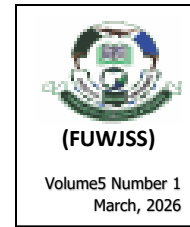


GOVERNMENT RESPONSES FOR TACKLING BOKO HARAM INSURGENCY IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Activities of Boko Haram have largely threatened national security in Nigeria since the past two decades. In Nigeria, the sect came into limelight when it attacked the United Nations' building and Police Headquarters in Abuja, leading to loss of lives and properties. It soon complemented these assaults with the kidnap of 276 Chibok schoolgirls and the slaughtering of 50 students of Federal Government College, Buni Yadi. Over the years, different strategies have been adopted by different administrations in Nigeria towards ending the crises, namely: Yaradua's shoot-on-sight approach, Jonathan's "carrot" and "stick" strategy and Buhari's de-radicalization, de-mobilization and rehabilitation programme, otherwise known as DDR. Although Buhari's approach looked good in walking a fine line, Boko Haram is still in the bush fighting with its sister organization, the Islamic State of West Africa Province (ISWAP). The study adopts the descriptive cross-sectional survey design which involved the administration of 250 questionnaires, conduct of in-depth interview and Focus Group Discussions. The study's findings revealed ethnicity, betrayal among Nigerian military forces, greed and corruption coupled with foreign involvement as the major reason why Boko Haram crisis remains unabated in Nigeria. The study concludes that while much attention is paid to repentant Boko Haram, little or no attention is paid to their victims. This gap is generating hostility and rejection of government programmes in local communities. Thus, it is recommended that the back-to-school initiative of the Federal Government should go a step further to identify the real victims of Boko Haram insurgency and compensate them accordingly.

Keywords: Boko Haram, DDR, carrot and stick, ISWAP, corruption

Introduction

At the beginning, nobody gave Boko Haram a chance, not even the federal government. However, like a smouldering fire, Boko Haram has taken its activities to a new high, giving birth to two splinter groups, namely Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State of West Africa (ISWAP) that are fighting with ISIS. This feat did not come like a song. Spotting the danger ahead, the government under the watch of Ali Modu Sheriff instituted Operation Flush to tackle the excesses of the group. Although this group

did its best to tackle the security situation of the state, its best was not enough, as Boko Haram grew in leaps and bounds. The activities of these separatist fighters took a grand stand security wise, when they simultaneously attacked the United Nations building and the Police Headquarters in Abuja, killing several people. But it was the kidnap of over 200 female students of Government Girls' Secondary School, Chibok that took the activities of this group to the attention of the international community (Olanrewaju, 2014; Taiwo-Obalonye, 2014; Sokunbi, 2015).

Although the federal government led by Yaradua had taken radical steps towards addressing the unhealthy security situation in the North-east, many believe that government did not act spontaneously to nip the activities of Boko Haram in the bud. Worse hit by the mantra of inaction was the Jonathan-led administration. Although this government did not see Boko Haram as being capable of doing any harm to the security architecture of the country, especially North-east, the realities on the ground later made the Federal Government to seek external assistance from South Africa, United States and France. But it was the Buhari-led government that took the campaign to a new order of De-radicalization, De-mobilization and Rehabilitation (DDR), which was hibernated under "Operation Safe Corridor". Under this policy, dialogue became a major weapon of war, leading to the surrender of over 120, 000 former Boko Haram members who are presently undergoing rehabilitation at certain locations in Maiduguri and Gombe ([www. radionigeria.org.ng](http://www.radionigeria.org.ng); www.nta.org.ng).

