fulbe occupy temporary shelters such as tiny tents and hamlets. A "Wuro" is the general term used to describe a Fulbe homestead, which can range in size from a single hut to a large compound, village, or even a town, depending on the context (Sa'ad, 1983). Interestingly, a wuro only exists if a woman lives inside; an unmarried man's hut cannot

be referred to as a wuro. This reflects the Fulbe's deep connection between gender roles and their concept of home.

Physically, the wuro consists of at least one hut owned by a woman, built either by herself or by male members of the community. The wuro is not merely a physical structure; it represents a sociographic unit with the man as its head, and its members are connected by significant ties of kinship or neighborhood (Sa'ad, in Tahir, 1995). These compact social units embody the pastoral and communal nature of the Fulbe society, emphasizing cooperation and kinship bonds within their nomadic existence. Understanding this cultural context is vital in designing housing solutions for Fulfulde IDPs in Adamawa State, as housing interventions must consider their nomadic traditions, gender roles, and

communal living patterns to ensure cultural adequacy and acceptance.

Theme II: Existing IDP Settlements in Adamawa State

The Labondo Local Integration Project, a UNHCR pilot initiative, aims to demonstrate durable solutions for internally displaced persons (IDPs) through local integration led by the government and stakeholders in Adamawa State. The project supports over 454 displaced households by promoting social cohesion between IDPs and the host community. Its comprehensive approach links humanitarian, development, and peacebuilding activities, addressing the long-term needs of IDPs rather than short-term relief. By focusing on permanent housing solutions and economic opportunities, the project contributes to the Nigerian government's efforts to provide sustainable support for displaced populations while

encouraging community rebuilding and resilience (UNHCR, 2022).

Despite the project's general focus on local integration, its objectives align with the study's exploration of culturally adequate housing. While the Labondo project does not specifically incorporate Fulfulde cultural practices, its emphasis on social cohesion, tenure security, and livelihood promotion indirectly supports the integration of displaced Fulani populations. The project promotes a holistic approach to durable solutions that can be adapted to reflect the cultural needs of IDPs, including the Fulfulde community, by fostering empowerment, economic inclusion, and access to government services. This approach provides a framework for addressing the long-term well-being of IDPs in a culturally sensitive manner.



Figure 3: Labondo Local Integration Pilot Project (UNHCR, 2023)

DISCUSSION

The findings from the case studies on Borno and Adamawa States highlight a crucial gap in integrating cultural elements into housing

designs for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Nigeria. In Borno State, which hosts 62 formal and 158 informal IDP camps, and in Adamawa State with 3 formal and 22 informal IDP camps, fewer than 5



camps across both states have deliberately incorporated cultural elements into their resettlement interventions (UNHCR, 2023; IOM, 2023). This significant oversight underscores the need for culturally sensitive approaches in housing design to better address the unique needs of displaced populations.

Incorporating cultural elements into housing design has notable implications for both policy and practice. For the Kanuri and Fulfulde communities, traditional housing structures and social practices are integral to their cultural identity. In Borno State, the integration of traditional Kanuri architectural features in resettlement homes has resulted in improved community cohesion and reduced stress among IDPs (Modu *et al.*, 2024). Similarly, adapting housing designs in Adamawa State to reflect Fulfulde cultural practices would enhance the functionality and acceptance of resettlement homes, supporting the community's traditional nomadic lifestyle (Sa'ad, 1983).

Key examples such as the Ngarannam IDP Settlement and the Labondo Local Integration Pilot Project offer valuable insights into how cultural elements can be effectively integrated into resettlement efforts. The Ngarannam project successfully incorporated Kanuri cultural elements into housing designs, thereby improving community integration and well-being (UNDP, 2022). The Labondo project, although a promising model for local integration, needs refinement to deliberately include cultural elements in its design. Building on the results and lessons learned from these pilot projects can guide future interventions, ensuring they are more attuned to the cultural needs of IDPs. This approach will enhance the overall

effectiveness of resettlement efforts, fostering greater community integration and dignity for displaced populations.

CONCLUSION

This research highlights critical gaps in incorporating cultural adequacy into housing solutions for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Nigeria. Despite the presence of numerous formal and informal IDP camps in Borno and Adamawa States, fewer than 5 camps across both states have intentionally integrated cultural elements into their resettlement designs. Case studies of the Ngarannam IDP Settlement and the Labondo Local Integration Pilot Project reveal that integrating cultural practices and traditional architectural features significantly enhances community cohesion, reduces stress, and improves overall well-being among IDPs. The lack of widespread application of these culturally sensitive approaches underscores the need for a more inclusive and context-specific design strategy in housing interventions.

Implications

The findings of this study have broad implications for housing solutions for IDPs. Culturally adequate housing designs not only align with the social and cultural norms of displaced populations but also contribute to their psychological and social well-being. By integrating traditional architectural elements and respecting cultural practices, resettlement efforts can foster a sense of belonging and stability among IDPs. This approach is essential for creating sustainable and effective housing solutions that address both the immediate and long-term needs of displaced communities.

Limitations

The study's limitations include a reliance on existing literature and case studies, which may not fully capture the diverse and evolving needs of IDPs across different regions. Additionally, the focus on specific case studies in Borno and Adamawa States may not be representative of all IDP camps in Nigeria. Future research should include broader geographic coverage and direct engagement with displaced communities to gain a more comprehensive understanding of their cultural needs and preferences.

Design Guidelines

1. Incorporate Cultural Elements: Housing designs should integrate traditional architectural features and spatial layouts that reflect the cultural practices of the displaced community. For instance, in Kanuri communities, designs should include specific room arrangements and communal spaces that align with traditional practices.
2. Engage with Local Communities: Involve local cultural experts and community members in the design process to ensure that housing solutions are culturally relevant and acceptable.
3. Adapt to Mobility Patterns: For nomadic or semi-nomadic communities, such as Fulfulde, design solutions should consider mobility patterns and flexibility in housing structures.

Policy Suggestions

1. Support Culturally Adequate Housing: Government policies should mandate the incorporation of cultural elements in housing designs for IDPs. This

could be achieved through guidelines and standards that ensure cultural sensitivity in all resettlement projects.

2. Increase Funding and Resources: Allocate resources and funding to support the development of culturally appropriate housing solutions. This includes supporting pilot projects and scaling successful models that incorporate cultural elements.
3. Promote Collaborative Approaches: Encourage collaboration between governmental agencies, NGOs, and local communities to develop and implement culturally sensitive housing solutions. This approach should align with broader humanitarian, development, and peace building objectives.

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