

NORTHWEST NIGERIA

Accountability to Affected Populations

February 2023



CONTEXT AND RATIONALE

This report focuses on key topics related to accountability to affected populations, a **commitment by humanitarian actors to actively solicit the views, opinions and preferences of crisis-affected populations, prioritising their involvement in decision-making.**

For the last decade, the seven states that comprise the Northwest region of Nigeria have experienced deadly inter-communal conflict and organised crime, resulting in more than 450,000 displaced people across Katsina, Sokoto and Zamfara States alone.¹ Underlying the region's accelerating insecurity and extreme poverty is the desertification of land brought on by climate change,

which has left millions of pastoralists and farmers without their principal sources of livelihood.² Due to the relative lack of information on the needs and vulnerabilities of crisis-affected populations in the Northwest, it is critical to better understand key topics from their perspectives, including the populations' assessment of their needs, their preferences regarding type and modality of assistance, as well as preferred communication mechanisms. In areas where information is scarce, it is paramount for humanitarian actors to understand the views of those affected by conflict and displacement, in order to be responsive to their needs and ensure the relevance of any service provision and communication with communities.

KEY FINDINGS

- Findings suggest that the majority of assessed households across Katsina, Sokoto, and Zamfara never received assistance (89%), despite nearly all households having multi-sectoral humanitarian needs (96%). Among those who reportedly received assistance (10%), more than half received it from the government, while less than a quarter received support from international NGOs or UN agencies.
- In line with the low levels of assistance provided in the assessed areas, findings suggest that consultations with communities to solicit their opinions or preferences regarding types or modalities of aid provision were uncommon. Where consultations did take place, women often reportedly felt left out of these processes, with community leaders - predominantly men - mainly being consulted on behalf of communities.
- Findings suggest that information needs are high and – reflective of the dire situation faced by many communities in the region – the types of information predominantly needed pertain to meeting basic needs, such as how to find food, water, and healthcare.
- Literacy rates appeared to vary between states and population groups, with IDP households in Sokoto and Zamfara in particular reporting lower levels of literacy than non-displaced households.
- Hausa was decidedly the preferred language of communication across the three States and face-to-face communication was the preferred means of receiving information and giving feedback.

89%

of households reported **never having received assistance**

83%

of households reported wanting to receive **food assistance** in the future

98%

of households reported a **need for information** from assistance providers

1. IOM Displacement Tracking Matrix, "IDP Atlas as of October 2022, Mobility Tracking - North-Central and North-West Nigeria," (2022).

