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## The International Court of Justice's Verdict on the Bakassi People: An Assessment of the Contemporary Challenges of the People since 2002

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### **ABSTRACT**

This paper, entitled "The International Court of Justice's verdict and the Bakassi People," assessed the contemporary challenges facing the people due to the court's decision. The decision was expected to provide a lasting solution to the conflict between Nigeria and Cameroon over the Bakassi Peninsula. Unfortunately, it did not, but it created more problems, especially for the people of the area. This study used secondary data sources, including online materials, newspaper publications, and other relevant documents. The data were analyzed using content analysis. Hunger and starvation, homelessness, internal displacement, refugee crisis, loss of livelihood, police harassment. It concluded that the International Court of Justice's verdict that resolved the ownership dispute between Nigeria did not resolve the conflict. It recommends that the United Nations Organization, through its various agencies, ensure the alleviation of the people's pains.

**Keywords:** Bakassi Peninsula, International Court of Justice (ICJ) Verdict, Nigeria–Cameroon Conflict, Humanitarian Crisis, Internal Displacement.

### **Introduction**

The Bakassi Peninsula was a source of long-standing conflict between Nigeria and Cameroon, and the conflict was eventually resolved by the International Court of Justice in 2002. After hearing allegations and preliminary objections from Nigeria that questioned the Court's power to arbitrate, the Court handed down its verdict on June 11, 1998. The court rejected seven of Nigeria's preliminary objections and found in favor of Cameroon, admitting their arguments. The Equatorial Guinean Republic attempted to interfere in the conflict on June 30, 1999, to protect its sovereign rights in the Gulf of Guinea. It was also

concerned that the other parties' maritime border claims may affect its interests and sought to let the Court know about such an effect. Equatorial Guinea's decision to stay out of litigation is a major development. A public hearing was scheduled for February 13 and March 13, 2022. The Bakassi case was finally decided by the court on October 10, 2002. The Court's 13-3 decision recognized Cameroon as the peninsula's legitimate owner. The agreement stipulated that Nigeria's military and civilian governments would vacate the peninsula within two years and cede it to Cameroon, without any conditions attached. Simultaneously, the court mandated that Cameroon's government and military withdraw from the territories claimed by Nigeria, including Habuna, Mbenmong, and Amoto. This judgment marked a significant legal resolution, delineating sovereignty over Bakassi in favor of Cameroon and establishing a timeline for the transfer of control between the involved nations.

The court agreed that the International Court of Justice at The Hague had resolved ownership of the oil-rich Bakassi Peninsula in 2002. The court's judgment confirmed that the disputed area's sovereignty lies with the Republic of Cameroon. However, as lofty as the resolution was, it did not resolve the conflicts in the area; rather, it created more problems that now affect the area's people negatively. In the peninsula today, people are faced with human violations and abuses, intimidation, homelessness, hunger, and displacement. Despite this, the governments of Nigeria and Cameroon are not transparent about the suffering of the people, which has also created some security concerns in the area. The Green Tree agreement also did not properly address the post-Bakassi conflict situation of the people affected by the ICJ verdict. This study aims to examine the contemporary living conditions of the people of the Bakassi peninsula. Specifically, the study;

### **Methodology**

This study is qualitative. Hence, secondary sources constitute ingredients with which paper is produced. Online sources, a newspaper, and relevant sources were consulted for this work. This is connected to the work is exploratory and does not require any serious statistical tools for analysis. On the issue of analysis, content analysis was adopted in this study.

### **Results**

During the transfer of Bakassi to Cameroon and the subsequent resettlement, residents of the Bakassi peninsula faced ongoing challenges and reported harassment by Cameroonian gendarmes. This harassment led to a continuous exodus of Nigerians to Bakassi to escape unfavorable conditions. A report by the Punch Newspaper highlighted the plight of the Bakassi people, stating that the Ekpiri camp in Cross River State, initially intended for 400 individuals, saw an influx resulting in a population of 1,500 refugees (Nowa, 2010). The situation in Bakassi was marked by numerous distressing incidents. Incidents

such as the kidnaping of a Nigerian cargo ship occurred in the region, and the hijackers sought a ransom of 1.5 million USD. The African Marine Commando gang captured a Chinese fishing vessel carrying a crew of seven people (Yemi, 2007). The Bakassi people suffered greatly, prompting them to seek assistance from the Nigerian government. However, their requests seem to have been ignored, aggravating their terrible situation. The Bakassi inhabitants then revived their complaint against the Federal Government of Nigeria, claiming compensation of four hundred fifty-six billion naira. Their issues included the government's refusal to offer sufficient assistance to the Bakassi people.

