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EMERGENCY RESPONSE AND GOVERNANCE GAPS DURING THE 2025 MOKWA FLOODING IN NIGER STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

***Purpose**: In late May 2025, severe flooding struck Mokwa, a major commercial town in Niger State, Nigeria, claiming lives, displacing thousands of residents, and destroying critical infrastructure. Despite early warnings, emergency response efforts and governance structures revealed significant weaknesses in preparedness, coordination, and community engagement. Drawing on news reports, official assessments, and humanitarian response summaries, this paper analyses the emergency response and governance gaps that emerged from the crisis and offers recommendations to strengthen future flood risk governance and response mechanisms.*

***Design/Methodology/approach:** The study employed a case study research design involving both qualitative and quantitative data. A total of 200 respondents were proportionately sampled from Tiffinmadza and Ungwan Hausawa. Random sampling was initially used to select housing units located along the banks of the river, which were the areas most affected by the floods. From the compiled list of affected housing units, 46 and 154 units were randomly selected from the two respective communities.*

***Findings:** The findings reveal that although the Nigerian government, through the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) and the Presidency, acted quickly to mobilise relief, the effectiveness of the response was hindered by systemic governance weaknesses. These included inadequate early warning systems, delays in evacuation, weak inter-agency coordination, and the failure to implement planned flood mitigation projects. While the World Health Organization and local actors contributed to emergency health interventions, recovery efforts were undermined by resource mismanagement, poor urban planning, and limited community resilience.*

***Research implication/Limitation:** Government officials, security personnel, and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) were the only agencies permitted access to the scene of the incident. In addition, some victims could not be located for oral interviews. Furthermore, the terrain was heavily submerged, which made the data collection exercise cumbersome and difficult to carry out effectively.*

***Practical implication**: The paper concludes that while emergency interventions helped reduce immediate mortality, governance deficiencies exacerbated the disaster's overall impact. It recommends strengthening early warning systems, decentralising water governance, enforcing urban planning regulations, and integrating climate adaptation strategies into Nigeria's disaster management framework.*

***Originality/value:** The analysis of the data was organised based on a detailed description of the general characteristics of the emergency response operations.*

Keywords: Emergency response, Flood governance, Mokwa flood, Disaster recovery, Niger State

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

Nigeria frequently experiences devastating flood events, a situation exacerbated by climate change, inadequate infrastructure, and governance challenges. In May 2025, torrential rainfall triggered flash flooding in Mokwa Local Government Area of Niger State, leading to widespread destruction of homes, bridges, roads, and livelihoods (AP News, 2025a; Reuters, 2025). Officials reported that more than 150 people died and thousands were displaced, making it one of the most severe flood disasters in recent state history (Reuters, 2025; AP News, 2025b).

Effective disaster governance encompassing risk reduction, preparedness, early warning systems, and coordinated emergency response is essential for minimising the human and economic costs of such events. However, the response to the Mokwa floods highlighted existing gaps in governance arrangements and emergency management capacities in Nigeria. This study examines these gaps and makes recommendations for improvement.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Context and Disaster Overview

The flooding in Mokwa was triggered by intense rainfall over a short period between May 28 and May 29, 2025. Emergency authorities reported heavy rain overwhelmed drainage infrastructure, leading to rapid inundation of residential areas and key transport routes (Reuters, 2025; AP News, 2025b). Local emergency management agencies estimated that over 3,000 residents were displaced, hundreds of households were impacted, and more than 500 homes were damaged or destroyed (AA News, 2025). According to the Federal Government of Nigeria, heavy rainfall combined with blocked waterways contributed significantly to the flood's impact, rather than dam failures from nearby dams such as Kainji or Jebba (Nairametrics, 2025). The Nigeria Hydrological Services Agency had forecasted flood risk in the region in its 2025 Flood Outlook, but this information did not translate into adequate preparedness at the community level (Federal Ministry of Information & National Orientation, 2025).