With the laying down of arms by some former Boko Haram fighters and the deaths of former leaders, Mohammed Yusuf and Abubuakar Shekau, many had thought that it was only a matter of time before it was all over. Unfortunately, that is not the case today in the North-east. In a corollary with the Tamil Tiger of the Sri Lanka fame, Special Adviser to President Muhammadu Buhar on Media and Publicity, Femi Adeshina, was optimistic that it would not be long before it was all over, citing Tamil Tigers' rebellion, which came to an infamous end after 28 years of fighting following the death of their leader. Adeshina: "Nothing is impossible. I always refer to the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka. That rebellion lasted for 28 years. But one day the mastermind of the rebellion was taken out. And that was the automatic ending of it". Different strokes for similar situations. While the rebellion in Sri Lanka was put out after 28 years with the killing of Tamil Tigers' leader, in Nigeria, Boko Haram crises still rage on in spite of the deaths of its leaders, Mohammed Yusuf and Abubakar Shekau at the hands of Nigerian security operatives. For instance, in December 2021, the Islamic State of West Africa Province (ISWAP), launched a rocket attack in Maiduguri, targeting the president and his team. Although the

attack missed its target, it ended up claiming many other lives (Usigbe, 2021). Soon after, terrorists linked to Boko Haram and the Islamic State of West Africa Province (ISWAP), carried out a deadly attack on the Nigerian military base in Damboa Local Government Area of Borno State, leading to the deaths of several soldiers, leaving many others unaccounted for. Yet, in the same month of January 2025, another attack was carried out in the Damboa community in Kukawa Local Government Area of Borno State, which left 40 farmers dead, while scores were abducted (Usigbe, 2021; Obisue, 2025; Tunji, 2025).

During the campaign that brought him to power in 2015, Buhari had promised to take the fight to Boko Haram in Sambisa Forest. Many had believed him given his military background. Ironically this never happened. Rather, the administration was believed to have fallen into the same cesspool as the Goodluck Jonathan-led government. Pronto, it was the inability of the Goodluck Jonathan administration to address the security situation of the country, especially that of the North-east that robbed him of his second term ambition. Ironically the profiteer of that infamous outing in the general election never lasted out his promise. At a certain point in the history of Boko Haram crises, Boko Haram was in full control of six local government areas in Borno State namely Bama, Konduga, Abadam, Kala Balge, Mafa and Maigumeri. Some factors have been attributed to this failing namely tribalism, ethnicity, religion, pecuniary interest, greed and corruption. Among their weapons of war include Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs), Rocket Propelled Grenade (RPG), drones and kidnap (Olanrewaju & Omipidan, 2014; Ojodhale et al. 2024).

Boko Haram crises led to the closure of over fifty seven per cent of schools in Borno State, while 1,400 schools were destroyed. Majority of these schools have not been able to re-open ever since either because of extensive damage done to them or because they are located in areas considered unsafe for academic programme. The violence got to its apogee in 2014, leading to the death of 10, 849 people, among them 295 teachers (Olanrewaju & Omipidan, 2014; Ojodhale et al. 2024).

The failure of Joint Military Forces in Nigeria to end Boko Haram crises after fifteen years has thrown up a lot of questions, which this research is trying to answer. The paper is divided into four sections. The first section comes with introduction; followed by Section Two, which delves into the theoretical framework. Section Three is themes and perspectives. This leads our submission to solution, captured in the paper as Section Four from which our conclusion is drawn. Among the objectives of this paper include: 1. To investigate the conditions that provoked Boko Haram crises. 2. To identify the consequences of Boko

Haram crises .3. To ascertain why Boko Haram crises have continued in spite of numerous measures put in place by the government to end the crises. 4. To establish whether there is a corresponding relationship between Boko Haram and other global terror networks, and 5. To determine how the crises can be terminated.

