**INTRODUCTION**

Throughout Northeast Nigeria, violent conflict and pre-conflict poverty have provoked mass internal displacements and spurred the provision of humanitarian service delivery since 2009. In 2014, Organized Armed Groups (OAGs) took control of significant swaths of territory, increasing insecurity and rendering the vast bulk of Borno state as hard to reach for those delivering humanitarian aid. Persons fleeing these hard-to-reach areas in search of assistance frequently take refuge in Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camps, most often located in the garrisoned capitals of Local Government Areas (LGAs). These LGA capitals, under the control of Nigerian Government Forces, serve as hubs for humanitarian service provision, particularly in Borno state.

To inform humanitarian service providers and aid actors on the demographics of persons still in hard-to-reach areas of Northeast Nigeria, as well as to identify their needs, access to services and intentions to move, REACH initiated an ongoing assessment of hard-to-reach areas in Northeast Nigeria. The H2R assessment aims to:

- Characterize the cross-sectoral needs and vulnerabilities of remaining populations
- Provide up-to-date information on service provision and access
- Represent geographic displacement patterns

**KEY FINDINGS**

- 82% of assessed settlements reported that some population remains in the hard to reach area
- Populations consist largely of captive populations and vulnerable sub-groups unable to journey to LGA capitals; Most have limited to no information on the availability of humanitarian aid services in LGA capitals.
- Deteriorating food security and violent conflict are key drivers of displacement
- Food insecurity and protection needs are most severe in Gwoza LGA, followed closely by Dickwa LGA
- Hard-to-reach data indicates that ongoing wild polio transmission in Borno state remains possible, and that access restrictions in Northeast Nigeria persist as a potential barrier to global polio eradication.
- KIs from hard-to-reach areas reported widespread violence. While some focus group respondents expressed a desire for security intervention, others feared being targeted in airstrikes or caught in crossfire.
- Focus groups reported near-universal rustling of livestock, harvest confiscation, and destruction of non-religious schools which has significantly disrupted livelihoods and continues to negatively impact daily life.

**METHODOLOGY**

Primary data was provided by KIs who had arrived from their pre-displacement location (or “area of knowledge”) within three months of being interviewed. Information for this assessment was collected in seven accessible LGA capitals in Borno State: Bama, Dickwa, Gwoza, Maiduguri, Monguno, Ngala, and Rann, and represents knowledge of settlement conditions ranging from 1 August 2018 to 30 April 2019.

KIs are queried about settlement-wide circumstances in hard-to-reach areas, rather than their individual experiences. As many KIs as can be interviewed are interviewed, and therefore multiple KIs may provide information on the same settlement. Responses from KIs from the same settlement are then aggregated to the level of the settlement, (used as the unit of analysis) to provide a more substantial N as well as to protect the personally identifiable information of KIs. To reconcile divergent responses when responses are aggregated to the level of the settlement, the most common response provided by the greatest number of KIs is reported for that settlement. Settlements for which no consensus was reached between KIs are withheld from the reported indicator.

For this situation overview, KI data is reported only for LGAs of origin from which at least 20% of settlements were reported during the data collection period (November 2018-April 2019). This threshold was determined using a list of settlements compiled from local humanitarian actors with historical frontline access. Unless otherwise stated, all LGA-level findings are given as a percentage of settlements assessed within that LGA.

All focus group participants participated in a guided discussion elaborating current and historical access to services in the area of origin followed by a participatory mapping exercise. Participatory mapping was conducted by asking participants to trace and validate travel patterns, and to discuss challenges encountered en-route. When large numbers of new arrivals from the same area of knowledge were willing and available, FGD participants were separated into groups by gender and age.

KI and FGD data were collected concurrently and analyzed using a mixed-methods approach. Qualitative data (FGDs) was transcribed, translated and then thematically coded and parsed for categorical responses of interest, and corroborated using KI data. Quantitative data (KIs) was aggregated and analyzed in R using descriptive statistics and geospatial analysis. Key indicators highlighted in the qualitative analysis were further examined in the quantitative analysis.