The Mokwa floods in Niger State, Nigeria, were a devastating disaster that occurred in May 2025, causing widespread destruction and loss of life. The floods were triggered by heavy rainfall and the partial collapse of a dam, resulting in the deaths of at least 161 people, with many more missing. The affected areas, including Tiffin Maza and AuguwanHausawa districts, were left without access to basic necessities like food, water, and shelter. The floods destroyed over 4,000 homes, 45 schools, and 44 health centers, leaving thousands of people displaced. The economic impact was also significant, with over 10,000 hectares of paddy farms destroyed, affecting the livelihoods of thousands of farmers. The floods also damaged critical infrastructure, including bridges and roads, disrupting transport and economic activity in the region. The response to the disaster was swift, with the Nigerian government and international organizations providing emergency aid, shelter, and medical assistance to those affected. The Niger State government also launched a reconstruction effort, promising to build new homes and infrastructure. The Mokwa floods highlight the need for improved disaster preparedness and management in Nigeria, as well as the importance of addressing the root causes of flooding, such as poor drainage and infrastructure.

2.1 Emergency Response to the Mokwa Flood

Government Agency Response

The National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) and the Niger State Emergency Management Agency (NSEMA) were primary government responders. NEMA deployed search, rescue, and relief

teams, providing equipment, rapid intervention vehicles, and water treatment units to support operations (NEMA, 2025). Despite these efforts, logistical challenges and coordination inefficiencies hindered a fully effective response.

State agencies acknowledged gaps in beneficiary identification and relief distribution, suggesting that data management and crisis logistics capacity were insufficient for such a large-scale disaster (Vanguard News, 2025). Delays in establishing operational relief camps and in delivering sufficient food and sanitation resources further compounded the humanitarian situation.

2.3 Humanitarian and International Support

International organisations and the private sector also participated in flood response operations. UNICEF partnered with local entities to provide emergency support, including water, sanitation, and protection services for vulnerable children, pregnant and lactating women, and displaced families (UNICEF Nigeria, 2025). The World Health Organization (WHO) analysed health risks in flooded communities to mitigate potential outbreaks of waterborne diseases, demonstrating the need for integrated public health strategies in emergency responses (WHO Regional Office for Africa, 2025). Although these interventions helped address immediate needs, fragmented coordination between government authorities and humanitarian partners reduced the overall effectiveness of response efforts.

2.4 Governance Gaps Revealed

The Mokwa flooding revealed key governance and emergency management shortcomings:

i. Weak Early Warning Dissemination

While national agencies forecasted flood risk, the translation of such warnings into actionable information for communities was weak. Many residents lacked awareness of the flood risk, limiting their ability to prepare or evacuate ahead of the disaster. This suggests gaps in local communication, risk education, and trust in early warning systems.

ii. Infrastructure and Land-Use Failures

Officials cited blocked waterways and inadequate drainage infrastructure as major contributors to the severity of the flooding (Nairametrics, 2025). Unregulated development and encroachments on natural water channels exacerbated the crisis, highlighting governance weaknesses in land-use planning and environmental management.

iii. Coordination Challenges

The response illustrated limited coordination across government and non-government actors. Inconsistencies in data collection, beneficiary identification, and resource distribution were reported. These issues point to deficiencies in integrated disaster management systems and emergency coordination protocols.

3.0 AREA OF THE STUDY

Mokwa, a town in Niger State, Nigeria, was hit by devastating floods in May 2025, leaving a trail of destruction and loss. The flooding, caused by heavy rainfall and the partial collapse of a dam, resulted in the deaths of at least 161 people, with many more missing. Over 3,000 people were displaced, and critical infrastructure, including homes, schools, bridges, and electricity poles, was damaged. The affected areas include Tiffin Maza and AuguwanHausawa districts, which were worst hit. The floods

also submerged large areas of farmland, destroying crops and worsening food insecurity in the region.The Nigerian government, along with international organizations, has launched relief efforts, providing emergency aid, shelter, and medical assistance to those affected. However, the need for sustained support and rehabilitation remains urgent.

