Gender and Solidarity in Times of Armed Conflict: A Case Study of Internally Displaced Women

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Abstract

Persistent social, economic, and environmental pressures are causing more people to leave their homes and livelihoods, seeking refuge in safer locations, on a temporary or long-term basis. Hence, Refugees, asylum seekers, and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) are increasing globally, resulting in complex humanitarian challenges. Historically, the global crisis of internal displacement emerged on the global agenda in the late 1980s resulting from violent conflicts, internal strife, systematic violations as well as other natural factors which have resulted in severe loss of assets and lives, and food insecurity. Among the most vulnerable are internally displaced women, who are primary targets of violence due to their care-giving roles and responsibilities. Hence, this study aims to explore the experiences and responses of IDP women to such violent transformations and ongoing disruptions in their lives. Particularly, the role of solidarity in fostering a sense of belonging and improving their community experiences and psychological well-being. The theory employed in this study is the empowerment theory. The theories of empowerment involve both process and outcomes suggesting that actions, activities, or structures may be empowering and that the outcome of such processes results in a level of being empowered. Also, the paper draws on information from secondary data sourced from books, journals, and published works on the internet in examining relevant issues and aiming at a conclusion. The findings of the study indicate that a strong sense of solidarity through the transformative potential of empowering displaced women can foster positive change in conflict-affected communities.

Keywords: Conflict, Empowerment, Gender, IDP, Solidarity, Woman

Introduction

Persistent social, economic, and environmental pressures are causing more people to leave their homes and livelihoods, seeking refuge in safer locations, on a temporary or long-term basis. Historically, the global crisis of internal displacement emerged on the global agenda in the late 1980s resulting from violent conflicts, internal strife, systematic violations, and natural factors (Cohen, 2004). The World experienced the highest ever rate of migration since the beginning of the 21st century, even tagged "century of people on the move" by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, António Guterres in 2011

(United Nations General Assembly, 2011). By the end of 2017, the Internal Displacement Monitoring Center (IDMC, 2018) puts the total global internal displacement head count at 40 million with 30.6 million new displacements. These displacements are both conflict and disaster-related, spread across 143 countries and territories. Out of 30.6 million new human displacements, 11.8 million people were displaced by violent conflicts while 18.8 million other displacements were linked to natural disasters. The regions affected by disasters include Africa, Asia, the Americas, and Europe with Sub-Saharan Africa leading in violent conflict-related displacements (IDMC, 2018).

The causes of internal displacement of persons are multi-faceted, complex, and often overlapping. For example, armed conflict between states or non-state actors; generalized violence, man-made disasters, climate change, ethno-religious clashes, insurgency, natural disasters, and developmental projects are general causes or reasons for internal displacement in Nigeria (Omoraka, 2021). The global effects of internal displacement and forced migration constitute significant impacts on the countries' economies, particularly the huge task of providing humanitarian response to affected persons and communities for a sustained period until normalcy is returned. In terms of spending, a great deal of resources is needed to provide such responses: humanitarian responses have high capital costs (Eriksson et al., 1996).

Internally displaced persons often exist on the margins of society and are subject to several vulnerabilities because of their displacement. For instance, IDPs face an immediate need for protection and assistance in finding adequate shelter, food, and health care. Over time, they can suffer discrimination in accessing public services and finding employment on account of being an IDP from another region or town. IDPs also face an especially high risk of losing ownership of their housing, property, and land, something which can lead to loss of livelihoods and economic security as well as physical security. Women and children, who often make up the majority of IDP populations, face an acute risk of sexual exploitation and abuse. According to Azam (2008), the challenges faced by IDPs, include hunger and starvation, lack of education, acute malnutrition, insecurity, trauma and bitterness, Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs), poor waste management, and lack of electricity, and lack of good water among others.