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2. Any self-forming, non-state group that is organised, in terms of a formal or semi-formal command and control structure, bears arms and conducts organised armed operations in pursuit of political, societal or ideological objectives within and usually in opposition to the state and/or for its own vision of the organisation of life in the territory (self-determination).
3. A local government area is an administrative boundary one size smaller than a state.
4. Data collection in Kala Balge LGA-continued on January 14th, when the town of Rann was overtaken by AOGs and rendered hard-to-reach for humanitarian actors.
5. The REACH settlement database used for this assessment was compiled from the polio Vaccination Tracking System and the Common Operational Dataset published by the Humanitarian Data Exchange by OCHA.
REACH interviewed KIs with knowledge of settlements across 16 LGAs of Borno state. Focus group participants originated from 82 settlements spanning nine LGAs (Bama, Dikwa, Guzamala, Gwoza, Kala Balge, Kukawa, Mafa, Marte, and Ngala). These interviews provided coverage of 20% or more of settlements in Bama, Gwoza, Dikwa, Ngala, Kala Balge, and Kukawa LGAs, which are reported on herein.

Assessment coverage of Borno state, November 2018 – April 2019

LIMITATIONS
Data collection is dependent on the presence and identification of eligible KIs in LGA capitals. REACH can therefore not guarantee sufficient coverage of geographical areas, and lack of responses from a given area should not be used to conclude that there are no people remaining in those areas. While this situation overview reports LGA-level information for LGAs wherein 20% of all settlements with whom interviews during the reporting window, month-to-month coverage for each LGA varied throughout that time frame. H2R data is indicative only – not representative therefore must be triangulated with other sources. As data is triangulated from recalled accounts from persons in transit, it is possible that incidences attributed herein as having occurred in one LGA may have occurred in a neighboring LGA. Additionally, it should be noted that, the majority of areas reported on here are areas that are commonly interpreted to be under the influence of the organized armed group Jama’atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda’awati wal-Jihad (JAS), namely the more southern LGAs of those assessed. Kukawa is an exception as it is known to be under the influence of the organized armed group Islamic State of West Africa Province (ISWAP). These two groups are different, with one of the main differences being their approach to civilian populations leaving areas under their control.

DATA PROTECTION
REACH proactively engages with the Protection sector concerning H2R data collection. Settlement-level data is aggregated to the ward level or greater. Reach will not publish or share settlement-level data in an electronic format. Any hard-copy sharing of settlement-level data will require a data sharing agreement reviewed and agreed upon by both REACH and Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

SITUATION IN ASSESSED SETTLEMENTS

DEMOGRAPHICS & VULNERABILITIES
Only 1% of assessed settlements reported that the entire original population has remained and 82% reported that at least some people remained in the hard to reach area. Two percent reported none of the original population remained and the remaining 5% did not have consensus. The remaining populations reported by FGD participants consisted largely of the most vulnerable: people who had been too malnourished, ill, young, or elderly to flee. Civilian men were a notable exception as it was often reported by focus group participants that civilian men are afraid of being killed if caught fleeing and therefore also remain in hard-to-reach areas. The severity of movement restrictions and punishments for violations reported by FGD participants varied throughout hard-to-reach areas, but, as a group these retributions were reported as the primary reason for populations to remain in hard-to-reach settlements. Of the 96 FGDs that consisted of participants who often arrived from the same village in the same group, 23 reported being attacked by OAGs during their escape, which ranged from lootings and beatings to abductions and deaths of up to fifty people.

% of assessed settlements reporting each of the following:

- Some population remaining: 82%
- Presence of IDPs: 60%
- Presence of unaccompanied children: 73%
While 60% of settlements reported the presence of IDPs, relationships between IDPs and the original host community were reported as positive. FGD participants attributed this to a lack of returnees (and subsequent disputes over land and materials) which is notable should the number of returnees ever increase. IDP presence was least commonly reported in Kukawa LGA, nearest to Lake Chad (33% of assessed settlements) and most commonly reported in Gwoza LGA (92% of assessed settlements).