4.0 METHODOLOGY

The study employed a case study research design, and involved qualitative and quantitative data. Thus, it employed an in-depth study of the disaster response strategies and operations in Tiffinmadza and Ungwan Hausawa communities of Mokwa. This method of study was empirically useful as it allowed for measuring the behaviour of the disaster response operation in the study communities against recognized or standard disaster response and recovery frameworks or models. In undertaking the study, 200 respondents were proportionately sampled in Tiffinmadza and Ungwan Hausawa. Random sampling was first used to sample housing units located along the banks of the river, areas where the floods affected. The researcher took transect walks along the river, listing the housing units that were affected by the floods. From the listed housing units, 46 and 154 were randomly selected from the two selected communities.

The victims of the floods served as clients to the disaster response service, dealt directly with the disaster response organisations, and benefited from the response and relief services. Hence, they were the suitable persons who could have shown uncompromising interest in monitoring the response operations. They were, therefore, the appropriate persons to provide useful information on the kind of response activities they witnessed the disaster response organizations undertake, as well as the quality and satisfaction of the disaster response service delivery.

Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were held within each of the study communities. FGD is an informal discussion among a group of selected individuals about a particular topic. Two FGDs each were conducted in Tiffinmadza and Ungwan Hausawa, with separate groups for males and females because of the cultural setting that predominantly support male domination over women, hence harbouring the potential to prevent the women from being as involving, interactive and expressive as possible if mixed with men in a single group, even though they might be the highly affected with rich experiences to share in the discussion. For the purposes of information control, eight (8) people formed a group. The strategy for analyzing the study was through developing a case description. Thus, the analysis of the data was organized on the basis of description of the general characteristics of response operation. The technique used for developing the case description included pattern matching i.e. empirically based patterns or standards were compared with the evidence from the studied cases. Also, aided by an appropriate statistical tools and computer software (Statistical Package for Social Sciences-SPSS) frequencies were tabulated. As one of the means of analyzing data on the effectiveness of the response strategies in the study areas, Likert scale was used to evaluate the local people perceptions on the performance of the response organizations during the flooding disaster.

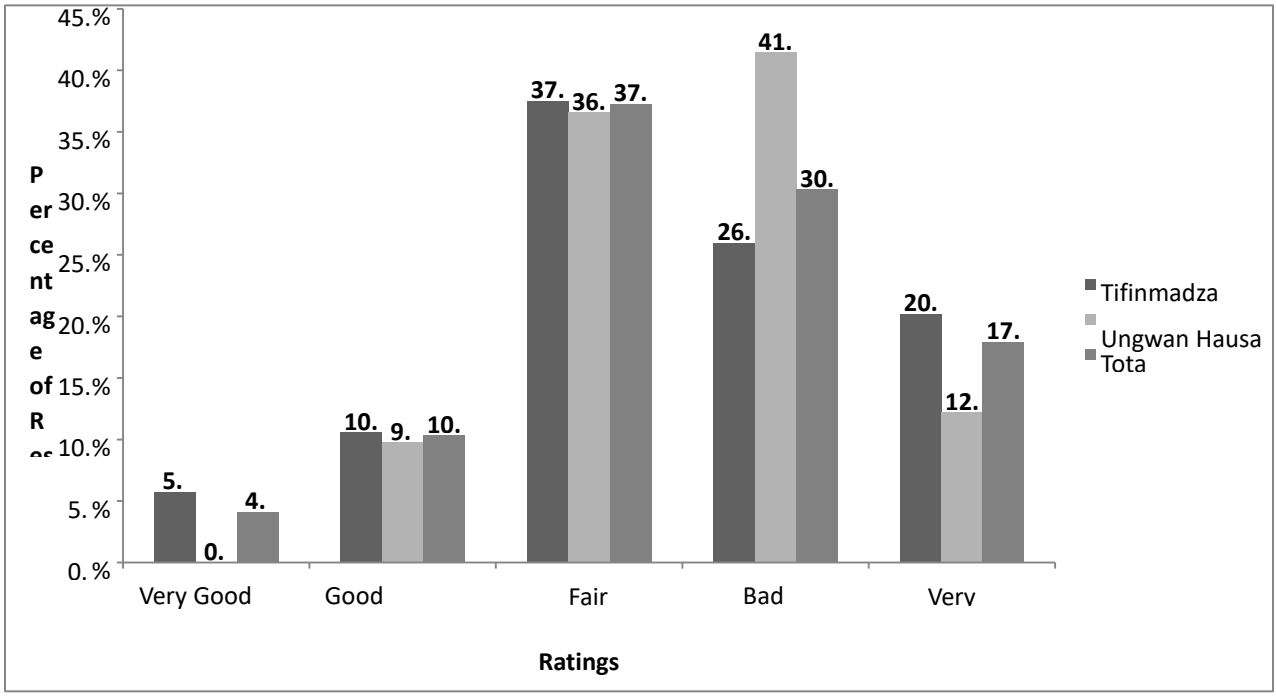
5.0 PRESENTATIONAND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