Additionally, residents requested the establishment of a new local government council to address their needs. As a result of the unfavorable conditions and reported harassment, individuals from various states such as Delta and Imo, relocated to Bakassi. State governments stepped in to aid internally displaced individuals, while the Bakassi peninsula gradually became depopulated due to residents fleeing for safety reasons (Odiegwe, 2009).

The transfer of the Bakassi to Cameroon had far-reaching consequences, particularly for the indigenous people of the region. These inhabitants, originally Nigerians residing in Cross-Rivers state, faced a significant dilemma: whether to identify as Nigerians or remain with Cameroon. This transition left those who considered themselves Nigerian feeling abandoned because inadequate measures were put in place to address their needs. While the verdict concluded the ownership dispute between Nigeria and Cameroon over the area, it did little to resolve the plight of the inhabitants.

The following question arises: to what extent did the verdict effectively resolve the Bakassi problem? It appears that the primary focus of the verdict was dialog the longstanding political dispute between Nigeria and Cameroon regarding the contested territory. However, its effectiveness in addressing the multifaceted issues faced by indigenous people is limited. The verdict seemingly overlooked the complex humanitarian and citizenship concerns of the inhabitants, leaving them in a state of uncertainty and vulnerability.

After the cession of the oil-rich peninsula, the indigenous people have encountered challenges in asserting their identity. The transition rendered them stateless, as the Francophone country treated them as outcasts, worsening their plight. The verdict appears insufficient in addressing the fundamental needs and rights of the affected population, leaving them in a state of limbo amid shifting national boundaries and geopolitical transitions.

In light of the recent ICJ ruling that ceded the peninsula to Cameroon and Chief Olusegun Obasanjo's hasty transfer of ancestral land to the Cameroonian people, Nigeria has become the first nation in history

to voluntarily agree to displace its own citizens from their home land, and the displaced people of Bakassi are now bearing the brunt of the consequences for Nigerians to witness: hardship, deprivation, and neglect (Vanguard, June 10, 2017).

A remark by Ene Okon, coordinator of the Bakassi Advocacy Media Group, lent credence to this idea:

The Bakassi Peninsula has a long history of hostile Cameroonian security forces. Remember that under Alhaji Shehu Shagari's civilian rule, five Nigerian soldiers were slain on Bakassi land, prompting the administration to deploy forces to fight Cameroun. In reality, Shagari rightly noted that the finding of vast amounts of oil in the Bakassi area intensified the issue of international maritime boundaries. Today, the displaced people live as refugees in their own nation. Those who chose to stay in the territory granted to Cameroon by Those who have been before the Court of Justice are now considered stateless, which means they cannot vote or be elected, are subject to heavy taxes and are viewed as outsiders.

There was growing concern about the increasing social dislocation of the Peninsula during a joint meeting on ending challenges in Abuja hosted by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Brigitte Mukanga-Eno, the UNHCR's Deputy Representative for Protection, expressed deep apprehension, emphasizing the urgent need for both Nigeria and Cameroon to take more proactive measures to support the displaced residents of Bakassi.

Ms. Mukanga-Eno highlighted the risks associated with statelessness, underscoring that stateless individuals are vulnerable to marginalization and can be targeted for recruitment as armed combatants, a scenario witnessed in the Democratic Republic of Congo. The growing wave of social displacement in Bakassi poses a significant risk of rendering individuals stateless, which, in turn, heightens their susceptibility to exploitation and further intensifies their precarious situation. The plea was for urgent action to prevent a humanitarian crisis and mitigate the risks faced by those affected by displacement in the region. It was brought to light that the 2002 ruling of the ICJ resulted in displacement on the Bakassi Peninsula; the ruling said that those who chose to become Nigerian citizens are now displaced domestically, while those who chose to remain on their ancestral territory are now stateless. A humanitarian catastrophe could be prevented and the risks to those affected by the transfer could be reduced with swift action, according to the appeal. It was remembered that the 2002 judgment of the Court of Justice (ICJ) triggered displacement on the Bakassi, stating that although inhabitants who chose many Nigerian descent have been forcibly removed from their homes, those who stayed behind are now considered childless.