However, despite the overwhelming challenges and devastation caused by the conflict, people in internally displaced persons' camps have found ways to cope. The collective grief suffered by the people motivates them to participate in mutual

actions to find solutions to hard-living situations at such times. As Durkheim (1995) believes, society will find its social glue to engage with each other and overcome challenges. Extreme instability can motivate people to cooperate and foster social solidarity, even in the most difficult circumstances. Women in the camp share their experiences to ease the process of finding accommodation and overcoming everyday challenges. Moreover, they collaborate and work in mixed or separated groups in a new context (Puente, 2011). These activities flourish because women identify themselves as subject to the same threat and assume an attitude of collaboration and solidarity when they recognize that the struggle of each is the struggle of all (Da Silva et al., 2015). In such circumstances, the feeling of belonging to a community is significant, according to Da Silva et al. (2015), and this feeling becomes even stronger when the challenges are greater. Therefore, this study seeks to explore gender and solidarity in times of armed conflict: a case study of internally displaced women.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

a) Gender: According to UNICEF Gender Mainstreaming Framework (2014), the term gender refers to the roles and responsibilities of men and women that are created in families, societies, and culture. It can also include the expectations held about the characteristics, aptitudes, and likely behaviours of both women and men in terms of their nature, i.e., being either feminine or masculine. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO) Gender Policy (2002), gender is used to describe characteristics of men and women that are socially constructed, however, when using it in the context of sex, it defines the biological constitution of individuals. This is to explain that people are born either female or male, learn to be girls and boys, and grow up into women and men. The learned behaviour constitutes the gender identity which eventually determines roles assigned to each gender.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) defines gender as:

> the qualities associated with men and women that are socially and culturally, than biologically determined. Gender includes how society differentiates appropriate behaviour and access to power for women and men. Although the details vary from society to society and change over time, gender relations tend to include a strong element of inequality between women and men and are strongly influenced by ideology (UNDP, 1986, p. 258).

From the above definitions, we can see that gender is a socially constructed phenomenon that differentiates women from men and thereby creates a system through which roles and certain features (feminine or masculine), attributes (weak or strong), and expectations are assigned to women and men in society.

b) Woman: A woman is an adult female person, who has passed the age of puberty. Womanhood was defined within the African cosmic order as "a human being endowed with all the capacities and talents required to effectively function and make an impact on all levels of life within the society (African Leadership Forum Dialogue, 1993, p.5). The above African definition of woman implies that human beings are equally created and endowed to effectively participate in the life of the community. Women were therefore seen in the African traditional context to be effectively and dynamically involved in all levels of the social process as they actively participate in the life of the community. According to (Sofola, 1981, p.52), the worldview underscores the idea that both genders (male and female) have the same divine source even though each has its distinctive roles to play in the life of the community. In essence, one cannot do without the other, and any form of inequality is unacceptable. However, the African woman is also perceived on the following levels of her reality:

i. As a human being, a counterpart of man at all levels of the social and economic order.
ii. As a daughter, the counterpart of a son, with the roles and a presence that only a daughter can fill. Important and powerful institutions of a daughter (e.g. Umuada) have remained vital.
iii. As a mother, a woman is seen as the seat of life, and plays the role of nurturing, sustenance, and stabilisation of life within the family and the community in general.
iv. As a wife, spouse to a man, and partner in the business of making a home, a community, and a society (African Leadership Dialogue, 1993, p.5).

c) Conflict: Conflict as a term is used usually for the range of arguments, tensions, and violent conflicts that occur both within and between states (Burton, 1993). It is therefore defined as the pursuit of incompatible goals or interests by different groups or individuals. This definition by implication, asserts the intrinsic and inevitable nature of conflict in human life. All humans or groups of humans have goals and interests which may be different from the goals and interests of other groups.

Since the Cold War, the concept of conflict has gained paramount importance (Al-Majali, 2017). Conflict is an inherent aspect of human interaction, occurring among individuals, families, tribes, clans, nation-states, and city-states, and can manifest in various forms, such as social, political, cultural, and symbolic (Brecher, 2008). It encompasses a wide spectrum, ranging from minor familial disputes to armed conflicts, crises, and wars, with diverse scopes and outcomes (Al-Majali, 2017). A fundamental element in defining conflict is the presence of two or more parties with opposing goals, wherein meeting the needs of one party may lead to the neglect of the other's needs (AlMajali, 2017). Such conflicts can drive social development or escalate into radical political developments (Al-Majali, 2017). Generally, conflicts are categorized into three types: intrastate, inter-state, and trans-state.

d) Solidarity: The Oxford Dictionary defines solidarity as unity or agreement of feeling or action, especially among individuals with a common interest; mutual support within a group. Solidarity is an awareness of shared interests, objectives, standards, and sympathies creating a psychological sense of unity in groups or classes.