Of all KIs, 68% were female – reflective of the general population of IDPs in the LGA capitals that are used as accessible data collection sites. FGD participants also consistently reported that more women remained in hard-to-reach areas than men.

FOOD SECURITY & LIVELIHOODS

The reported primary drivers of food insecurity in hard-to-reach areas include movement restrictions and supply disruptions, followed by OAG rustling livestock and harvest confiscation, and disrupted supply chains. Food security needs, and barriers to farming, are more severe in the assessed LGAs in central-Borno LGAs (Gwoza, Dikwa, and Ngala) relative to northern-Borno LGAs. In the central-Borno LGAs, populations frequently reported all-season foraging for wild foods as a key coping mechanism. These areas additionally reported more severe movement restrictions, harvest confiscations and widespread hunger.

Severity of hunger: % of assessed settlements within the ward reported that “hunger is the worst it can be all over the settlement, causing many deaths”:

Insufficient access to food for most people was reported in 74% of assessed settlements, with over half of those respondents attributing the primary reason to unsafe access to land.6 This has led to substantial shifts in diets with 96% of assessed settlements in Gwoza LGA and 93% of assessed settlements in Dikwa LGA reporting consumption of wild foods as a coping strategy, especially during the dry season. Frequently consumed wild foods include kyara grass, which FGD participants noted may be poisonous if not adequately cooked.

Food insecurity was strained, though not catastrophically, in Kukawa, where land access restrictions were less common and people retained some capacity to farm. Kukawa reported relatively less extreme coping strategies, for example reducing meals from 3 to 2 per day in 77% of assessed settlements, and little reported widespread hunger-related mortality. While FGDs from Kukawa reported that hunger is manageable using the aforementioned coping mechanisms, participants expressed uncertainty about the next planting season “due to the ongoing offensive” and the possibly that conflict would cause displacement and render it too insecure to return for planting. Wild foods were not mentioned in Kukawa from FGDs in August 2018 - March 2019 but were first mentioned as a primary coping mechanism in April 2019, potentially indicating a changing food security situation.

Access to General Food Distributions (GFD): % of assessed settlements reporting a food distribution within the last month, at the time of interview:
Livelihoods

Complete or partial confiscation of harvest by OAGs was reported in 60% of FGDs, which creates insufficient access to food and an inability to produce enough food to sell. Beyond land-access restrictions and harvest confiscations, 88% of assessed settlements reported lacking access to agricultural inputs – including seeds, tools, and the ability to repair old equipment – to sustain their historical livelihoods of farming, trade, and transportation.

Fishing was likewise limited due to movement restrictions, though occasionally emerged as a coping strategy to compensate for restrictions in land access. In Gwoza LGA, four FGDs reported that rivers serve as fronts between government forces and OAGs. Where not directly banned from fishing, FGDs reported that most people avoid these areas due to protection concerns regarding cross-fire.

Cattle rustling was near-universally reported in FGDs, and in 95% of assessed settlements KIIs reported that people who normally access livestock were unable to access any livestock during the past month. Only one FGD with respondents who recently arrived from a settlement in Marte LGA reported retaining some livestock. However, some FGDs reported on settlements in the Sambisa Forest, which were described as containing collections of livestock that had been collated from other areas of the Lake Chad Basin.

PROTECTION

Civilian protection concerns in hard-to-reach areas report opposing tensions: an expressed desire for security assistance, tempered by a fear of being mistaken for OAG affiliates and harmed in airstrikes or crossfire. Regardless of the reported primary concern, KIs reported near-universal worsening perceptions of safety relative to previous months.