Who's on the land of Bakassi, anyway? In 2002, the International Court of Justice ruled that the Bakassi Peninsula belonged to Cameroon, but what about the indigenous inhabitants of Bakassi? As a result, residents had a 10-year opportunity to opt for either Nigeria or Cameroon. Most of them opted for Nigeria because they were hitherto Nigerians, so they moved from their ancestral land to Nigeria and are now internally displaced. For those who remained on the peninsula, after 10 years, Cameroon asked them to acquire citizenship or be documented as foreigners. They refused, and they are still there, stateless. There are still many things to do in that region. No child should be born without nationality (Vanguard, June 10, 2017).

### **The Living Conditions of the People**

Based on the ICJ verdict, people in Peninsula are encountering homelessness and joblessness because they have relocated, but the relocation process was not tidy. However, it is vital to note that some of the persons who are now homeless and jobless are mainly those Bakassi people whose other challenges include disenfranchised, outrageous taxes and levies by the Cameroon government. Given this backdrop, the Bakassi people suffer from the policies of both the Nigerian and Cameroonian governments. Meanwhile, what the people are experiencing now is contrary to what the two countries promised them when they signed the Green Tree Agreement of 2006.

The Bakassi people in Ikang discovered that they suffer from inadequate social amenities, which have resulted in homelessness and poor health conditions. In short, the living conditions of the people are threatened because they were not properly resettled. Based on the testimony of the women leaders of the Bakassi people, they have suddenly become poor compared to when the ICJ had not intervened in Nigeria-Cameroon dispute. In a sense, the poverty of the Bakassi people, who had to wait for a government supply of basic human needs, such as food, before they could survive, was linked to their joblessness.

One can imagine what life would be like for anyone without a job. Frankly speaking, no one can claim to be free from hardship or to have a good standard of living where no source of income is available. This therefore tells about the extent of poverty and penury that the displaced Bakassians endure daily. Their economic conditions are worsening as they are dispossessed of their environment and culture. In summary, they are struggling to survive because of their inability to access fishing rights in the new location. Just like the dispossessed section of the Bakassi people suffers in Nigeria, so do the Bakassi residents in Cameroon. Utoma, (2016) remarked that the Bakassi residents in Cameroon are not only denied employment but are also forced to go through unimaginable hard times with high taxes imposed on them.

The Bakassi community in Nigeria and Cameroon indicates that the challenging living conditions affecting the general population have led to significant insecurity in the water regions. They believe that the livelihoods of the Bakassi people are directly linked to widespread piracy issues in the area (Funteh, 2015). Despite the Cameroonian government's refusal to recognize the political aspects of the violence in Bakassi, labeling the insurgents merely as "armed bandits," Funteh (2015) argues that the waterways have been plagued with frequent incidents of piracy due to problems of poverty, hunger, and unemployment. Consequently, daily reports from residents highlight issues of insurgency, militancy, and piracy on the waterways, resulting in the theft of fishing vessels, marine engines, and other valuable possessions. The severe insecurity in the Bakassi region is evident, as various locations in the area are filled with military checkpoints. The soldiers stationed at these checkpoints carry demanding identification cards, a practice that is far less common in Nigeria than in Cameroon.

In addition to the previously mentioned concerns, it has been consistently noted that many people feel marginalized. The Bakassi community's lack of voting rights stems from the omission of the New Bakassi Local Government in Ikang from the Cameroonian constitution. Without constitutional amendments, they may not be able to participate in general elections. This issue was highlighted by the delayed appointment of Mrs. Edisua as Chairperson in February 2014, which was affected by doubts regarding the legitimacy of the Local Council. Due to inadequate political representation, some residents of Bakassi have moved to Akwa Island, Day Spring I and II, a water area in Nigeria that has not been ceded to Cameroon. They believe that the Bakassi people cannot vote because their voter registration did not occur in the resettlement camp where their local government is located. Although the Cross River State government passed Law No. 7 of the Cross River State House of Assembly in 2007 to include the Bakassi community in three Ikang wards taken from Akpapuyo LG, they can still not participate in elections.

