Water Scarcity and Displacement Brief

Gujba and Tarmua LGAs, Yobe State, Northeast Nigeria, April 2022

CONTEXT

At the end of February 2022, REACH field teams started to receive reports about some unusual displacement patterns especially in Tarmua and Gujba Local Government Areas (LGAs) in Yobe State, Northeast Nigeria

The dry season that usually takes place between November and May has historically been associated with drought and food insecurity in the state. The steady degradation of the Lake Chad Basin, reduction in length of rainy season and insecurity in the region has led to the increase in incidences of drought in the state.

Years of dealing with drought-like situations seasonally has led to the emergence of a diverse range of mechanisms to manage household resources. Despite this, people in communities across Tarmua and Gujba Local Government Areas (LGAs) are forced to leave their homes and seek refuge in central towns where they have to rely on the assistance of host community members, government officials and NGOs. This assessment is designed to understand the cause of such changes in displacement patterns as a reaction to an annual seasonal occurrence. It aims to inform humanitarian partners about the priority needs of the displaced population as well as the strain on resources during what is an already arduous time for host communities.

METHODOLOGY OVERVIEW

From the 10th to 15th March, REACH conducted a rapid assessment through key informant interviews (KIIs) and participatory mapping with 17 purposively sampled Internally Displaced Person (IDP) arrivals and three host community leaders. Specifically, the tools targeted IDPs displaced from hard-to-reach areas of Gujba and Tarmua LGAs, and community leaders in Babban Gida town in Tarmua LGA and Gujba town in Gujba LGA that are seeing a large number of arrivals. Three interviews were conducted remotely with IDPs in Buni yadi (2) and Biriri towns (1) in Gujba LGA. Fourteen interviews were conducted in-person: 11 in Babban Gida in Tarmuwa LGA, one in Gujba town and two in Katarko, both in Gujba LGA. Remote data collection methods had to be used for those areas determined unsafe to travel to. All findings in this brief are indicative only and should be triangulated with data from other sources.

A scoping exercise was first conducted to collect an indicative list of IDP journeys. It allowed us to be contextually grounded while designing tools and during analysis. Additionally, great care was taken in the design of the assessment to not lead respondents to speak of water scarcity as triggering their displacement by keeping the first half of the tool completely open ended and focusing on displacement The main limitations were time and size of sample. This means that we do not completely understand the absolute scale of displacement in numbers and cannot report on the same.

Movement Trends

Drivers of displacement and settlement dynamics:

- IDP respondents unanimously reported water scarcity as the reason most people chose to move from their settlements to their present location. As drivers generally operate, this one affects decisions to migrate in tandem with other factors depending on the context and geographical location of the Area of Origin (AoO) of respondents. Notably, the second most reported reason why people left the settlement was the lack of food due to lack of water, thus displaying the importance of water as a trigger for displacements in these communities.
- The prevalence and severity of the dry season and of accompanying drought-like conditions every year often trigger some level of migration as a coping mechanism, however the scale of displacement witnessed this year, KIs reported, was unprecedented.
- Most KIs reported four factors that have exacerbated the impact of water scarcity on their AoOs: lower rainfall, unsatisfactory harvests, fuel scarcity and the presence of Armed Opposition Groups (AOGs).

Information on routes:

- Of the 17 KIs interviewed, all except for one KI travelled from a settlement within their own LGA. The exception was a KI who left Gumsa in Geidam and reached Babbangida after many pit stops. The predominant pattern of movement was that KIs preferred to move to the closest location to their home where water would be sustainably available. Thus KIs who had sought refuge in settlements that were closer to their AoO, but did not have sufficient water, found themselves having to move more than once. When they had to move again, they often moved into bigger towns that were known to have sufficient water.
- In other instances, KIs who reported having been displaced more than once were those who were displaced due to insecurity in the first instance, and then were displaced again during this dry season due to water scarcity.
- KIs traveling within the southern Yobe region reported not facing any checkpoints on the way. They also reported not encountering any security personnel along the way This may be because many of those interviewed used untarred roads or bush paths for a considerable amount of their journey, while some switched to main roads to access commercial vehicles midway through the journey, depending on availability.
- All respondents reported having travelled in groups. The size of the caravan traveling together often depended on the existing movement restrictions and capacity of people to move. For instance, those originating from areas with Armed Opposition Groups (AOG) presence had to leave discreetly in small groups at night so as to not be seen by AOGs who prevent people from leaving the settlement. KIs also reported they heard of AOGs following some groups that tried

Funded by European Union Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid
USAID FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE
REACH Informing more effective humanitarian action

to leave and forcing them to return. Two routes that were flagged as insecure due to AOG activities or presence were the routes from Jama'are in Gujba to Katarko in Gujba and from Gumsa in Geidam to Babban Gida.