Theoretical Framework

The findings in this study shall be discussed under the platform of functionalist perspective. More specifically the findings shall be discussed under social control theory. In all consciousness of purpose, social control theory according to Schaefer (2001) reported in Nwoye (2021), refers to the techniques and strategies for preventing deviant behaviour in any society. By extension of knowledge, the term, “social control”, is founded on safety catch philosophy, which holds that the individual seeks to reach his objective at less cost. This grandstand finds expression in government policies both on the state and federal levels. It goes to show that in 2006, Borno State Government led by Dr. Ali Modu Sheriff introduced Operation Flush in response to the activities of an outlaw “Maitesine”, which many believed later metamorphosed into Boko Haram. On federal level, the federal government under the watch of Umaru Musa Yaradua introduced a Joint-Military Task Force to radically address the excesses of Boko Haram. This Military Joint Task Force comprised the army, the police, customs, immigration, Air Force and the Navy (Kirby et al. 2000; Yusuf, 2014 in Seidensticker-Brikay, 2014; Haralambos, Hoborn, Chapman & Moore, 2013 in Nwoye, 2021).

Reckless (1967) quoted in Kendall (2003) examines this theory from the typology of “pushes and “pulls”, which in their strength tend to attract people to crime or discourage them from crime if they have positive self-esteem and strong group cohesion. Standing on the typology of “inner containments” and “outer containments” to explain further, Reckless posits that one resists the temptation to commit crime if he has the strongest containment mechanisms. Comparatively, Boko Haram fighters did not have the positive strongest containment mechanisms advocated by Reckless. More so , when collapse of group cohesion reinforced by their inability to apply religious norms made crime situation incentive to them (MacDougall, 2012 in Mugeru, 2012; Olanrewaju 2014; Yusuf, 2014 in Seidensticker-Brikay, 2014; Taiwo-Obalonye, 2014; Nwoye,2021).

Hirschi (1969), cited in Nwoye (2021) also argues that people are insulated from deviant behaviour if they have strong “social bonds”, which bind them to their families, peers, schools, churches and other social institutions. The high point of this proposition, also known as social bond theory, is the notion that the probability of deviant behaviour increases if

a person's ties to society are weakened or broken. The social bonds are presented as attachment to other people, commitment to conformity, involvement in convention and norms. Relating these outlines to the research, it is important to note that Boko Haram combatants as outlaws do not possess these qualities of the imbalance that exists between the impulse to commit crime and the physical and social controls that deter it such as the law and law enforcement agents. The tendency to commit crime tends to be higher with Boko Haram elements. Hence, an escalation of Boko Haram activities in the North-east, particularly in Borno and Yobe States (Lawson & Heaton, 1999; Schaefer, 2001; Kendall, 2003; Henslin, 2008 in Nwoye, 2021).

The theory finally presents human beings as self-conscious animals, who wouldn't want to fail in their chosen vocations. That is why Boko Haram fighters are dogged in their activities, wanting to realize their ambition against all odds. It also explains why they have introduced sophisticated weapons such as Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs), propelled rocket launchers and even drones to succeed in their mission (Kendall, 2003 in Nwoye, 2021; Tunji et al. 2025; Obisue, 2025).

Research Methodology

Four instruments of data collection were deployed for this study to support the data generated through secondary sources namely the questionnaire, in-depth interview, Focus Group Discussion and convenience sampling. The questionnaires, executed on 250 respondents were self-administered questionnaires and other-administered questionnaires. In executing the Focus Group Discussion, respondents were examined in groups of eight persons per group. Under the in-depth interview, opinions of the principal officers at the repentant Boko Haram camp were sampled. To this end, eighty respondents were examined under the focus group, while the opinions of twenty interviewees were sampled under the in-depth interview.