5.1 Effectiveness of Disaster Response Strategies

Local People Perception of the Assistance Received

The perception the respondents have of the assistance they received shed light on the disaster relief process as well as on social service provision more generally from recipients‟ perspective. Largely, there were mixed perceptions of the assistance and social service provision by the disaster response organisations. Asked to assess the assistance received following the disaster with regards to its

timeliness, quality and quantity, on the whole, only 4.1% of the respondents rated it as very good. About 37.2% of the respondents said that it was fair whilst a significant proportion of the respondents (about 30.3%) said it was bad.



Seen from the details illustrated in Fig. 4.1, largely, a considerable proportion of the respondents rated the assistance received as ordinary or below average. These perceptions the respondents have, especially where about 48.2% of the entire respondents perceive the assistance to be below average, is perhaps influenced by their literacy standards, the expectations they held during and after the disaster period, the promises from government, as well as the low community outreach on disasters.

Most of the respondents had and continue to have negative perceptions of the response agencies they worked with the assistance they received greatly because of the above-mentioned factors. Because in Tifinmadza, majority of the respondents (53.8%) perceived the assistance to be average and above average, a considerable proportion of them (26.0% and 20.2%) said the assistance was bad.

Similar pattern of responses was again observed in UngwanHausawa. Even though there were mixed reactions on the respondents‟ perception of the service provision as shown in Fig. 4.1, majority of the respondents (52.7%) stated that the support was far below average. In Ungwan Hausawa, 55.3% of the respondents mentioned that the support wasn't adequate. This was emphasised in the focus group discussions where most of the participants in the female group expressed that six (6) margarine cups of rice, a bottle of oil and the other foodstuffs and the non-food items such as the mats they received were woefully inadequate to sustain their large households for even a week especially when most of their source of livelihoods had been washed away by the floods, depriving them of any other alternative source of food.

5.2 Local Perception of Organisations' Performance on Response Activities

The respondents were asked to state their perceptions on the performance of the disaster response organisation on disaster response activities. As detailed in Table 1, the respondents held varied perceptions on the response agencies perceptions. Overall, but for performance on repairs rated as good, performances on six selected response activities were rated as ordinary with performances on other five activities seen by the residents as below average. It is observed in Tifinmadza that, but for social cohesion, which is activities directed towards avoiding intergroup divides during the flood disaster, and repair activities which were rated as "good", performance on the other activities were rated below average or at best as average. The repair and construction of the bridges were much appreciated by the victims. This was mentioned in the FGDs held with the male and females in the Tifinmadza.