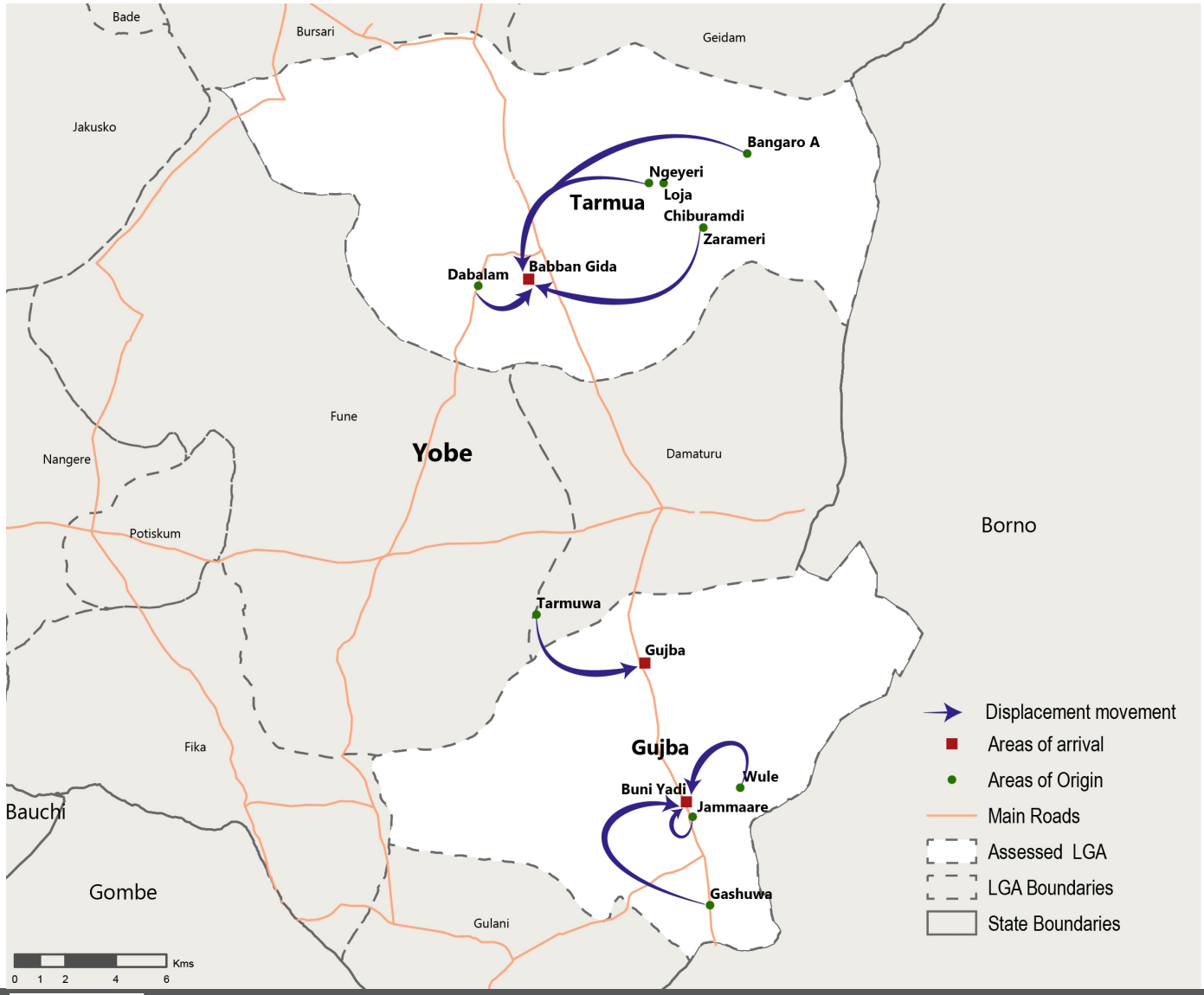
- KIs reported the presence of diverse groups of people traveling together, including men, women, children and the elderly. Some KIs reported having witnessed deaths of other travellers during their journey reportedly due to the strain of the journey. The means of transportation used by people leaving their AoOs also varied, depending on the size and capacity of those traveling. Those without their own vehicles reportedly combined various modes of transport such as paying for a seat on a commercial vehicle or traveling on foot with children and elders on pushcarts. Such respondents were also more likely to stop at transit stops for a few hours or overnight to refresh or to seek refuge temporarily before moving on to other towns.