Boko Haram as a Metaphor

There are various interpretations on the concept, "Boko Haram". For Agbibua (2015) in Ojodhale et al. (2024), Boko Haram, which implies "Western education is sin" is a colloquial applied to the group by their neighbours, the media and public. Agbibua also noted that the name was ascribed to them based on what people see them do. Coming out as Jama'atu Ahlis Sunnah Lidda'awati Wal-Jihad, which is their patent name, the concept, "Boko Haram" is today interpreted based on each scholar's perspective. In their own contribution, Odiri (2012); Aro (2013); Nwanagbo and Odigbo (2013), quoted in Seidensticker-Brikay (2014) see

Boko Haram as a home-grown terrorist group that romances with some desperate politicians in the North. MacDougall (2012), cited in Mugeru (2012) extended the understanding of the concept of Boko Haram by presenting Boko Haram as a metaphor, which means “Western education is forbidden”. In his own context, Ameh (2020), quoted in Ndubueze et al. (2020), “boko” is a Hausa word which means “animist”, western or non-Islamic education. The Arabic word, “Haram”, means “sin”. Taken together, this means non-Islamic education is forbidden. However, for the purpose of this research, this paper aligns itself with MacDougall (2012), which presents Boko Haram as a group which perceives Western education as forbidden.

As its name, the origin of Boko Haram is also another pot of controversy. While some scholars in the cast mould of Adenele (2012) and Dajumbo in Ajayi (2012), cited in Seidensticker-Brikay (2014) see Boko Haram as an apparatchik of the 1980's Maite sine, Adetoro (2010) also in Seidensticker-Brickay (2014) traces the origin of Boko Haram to the Jihad of Usman Dan Fodio in 1804. However, for the purpose of this work, the paper identifies with Ameh (2020), quoted in Ndubueze et al. (2020), which traces the origin of Boko Haram to the fordism of 2009 religious crises which apart from destroying lives and property, displaced many people from their homes. In his word: “It was in 2009 that the sect deviated from other regular sects. The Nigeria Police at this time commenced investigation into the activities of the sect, following reports that the group was arming itself. The investigation led to the arrest of several Boko Haram leaders in Bauchi State, sparking deadly clashes with the security forces, which led to the death of an estimated 700 people”. Yusuf (Seidensticker-Brickay, 2014) narrows this down specifically to July 2009, when there was a reported widespread police and military suppression of Boko Haram following Boko Haram's refusal to follow motorbike helmet law in Bauchi, Borno, Yobe and Kano States of Nigeria. The non-compliance with the helmet traffic law also led to several clashes between the police and motorcycle riders. However, the whole thing turned out to become a religious crisis, leading to loss of lives and property in Maiduguri as churches were burnt down, while many people were displaced from their homes. However, the propensity and propinquity of attacks later changed, making Boko Haram to be recognized internationally as a terrorist organization. The modus operandi of this group initially suggested militancy, which later graduated to becoming one of guerrilla fighters and eventually terrorists. While their initial tactics were drive-by-shootings, early morning raids of villages and attacks on symbolic targets, such as innocent citizens, luxury hotels, residential buildings, schools, places of worship, they later upgraded their tactics into

the use of sophisticated weapons such as Ak47, Improvised Explosive Devices, Rocket Propelled Machines and suicide bombing (MacDougall, 2012 in Mugeru, 2012; Olanrewaju, 2014; Yusuf, 2011 in Seidensticker-Brickay, 2014; Ameh, 2020 in Ndubueze et al. 2020).

The onslaughts of Boko Haram led to the exodus of people from Maiduguri in 2011, but it was their attacks on the UN building and Police Headquarters in Abuja as well as the kidnap of over 200 Chibok schoolgirls that brought the activities of the group to the attention of the international community. The security situation of the North-east particularly that of Borno and Yobe States worsened in 2014, when over 50 students of Federal Government College, Buni Yadi, were slaughtered, while many were abducted. The security lapses of the nation further came to the fore, when the Nigeria Air Force Base in Maiduguri was attacked even as prisons in Maiduguri were forced open and inmates released (Olanrewaju, 2014; Taiwo-Obalonye, 2014).