In the twelfth century, the term used to indicate solidarity in the Islamic world was "'Asabiyah." Ibn Khaldun, in his al-Muqaddimah, postulates the need to have 'Asabiyah in building a strong civilization. 'Asabiyah or "esprit de corps" represents the bond of cohesion among humans in a group-forming community. In other words, 'Asabiyah is the state of mind that makes individuals identify with a group and subordinate their interests to the group's interests (Dusuki, 2006).

e) Internally Displaced Persons (IDP): Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) are "persons or groups of persons who have been forced to flee their homes or places of habitual residence suddenly or unexpectedly as a result of armed conflict, internal strife, systematic violations of human rights or natural or man-made disasters, who have not crossed an internationally recognized state border (Kampala Convention, 2009). In other words, IDPs refers to persons who have been displaced by natural disasters or violent conflicts from their homes and traditional support structures and have not crossed the borders of their countries. They are victims of various kinds of injustices, and violent attacks orchestrated by their government or others against them. According to Durosaro and Ajiboye (2011), there are two major components of IDPs the coercive or otherwise involuntary character of movement and the fact that such movement takes place within national borders. Some of the most common causes of involuntary

movements are armed conflicts, violence, human rights violations, and disasters among others. This gives no choice to people but to leave their homes, depriving them of the most essential protection mechanisms, such as community networks, access to services, and livelihoods. The second component of the IDPs is the movement within national borders.

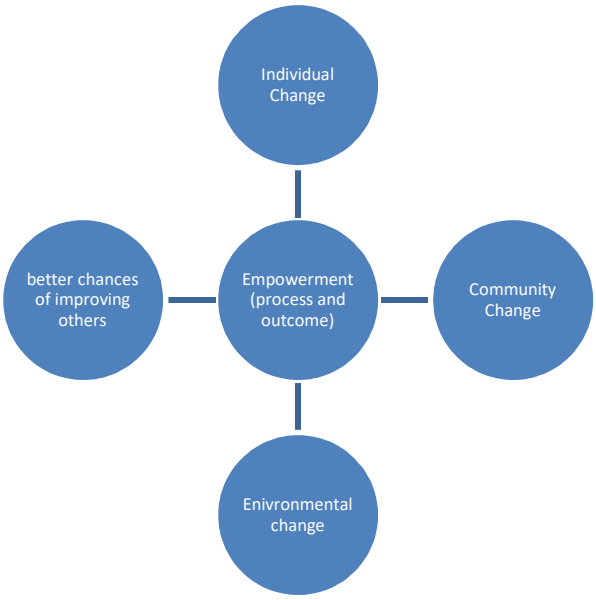
In contrast to refugees, internally displaced persons do not cross an internationally recognized boundary. They remain within the borders of the country of their citizenship or formal residence. As such, they are subject to the laws of this country, which, according to the Guiding Principles, has the "primary duty and responsibility to provide protection and humanitarian assistance to internally displaced persons". This responsibility includes protecting IDPs from discriminatory practices and guaranteeing their political and civil rights.

f) Empowerment: Empowerment is also seen as: "the process by which people, organisations or groups who are powerless (a) become aware of the power dynamics at work in their life context; (b) develop the skills and capacity for gaining some reasonable control over their lives; (c) exercise this control without infringing upon the rights of others; and (d) support the empowerment of others in the community". (Rowlands, 1997, p. 25).According to Akanbi and Jekayinfa (2011), empowerment is the process of increasing the capacity of individuals or groups to make choices and transform those choices into the desired actions and outcomes. Furthermore, empowerment is also recognized as an essential strategy to strengthen the well-being of individuals, families, and communities. Based on this, the World Bank suggested outcomes of empowerment of women should be a key aspect of all social development programmes (World Bank, 2001). In line with this statement, Allahdadi (2011, p. 40) sees "the empowerment of women as a means for them to have the necessary ability to undertake several tasks either individually or in a group so that they have further access to and control of societal resources".

