



Photo: Elizabeth, PSS Beneficiary from Pulka community, Gwoza LGA, Photo by Dauda, November, DRC,2021.

## **IMPROVING THE MENTAL AND PHYSICAL HEALTH OF DISPLACED AND CONFLICT AFFECTED PERSONS THROUGH PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT ACTIVITIES**

Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe (BAY) states in Northeast Nigeria are currently facing acute crisis due to ongoing military hostilities between the Nigeria army and organized armed groups. The conflict is widespread, impacting neighboring countries including Cameroon, Niger, and Chad. It has displaced more than two million people and at current approximately seven million individuals are exposed to various types of vulnerabilities including food insecurity, lack of primary health care, and barriers to education.

Through our ongoing ECHO funded project to address humanitarian needs resulting from armed conflict and displacement through multi-sectoral interventions, DRC is building on the work it has been doing over the years now in Northeast Nigeria. With the help of the project, DRC has continued to strengthen the

protective environment for conflict-affected communities through the provision of stand-alone and integrated protection interventions in the areas of psychosocial support services (PSS), protection monitoring, information dissemination on protection, advocacy, shelter and NFI solutions, sanitation and Hygiene promoting solutions, and food and livelihood support.

Elizabeth is one of the beneficiaries selected in Gwoza LGA, Borno state. She is 58 years-old and heads her household of seven dependents (two girls and five boys). She had been displaced for four years, and has now returned to her place of origin, Pulka community of Gwoza LGA.

*Narrating her ordeal; "I was displaced from Pulka to Cameroon for four (4) years, after Boko Haram Fighters (armed opposition group (AOG)) infiltrated Pulka looting food items and valuables, setting building ablaze, killing civilians including my eldest son and government security forces while holding many hostages. Before the attack, I have never thought of leaving my community, but the threat of being killed or abducted made me leave my community in search of safety in Cameroon. I started to think about leaving my home one year before I did when the insurgents started gaining control of local government areas such as Bama, Dikwa, Marte, and Baga, restricting movement by road to Maiduguri the state capital.*

*I didn't get a chance to adequately prepare to leave because markets were closed, electricity power cables were destroyed, most roads were not safe. We escaped from the community together with my husband and children at night, I left with only a pair of clothes because you will be killed when the AOGs see you moving with any form of luggage. We walked throughout the night without food and water until we got to Minawawo (Cameroon) three (3) days after fleeing from Pulka.*

*After I received information from other refugees that government security forces have regained control of Pulka and that Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) have started settling back in Pulka coupled with presence of humanitarian organizations, I decided to return to Pulka. My husband stayed behind, he vowed not to come back because his brothers were killed right before his eyes and his house was destroyed despite our poor living condition.*

*Our family lost its means of livelihood because I was a farmer (livestock/crop production), and when our house was targeted, the food stored and the flock of goats/sheep we had were looted before the house was set on fire. I cannot go back to the farm now because it is not safe to do so."*

*"It would not have been possible to return back to my community if there was no humanitarian support like this."*

-Elizabeth  
Program Beneficiary

Elizabeth has been a beneficiary of DRC's protection psychosocial support program (individual/group lay counselling, skill development) for four months. Before benefitting from psychosocial support, she frequently had nightmares due to her trauma and she was always isolating herself from

people. But after enrolling her into PSS lay counselling sessions, she has improved her mental, emotional,



social, and psychological well-being. She now relates well with family members, neighbors and the nightmares have stopped.

Finally, she says; *“I appreciate the effort of humanitarian organizations especially DRC for intervening at this critical period when IDPs and returnees cannot help themselves. It would not have been possible to return back to my community if there was no humanitarian support like this and I would have had no hope of a future for me and my family. We are now able to move on from what has happened in the past and hope for a better future.*

### **About the ECHO Project**

The European Union Humanitarian Aid and Civil Protection funded program implemented by Danish Refugee Council (DRC) aims to improve the protection environment of 62,000 individuals identified as vulnerable members of target communities in seven LGAs of Borno State by delivering integrated protection, WASH, and shelter/NFI response in mostly hard-to-reach locations in Borno state through stand-alone protection programming as well as the provision for basic needs through protection integrated hygiene promotion and shelter/NFI solutions. The project runs from May 2021 to April 2022.