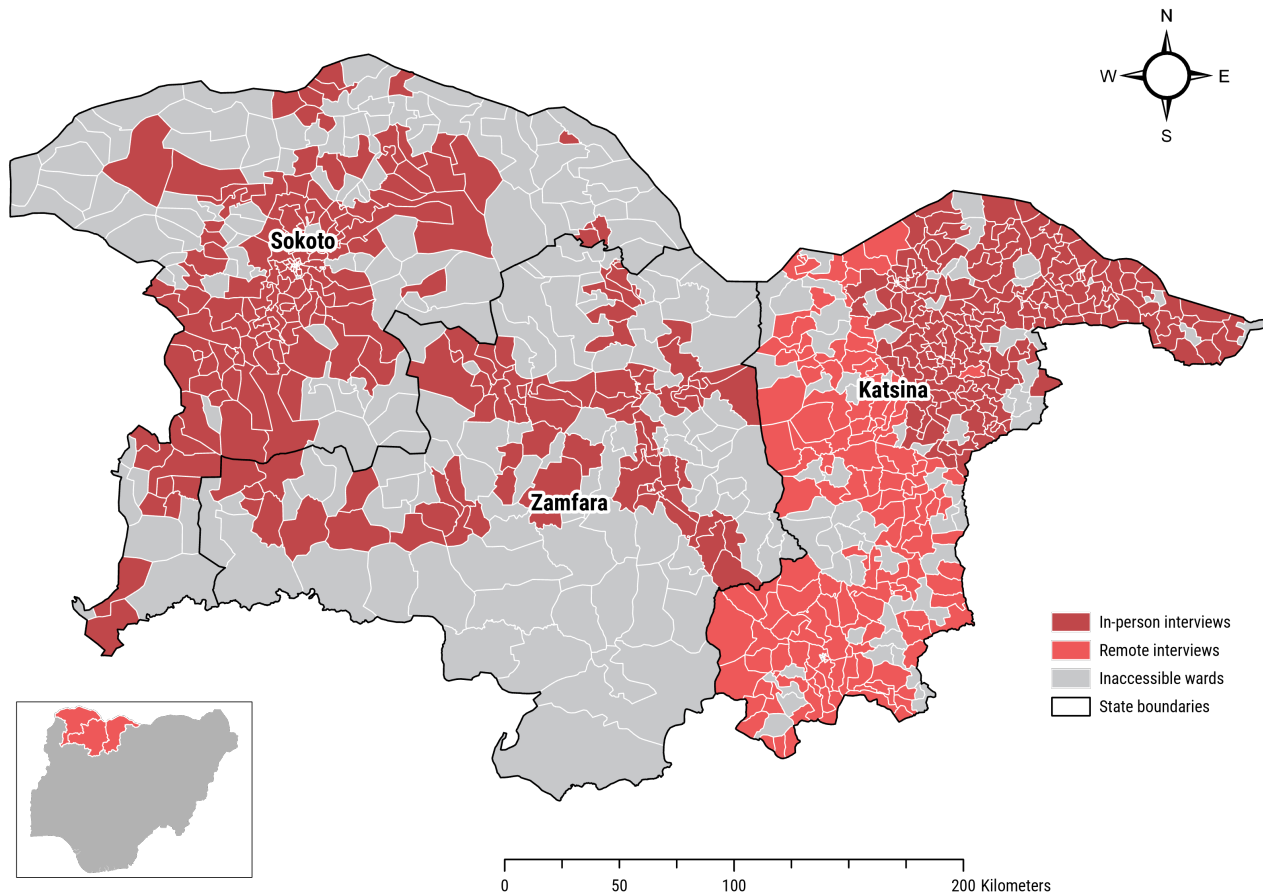
2. OCHA, "Nigeria Humanitarian Needs Overview 2022," February 2022.

METHODOLOGY

To better understand needs and vulnerabilities in the Northwest, between March and July 2022, REACH conducted the first household-level multi-sector needs assessment (MSNA) in the Northwestern states of Katsina, Sokoto, and Zamfara, surveying 11,090 households in 1,335 settlements across 71 local government areas (LGAs). The sample of non-displaced households is representative with a 92% confidence level and a 10% margin of error at the State level, while findings from the displaced households are generalisable with a 92% confidence level and a 10% margin of error at the State level. Further details can be found in the Northwest MSNA [Terms of Reference](#).

In addition, qualitative research focusing on AAP was conducted to inform programming in the Northwest, aiming to ensure that existing or future interventions are in line with the expectations of affected populations. Between June and August 2022, a total of 15 focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted in Katsina and Sokoto States, while nine remote key-informant interviews (KIIs) were conducted in Zamfara State. Three FGDs were conducted in three local government areas (LGAs) in Katsina State (Bindawa, Katsina town and Jibia) and two each in three LGAs in Sokoto State (Sokoto South and North and Tambuwal). Nine KIIs, three in each LGA, were conducted remotely via phone in three LGAs in Zamfara State (Anka, Gusau and Bakura). The LGAs were selected based on accessibility and because initial data from the MSNA indicated that some households in the LGAs had received assistance in the six months prior to data collection, with people who had received aid being targeted to participate. All FGDs were disaggregated by gender and population group, covering both host communities and internally displaced populations. For more information, please refer to the Northwest AAP [Terms of Reference](#).

Map 1: REACH MSNA coverage in Sokoto, Zamfara, and Katsina States, Northwest Nigeria



Given the severity of needs in the Northwest and the lack of a coordinated humanitarian response, respondents and participants were asked about any kinds of assistance received from any actors, including from the government, international NGOs, national NGOs, host communities, among others, to gain an understanding of the support that affected populations may be receiving.