Table 1: Respondents' Perception of Organizations' Performances

ACTIVITY	TIFINMADZA		Ungwan Hausawa		TOTAL	
	Mean	Remarks	Mean	Remarks	Mean	Remarks
SWIFTNESS OF RESPONSE	3.1	Fair	3.7	Bad	3.2	Fair
RELIEF DISTRIBUTION.	3.8	Bad	3.6	Bad	3.8	Bad
DIRECTION AND CONTROL.	3.7	Bad	3.3	Fair	3.6	Bad
LOCAL INVOLVEMENT.	3.1	Fair	3.5	Bad	3.2	Fair
COMMUNICATION.	2.9	Fair	3.5	Bad	3.0	Fair
HEALTH SERVICES.	4.4	Very Bad	3.9	Bad	4.3	Very Bad
PROPERTY PROTECTION.	4.1	Bad	3.8	Bad	4.1	Bad
SOCIAL COHESION.	2.6	Good	3.8	Bad	2.9	Fair
DAMAGE ASSESSMENT.	2.8	Fair	3.5	Bad	3.0	Fair
REPAIRS.	2.1	Good	2.8	Fair	2.6	Good
SHIFT TO RECONSTRUCTION.	4.6	Very Bad	3.3	Fair	4.3	Very Bad
COMMUNITY OUTREACH	3.1	Fair	4.1	Bad	3.3	Fair

Source: Field Data, 2025

This informed the "good" perception the residents on the performance of agencies on repairs made. Thus, the residents conceivably are aware of the notorious activist behaviour of residents in Tifinmadza, and the potential it could have had in surging extreme competition for relief resources, ignited tensions between and among individuals as well as inter-group rivalry, and possibly violent clashes. With none of these surfacing and/or occurring unnoticed because of its insignificance on such environment, the residents thus acknowledge a good performance on building social cohesion.

5.3 Respondents Impression on Disaster Response Organisations

The mixed perceptions the respondents have of the disaster response and relief assistance have, unsurprisingly, shaped their impressions on the agency's response. As indicated in Table 2, a considerable proportion of the respondents raised that they have less confidence in the disaster response agencies regarding their ability to effectively handle disaster and post disaster situations. From the field data, majority of the respondents (66%) claimed that they have distrust and doubts about the disaster response system regarding their ability to meet the needs of disaster victims in the, whilst only 11.4% gave the organization a room for improvement. As seen in Table 2 below, 65.5% of the respondents in Tifinmadza indicated distrust in the response system whereas 67.4% of the respondents in UngwanHausawa expressed their distrust in the response system. More significantly, only 10.3% and 2.2% of the respondents in Tifinmadza and UngwanHausawa respectively mentioned that the response organizations are capable of reducing flood risk factors in the communities.

Table 2: Respondents' Impression on Disaster Response Organizations

	COMMUNITY					
	TIFINMADZA		**UNGWAN HAUSAWA**		**TOTAL**	
RESPONDENTS' IMPRESSION	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Distrust in the system	101	65.5	31	67.4	132	66.0
Capable of reducing flood risk	16	10.3	1	2.2	17	8.5
Response system very reliable	18	11.7	11	23.9	29	14.5
Agencies could do better	19	12.5	3	6.5	22	11.0

