



Focus group discussion with displaced women in Sangaya Camp, Dikwa. Photo credit: Mercy Corps

RAPID ASSESSMENT

Dikwa and Ngala Local Government Areas, Borno State

FEBRUARY 2017

The purpose of this rapid assessment was to establish the severity and range of humanitarian needs of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and host community members in Dikwa and Ngala Local Government Areas (LGAs), and develop recommendations for programmatic responses in the two areas. Mercy Corps conducted the assessment over a two-day period in mid-January 2017. Given the time constraints, Mercy Corps opted for focus group discussions and key informant interviews as opposed to household surveys. Other agencies operating in the area collected extensive secondary information beforehand.

Highlights

1. **None of the displaced people Mercy Corps spoke with has any immediate intention of returning home.** This is mainly due to fear of attacks and lack of resources to rebuild their lives and livelihoods from scratch upon return.
2. **While we observed that the nutrition crisis appears to have stabilized in these locations thanks to humanitarian interventions, people still need assistance in covering all of their basic needs, including food (currently provided by WFP).**

3. **Market activity is limited** in Dikwa because no one has enough money. The situation in the town of Gambaru in Ngala is better, as markets are supplied from Fotokol, a nearby bustling border town in Cameroon. Cash is still limited and there are no operating banks, so many people must barter.

4. **While some IDPs have tents provided by humanitarian responders, the majority still live in makeshift shelters built of sticks, straw, mud, scraps and whatever else is available.** Others have been taken in by host community members or are living in abandoned buildings, most of which are partially or fully destroyed and missing roofs, doors and windows.



5. **While the planting season is approaching in the coming months, most farmers have been unable to access their land due to continued insecurity.** However, both Dikwa and Ngala have many hectares of land within their secured perimeters that could be used for cultivation, providing both food and employment. The farmers who own the land, however, need cash to buy tools, seeds and pumps for irrigation.

Main Findings

Dikwa

Dikwa town was recaptured from Boko Haram in July 2015, after being deserted of all but a fraction of its inhabitants in August 2014. Since then, it has seen a steady increase of the IDP and returnee population. Current estimates show a total population of approximately 110,000 people, of which roughly 60,000 are IDPs. Most of the displaced people come from within Dikwa LGA itself; however, there are also several IDP communities from other nearby LGAs, notably Bama, Ngala, Kala-Balge, Marte and Mafa. The other 50,000 people are host community members, almost all of them former IDPs who have recently returned home.

There is a wide range of unmet needs in Dikwa town, with IDP and host community populations experiencing broadly similar levels of vulnerability. **Humanitarian priorities include:**

- **Food/Nutrition:** All those interviewed indicated that food was their priority. While rates of malnutrition in Dikwa appear to have stabilized since late 2016¹, there is an ongoing risk of pockets of malnutrition, particularly among those outside the main camps and new arrivals.
- **Fuel:** A severe shortage of firewood and alternative fuel sources is restricting the amount households are able to cook. Most people said that they were only able to cook once a day.
- **Shelter:** While the military has allowed IDPs to construct makeshift shelters within Dikwa town and to occupy public and private buildings, the shelters are often inadequate and the buildings are typically missing roofs, doors and windows. While the need to improve the makeshift shelters is great, space and land ownership is a challenge to providing improved shelter solutions to IDPs.

¹ According to ACF's Mid-Upper Arm Circumference (MUAC) screening in its Rapid SMART survey of December 2016, the Severe Acute Malnutrition (SAM) rate in Dikwa was 1.1% and the Moderate Acute Malnutrition (MAM) rate was 4.7%.

- **Basic household items:** Many IDP households are lacking a wide range of non-food items, particularly bedding, clothing and hygiene supplies. However, distributions by ICRC, UNICEF, IOM and UNHCR to a proportion of IDPs means that the immediate NFI needs of at least some households in or near camps have recently been met, including jerry cans, some items for cooking, mats, bed nets and hygiene consumables.
- **Livelihoods/Markets:** Many IDPs are desperate to start earning income and support themselves, but have no means to do so. There are no banks or microfinance service providers operating in the area, and strict restrictions on movement outside of the town minimize opportunities for daily labor on surrounding farms or foraging for firewood. Although the town's main market is functioning to a degree, prices for food staples are up to 40% higher than in Maiduguri, which is prohibitively expensive for many residents lacking cash.
- **WASH:** There is limited access to potable water sources, forcing people to walk long distances to collect water or pay vendors (50 naira for a 25-liter jerry can). Latrines are in short supply and the majority of IDPs said that the latrines in almost all the camps are filled, causing most people to resort to open defecation, with very limited access to water and soap for handwashing. Bathing takes place in the open and usually at night, a huge protection concern for women and children.
- **Protection:** While very few IDPs reported suffering or witnessing violence or intimidation, safety concerns were noted due to the long distances women and children must cover to access water, places to defecate and find firewood. In addition, the lack of electricity and sources of light inside and outside the camps also increases potential dangers.
- **Education:** Children in the town have been out of school for four years or more, and there is an absence of teachers and facilities, with many former schools used as shelters. While UNICEF recently built a makeshift primary school close to the Sangaya camp, children in camps farther away may not be able to access it.