FINDINGS

NEEDS AND ASSISTANCE

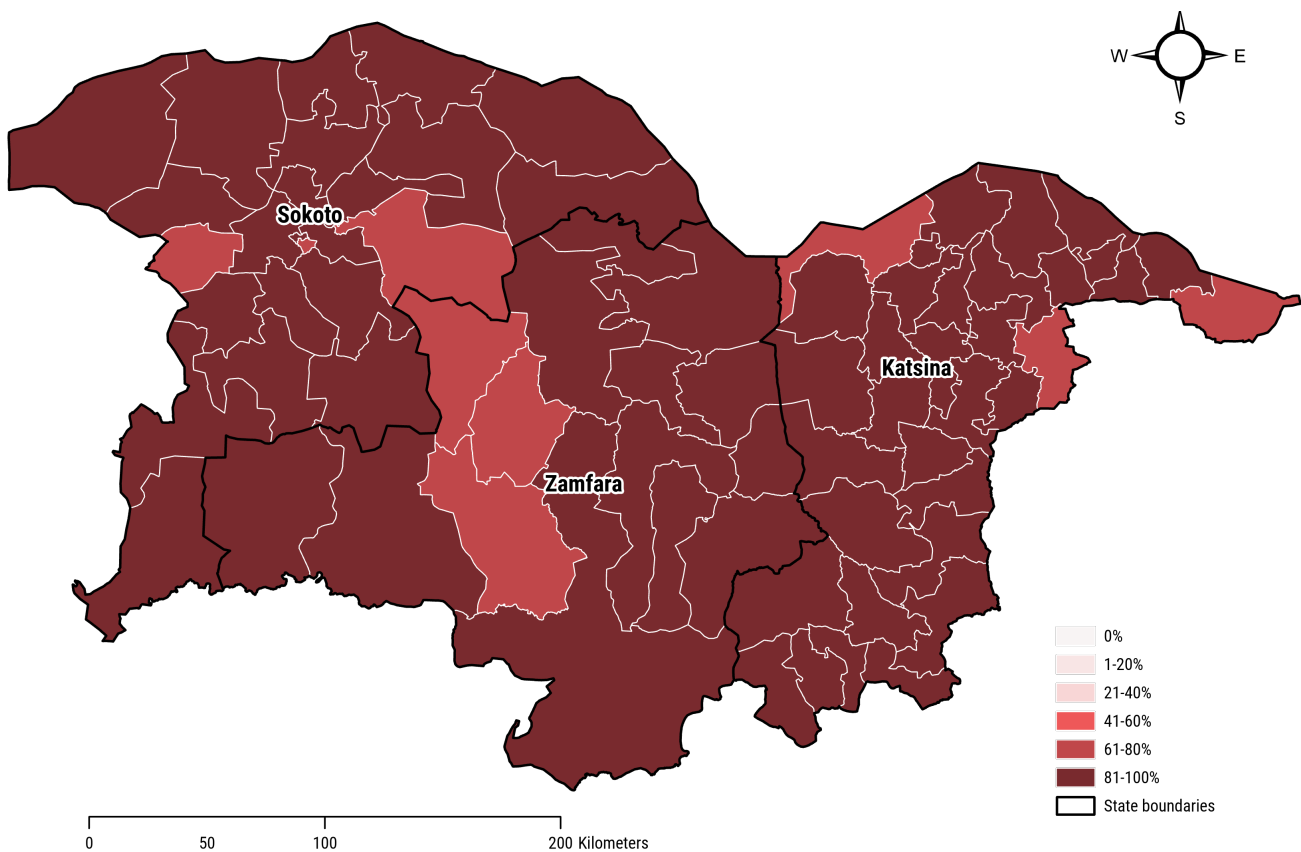
89%

of households reported never having received assistance

Across Katsina, Sokoto and Zamfara, findings point to widespread humanitarian needs among displaced and non-displaced populations, with nearly all households (96%) found to have multi-sectoral needs, particularly relating to shelter and non-food items (NFIs) (82%), education (78%), and water, sanitation, and hygiene (71%). Overall, findings suggest that 41% of households experienced food security-related gaps.

Despite dire humanitarian conditions, affected populations have generally not received support to meet their needs or cope with shocks, with almost all assessed households (89%) reportedly never having received any kind of assistance and only 6% having received assistance in the six months prior to data collection.