Movement intentions:

According to KIs, even though some people remain in the hard-to-reach settlements, movement of people seems to have intensified in the month prior to data collection in many cases and in some cases a few months before that.

- In two cases, KIs were displaced due to water scarcity issues that began during the previous dry season a year ago. This may indicate some changes in the use of migration as a coping mechanism, with people in these areas seemingly turning to longer stays in their host destination in the face of this severe water scarcity.
- The scale of displacement is reportedly much larger than during previous years. KIs reported that in previous years a comparatively smaller sub-section of the population would be compelled to move due to water scarcity. Most people would cope by relying on water vendors and water trucking services or by digging new wells. However, when the cost of accessing water started to surpass the cost of living in a new destination, more people were reportedly forced to leave the settlement.
- KIs reported that leaving the settlement was a coping mechanism for a subset of the population that has fewer resources or less capacity to afford the rising prices of water.
- According to some KIs, most IDPs looking to stay longer in their current destination are trying to find affordable and sustainable ways to provide shelter for their families in the towns, and do not plan to return to their AoO with their entire families. The preferred nature of return, if considering returning at all, seems to be for one or two working members of the household to go back to tend to their farms during the rainy season.

Map 1: Displacement Journeys to Buniyadi and Gujba towns in Gujba LGA, and Babbangida town in Tarmua LGA



Funded by European Union Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid
USAID FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE
REACH Informing more effective humanitarian action

Water scarcity in Areas of Origin

KIs reported that water scarcity was usually worse in the months between November/December and June with slight variations. Annually, during this time of the year, water is scarcely available in most locations that KIs came from.

- An often-mentioned coping mechanism for households in previous years during the dry season has been to buy water from water vendors and/or hire water trucking services from nearby towns where water is available. While prices normally range from approximately 5 to 20 naira per jerrycan, the prices reportedly currently range from 200 to 400 naira per jerrycan, depending on distance and demand. This indicates a very steep increase in costs for people living in these communities.
- Respondents mentioned that people had to arrange long arduous journeys on a regular basis to towns where water was still available to negotiate a price, buy the water, and transport it back to their AoO themselves. Transporting water on their own sometimes reduced the cost per jerrycan to between 25 and 40 Naira, but also led to other costs associated with transportation, the long travel time and distance covered to obtain water. For instance, some KIs reported that this meant having to travel and stay for one or two days at a garrison town.

Water points and sources:

Several KIs mentioned that in the time before they left their AoO, the main sources of water available to them were unprotected wells. However, these were reportedly drying up.

- KIs also reported that people in their AoO tend to hand dig wells to access water when older wells dry up. However, the depletion of water aquifers over time had rendered the digging of wells ineffective as it now reportedly takes them too long to fill up for utilization. Additionally, those who continued to dig and tried using well-water before leaving their settlement reported that water quality was worse than what they were used to.
- At least one KI reported an incident where a water point had been destroyed by AOG activity (in Anzai settlement, Gujba ward).
- Most KIs mentioned not having access to boreholes in their settlement. However, those that reported the existence of one in their settlement said they were not functional.
- Boreholes that were damaged reportedly remained unrepaired due to the steep costs involved and lack of external support to fix them. Those that functioned were commercialized or the unavailability or cost of fuel had made the possibility of operating them prohibitively expensive.