Source: Field Data, 2025

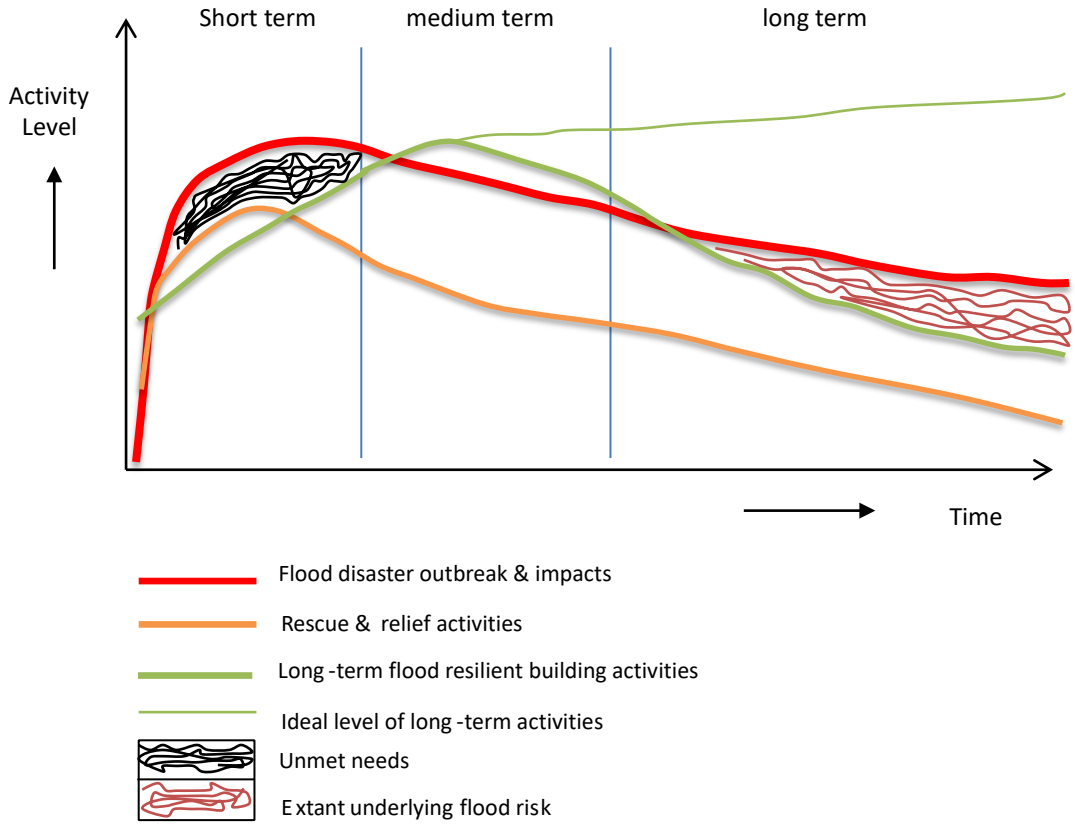
Nevertheless, 1.8% and 23.9% of the respondents in Tifinmadza and UngwanHausawa respectively expressed their confidence in the response system describing them as reliable. Some participants in the female FGD held in Tifinmadza added that it could be made better provided certain lessons in previous disaster events in the country are learnt and corrections made.

5.6 Behaviour of the Response and Recovery Operations

The behaviour of the disaster response and recovery activities in the study areas was described and summarised in a model termed Activity Level Decay Model (ALDM). The key indicators through which the model was developed involved the activities that were undertaken following the floods, the time frames within which the activities were undertaken. This was classified into Short-Term Activities, Medium-Term Activities and Long-Term Activities. The various recommendations made by the key agencies or institutions towards making the settlements in both study communities safer from flood recurrence, the achievements made as of the time the study was being conducted, and field observations of developments along the river in Tifinmadza and UngwanHausawa respectively.

The activities that were considered for this model ranged from rescue and relief services such as registration of victims, rate of influx of response organisations and relief resources, relief distribution and disbursement; through restoration services such as repairs and construction of collapsed infrastructures in the communities such as disconnected roads and damaged bridges; to flood reduction initiatives and activities. With flood risk reduction activities, one key activity, aside from public education on disaster risk reduction, recommended in Tifinmadza was the dredging and concretising the floor and erecting concrete walls at the banks of the river.

Fig. 4.2: Activity Level Decay Model (ALDM)



Source: Author's Own Construct.

The advanced ALDM shown by Fig. 1 reveals that within the respective study communities, the impulse of interest and commitment to both the relief activities and flood resilient or sustainability building activities were high with the outbreak of the floods. Rescue and relief activity is indicated by the brown curve in the model. It relates to activities geared towards providing material security, stability, protection and support for the affected population of the community. Thus, they include activities aimed at giving reassurance of hope and life. Indicated by the green curve in the model are the flood resilient/sustainability building activities. They concern activities aimed at ensuring a balance and harmony within the natural and human environment in order to create a flood resilient community.