Violence Against Civilians

In 45% of assessed settlements, at least one incident of conflict was reported that reportedly killed a civilian in the month prior to departure. Physical violence described in FGDs included public beatings, rapes, forced recruitment, and forced marriages. FGDs reported punishments for persons who escaped hard-to-reach areas including reports of amputation in Bama, Dikwa, and Gwoza LGAs, stoning in Bama LGA andmaining in Ngala. Among the assessed LGAs, incidents involving body-borne improvised explosive devices (BBIEDs) were most commonly reported in Gwoza, where 57% of assessed settlements reported awareness of a BBIED attack within the last month, relative to 12% or less in all other LGAs. International INGO Safety Organisation (INSO) in Nigeria notes that BBIEDs in most cases target garrison towns, not hard-to-reach areas. Specifically, BBIEDs against IDP camps have been used to deter civilians from abandoning hard-to-reach areas. INSO reported five BBIED attacks in Madagali and Northern Adamawa during a similar time frame, indicating the possibility that references to these non-hard-to-reach areas were included in data collection for Gwoza LGA.

Worsened security situation: % of settlements within the LGA reported that security situation has worsened over the previous month:

- November 2018
- January 2019
- April 2019
Unexploded ordnances (UXOs) were reported as rarely present, though 3% of assessed settlements reported an incident involving an UXO during the past month. Looting was also widespread, with 49% of assessed settlements reporting an incident of property looting within the last month. While the bulk of KI and FGD protection concerns involved violence and threats of violence from OAGs, secondary protection concerns involved other actors. Concerns about attacks from government forces were most common in Kukawa LGA, where FGDs cited previous civilian deaths from airstrikes.

% of assessed settlements within the ward that reported at least one security incident that resulted in the death of civilians during the reporting period:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LGA analysed</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>1 - 25%</th>
<th>26 - 50%</th>
<th>51 - 75%</th>
<th>76 - 100%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bama LGA</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dikwa LGA</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gwoza LGA</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kala Balge LGA</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kukawa LGA</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ngala LGA</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Child-Specific Protection Concerns
Protection concerns for children included abduction, and resultant forced marriage and forced recruitment. There were no major gender differences reported in the frequency of abductions between boys and girls.

Unaccompanied children were reported in two-thirds or more of assessed hard-to-reach settlements in every LGA. Ten FGDs reported large proportions of unaccompanied children in the remaining populations of hard-to-reach settlements, explaining that these children were often either orphans or left behind when their parents escaped. Two FGDs also reported deliberate separation of children from their parents.

Main protection concerns, by gender and age groups:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Early / forced marriage</th>
<th>Violence by AOGs</th>
<th>Abduction</th>
<th>Family separation</th>
<th>No issue</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Girls</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td></td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boys</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td></td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Security incidents, by LGA:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LGA</th>
<th>Abduction of children</th>
<th>BBIED</th>
<th>Killing</th>
<th>Property looting</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bama LGA</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dikwa LGA</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gwoza LGA</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kala Balge LGA</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>83%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kukawa LGA</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ngala LGA</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
HEALTH & NUTRITION

Only 12% of assessed settlements reported access to healthcare within walking distance. According to respondents, limited access to healthcare pre-dates the current crisis, but the situation has been exacerbated by deliberate destruction of facilities. Historical absence of health facilities was reported in 51% of assessed settlements, while 19% of settlements reported that health facilities had been destroyed.

% of settlements within ward that reported having access to a functional health facility within walking distance:

As described by four FGDs, the health facilities remaining in most hard-to-reach areas were OAG-run clinics of questionable quality managed by OAG medics. One facility in the Sambisa Forest was an exception, reported to be staffed by abducted doctors.

Lack of access to healthcare and nutritional supplementation rendered hard-to-reach populations susceptible to preventable causes of death, especially children. Implications toward child malnutrition were especially dire: FGD participants from one larger settlement in Gwoza reported that seven to eight children die daily.

Very few (7%) hard-to-reach settlements reported receipt of supplemental feeding programs within the most recent month, likely impeded by access restrictions. Of the 52% of assessed settlements that reported an increase in mortality during the past month, 55% attributed the increase primarily to malnutrition. However, this may be confounded by proximity to Lake Chad and other sources of standing water, where malaria was more frequently reported as the primary cause of increased deaths.