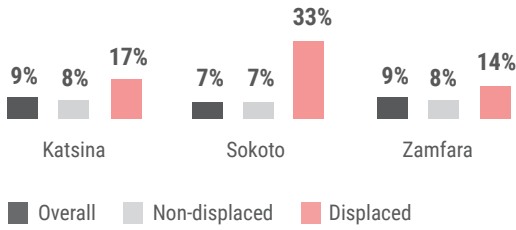
Map 2: % of households that reportedly never received any assistance



With a relatively small humanitarian presence in the region compared to the Northeast, nearly one third (28%) of households cited a lack of aid providers in the region as a barrier to accessing assistance in the six months prior to data collection. The aid providers that are active in these areas are facing levels of needs that cannot be fully addressed without an increase in the response from other organisations,³ something that may erode trust with communities. As mentioned in an FGD in Sokoto, communities feel *“disrespected by humanitarian workers because . . . they don’t fulfil all the promises . . . all they keep telling us is that it’s not their fault, they are trying their best.”*

3. Médecins Sans Frontières, [“Out of sight: the neglected malnutrition crisis which threatens thousands of children’s lives,”](#) July 2022.

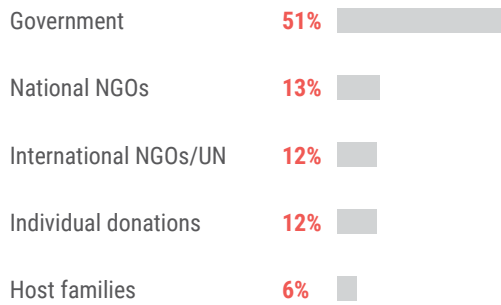
% of households that reportedly received assistance in the year prior to data collection, by State and population group:



A slightly higher proportion of IDP households (21%) reported having received assistance in the year prior to data collection than non-displaced households (8%). Nonetheless, participants in a majority of FGDs and KIIs reported that IDPs often had to resort to begging from the host community, friends or relatives, to meet their priority needs. Participants in a quarter of the qualitative discussions and interviews mentioned that members of the host communities have felt left out of assistance provision compared to IDPs. Moreover, while they are seen as being in need, women, older persons and people with disabilities were also mentioned as being left out several times.

In general, a majority of participants said that relations between host and displaced communities – and within each of the communities – are harmonious. Nevertheless, given the widespread needs across the region, participants in two discussions mentioned the development of some inter- or intra-communal bitterness between those who received support and those who did not. Moreover, some IDP participants asserted that some members of the host communities have tried to claim assistance meant for displaced populations, while some host community participants suggested that in some cases IDPs have more resources and receive more support than non-displaced populations.

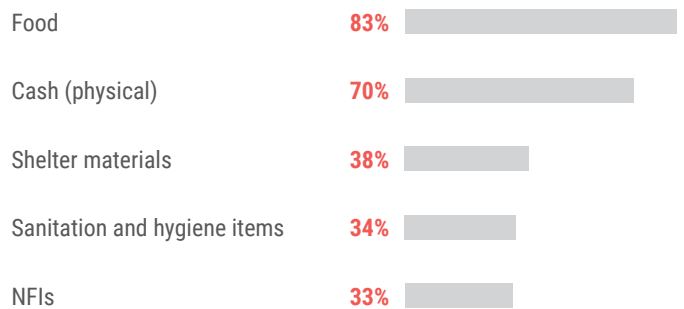
Among households that reportedly received assistance, most commonly reported assistance providers, by % of households



Households that reported having received assistance (10%, n=1,384) predominantly received support from the government (51%), national NGOs (13%), international NGOs or the UN (12%) and individual donations (12%). Those who reportedly received assistance mainly received food (46%) and cash (41%). The majority of households who reported having received assistance were satisfied with it (73%), with those who were dissatisfied mainly citing that it was not enough to meet their households' needs (64%), a sentiment echoed by FGD participants and KIIs. Participants in a third of the qualitative discussions and interviews mentioned that people have felt unsafe during aid distributions, citing a lack of security personnel, rowdiness and violence, or ambushes and attacks either at the site or en-route as people returned home with the aid.