Ngala

The IDP camp in the capital of Ngala LGA was established around the local secondary school at the end of 2015, after heavy fighting between the Nigerian Army and Boko Haram. The current population of the camp is estimated to be between 60,000 and 70,000 with additional IDPs arriving regularly. Places of origin include Ngala LGA itself as well as Bama, Mongunu, Kala Balge, Dikwa and Marte LGAs. Neighboring Gamburu town saw several deadly attacks by Boko Haram in 2014 and 2015, but was retaken by the Nigerian army in September 2015. The town's current population is estimated at 70,000 to 80,000 people, though host community representatives say that it is closer to 100,000. Although there are similar levels of destitution among IDPs in the Ngala camp and IDPs and host community members in Gamburu town, the majority of the assistance from the Nigerian Government agencies and international community has prioritized the camp.

Current humanitarian priorities include:

- **Food/Nutrition:** All those interviewed indicated that food was their priority. Rates of malnutrition in Ngala appear to have stabilized since an October 2016 MSF screening showed a SAM rate of 8.5% and a MAM rate of 14.3%.
- **Fuel:** As in Dikwa, most people said that they were only able to cook once a day due to the severe shortage of firewood and alternative fuel sources. Firewood is prohibitively expensive, and foraging outside of the town is limited and is difficult and dangerous. Sixteen IDPs were killed a few kilometers from the camp by the Nigerian Armed Forces after being mistaken for insurgents on 7 January 2017.
- **Shelter:** The majority (75%) of IDPs in Ngala camp are living in inadequate makeshift shelters. Those in the town are occupying damaged houses or school buildings.
- **Basic household items:** Many IDP households in Ngala camp lack a wide range of basic non-food items. However, distributions by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)/Nigerian Red

Cross and, more recently, the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) and International Organization for Migration (IOM) have made a significant difference.

- **Livelihoods/Markets:** As in Dikwa, many IDPs are desperate to support themselves, but have no means to start income generating activities and are restricted from moving outside of the town. The main livelihood of the area's population is farming, and while there are relatively extensive areas of fertile, irrigable land between Ngala and Gambaru, most people lack the necessary inputs. Gambaru town has a large, busy market, thanks to its proximity to Fotokol across the river in Cameroon, but no banks or microfinance service providers are operating, so most of the trade is barter-based.
- **WASH:** According to the Red Cross, Ngala camp has seven functional hand pumps and six solar powered boreholes. These water points have an average queuing time of 30 minutes to one hour and provide an average of five liters of water per person each day, well below the SPHERE standard of 15 liters per person each day. The camp has 150 unimproved household latrines and 30 septic tanks converted to direct drop pit latrines, translating to an average of one latrine per 310 people.
- **Protection:** According to BAMCOPI, UNHCR's implementing partner, the main protection concerns in Ngala relate to exposure of women and children while fetching and waiting for water or firewood, inadequate shelter and lacking lighting around the camp and the town. While there does not appear to be any open hostility between IDPs and host community members, the perception that only Ngala camp-based IDPs are receiving assistance is starting to generate resentment and a cause of grievance.
- **Education:** Primary education is taking place in Ngala camp thanks to volunteer teachers and the support of the U.N. children's fund (UNICEF), albeit with huge class sizes of over 40 children at a time. In Gambaru, UNICEF recently built a makeshift primary school.

Recommendations and Next Steps

It is critical to ensure there is an adequate supply of short-term humanitarian assistance for those in need, even as the emphasis shifts to long-term reconstruction. At the same time, assistance must be flexible enough so that when opportunities arise to stimulate local markets, interventions can quickly shift from in kind aid to cash and livelihoods activities.

Food security: Engage in direct food distributions to IDPs – and host community households outside of camps – in coordination with other agencies on the ground. Conduct a nutrition awareness campaign alongside the provision of food baskets. Start tracking market prices and engaging in dialogue with vendors and the Nigerian military to establish modalities for voucher-based food distributions as soon as conditions allow.

Cash transfers: After food, the priority needs cited by beneficiaries vary significantly. Thus, cash transfers could be by far the most cost-effective way of providing flexible assistance to IDPs.

Shelter: Related to cash transfers, shelter reconstruction could be linked to cash for work activities with technical supervision in place to ensure shelter quality and safety.

Livelihoods/Markets: Support for restarting livelihoods should begin as soon as a market assessment has been carried out and viability established. Both Dikwa and Ngala have many hectares of land that could be used for cultivation if people had the necessary tools and inputs. Other than farming, IDPs and host community members suggested operating grinding mills, catering, tailoring and knitting, petty trade and fishing. In the short-to-medium term, cash for work projects could provide temporary employment and help rehabilitate community infrastructure, including schools, health and sanitation facilities, and rural roads, particularly for those not yet able to undertake independent income generation. The markets in both Gambaru (Ngala LGA) and Bakin Kasuwa (Dikwa LGA) also have the capacity to provide more employment as they are currently only operating at a fraction of their pre-crisis capacity.

WASH and Protection: There are extensive needs in both Dikwa and Ngala, however several other agencies are already engaged or planning to be engaged in these sectors, notably UNICEF, the Red Cross, Médecins Sans Frontières, UNHCR, FHI360, Solidarite and Secours Islamique Francais. Further dialogue and in-depth assessments would be required before engaging in sector-specific programs in these areas. In the meantime, protection should be integrated on a cross cutting basis across all interventions, with intentional measures to reduce vulnerable groups to risks.

Recovery: Interventions in both Dikwa and Ngala should include a plan for a recovery and resilience-building phase later in the process, even if the timing of the start-up of this work is hard to predict.

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