% of assessed settlements reporting the following as primary cause of death, by ward:

Prevalence of Watery Diarrhea

The data collection period for H2R aligned with an identified increase in the prevalence of watery diarrhea cases in Borno State, with WHO reporting 6,367 cases and 73 deaths in Borno State from November 2018 to January 2019. During this timeframe, watery diarrhea was reported as the primary cause of death by 7.5% of assessed settlements.

Assessed settlements that reported cholera as the primary cause of death during this timeframe were concentrated in Kala Balge (12%), consistent with WHO reports, as well as in Kukawa and Bundur wards of Kukawa LGA, and Ndufu ward of Ngala LGA where cases were not reported through the WHO system but may be worth further inquiry. Settlements distributed across Gwoza and Bama also reported case-related deaths.
Vaccination: A Pre-Conflict Service for Most Hard-to-Reach Settlements

Northeastern Nigeria is one of two remaining areas in the world with potential but unconfirmed ongoing wild poliovirus transmission. Low vaccination rates also leave hard-to-reach communities at high risk of outbreaks of circulating vaccine-derived poliovirus.

Most recent visit from a polio vaccination team, % of FGDs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 6 months</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between 6-12 months</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between 1-3 years</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between 3-5 years</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between 5-10 years</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Longer than 10 years</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Despite embedded community mobilizers and innovative access strategies, FGDs indicate that many hard-to-reach settlements remain beyond the grasp of polio vaccination teams. 79% of FGDs reported that the most recent vaccination visits pre-dated identified outbreaks in 2013-2014 and 2016. Hard-to-reach data indicates that ongoing wild polio transmission in Borno state remains possible, and that access restrictions in Northeast Nigeria persist as a potential barrier to global polio eradication.

WATER, SANITATION, AND HYGIENE

% of assessed settlement by the main source of drinking water, LGA level

While 47% of assessed settlements reported the existence of boreholes, only 66% of those boreholes were functional. Access to clean drinking water was least available in Ngala LGA, with 19% of assessed settlements reporting primary use of rivers, ponds, or swamps for water sources. FGDs from most settlements had boreholes before the conflict reported that their boreholes were now nonfunctional due to lack of maintenance.

Access to non-food items is limited due to trade and access restrictions. The most commonly needed non-food items are sleeping mats (28% of all assessed settlements), soap (22% of all assessed settlements), and clothing (13% of all assessed settlements), which is notable in anticipating the needs of those who may flee or be moved into LGA capitals. Beyond the basic issue of transport of goods and closure of markets, price inflation at remaining markets made it more difficult to purchase what foods were available, with 81% of settlements with access to a market reporting an increase in cereal prices. Furthermore, of 22 functional markets reported by FGDs, ten were managed by groups that limited purchasing access. FGDs reported that some markets sold goods looted from settlement households; some utilized cross-border supply chains, smuggling items from Cameroon; and others reportedly paid smugglers to circumvent a blockade on traders instituted by government forces.

Of the nine FGDs who reported pre-conflict access to electricity in their settlements, all reported that electricity had ended over the past years of the conflict.

EDUCATION

Informants from hard-to-reach areas traced the destruction of non-religious education facilities to the beginnings of the conflict in their respective areas. Among all assessed settlements, gender disparities in non-religious and religious school attendance were small; the governing factor, instead, was whether education facilities existed at all. Only 23% of assessed settlements reported the existence of any current education services within walking distance.

SHELTERS AND SUPPLIES

Reports of frequent shelter destruction, combined with movement restrictions limiting access to rebuilding supplies, have left many residents of hard-to-reach settlements residing in makeshift shelters or tents. Higher rates of makeshift shelter utilization were reported for IDPs than for host communities. In Kukawa LGA, ten of 17 FGDs reported recent destruction of shelters in the assessed settlements.

3 most common shelter types, per LGA:

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**Access to religious/non-religious education by gender, assessed LGAs**

Of 96 FGDs, 31 reported the destruction of preexisting religious schools, due to either OAG-mandated closure or because the scholars who had previously led instruction fled. In settlements where religious schools were managed by OAGs, four FGDs reported that families were scared to send their girls to school because they would be more likely to be identified by OAGs for forced marriage.