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

To provide a rational explanation for this study, the study adopts the Empowerment theory. The theory of empowerment has been identified in 2 forms which are: the empowerment process and the outcome which are embedded in individual, community, and organisational empowerment, Swift and Levin (1987) and Zimmerman (2000) believe that "theories of empowerment include both process and outcomes suggesting that actions, activities or structures may be empowering and that the outcome of such processes results in a level of being

empowered". As emphasised by Sadan (1997), empowerment creates a change in human behavior and in the social structure which goes in a cyclical mode. The potential for community empowerment exists in every environment, just as the potential for individual empowerment exists in every person. In every process of individual empowerment, there also exists a potential for community empowerment as every process of community empowerment creates an environment that facilitates individual empowerment and at the same time also shapes and determines its form (Maton & Rappaport ,1984). Thus, every individual in society has an important part to play in development of the society. The improvement of women and their access to education enhances the economic independence of women and makes them better people in the community they find themselves. This implies that, as women find themselves in certain circumstances, their ability to help themselves with skills enables them to develop each other. Thus, each woman plays a key role in the institutional process of empowerment.



Source: Authors compilation, 2024

METHODOLOGY

This study relies solely on secondary data. The secondary data were collected from journals, relevant textbooks, government publications, internet materials as well other relevant publications. Descriptive analysis was used to analyze the data gathered which was presented in narrative.

WOMEN SOLIDARITY PATTERNS IN IDP CAMPS

Solidarity between internally displaced persons, especially among women, is magnificent. This is because women in the camp share their experiences to ease the process of finding accommodation as well as overcoming everyday challenges. Moreover, they collaborate and work in mixed or separated groups in a new context (Puente, 2011). These activities flourish because women identify themselves as subject to the same threat and assume an attitude of collaboration and solidarity when they recognize that the struggle of each is the struggle of all (Da Silva et al., 2015). In such circumstances, the feeling of belonging to a community is significant, according to Da Silva et al. (2015), and this feeling becomes even stronger when the challenges are greater.

People live a life of satisfaction before displacement. They have access to food and even a surplus. But because of war, people's lives become changed; they lose their property, and thus trust is broken. These displaced people usually find themselves in a place where the main necessities of life are not found. They come with only the clothes on them. People will steal from each other, and if a person does not have 'faith,' he will steal from others because he has reached a stage where he does not have his day's food. War has a catastrophic impact on the well-being of nations. Conflict destroys families and communities and sometimes disrupts the development of nations' economic and social fabric (Murthy & Lakshminarayana, 2006). Many studies have shown that conflict situations cause more disability and mortality than any major disease (Murthy & Lakshminarayana, 2006).

Mawa (2020), using an exploratory sequential mixed method and an ethnographic approach, investigated women's social solidarity practices in a time of armed conflict inside the Abu-Shouk camp. The study indicates that conflict leads to an increase in female–to–male ratios and Women-Headed Households (WHH) which is evident in Darfur where women and children make up the majority of IDPs. Similarly, in the Abu-Shouk camp, females and children comprise more than 60% of the total IDPs, and women head approximately 33% of all households (Camp Administrative, 2020.). These numbers reflect a demographic imbalance (Berry, 2015). Moreover, the gender-related effect of conflict on family demography increases the number of widows and WHH in post-conflict settings. For example, in the Abu Shouk camp, the percentage of married women whose husbands do not live with them is 33%, and the total rate of widows and divorced women is 13% (Mawa, 2020).

The study indicated that living in the camp was very difficult for most IDPs, especially for women; this was due to their inability to adapt to the new living conditions as a result of many challenges. These included the small size of residences provided whereby each family was assigned a tent sized 100 meters, a space too small for a family. The second problem was the lack of accessible fire-building sources such as charcoal or firewood. This type of resource could be found in a remote area where women were exposed to the risk of rape and as such difficult for them to go to such places. Moreover, there was always a conflict between ethnic groups either inside the camps or where water was located. Also, these conflicts between the different ethnic groups resulted from "injustice and resentment." This is because of the nature of the conflict. During the war, some tribes were marginalized, and other tribes were subjected to high violence. So, when these people came to the camp, they were afraid to bond with other people.