In contrast to the Bakassi people's concern that their political rights are being denied in Nigeria, thousands migrated to Cameroon for work, as they are primarily fishermen, registered at Dayspring. The INEC agent in Cross River State, Igini, initially indicated that the INEC would not conduct elections in areas not formally recognized by the federal government and that State Law No. 7 of 2007, which established New Bakassi, was invalid (Akpan, 2015). According to Sen. Florence Ita-Giwa, the citizens were slow in collecting their voter cards. She noted:

The distribution of PVCs is currently a challenge. After registration, many of our people returned to Cameroon to tend their crops. Since these Bakassi natives now live in Cameroon while holding Nigerian citizenship, we were fortunate that the Cameroonian authorities assisted us. Unfortunately, they were unable to come for the PVC distribution, despite our efforts to send boats to bring them to register. During

that time, Ebola virus disease (EVD) was widespread in Nigeria. Subsequently, Cameroonian authorities closed their borders... of the 6,325 PVCs created in July 2014 for registered voters in Bakassi, only 1,218 had been distributed by January 27, 2015... and the few individuals who received theirs were those residing in refugee camps and nearby areas (Effiong, 2015).

The Bakassi people, who have endured protracted political neglect in Nigeria, have been trapped in inadequate and overcrowded refugee camps for almost two decades, receiving little more than empty sympathies and indifferent gazes from the broader society. Their suffering predates the turmoil created by the Boko Haram insurgency in the northeast. Indeed, given the length of their suffering and the betrayal by the former Olusegun Obasanjo administration, the Bakassi people ought to have been prioritized for a presidential program centered on rehabilitation and reconstruction; however, the lack of profitable contracts for officials meant they largely went ignored by national authorities. The Bakassi individuals forced from their homeland and confined to squalid conditions for close to 2 decades, have seen their circumstances become increasingly dire. The hardships faced by the Bakassi people have persisted and worsened, while successive governments have turned a blind eye. Recently, Cross River Governor Ben Ayade publicly expressed sorrow over the plight of the Bakassi population, yet his emotional response rings hollow given that he presides over untraceable security funds, sufficient to build approximately 5,000 affordable housing units. The large amounts of money that past governments of Cross River spent annually on the Calabar Carnival could easily improve the living conditions of the Bakassi people.

The plight of the Bakassi people constitutes a national disgrace that demands the same level of attention from the federal government as those in the northeast. The Bakassi people should not continue to be manipulated by local politicians who exploit their misfortunes for personal gain. After a territorial dispute resolution between Nigeria and Cameroon over a decade ago, Nigeria ceded Bakassi to Cameroon. Hundreds of thousands of Nigerians returned to Nigeria with the expectation that the federal government would provide for their welfare, housing, and means of survival. However, the reality has proven otherwise, as many displaced Bakassi individuals remain inadequately resettled and integrated into Nigerian society. Many of those who returned found themselves in temporary camps across the country, living in poverty, facing hunger and suffering from poor sanitation, disease and mortality, compounded by a lack of educational opportunities and mismanagement of aid. The extensive issue of displacement and loss of livelihoods stems from a 2002 ruling by the International Court of Justice.

During the height of this displacement, over 100,000 individuals returning from Bakassi found shelter in makeshift accommodations in Akwa Ibom, approximately 100 kilometers from Cross River and closer to

the peninsula. The core of the issue lies in the singular emphasis on constructing new homes for returnees in Cross River, where many had settled, with insufficient consideration given to their daily necessities. Moreover, the relief resources intended for these refugees often fail to reach them, and their children struggle to access quality education. Returnees who later relocated back to their home regions in southern Nigeria—namely, Akwa Ibom, Delta, Rivers, Ondo, and Bayelsa—were generally left to navigate their challenges without assistance.

## **Specific Humanitarian Issues**

### **Hunger and Starvation**

Individuals who returned to Nigeria due to the verdict are facing starvation and continue to perish from hunger because of governmental negligence. A clear example of this situation can be observed in Bayelsa State, located in the South-South geopolitical zone of Nigeria, where returnees receive minimal or no support from the state government. For instance, the makeshift camp in Yenagoa is surrounded by makeshift structures made of corrugated metal and wood. Furthermore, open defecation is prevalent, and the lack of essential sanitation and hygiene facilities intensifies the issue, as there are no available drinking water, toilet facilities, or sources of livelihood. Since their return to Bayelsa State in 2006, the people of Bakassi have faced challenges, including hunger, illness, and a scarcity of food; they struggle to find sufficient meals and have been dealing with hypertension and stomach ulcers, and some individuals have experienced mini-strokes.