**SOURCES OF INFORMATION**

Residents of hard-to-reach areas had little to no information on the availability of humanitarian aid services in LGA capitals. FGD participants attributed this limited awareness to some OAG restrictions on cell phone and radio ownership; poor mobile network coverage, in areas where cell phones are not prohibited; and misinformation provided to the public by OAGs, including being told that security forces will kill anyone arriving from hard-to-reach areas.

The most commonly requested sources of information about aid services were via radio and pamphlet drops from helicopters; the latter were mentioned by a group as the reason they sought refuge in Gwoza. Three FGDs requested that information on aid services, notably that aid exists, that livelihood opportunities exist and that safety exists, be made known to persons in the hard to reach areas by dropping pamphlets written in multiple languages from helicopters.

FGDs with radio access recommended relaying information about humanitarian aid via radio, with three FGDs strongly recommending that radio announcements be made which communicate that services are available and safety is possible be made by willing escapees known to community members in the hard-to-reach areas to increase trust in the source. Radio use was most common in Dikwa and Kukawa, where 31% and 29% of assessed settlements respectively reported it as the primary information source.

Mobile network coverage in hard-to-reach settlements was reported as rare, ranging from 0% in Kukawa LGA to 17% in Ngala LGA. Settlements close to the Cameroonian border, however, had much better coverage using Cameroonian SIM cards and were thereby able to relay updates to family members in other parts of the state. This method of communication is not without risk, as one FGD with participants from Gwoza reported that cell phone ownership was punishable by death.

**POPULATION MOVEMENT & DISPLACEMENT**

**Key Drivers of Displacement: Food Insecurity and Violence**

Hunger and OAG attacks were cited as the primary motivation for movement. Some IDPs, especially in Kukawa, Gwoza, and Bama LGAs, also expressed concern about encroaching fronts between OAGs and government forces.

IDPs expressed an overall tendency to flee to the nearest LGA capital. Maiduguri attracted IDPs from all areas of the state. The majority of movements were voluntary, though three groups from Bama and one group from Gwoza, reported that they were displaced by government forces. One group fleeing Kukawa in April reported that they were given a three-day notice to leave their settlement. In some events, government forces displaced civilians from the area amid operations for their own safety.

Participatory mapping exercises revealed consistent transport patterns. Of 96 groups, 91 traveled by foot at least part of the way, while 52 traveled by foot the entire way – typically over the course of several days. Government forces picked up groups of IDPs at consistent locations providing transportation assistance to IDP camps in LGA capitals, and in some instances providing food and water.

Hunger and thirst posed central challenges on these journeys. Many IDPs traveled on foot without shoes for several days and reported difficulty sleeping outside in open landscapes given fears of OAG attacks.

Attacks on escapees were distributed across multiple LGAs in both the north and central parts of Borno state, with no clear patterns, though none were reported from Kukawa LGA. Of 96 groups, 23 reported OAG attacks en-route. One group was returned to their settlement and escaped on the second attempt; four were robbed en-route, with no casualties; two involved child abductions; and five were serious attacks involving fatalities.

**Abductees: Unique Needs Profiles**

Four FGDs were conducted with escapees from settlements where nearly all remaining residents had been abducted from elsewhere. These settlements, primarily located in the Sambisa Forest, reported relatively low food security needs, but more severe protection needs. FGD participants from these settlements reported thousands of people remaining, and all expressed protection concerns regarding civilian casualties should conflict in these settlements intensify.

The largest stronghold, described as being located in Bama LGA, was reported to contain approximately 40,000 abducted IDPs – mostly women, and nearly all pregnant or breastfeeding as a result of forced marriage. In this hard-to-reach area, it was described that OAGs shared food with abductees, including meat from rustled livestock, and a hospital was run by abducted doctors. Fear of crossfire overwhelmed secondary concerns of enslavement, forcible marriage, and divorce. Escaped FGD participants relayed the gravity of the situation: “everyone is trying to escape.”

