

Akwaja

During the 2005 census, Akwaja had 2583 residents.¹ It is estimated that as of 2023, there may be 4,477 persons residing in the areas.² With the start of the crisis, many IDPs have resorted to hiding in the bush and taking regular shelter there due to the many insecurity incidents that have impacted the town since the beginning of the crisis. There are reportedly 10,850 IDPs settled in Akwaja Bush settlement.³ The majority of the IDPs in this settlement arrived in the early years of the crisis prior to 2020 from other conflict affected areas of Donga Mantung Division. Pendular movements between Akwaja Village and Akwaja Bush settlements are caused by military operations that are frequent in Ako and also the poor living conditions that are found in the bush.⁴ There are apparently no internally displaced person in the town but there are reported to be 225 people who have returned from surrounding areas of Ako Subdivision and also from Nigeria due to the ongoing crisis and the lack of access to farmland and lack of livelihoods in their area of displacement. There are a number of vulnerable people displaced within the bush settlement with reports of 1700 child headed households, 50 female headed households, 25 elderly headed households, and 20 male headed households. In addition to these vulnerable groups, key informants have reported various protection and security threats such as armed attacks, shootings, theft, arbitrary detention and arrest, lack of civil documentation, extortion, and pregnancy amongst young girls.⁵

In the bush settlement, all shelters are makeshift shelters made primarily out of thatch and wood. Due to the agricultural background of those living in the settlement, it is reported through Shelter Cluster analysis that beyond the typology of makeshift shelter that the shelter types are probably similar to agricultural shades. It is reported by Shelter Cluster partners that pendular movements are quite frequent in these locations, with IMC reporting that health centers are often used as temporary shelters for IDPs engaging in these pendular movements. Not designed as accommodation facilities, these health centers often lack bedding, and adequate conditions to accommodate the IDPs.⁶ Returnees in the town are living in mudbrick shelters of which 54% are in good condition and 46% are damaged. The main cause of damage is due to the fact that there were burnt intentionally during the crisis. For the Humanitarian Needs Overview 2023, the Shelter Cluster ranked both the main town and the settlement as being in Shelter Severity Level 5 of having extreme inadequacies. No household assessments have been reported by Shelter Cluster partners in the area of Akwaja.

Akwaja has a regular rainy and dry season, when extreme temperatures going up to 35 degrees Celsius. Akwaja is also impacted by the Harmattan winds which can cause adverse health impacts such as respiratory difficulties or in the event of thunderstorms at the beginning of the rainy season damage to homes.⁷ Akwaja is considered to be in the tropical savannah ecoregion,⁸ with shrubs covering the low-lying areas below 100m, with various trees found in the higher elevation areas which include Iroko, Mahogany, Dibetou and Teak and natural palms.⁹ Akwaja is located 17 km from the Mbembe Forest Reserve¹⁰, which is home to many wild plants and reptile species including crocodiles, pythons, chameleons, and tortoises. Monkeys, gorillas, antelopes, chimpanzees,

¹ https://www.pndp.org/documents/24_CDP_Ako.pdf

² Oakridge Laboratory Landsat Population Estimates 2021

³ OCHA Multisector Needs Assessment August 2022

⁴ OCHA MSNA

⁵ OCHA MSNA

⁶ Shelter Cluster Photo Galleries, November Factsheet

⁷ https://www.pndp.org/documents/24_CDP_Ako.pdf

⁸ World Wildlife Fund Ecoregions of Africa

⁹ https://www.pndp.org/documents/24_CDP_Ako.pdf

¹⁰ Mapcarta

leopards, and various kinds of birds can also be seen in the reserve. The forest reserve has certain protected areas which are reserved for conducting traditional rites and include various shrines and secret houses. The dominant soil types in the subdivision of Ako include sandy-clay ferruginous soils or laterite soil, which is helpful for the production of a variety of agricultural crops.¹¹

Being in Ako Subdivision which has many rivers, lakes, and waterfalls, Akwaja bush settlement itself is located in close proximity to a river that eventually connects to the Donga River in the North.¹² The crisis affected population has reported that everyone in the population has access to water which they collect from surface water. Nearly none of the people in Akwaja are treating the water before drinking it. For those living in the town, the nearest water source is between 16-30 minutes away, while those living in the bush report that the nearest water source is less than 15 minutes away. In the Akwaja bush settlement, IDPs have reported that they don't have containers to carry the water and that the water has a bad taste when drinking it.¹³ In Akwaja settlement, the population is using pit latrines with or without slabs, while in the bush, the population lacks access to latrines and is practicing open defecation. The conditions of the latrines in both locations are deplorable. Lack of privacy and lack of hygiene were reported in both locations. The problem to access both latrines and water is exacerbated for persons living with disabilities.¹⁴ Waste management is a challenge due to the remoteness of the location and most waste is done through household collection and removal to landfills. The situation in Akwaja Bush settlement can be considered to be particularly dire as it does not have access to any regular municipal garbage collection facilities.

Prior to the crisis, the most common forms of economic activity included cash crop production, beekeeping, animal husbandry and fishing, hunting, exploitation of the forest for making a livelihood, craftsmanship including making baskets, canoes, traditional drums and other works, commerce, mining, and transportation activities.¹⁵ In order to feed themselves, the crisis affected population produces their own food, gathers food from the bush, and goes fishing in the nearby river. Coping mechanisms include having to rely on cheaper food, buy food on credit, and reducing the amount that one consumes/meals per day in order to feed children.

Akwaja is stated to lack access to electricity and lacks a stable electrical network.¹⁶ The markets only sell wood for cooking, making that the most common fuel used for cooking of meals.¹⁷ There are several markets near Akwaja: The Akawaja Main Market, the Dumbo-Akwaja Market, and the Tumbo-Akwaja Market. Many of these markets were said to lack the proper infrastructure and the Ako council was considering on makin some improvements by the installation of water points, latrines and improved market sheds.¹⁸ The crisis affected population has several concerns about the markets including that they are too far, while the residents of Akwaja Town say that the markets are difficult to access. It is reported that the town is accessible by car and motorbike, while the bush settlement is only accessible by foot.

¹¹ https://www.pndp.org/documents/24_CDP_Ako.pdf

¹² https://www.pndp.org/documents/24_CDP_Ako.pdf

¹³ OCHA MSNA

¹⁴ OCHA MSNA

¹⁵ https://www.pndp.org/documents/24_CDP_Ako.pdf

¹⁶ https://www.pndp.org/documents/24_CDP_Ako.pdf

¹⁷ OCHA MSNA

¹⁸ https://www.pndp.org/documents/24_CDP_Ako.pdf

Through the OCHA Multisector Needs Assessment, different forms of humanitarian assistance have been provided to the people in Akwaja including food distribution, nutrition, nfi distribution, and health services through the hospital.¹⁹

¹⁹ OCHA MSNA