### **Homelessness**

Bakassi returnees found themselves without homes after returning to Nigeria. The resettlement initiatives by the Nigerian government were poorly executed. While the government constructed housing units for returnees to help them live comfortably, these efforts were unfortunately undermined by corruption. Innocent Efoghe, the south-south zonal coordinator of the National Commission for Refugees, Migrants and Internally Displaced Persons (NCFRMI), discussed the accommodation challenges faced by the returnees;

He is aware that the newly built flats in Ekpri-Ikang village have yet to be allocated to the “right people.” If a complex has been built for returnees to live in and they happen not to be the people there, the National Commission for Refugees has no option but to evacuate all those who are there.

In a remote section of a camp designated for Bakassi returnees in Cross River state, southern Nigeria, 42 new apartments are situated; these were constructed by federal authorities for Nigerians who had

relocated from the contested region of Bakassi. Although the construction of the flats was completed in 2019, they are currently unoccupied by any Bakassi returnees. Instead of being inhabited by intended residents, the apartments were claimed by local community members. Iyang Aston, a representative of the Bakassi returnees, expressed his concerns in this way;

The flats have been taken over by community youths, political party members, and hoodlums. The community complained to government officials who visited and took a list of names, but nothing has changed. No Bakassi returnee has been given a flat.

In 2017, excitement surged among the displaced Bakassi as plans were unveiled for a significant housing project. The Africa Nations Development Programme (ANDP) and authorities in Cross River state vowed to construct 5,000 housing units in Ikpa Nkanya village, located around 15 km from Calabar. Currently, the site features only concrete blocks and a few deserted buildings lacking roofs, serving as the sole evidence that any project was initiated there. Ifeanyichukwu Eze, the country director of the ANDP, attributes the project's sluggish execution to bureaucratic hurdles. He states that difficulties arose in "bringing the money into" Nigeria to commence the work, primarily due to the multiple government entities they had to coordinate with, including the Central Bank of Nigeria, the Nigerian Financial Intelligence Unit, the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission, and the Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs, Disaster Management, and Social Development. However, his warnings, though serious, are far from novel in the context of tackling the corruption that has hindered the resettlement of the Bakassi population, nor are the political maneuvers that have obstructed nearly every chance for the returnees' resettlement and reintegration. Several resettlement committees have attempted to resolve this issue but to no avail.

Some Bakassi political figures accuse one another of 'fraud' regarding the funds designated for resettling Nigerians who vacated the peninsula. Interviews with six local politicians and activists for this report reveal a pervasive lack of accountability, beginning with the 'heavy secrecy' surrounding the federal government's budget allocation for Bakassi reintegration and the actual expenditure of those funds.

In late September 2008, Nigeria's federal government set aside approximately N2bn (\$17m) for the authorities in Cross River state to create a permanent settlement approximately 30km from the peninsula in a newly established Bakassi local government area, which was quickly established in early 2007 for the purpose of resettling Nigerians displaced from the Bakassi peninsula.

Only approximately 300 homes were constructed. Residents in this area expressed that they had to fit as many individuals as possible into their homes to ensure that nearly everyone had somewhere to sleep. For

instance, in one situation, two families with more than 12 children are crowded into a two-bedroom apartment. Innocent Asuquo Bassey, a camp leader in the Bakassi local council lamented that;

Approximately 3,000 households live in camps. The issue of Bakassi [settlement] is yet to be fully resolved because we are still suffering, and some of our people had to return to the peninsula again. There will be a time when the crisis that will erupt in this camp will be beyond control; the camp has not received any relief materials for so many years now.

In Bayelsa State, located in Nigeria's Niger Delta region, Jeremiah Jerry-Wemi, who leads around 3,200 families residing in camps in Yenagoa, remarked that;

Most Bakassi people in Yenagoa returned as early as August 2006, two years before the formal handover to Cameroon. Most of us forfeited (personal belongings such as fishing boats) because the ship that came to bring us back could not contain property and everything. Some people just came with the clothes they had on them.

In October 2006, the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) estimated that over 10,000 individuals had returned to Bayelsa state; however, officials quoted by the New Humanitarian reported that approximately 4,000 people had been residing in tents in Yenagoa as of September 2006. Samuel Numonengi, the former chair of the Nigeria Union of Journalists in Bayelsa, who extensively covered this matter, noted that "many of the returnees were unaware of their original locations," as some had been born in Cameroon, which would hinder resettlement efforts without adequate planning.

