

## **Doctoral School Research Award Report**

### **Project: Determinants of the Staying Behaviour: Immobility and Resilience in conflict-affected societies (Ezenwa Olumba)**

The Doctoral School's financial support was of great benefit to my PhD project because it enabled me to travel to Nigeria to collect data to answer the research questions that would lead to the completion of my doctoral studies.

Conflicts between non-state actors have increased since the Cold War's end, resulting in the loss of lives, the destruction of infrastructure and ecosystems, and the displacement of millions of people. One such conflict is called eco-violence, a violent conflict between nomadic herders and sedentary farmers across the Sahel region of Africa. It erupts due to the contending groups' competition over access and control of water and other agricultural resources. When nomadic herders and farmers engage in conflict, the farmers are often displaced, and their communities are deserted. However, not all communities can accept being forced to flee; some prefer to acquiesce or resist displacement despite living in a climate of violence.

Existing research focuses on displaced persons in camps, those who pay taxes to belligerent parties to live in conflict zones, and those who collaborate with government security to repel armed aggressors and remain in their communities. Households that repel aggressors and remain in their communities without government backing have received little to no notice. My PhD thesis seeks to explain the reasons that lead households, particularly arable farmers, in communities impacted by conflict to choose to remain rather than flee, as well as the measures they take to maintain this decision.

The nature of my thesis necessitates that I speak directly with farmers whose communities chose to remain despite living in a conflicted environment. Therefore, a trip to Nigeria's Middle Belt region was necessary. The project was designed to use focus group discussion sessions to ascertain the perspectives of the households within a community that I purposively identified as choosing voluntary immobility in the face of armed aggression. This research is essential because it addresses how life choices, circumstances, and violent conflict

influence immobility aspirations in conflict environments, which is not well understood in migration studies. It also gives a platform for those categorised as "invisible" in the literature, particularly their thoughts on a workable solution to their plight. Rather than having "solutions" thrust upon them.

The funds from the Doctoral School Research Awards made it possible for me to travel to Benue and Nasarawa states in Nigeria from the United Kingdom to collect data, which became critical for my doctoral research. The grant covered my return tickets back to London, flight tickets from Abuja to Enugu (to avoid the prevalent kidnapping along Abuja to Makurdi via Laffia roads), my accommodation in both states, and local travel during the study period. I departed from Heathrow Airport on the 27th of April and arrived at Abuja Airport on the 28th of April, 2022. Even though the targeted households were households that chose voluntary immobility and focus group discussions were conducted with the men and women separately, I also spoke with those who fled their communities. To realise why people do not migrate, it is necessary to comprehend why others have done so. Five focus groups and a couple of in-depth interviews were conducted.

The journey was successful and beneficial, despite some unforeseen obstacles. It was easier to recruit focus group participants than to undertake the Ethics Committee-approved pre-discussion screening. Among the significant challenges was travelling in motorbike taxis for hours on some occasions (Eggon Nasarawa), after having travelled by hired cab for like 2 hours; the roads were unmotorable and even unsuitable for motorbikes.

I am writing up the findings; the initial results I shared with the annual review panel were well-received. The trip, the experiences I had with wonderful people in Benue and Nasarawa states, and other benefits would not have been possible without the generous support of Royal Holloway University of London's Doctoral School Research Award. I am eternally thankful to the academic and non-academic staff who have given me this chance for their unwavering support. Stay blessed.