Similarly, finding jobs constituted another difficulty for IDPs because their agro-pastoral production qualifications did not coincide with the city's economic sector requirements. This led to an increase in unemployment among internally displaced men. Additionally, new and unfamiliar expenses became the norm, relating to access to clean water, electricity, and fares for local public transportation. The only sources are water pumps located at specific places inside the camp. The lack of water and food worsened IDPs' living and health conditions - the combination of these elements increased the level of poverty among the IDPs (Mawa, 2023, p.13).

Consequent upon the challenges, the IDPs in the Abu-Shouk camp had to reduce the number of meals from three or four per day. They mostly depended on relief food, which was insufficient to nourish the entire family unit. Families in the Abu-Shouk camp found themselves alone and confronted by the difficulties of managing their lives in the camp. Therefore, families in the Abu-Shouk camp, especially women, had to interact and adapt to the new conditions and lifestyle. One of the mechanisms that helped them overcome those challenges was unity and cooperation.

The study shows that women adopted several practices that helped them cope with everyday challenges. They consciously created unity groups with a sense of shared purpose and social cohesion to safely move at night to fetch water and firewood. They also bonded with other families to find strength in numbers and sleep together at night to feel safe. Each woman built a social circle that provided them with the financial and emotional support necessary to go through the day.

The findings indicate that women in the Abu-Shouk camp have two different social circles that vary based on their family and community's support level and social connections.

When they wanted to solve social problems such as meeting basic needs, women turned to their closely related family or neighbour. This could be due to women considering their neighbour as their families. According to them, family is not about blood relations -- family is people who live within the same space, have the same religion, and share the same pain. These women also collaborate more with their social support group and less with people outside their support group. Thus, there is a high level of social solidarity inside the social circle support and weak solidarity outside it. The data found high cohesion and structural unity inside the social support circle. In this social support group, members have strong, enduring, and direct relations with each other. In other words, women in this group are highly connected; hence, they have great unity. Second, women created several association groups such as monetary savings groups and religious groups. These associations helped them in many ways; for instance, savings associations helped the women start new jobs without taking bank loans. Then the study explores the contributions of women in building peace and social cohesion inside the camp. The results indicate that women's agency plays a significant role in gradually transforming the broken relationships in the Abu-Shouk camp. The study classifies women's agency into individual and collective agency. Women's roles as mothers and caregivers shape their individual agency, whereas their collective agency is carried out through women-led associations that create a space for interpersonal and intergroup discussions among women. These associations also engage in activities that empower women, such as skill acquisition and savings groups.

Similarly, in a study carried out by Brookings-LSE (2013) in Côte d'Ivoire, it was found that Internal displacement is not a new phenomenon in Côte d'Ivoire. Conflict and displacement in Côte d'Ivoire are linked to competition for political power, the economic downturn, and a corresponding sharp increase in poverty in a country that had previously enjoyed a comparatively high standard of development. In many ways, women have borne the brunt of the country's conflicts and its protracted displacement situation. Displaced women suffered numerous human rights violations, and along with their families have struggled to re-establish sustainable livelihoods – both while displaced, and upon returning to their communities or seeking out another solution to their displacement. The conflict destroyed the productive capital of thousands of households, and a

marked increase in single-parent families due to the death of many men in the violence. Looting, destruction, and land-grabbing have undercut the economic sectors (including subsistence agriculture and petty trade) that typically employ the poorest of the poor, particularly female heads of household.

This research underlines the importance of understanding the gender dimensions of IDP livelihoods, taking into account household-level dynamics and the broader socio-economic context within which livelihood interventions are implemented. While many displaced women assume new roles as primary breadwinners of their families, this research suggests that the ability of displaced women to develop relevant adaptation strategies, particularly through the creation of sustainable livelihoods, depends in part on the socio-economic status of their households before the crisis. Without other employed household members, many middle-class Ivorian women cut off from their area of origin or their social networks encountered difficulties adapting and re-establishing means of existence – they are the main victims of a conflict-induced drop in social status.