Although Boko Haram's reign of terror held sway for sometime, they were not allowed a free reign altogether. Ever since the emergence of Boko Haram as a security threat, different approaches have been adopted by both the federal and state governments in trying to handle the situation. When the sect was at its incubation stage, the then Governor of Borno State, Dr. Ali Modu Sheriff, had instituted Operation Flush. However, this failed to address the problem. Rather, the activities of the group had increased by leaps and bounds, leading to a declaration of shoot-on-sight on the group by the Umar Yaradua-led administration. This order came with a dispatch of Joint Military Task Force to Maiduguri in 2009. Although these moves by the Yaradua-led government appeared to have brought down the wanton destruction of lives and property in Maiduguri and its environs, it was only for a while. For the security situation of the North-east, especially that of Borno and Yobe States soon gave way to the accelerated activities of Boko Haram in 2011, 2012, 2013 and 2014 respectively. The situation grew so worse that Boko Haram combatants could be sighted operating brazenly on the streets even as they mingled with the civil population, hanging their guns on their shoulders. Taking a cursory look at the situation, Olanrewaju (2014) had argued that each time the acclaimed leader of this group, Mohammed Yusuf, was arrested and whisked away to Abuja by the security operatives, he had always ended up returning as a hero.

Findings and Discussions

Although initially Federal Government did not consider Boko Haram as a threat to national security in spite of glaring realities on the ground, it later recanted its position. But it was too little, too late as efforts put on

ground so far have yet to take Nigerians to the Promised Land. Not even after the deaths of Boko Haram leader, Mohammed Yusuf and his eventual successor, Abubakar Shekau. According to Dan Ali (2012), reported in Mugeru (2012), the killing of Mohammed Yusuf was the strike that stirred the Hornets' nests as the crisis escalated soon after. Although Federal Government under the watch of Goodluck Jonathan had favoured a twin track known as "carrot" and "stick" etymologically called kinetic and non-kinetic approach, it later fell for non-kinetic approach of dialogue, looking at the non-compromising attitude of Boko Haram fighters. This was not surprising. In every war situation, there is always a meeting point between the warring parties, which explains the exchange of prisoners of war along the line. It was former President Obasanjo that blazed the trail, when he visited Yusuf's family in Maiduguri to make peace soon after the death of the former Boko Haram leader at the hands of the security operatives in 2009. This move however failed to yield the much-desired result. Then came serial negotiation between the Federal Government and Boko Haram on prisoner exchange. While Boko Haram offered to release 200 Chibok schoolgirls in exchange for 16 members of the separatist group, this peace effort was brokered by one Sheik from Bauchi, Aisha Wakil, popularly known as "Mama Boko Haram" and Fred Eno, who featured as the last negotiator for Boko Haram. The high point of this initiative was when the Buhari administration offered the olive branch to the group through its De-radicalization, De-mobilization and Rehabilitation programme. The signs that Federal Government was ready to bend a little backwards became imminent, when Femi Adeshina, Special Assistant to President Buhari on Media and Publicity, in a public statement subscribed to the idea of Buhari government ending the crises even with seven months to the end of the regime. Adeshina: "Nothing is impossible. I always refer to the Tamil Tigers in Sri Lanka. The rebellion lasted for 28 years. But one day the mastermind of the rebellion was taken out. And that was automatic ending of it" (Osigbue, 2021; Kilete, 2021).

Interestingly in the Nigerian situation, it is a different ball game altogether. Although the leaders, Mohammed Yusuf and Abubakar Shekau have been taken out, to use the word of Adeshina, leading to what the Buhari administration described as "technical defeat of Boko Haram", Boko Haram is still fighting, destroying lives and property. Although not entirely taken out, some amount of progress has been made with Boko Haram. Since 2021, when the first set of Boko Haram downed their arms and surrendered to the federal government, others have followed suit. Presently around 120, 000 repentant Boko Haram members have thrown in the towel and are undergoing de-radicalization, de-mobilization and

rehabilitation, having been granted amnesty by the Federal Government. Ameh (2020) in Ndubueze et al. (2020) summing the situation, argues:

The three most deadliest terrorist groups all were responsible for fewer fatalities than in the previous year. Together, Boko Haram, the Taliban and Al-Qaeda killed 6,000 fewer people in 2015. Boko Haram, which was the deadliest terrorist group in 2014 with 6,700 deaths, is now third deadliest terrorist group, with their total number of attributable deaths dropping to 1079 in 2016. Boko Haram has been targeted by the Multinational-Joint Task Force and has also splintered into three distinct groups, because of the mounting pressure from military defeats.