In alignment with the assistance that has reportedly been provided thus far, if households were to receive assistance in the future, the vast majority expressed a preference for receiving food (83%) and cash (70%). This was followed by shelter materials (38%) and sanitation and hygiene items (34%), among others. Those who would prefer cash over material assistance do so principally because of a sense that cash gives them more freedom to choose what to buy to meet their needs. Some FGD participants mentioned that there is confusion over cash transfer processes, including online registration and submitting biometric data, pointing to the need for comprehensive information campaigns to accompany any existing or future cash transfer programming.

Most commonly reported preferences of types of assistance to receive in the future, by % of households

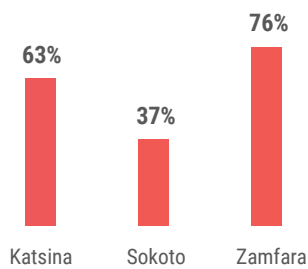


INFORMATION AND LANGUAGE

98%

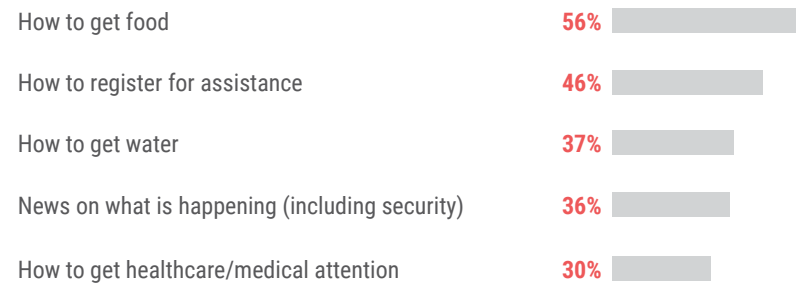
of households reported a need for information from assistance providers

% of households that would like to receive information on how to get food from assistance providers, by State



Information needs across the three assessed States are high, with 98% of assessed households reportedly needing information from assistance providers. Most of the information needs pertain to accessing fundamental necessities and services, with households wanting to know how to get food (56%), water (37%), healthcare (30%), shelter (26%), and education (23%), further underscoring the widespread needs in these sectors across the region.⁴ Moreover, reflective of the impact and volatility of insecurity in the region, households reported wanting information on the security situation and what is happening in the area they were in at the time of data collection (36%) and/or at home (22%), as well as on finding missing people (17%), staying safe to prevent an attack or harassment (17%), and getting help after an attack or harassment (12%).

Most commonly reported information needs from assistance providers, by % of households



Almost half of households reported a need for more information on how to register for assistance (46%), with the second most commonly cited barrier to accessing assistance being a lack of information on how to receive aid and when or where distributions took place (16%). This sentiment was echoed widely during qualitative discussions and interviews, with several participants pointing to a lack of information as the primary barrier to accessing assistance. As mentioned in an FGD with men from the host community in Sokoto, more awareness should be created about assistance because people are “desperately in need” but lack information on how to register for or express interest in receiving assistance.

Despite this seeming lack of information, according to KIs and FGD participants who had received assistance, various channels are used by assistance providers actors to inform communities about available support. This included community mobilisers, committees drawn from community members and community leaders, and town hall meetings. Moreover, consultations with government officials or traditional and religious leaders, who act as entry points to their communities, and the use of town criers and loudspeakers, were also mentioned. Some FGD participants and KIs mentioned that the information they receive about assistance was not seen as timely, often being shared either at night prior to the day of distribution or on the day of distribution.

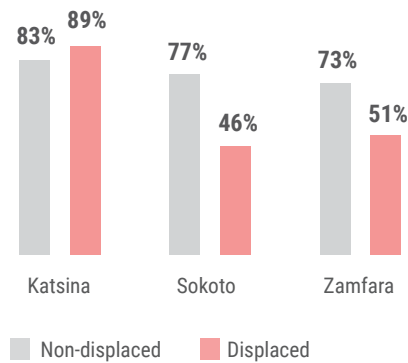
Community leaders were most commonly named by households as the preferred sources of information on assistance (73%). There seems to be a preference for more traditional sources of information in Zamfara State, where 90% of households named community leaders (compared to 66% in Katsina and 71% in Sokoto) and 54% of households expressed a preference for receiving information in places of worship (compared to 30% in Katsina and 33% in Sokoto). On the other hand, nearly half (45%) of households in Katsina would like to receive information regarding assistance from INGO or UN aid workers, compared to 23% in Sokoto and only 11% in Zamfara.