Water accessibility and quality:

From the descriptions of KIs, it is evident that accessing water began taking up a larger percentage of their income and their time than before.

- It took respondents a minimum of three hours to fetch water in the best case scenarios and upwards of a day to fetch water in the worst scenarios.
- It was reportedly more difficult to arrange for regular transport to fetch and carry water, since the distances people needed to cover to do so had increased. KIs reported having to buy or borrow tricycles and pushcarts or having to ride bicycles across rocky terrain while carrying water for the entire household, after waiting for a minimum of one or two hours in queues at nearby towns for water.
- In places with high AOG presence, community members faced some restrictions on water accessibility. For instance, a KI from Gumsa reported that AOGs prevented anyone from exiting the settlement to buy fuel for the borehole while also preventing fuel sent by authorities to enter the settlement.
- Most KIs reported that the quality of water in unprotected wells and surface water sources had deteriorated significantly. Some said only the colour changed and became muddy though the taste was unchanged. Most KIs reported that people in the settlements had experienced health issues as a result of drinking such water.

Water scarcity and food security:

- Some KIs reported having to sell their harvests to buy water. Additionally, they also reported suffering financial losses because they were unable to use water for farming or animal rearing activities.
- Due to water costs now taking up a significantly higher percentage of their income and leading to a depletion of their food reserves KIs also reported being unable to afford food prices in the markets.

Other Needs in Areas of Origin

- KIs expressed a need for functional educational and health facilities, which in many cases never existed or had stopped functioning years ago, and still remain an unmet need.
- Some KIs who had been living in AOG controlled settlements or experiencing bouts of criminality and looting in their AoO mentioned that they had become somewhat accustomed to living with the insecurity but that the deterioration of access to water drove them to leave.

Areas of Arrival

Priority needs in Areas of Arrival:

- The reported priority need of respondents in Areas of Arrival was shelter. Having moved primarily due to the costs of sourcing water, many KIs reported that most of those displaced now have to pay money for shelter, thus facing a new basic unmet need.
- Respondents noted that markets were functioning in locations of arrival, and this allowed them to access food and non-food items.
- KIs in Tarmua reported that prices of goods in the market were going up on a regular basis and making items unaffordable.

Infrastructure in Areas of Arrival:

- Unanimously, respondents noted that the access to, as well as availability and quality of water was significantly improved at places of arrival. Some respondents noted that their access to water in host communities was restricted to specific times during the day. However, relative to the water available to them in their AoO, respondents unambiguously stated that the cost and time taken to access water had significantly reduced.
- Buni Yadi reportedly had two boreholes, one of which is commercialized. This one runs on electricity and the vendor charges 5 to 10

Funded by European Union Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid
USAID FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE
REACH Informing more effective humanitarian action