In September 2006, authorities in Bayelsa state rapidly constructed a temporary camp for returnees in anticipation of a visit by then-Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo, according to Jerry-Wemi. Shortly after, the state began relocating returnees to their villages and offered a one-time payment of N10, 000 (\$76 at the time) to assist with resettlement and transportation back to their communities. "Many individuals did not even receive [the one-time payment] because, at that moment, thugs arrived while the money was being distributed, causing chaos and prompting many to flee," Fewer than half of the eligible returnees obtained the minimal stipends they were entitled to. In certain states like Rivers, Delta, and Ondo, little has been reported about returnees who relocated to Nigeria upon returning to Nigeria; especially since some had lost all hope of receiving federal assistance and have sought alternative ways to proceed with their lives.

Sadly, the returnees have not received any serious help from the government at all levels, and their plight has been politicized. There are only reports in the news media that the Bakassi people have received some help. People have never felt that help [and] that is why they are still suffering as [a] displaced people.

## Human Rights Abuse

- i. Individuals who are stateless frequently encounter severe violations of their human rights in Bakassi. Being without a recognized nationality means that they do not benefit from the legal protections afforded to citizens, rendering them susceptible to exploitation, discrimination, and mistreatment. Due to their legal status, stateless individuals often struggle to access justice, hindering their ability to seek legal recourse or representation in court (UNHCR, 2014).
- ii. Possessing a recognized nationality is crucial for identity and accessing vital social services. For those who are stateless in Bakassi, their ability to obtain healthcare, education, and other public services is greatly limited. For example, children from stateless families frequently encounter obstacles to education. Students may be refused admission into schools due to a lack of required documentation or may experience discrimination within the educational system. Moreover, stateless individuals often face challenges in accessing healthcare because they cannot obtain national health insurance or other forms of social protection (UNICEF, 2013).
- iii. Economic Struggles: Being stateless in Bakassi also results in economic difficulties. Those who lack legal status frequently encounter restricted opportunities for formal employment, making it difficult for them to obtain steady income. Additionally, they may not possess the necessary legal documentation to launch a business, acquire property, or gain access to financial services, such as banking or credit. For example, in Bakassi, fishermen and women face limitations in selling their catch in markets because of their statelessness, which restricts their economic prospects.

## Police Harassment

Nigerian residents in the Bakassi Peninsula face severe harassment and brutality from Cameroonian security and law enforcement. Instances of police molestation against Nigerians living in Bakassi were prevalent, with reports highlighting egregious incidents. For example, on October 16, 2009, Cameroonian gendarmes reportedly killed six Nigerian fishermen in Bakassi's territorial waters (Kenneth, 2016). Additionally, there were reports of Cameroonian authorities raising their flags in Nigerian villages, coercing Nigerians to change their names and adopt Cameroonian identities (Gustavo, 2013). These actions compounded the plight of Nigerian residents, contributing to an atmosphere of intimidation and forced assimilation.

## Citizenship crisis

The inhabitants of the Bakassi area, predominantly Efik people from the old Calabar kingdom, have experienced a citizenship crisis following the territory's transfer to Cameroon. This transition left them in a state of uncertainty, not firmly belonging to either Nigeria or Cameroon, a condition of "near statelessness" (Gustavo, 2013). Those who were resettled in Nigeria have continually voiced grievances about the lack of sufficient government support, particularly regarding their basic welfare needs. This has resulted in a prolonged struggle for recognition and assistance, worsening the vulnerable state.

### **Loss of livelihood**

The residents of Bakassi, primarily fishermen and traders, relied heavily on the maritime resources within the peninsula's territorial waters for their livelihoods. However, their resettlement to the Nigerian mainland resulted in a significant disruption of their traditional means of living. This displacement caused a severe crisis in their livelihoods, affecting their overall living conditions and leaving them grappling with the loss of their primary sources of sustenance.

### **Displacement of people**

Certainly, the Bakassi conflict's repercussions have been multi-faceted, profoundly impacting the people and the geopolitical landscape. The conflict led to immense social disruption, resulting in severe hardships, family separations, broken marriages, and a struggle for basic needs among the affected population. Reports of police brutality and harassment against Nigerian residents in Bakassi by Cameroonian security forces have added to the ordeal. For instance, on October 16, 2009, six Nigerian fishermen were killed in the Bakassi territorial waters by Cameroonian gendarmes (Benjamin & Nneamaka, 2018)

The conflict also triggered a citizenship crisis for the Efik people of the old Calabar kingdom, who found themselves in a state of "near statelessness" due to the ambiguous national affiliations resulting from the area's handover to Cameroon ((Benjamin & Nneamaka, 2018). Despite resettlement in Nigeria, these residents have experienced significant neglect of their material well-being. Additionally, the conflict caused mass displacement, with over 60,000 residents forced to leave the area. This displacement led to humanitarian crises, social dislocation, and economic vulnerability among affected populations. Moreover, the territorial shifts resulting from the conflict led to the loss and gain of land between Nigeria and Cameroon. While both countries experienced material and economic losses, the greatest loss is the irreplaceable loss of human lives.