Phone calls (59%), face-to-face in person communication (56%), and loudspeakers (32%) were the most reported preferred means of receiving information about assistance. Written communication was generally less preferred, with

4. REACH, “Northwest Nigeria: 2022 Multi-Sector Needs Assessment,” January 2023.

26% of households naming SMS as a preferred channel for receiving information, followed by social media (6%), WhatsApp or similar mobile applications (4%), billboards, posters, and leaflets (3%) and magazines or newspapers (3%). This could be linked to literacy rates in the region, where for example in Zamfara State almost a third of households (28%) reported that no one in their household could read and write. In an AAP report on Northeast Nigeria, Translators without Borders recommended that assistance providers expand “the use of audio, pictorial, and remote communication in local languages,”⁵ a suggestion that would also be appropriate in the Northwest.

% of households with at least one literate household member, by State and population group:

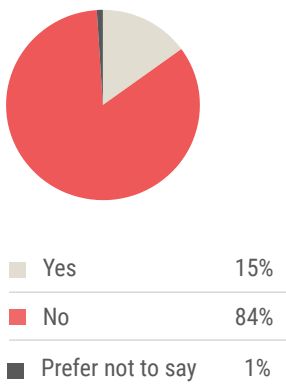


Reported literacy rates – where at least one member of the household can speak, read, and write in at least one language – are relatively similar across non-displaced households in the three States (83% in Katsina, 73% in Zamfara and 77% in Sokoto). However, the percentage among displaced households drops notably in Zamfara and Sokoto, where only 51% and 46% of displaced households reported at least one literate household member, respectively. The exception is in Katsina, where 89% of displaced households reportedly have a literate household member, slightly higher than among non-displaced households in the State.

Findings suggest that information is generally disseminated to and within communities in Hausa, aligned with both the preferences and abilities of households in the region. Ninety-seven percent of households predominantly speak Hausa at home, with the same percentage reporting that service providers speak to their household in Hausa. Among households in which at least one person is literate (79%, n=8,636), only 14% of households reported that at least one household member was able to read, speak, and write in English.

CONSULTATION AND FEEDBACK

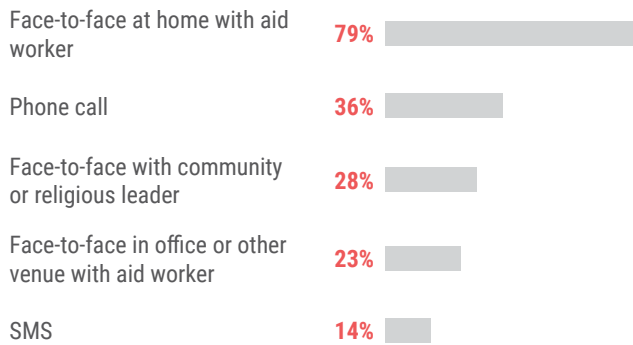
In the past six months, have you or anyone in your household been asked about what assistance you would like to receive?



In line with the low levels of assistance provision in the assessed areas, consultations with communities seem to be rare, with 84% of households reporting that they had not been asked what kind of assistance they would like to receive in the six months prior to data collection. Moreover, in several FGDs with women, both from the host communities and IDPs, participants mentioned that when consultations on programme design do occur, only men – often community leaders or elders – are included. Some of these female participants expressed a desire to be included, along with women more generally, in future consultations regarding assistance. On the other hand, in eight FGDs and KIIs with men, participants said they believed community or religious leaders were the right people to be consulted, mentioning that such leaders best understand the needs of the community. Thus, while this sentiment was echoed in a few discussions with women, there may nonetheless be a slight divergence between perceptions on community and religious leaders being consulted on behalf of communities. As they may not represent the views and needs of all marginalised or vulnerable populations, it would be important to ensure that women, youth, people with disabilities, and other groups who may not be reflected in leadership structures are included in any community engagement activities.