A second large settlement existed in the Sambisa Forest before the conflict; while residents were not abductees, they described that they were surrounded and trapped when the area was taken over by OAGs several years ago. Escapees from this group echoed concerns about escalation of conflict; men in particular were scared to attempt to flee for fear of being mistaken for OAGs, having heard of attacks on men fleeing Sambisa Forest.
Following years of conflict and harsh conditions, and difficult recent journeys, nearly all new arrivals from hard-to-reach areas expressed an intention to stay in IDP camps in LGA capitals. Respondents were hesitant to speculate on the potential conditions under which IDPs might return. However, most stated that guarantees of safety from government forces and confirmation of improved conditions from populations that remained would be requisite before considering returns. Respondents stated that the decisions to return would be made by male community leaders from the area of origin.

Access in hard-to-reach areas in Northeast Nigeria is perceived as a clear delineation between accessible and hard-to-reach areas, with few locations allowing intermittent access to service providers. However, a few assessed settlements reported recent receipt of nutrition supplementation (7% of assessed settlements), access to food (10% of assessed settlements), and vaccination services (12% of FGDs).

While there is no guarantee that recent partial access in these areas will persist, especially in LGAs with potentially deteriorating conditions, overlapping patterns for different types of distributions may indicate similar conditions that indicate opportunities for service providers.

A visual interpretation of the settlement-level results plotted on a map suggests that food distributions and supplemental feedings were limited to settlements in the immediate vicinity of LGA capitals or located directly off of main roads. The only reported exceptions were Kukawa LGA, where several food distributions were relatively further from garrison towns and more distant to main roads, and Bama LGA, where there was a concentration of distributions near the border with Cameroon. The bulk of identified hard-to-reach settlements are, logically, not conveniently located. New strategies will be required should humanitarian access be desired under current constraints.

Areas reporting polio vaccinations within the past six months included Doro and Kukawa wards of Kukawa LGA; Guzumala East, Guzamala West and Gudumbali West wards in Guzamala LGA; and Bita Izge ward of Gwoza. Bita Izge and Kukawa wards also reported recent supplemental nutrition distributions.

In five FGDs, participants from southern Bama reported access to some agricultural inputs and tools, due in part to trading routes accessible through Cameroon, and one mobile health clinic. These factors may be associated with less severe food insecurity indicators in Darajamal, Goniri, and Soye wards.

Together, food insecurity and violence against civilians have persisted as the driving forces behind IDP movements in Northeast Nigeria. Experiences in hard-to-reach areas also left strong impressions on IDPs, generating intense reluctance to return to their areas of origin.

The first large-scale H2R assessment paints a dire portrait of conditions for people left behind in hard-to-reach areas. Data collected from 9,315 key informants indicate that people remain in over 1,800 settlements in hard-to-reach areas. Many of those who have not yet undertaken the journey to LGA capitals are reported to be already internally displaced, undernourished, unaccompanied children, under five years of age, elderly, or pregnant. In short, the most vulnerable groups remain inaccessible to organizations capable of providing assistance. Barring significant shifts in territorial control, access negotiations will be required for humanitarian actors to reach these groups.

**CONCLUSION**

Together, food insecurity and violence against civilians have persisted as the driving forces behind IDP movements in Northeast Nigeria. Experiences in hard-to-reach areas also left strong impressions on IDPs, generating intense reluctance to return to their areas of origin.

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**About REACH**

REACH facilitates the development of information tools and products that enhance the capacity of aid actors to make evidence-based decisions. REACH activities are conducted through inter-agency aid coordination mechanisms. For more information, you can write to our country office: reach.ngnia@reach-initiative.org. Visit [www.reach-initiative.org](http://www.reach-initiative.org) and follow us on Twitter: @REACH_info and Facebook: www.facebook.com/IMPACT.init

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*Note: It should be noted that population estimates are taken from aggregated key informant interviews and therefore not derived from rigorous substantiation.*