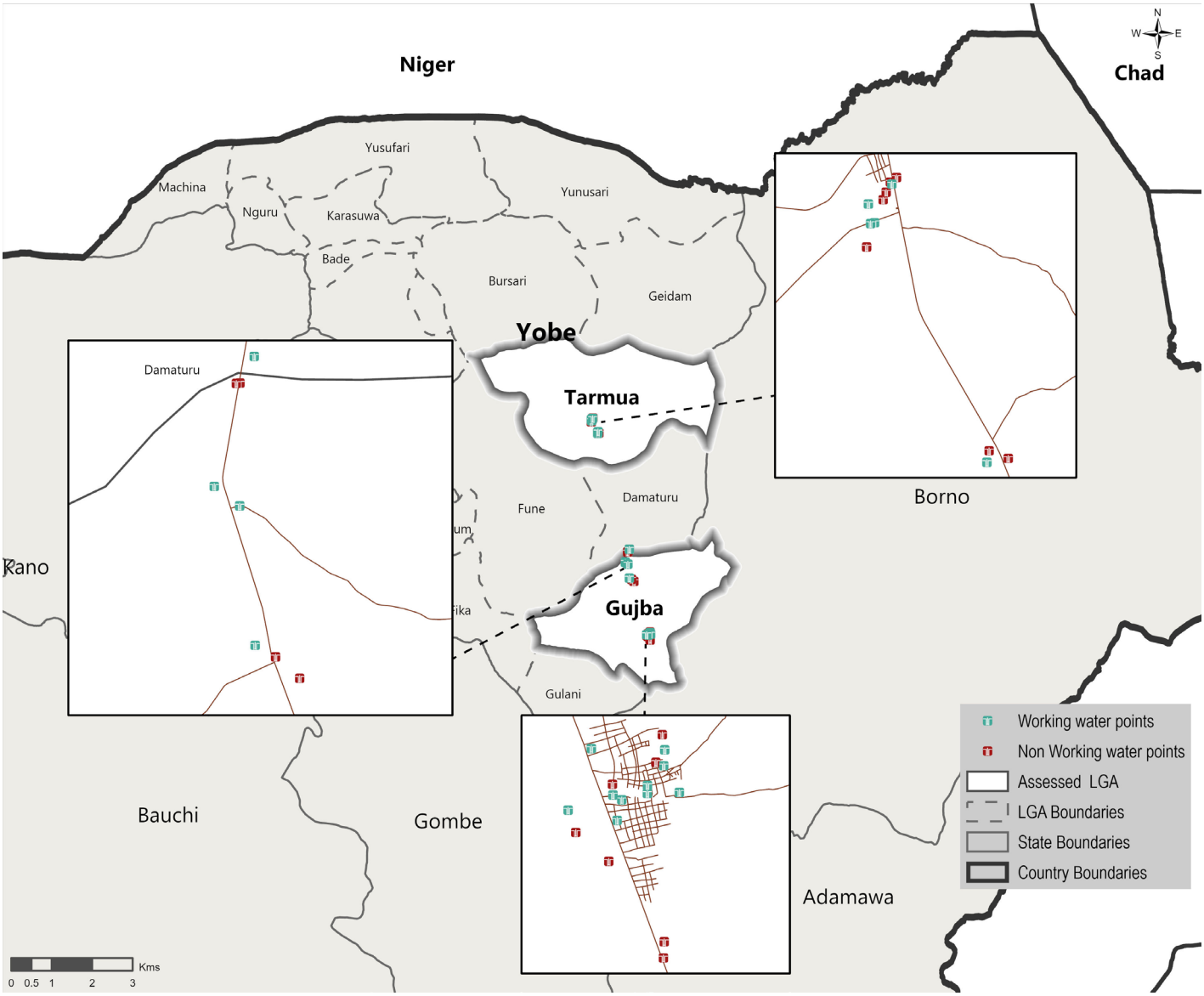
naira for a jerry can. The other borehole, built by an NGO, is solar powered and free to be used by all. However, the waiting times at both these water points are very high. This has been exacerbated by the arrival of IDPs. The KI community leader from this location mentioned that lack of electricity over the past few months has led to a situation of insufficient water supply in the town. Community leaders mentioned tensions between some IDPs and host community members, relating primarily to financial or property disputes.

- Babangida reportedly had four functioning boreholes, all of which were commercialised. The lack of electricity in the town drives water vendors to operate their boreholes only during times when supply of electricity is available. This causes restrictions on the times water can be accessed and increases the time each household has to spend on fetching water. In this town too, community leaders felt that the influx of new arrivals to the town may be exacerbating water scarcity and access issues.
- Biriri reportedly had four functioning boreholes of which two are powered by generators and two by solar energy. Despite the influx of IDPs, community leaders report that the sources of water are sufficient for those living in the town.
- Gujba reportedly had three boreholes of which two are not functional and the third is drying up.

Humanitarian aid in Areas of Arrival:

- Community leaders from Gujba town, Babban Gida town and Buniyadi town mentioned the gaps in food security due to a reported reduction in service provision from humanitarian organizations since last year.
- KIs elsewhere explained that the pattern of displacement to bigger towns was driven by the logic that water scarcity in those areas would be addressed sooner than it would be in their AoO. Relatedly, we assessed the perception of community leaders in three such big towns, Biriri, Baban-Gida and Buniyadi. All of them listed at least one borehole which had been originally established by an NGO.

Map 2: Water points in Buni Yadi, Gujba town in Gujba LGA, and Babbangida town in Tarmua LGA



Funded by European Union Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid
USAID FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE
REACH Informing more effective humanitarian action