Beyond these immediate consequences, the Bakassi conflict offered critical lessons. This underscored the importance of political preparedness, diplomacy, and the value of dialog in resolving conflicts. The study

highlighted the intricate biological connections between leaders and their influence on diplomatic decisions. The successful implementation of the Court of Justice (ICJ) judgment demonstrates the potency of diplomatic negotiations in fostering world peace and maintaining the credibility of global institutions like the United Nations and ICJ.

The conflict allowed leaders to score diplomatic successes. Paul Biya of Cameroon utilized the Bakassi victory to bolster his domestic image, contributing to his re-elections in 2004 and 2011. Former Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo's post-office diplomatic engagements enhanced the standing of Nigeria abroad as a promoter of world peace, potentially aiding its quest for a permanent seat on the UN Security Council (Temenu, 2017). Moreover, the Green Tree Agreement, which resolved the Bakassi conflict, elevated both countries' international credibility. This credibility-catalyzed domestic and foreign investment, aiming to alleviate the socioeconomic challenges faced by citizens in Nigeria and Cameroon.

Based on the experiences of the Bakassi people, their lives were deeply affected by the conflict. They faced tremendous hardship, suffering, and a range of difficulties, including family separation, broken marriage, hunger, and malnutrition. These challenges were intensified by the unsettling presence of military forces, which intensified the community's distress and struggles. The lack of legal recognition can make individuals susceptible to exploitation in the informal labor sector, where they often face low pay and unsafe working conditions (Odinkalu, 2012). The stateless individuals in Bakassi are at increased risk of security threats. Their marginalization and exclusion can lead to greater social tensions and instability. The absence of legal status also makes them vulnerable to various types of violence, trafficking, and other criminal activities. In extreme cases, statelessness can lead to displacement and further aggravating instability (Odinkalu, 2012).

The Bakassi conflict has resulted in notable social and environmental effects that have profoundly influenced both Nigeria and Cameroon. One such outcome was the MBO Resettlement project launched in 2007 to support those who were displaced following Nigeria's cession of Bakassi. Individuals who relied primarily on fishing and agriculture found it challenging to adapt to their new surroundings. Living conditions worsened as necessities of life became out of reach for the affected people.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

Even though the ICJ ruled in favor of Cameroon regarding the ownership dispute over Bakassi, there has been minimal international engagement in managing the aftermath. The Cross River State Government has been burdened by the lack of substantial contributions or involvement from international organizations in facilitating the resettlement of refugees returning after Cameroon acquires ownership.

This situation has been exacerbated by insufficient federal government cooperation and limited assistance from international bodies like the United Nations. The consequences of the Bakassi conflict present complex socio-environmental issues, legal challenges, and geopolitical factors that require thorough international engagement and coordinated efforts for effective resolution and rehabilitation.

Moreover, the transfer of Bakassi to Cameroon triggered disputes among border communities on the Nigerian side. Following the handover, Akwa Ibom State disputed territorial claims, resulting in legal conflicts involving the Akwa Ibom, Cross River states, and the Federal Government at the Supreme Court. This dispute focused on transferring territorial ownership and territorial state status between the two states. This legal contention had significant economic, security, and geopolitical consequences beyond its legal implications. If the Supreme Court endorsed unilateral changes to the baselines that define territorial waters as proposed by the National Boundary Commission, it could substantially lose Nigerian territory to international waters, affecting economic and security interests in the Gulf of Guinea. Such an inward shift of baselines might also weaken Nigeria's negotiating power in terms of territorial sea boundaries and convergence points with neighboring nations.

Based on the study findings, the following are recommended;

1. The United Nations Organization should, through its various agencies, ensure the alleviation of the people's pains.
2. Governments within these people now reside (Nigeria or Cameroon) and set institutions to end the suffering of the people.

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