The analysis of the field data confirmed the delay of response services. Overall, 48.5% of the total respondents from the study communities mentioned that they got the support or assistance within a month; with 10% claiming they received assistance two months later. Details on the time frame of receipt of relief assistance are presented in Table 3. This is quite a length of time sufficient enough to worsen the plight of the already incapacitated flood victims. Though they might have been given temporary shelters or some form of items from some individuals, friends and relatives from within or outside the communities, delays in response services might have created „window of vulnerability of the victims to worse physical and health situations". From the FGDs in the respective study communities, it was discovered that some of the promised medical services were not adequately fulfilled. This could have exposed the victims to worse health situations and possibly death.

Table 3: Time frame for Receipt of Relief Support

TIME FRAME	COMMUNITY					
	TIFINMADZA		UNGWAN HAUSAWA		TOTAL	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Within three days	24	15.6	4	8.6	28	14
A week later	42	27.3	13	28.3	55	27.5
Within a month	71	46.1	26	56.5	97	48.5
More than a month	17	11	3	6.5	20	10

Source: Field Data, 2025

It has been underscored by the United Nations (2008) that much of the life's loss during a disaster or hazard event occurs in the first 24-48 hours. This emphasises the need of offering necessary relief support to disaster victims in periods over a week or even months. The first two days after the outbreak of the disaster is very critical in achieving success in terms of reconditioning and re-establishing the community. Even if lives are not lost during the disaster event, there might be further psychological and physiological deteriorations of the victims and re-establishing them would be more difficult if not impossible.

6.0 CONCLUSIONS

Following from the findings of the study, it can be concluded, that existing frameworks and models for managing disaster situations in Mokwa, Niger State place emphasis on incorporating risk definition and reduction as well as vulnerability reduction in all phases of disaster management. Thus, disaster management frameworks have progressively shifted from the traditional methods, which focused highly on rescue and relief missions, to a more sustainable measure which focuses on mitigations against recurrence of similar events in future. Consequently, contemporary disaster management models have gradually moved away from reactive principles toward more proactive orientations.

However, several challenges ranging from institutional constraints to limited community cooperation have caused these proactive orientations to exist largely in theory rather than in practice. Persistent community-specific interests, individual parochial interests, institutional priorities, and limited organisational capacity have undermined the effective implementation of the key principles underlying disaster management models, particularly within the emergency response component. The execution of

post-disaster emergency response operations in the Tiffinmadza and Ungwan Hausawa communities experienced many of these challenges. In particular, some stakeholders were reluctant to act due to concerns about institutional image and accountability, while communities sometimes demonstrated limited cooperation with responding agencies. In addition, organisations were constrained by financial and logistical limitations. These factors collectively weakened response operations in the study communities, causing them to deviate from the sustainability pathway outlined in the Recovery Continuum Framework.

6.1 Recommendations

From the analysis of the information collected through the various methods, the following recommendations are made to improve the disaster response management in the country. Thus, seeing post-flood disaster periods as *'window of opportunity'* for reestablishing and resituating the affected community in a state or condition less vulnerable to the outbreak of similar disaster events over a considerable period of time, the following recommendations are outlined to shape disaster response operations in the country.

a. Inter-organisational platforms and forums should be annually organised, through which information and ideas on effective disaster prevention, preparedness, response and recovery activities could be exchanged.

b. If assistance is truly a matter of life and death, time does not permit the collection and analysis of all data to the extent required for wise decision making. Utmost priority should be placed on the speed of the response. Therefore, a speedy cross-sectorial needs assessment should be conducted jointly by responding agencies as prescribed in the National Standard Operating Procedure for Emergency Response in Nigeria.

c. Economic assessment of the impacts of the flood disasters and the creation of information systems on the needs of the affected population must be segregated. Information system for management of needs during disaster response and recovery must contain data segregated to reflect the needs of specific social groups such as school-age children, women, and well-defined group of households (based on location or community).

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