These women have relied in particular on mobility and solidarity networks – particularly the support of host families – to secure their livelihoods. Strategically, moving between different camps, between camps and host families, and between host communities and communities of origin, enabled many displaced families to protect key productive assets such as houses, and diversify their livelihood strategies by engaging in various kinds of employment and maintaining professional activities. Maximizing the value of mobility as an adaptation strategy requires the restoration of a minimum degree of security, and the possibility of moving the physical assets associated with displaced persons' livelihoods (e.g. goods for trade, tools, etc.). The extent to which IDPs could use mobility to advance their livelihoods is shaped by gender and family configurations. Mobility is a more accessible option for larger families that include adult men and women. These families could, for example, send an adult family member back to the community of origin to work and assess conditions, while the rest of the family remained in the host community. In contrast, displaced families headed by single mothers were more likely to become "trapped" in camps or informal settlements as they lacked the resources to move between locations. For families facing insecure conditions in host communities, mobility was not always an entirely free choice and could undercut their livelihoods. For example, many displaced women in Côte d'Ivoire work in petty trade. The need to move multiple times in search of improved security meant that these women had to constantly restart the process of

establishing a place to do business and building networks and a customer base, with negative impacts on the profitability of their work.

In a study carried out by Aham-Chiabuotu (2019) on the 'Suffering, Solidarity, and Spirituality: The Lived Experiences of Internally Displaced Women in Northern Nigeria', utilizing a hermeneutic phenomenological approach located within the constructionist paradigm to explore the lived experiences of women who were displaced by Boko Haram insurgency, the study investigated women's perspectives of their experiences, both with Boko Haram and with displacement, and the historical, socio-cultural, and structural factors that underpin those experiences and how they interpret them. As well as their empowerment through community building and mutual solidarity which enabled them to thrive amid displacement.

Rather than cast the internally displaced women as helpless and powerless victims, this study foregrounds the women's strength and resilience and projects them as the heroines of the Boko Haram insurgency. The study shows the women's commitment and determined effort to ensure the survival of their male partners, their children, and their communities. Survival for the women in this study demanded a process of continuous negotiation with both humans and supernatural beings. They drew on the knowledge of their indigenous cultures, which includes African traditional religious beliefs, their Christian and Islamic religions, and their spirituality to resist different forms of oppression while they pragmatically supported their men in their struggles. Their culture, religion and spirituality also provided a framework for interpreting their experiences of violence, including sexual violence, and gave them the impetus for selfless service towards their collective survival as internally displaced persons.

As a form of defence against antagonism and exploitation, as well as a way of maximizing the 'benefits' of their status as IDPs, the women cooperated with other IDPs. Their identity as Internally Displaced Women became the basis for their social solidarity amid their displacement. In their construction of a shared identity, they formed a community of belonging; this enabled them to perform a collective form of resistance to exploitation. No wonder Collin (2000) asserts that oppression and activism are intricately linked and that when power operates in a dialectical relationship, it gives birth to collective action and mutual solidarity. Solidarity for collective survival is embedded in the African philosophical worldview (Collins, 2000; Kambon, 1996; Kaoma, 2010; Karenga, 2007; Karenga, 2012; Karenga & Tembo, 2012). The women organized themselves

alongside their men and worked through their 'big people' to secure their place in displacement. These big people were the rich men and political officeholders who were living in Abuja before their arrival. As IDP communities, they try to address the government's exclusionary leadership by establishing a more 'inclusive' alternative as well as devising 'equitable' processes of resource distribution. They also established rules and promoted cultural norms that were supposed to protect women from sexual violence. They took charge of the distribution of donated items to ensure that every family received a 'fair' share. The participants who lived in informal camps established connections with some Human Rights Activists and politicians who in turn made a case for them to the government, for them to be recognized as IDPs and be allowed to retain their place in camps until a durable solution was found for them.