5. Translators without Borders, “[Complaints and feedback mechanisms - Effective communication is essential for true accountability: Our experience with language in northeast Nigeria](#),” October 2021.

Most commonly reported preferred means of giving feedback about assistance, by % of households



Most households (79%) expressed a preference for giving feedback about assistance face-to-face at home with an aid worker, followed by phone call (36%), or face-to-face with community or religious leaders (28%). Among households who reported having received assistance, about one third (31%) had approached assistance providers with feedback or complaints. Of those who received assistance and gave feedback or made complaints (n=425), the majority (84%) reported that they or their household received a response and roughly the same percentage (82%) felt their feedback was taken into consideration. Participants in a majority of FGDs and KIs said that they and people in their communities do not know how to submit feedback or complaints about the quality, quantity and/or appropriateness of the assistance received.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As the crisis in the Northeast continues to be the primary focus of aid providers in Nigeria,⁶ humanitarian needs in the Northwest – driven by insecurity, poverty, and environmental degradation⁷ – remain largely unaddressed. Despite these widespread needs, the vast majority of interviewed households reported not having received any assistance. Among those who reportedly received assistance, less than a quarter received it from international NGOs or UN agencies. While over half of those who reportedly received assistance did so from the government, questions have been raised as to whether there are sufficient resources in the region to address these needs, with the International Crisis Group highlighting that, thus far, the “response has been insufficient.”⁸ International NGOs that do have a presence in the Northwest are struggling to cope with the scale of needs and have made urgent pleas to the UN and other agencies to join their efforts to address the “neglected” crisis in the region, without which Médecins sans Frontières “fears that the situation will soon become untenable.”⁹ With needs going largely unaddressed, communities are likely to feel this neglect, and trust between affected populations and assistance providers may suffer under this strain. Thus, any response scale-up in the future should endeavour to prioritise AAP efforts, to ensure that gaining the trust of communities and enabling them to influence decision-making is a cornerstone of any coordinated humanitarian response in Northwest Nigeria.

Findings suggest that literacy rates and language abilities vary across states and population groups, and any information dissemination, consultations, or feedback mechanisms should be cognizant of this. With a potential scale-up of response in the future, there is an opportunity to create complaints and feedback mechanisms (CFMs) that are accessible to a wide segment of community members. While suggestion boxes remain a standard feedback mechanism in Northeast Nigeria,¹⁰ this would be largely ineffective in areas with lower literacy rates and do little to foster trust between affected populations and assistance providers. As recommended by Translators without Borders in the Northeast, it would be advisable for any response in the Northwest to “prioritise face-to-face CFMs by establishing structures such as mobile CFM desks.”¹¹ Moreover, findings suggest that women tend to feel excluded from consultations. Thus, beyond CFMs, any community engagement should endeavour to prioritise inclusivity, to ensure that the views and opinions of various population groups, including host communities, IDPs, men, women, older people, youth, and people with disabilities, are taken into consideration. While community and religious leaders are a key entry-point to engaging with communities, they may not always be aware of or represent the views of all community members, and should therefore not be the sole interlocutors with assistance providers on behalf of affected populations.

6. OCHA, “[Humanitarian Response Plan 2023](#),” February 2023.

7. REACH, “[Northwest Nigeria: 2022 Multi-Sector Needs Assessment](#),” January 2023.

8. International Crisis Group, “[Halting the Deepening Turmoil in Nigeria’s North West](#),” May 2021.

9. Médecins sans Frontières, “[Out of sight: the neglected malnutrition crisis which threatens thousands of children’s lives](#),” July 2022.

10. Translators without Borders, “[Complaints and feedback mechanisms](#),” October 2021.

11. Ibid.



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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 in emergency, recovery, and development contexts. The methodologies used by REACH include primary data collection and in-depth analysis, and all activities are conducted through inter-agency aid coordination mechanisms. REACH is a joint initiative of IMPACT Initiatives, ACTED and the United Nations Institute for Training and Research - Operational Satellite Applications Programme (UNITAR-UNOSAT). For more information, please visit [our website](#). You can contact us directly at: geneva@reach-initiative.org and follow us on Twitter @REACH_info.