Through collective action, the IDP communities were able to earmark and demarcate their own 'territory of belonging', in political terms, from the larger society by placing signboards on which the names of their pre-displacement communities and towns were boldly written. These sign boards served as both physical and symbolic barriers against potentially invasive and exploitative 'outsiders' to the IDP experience. Their organization and place demarcation enabled them to arrange for camp security guards (vigilantes). They also demanded external security from the government. These acts of collective resistance and demand for their rights attest to the fact that camps are not always apolitical spaces inhabited by docile and helpless victims (Agier, 2010; Branch, 2008; Häkli, Pascucci, & Kallio, 2017; Ilcan, 2018; Ilcan & Rygiel, 2015; Redclift, 2013; Sigona, 2015). Rather, such sites are often inhabited by politically intelligent, as well as culturally and historically embedded individuals (Branch, 2008).

Also, another source of empowerment was the women's decision to create functional units for mutual support. People utilized their skills for the benefit of the entire community in each of the settlements. Some of the women served as community midwives, some volunteered as teachers for the children, while others trained fellow internally displaced women in crafts. Thus, while the women struggled to meet the needs of their family members, their relationship with other women constituted a safe place from where they could both resist their oppression and contribute to the common good (Collins, 2000; HudsonWeems, 1995; Karenga & Tembo, 2012). It is also worthy to note that among the women, a commitment to collective survival tended to transcend age, tribal and religious boundaries.

In the face of the multiple oppressions and survival needs, what mattered to the women was that they and their families were supported and they believed that God (be it the Muslim Allah or the Christian God) would reward them. Through mutual solidarity and a bond of sisterhood, the women worked for the collective survival of not just their IDP communities, but their ancestral communities whose survival depended on the women's ability to deliver and raise more children. However, the solidarity and mutual support which most of the women talked about did not guarantee the equal and equitable IDP communities they expected to build. There were varied interests that often conflicted with group norms and interests. They also represented multiple identities even as members of 'united' IDP communities. Such differences often shaped the specific ways in which individual women lived and interpreted their experiences, suffering and oppression (Collins, 2000). As a result of the differences, not all personal interests were met, some community leadership arrangements excluded some individuals and groups, and some women had more privileges than others because of their social status. For example, some of the women who could communicate in English language had an advantage over those who could not. They could communicate directly with donors and they were the ones that were likely to be included in training and other empowerment programmes. As such, there were big people and small people in the IDP communities. Unlike the 'big people' described earlier, 'big people' in this context, refers to camp leaders and other powerful IDPs, both men and women, who were often in charge of material and opportunity distribution. A similar situation was reported in Darfur camps where individuals described as 'camp sheikhs' literally controlled everybody and everything in the camps (De Waal, 2009).

Conclusion

This paper investigated Gender and Solidarity in times of Armed Conflict among Internally Displaced Women. The paper reveals that while the armed conflicts brought hardships to women, it has also served as a catalyst for empowerment. The transformative effects of their experiences in the camp and engagement have gone a long way in reshaping women's aspirations, knowledge of their rights, and determination to achieve their goals, while striving to improve their status. They utilized such knowledge to navigate through the challenges of insurgencies, captivity and displacement. They also asserted themselves as culturally embedded political subjects, who knew and were capable of demanding their rights, in unique and non-conventional ways.

Notably, women in the IDP camps formed united groups that provided crucial financial and emotional support. Being united by a strong sense of solidarity, they overcome the most challenging circumstances, recognizing that mutual support is essential for overcoming daily obstacles. The spirit of cooperation that emerged amidst their living conditions exemplified the true essence of solidarity for the women in IDP camps. As a result, the effects of conflict on women extend beyond victimization, revealing their resilience and capacity for agency. These women derived a sense of achievement and empowerment from their abilities to survive and also contribute significantly to the survival of their families as well as communities. On the whole, their quest for survival was not centred on themselves but rather saw themselves as part of a community where an individual's survival is connected to the survival of others. Hence, they continued to make personal sacrifices for the collective survival of members of the IDP community, beyond religious and tribal barriers, while working together for a common good. The transformation observed in the lives of these women brings to the fore the critical role of social support systems, educational opportunities, and awareness of rights in empowering women. These findings have broader implications for conflict-affected regions and highlight the importance of recognising and fostering women's agency and solidarity in fostering positive change within communities.

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