Ameh also itemized the notable factors that encouraged the crises as including do or die politicking, ignorance, unemployment, breakdown of cultural values, religious intolerance, ethnic rivalry as well as agitations for resource control. Ameh went further to finger “ignorance” as the most crucial of these factors, which of course accounts for easy recruitment into the army of Boko Haram and escalation of crisis (Seidensticker-Brickay, 2014; Igbo, 2017; Ndubueze et al. 2020).

Boko Haram activities are a sing-song; neither here nor there; sometimes hot and sometimes cold. But it must be admitted that the joint effort of the military and Civilian JTF paid off tremendously, reducing the situation to a status syndrome of technical defeat, which was a coinage fondly used by the Buhari administration to describe the security situation of its time, especially in the North-east. The dispatch of a Joint Military Task Force to Maiduguri in 2009 by the Yaradua administration yielded dividends as Boko Haram crises then at their incubation stage, appeared to have died an imminent death. The presence of soldiers in Maiduguri was re-assuring to the civil populace. But that was only for a while, as Boko Haram crises returned in full force in 2011, making Maiduguri residents to do voyage with their legs on a mid-day. Although the situation was brought under control, that again was for a while. As the crisis situation broke loose once again, hitting its apogee in 2014 with a successful attack on the Nigeria Air Force Base in Maiduguri. This situation was incentive to the coming of Civilian JTF, which emerged as a child of necessity. A function of Hausari youths led by one Baba Lawan, who now operate in synergy with the Joint Military Task Force. In his examination of the situation, Yusuf (Seidensticker-Brickay, 2014), argues; “Civilian JTF emerged to salvage the situation in the state. The coming of the Civilian JTF is a big disadvantage to the insurgents in Borno State. The insurgents are angry with the people of the state, who have turned their backs on them. Moreover, in the past months, Boko Haram insurgents have failed to carry out their nefarious activities in the state capital as a result of the onslaught meted out on them by the youth volunteers”. Yusuf

also noted that the “the insurgency of Boko Haram in Borno State exposed security lapses because of attacks that have succeeded in some unexpected places such as Monguno and Bama Army Barracks, 33rd Battalion and Air Force Base respectively”. The crises have also affected businesses in the North-east, especially Borno and Yobe States as most of those who ran out of these states are yet to come back.

As it were lack of resolute to act decisively by the Jonathan-led administration took the shine off the sail of the ship in the campaign against Boko Haram. Many at the time had thought that Jonathan would have continued with the firebrand approach adopted by his predecessor, Musa Yaradua. But that was not to be. Rather, Jonathan preferred it the other way, initiating a twin-track, also known as “carrot” and “stick” approach. Unfortunately, neither the “stick” nor the “carrot” gave Nigerians the much-desired result. Instead, the crises escalated. This failure to act spontaneously lionized the Boko Haram combatants. The feeling that they were winning the war made them to take their onslaughts to the Abuja city centre. When the chips were down, both the United Nations building and the Police Headquarters in Abuja came under attack, leading to loss of lives and property. Although some Nigerians at the time had called for a state of emergency proclamation to end it all, Jonathan did not see it as a better approach. This inability to act effectively by Jonathan apart from hounding him out of Aso Rock, the seat of power, also came with other calamities. For instance, while the Federal Government levied war with only Boko Haram at onset, today it is doing war with Boko Haram, Al-Qaeda and Islamic State of West Africa Province (ISWAP). Although when senior public officials including the head of the United States Africa Command (Africom), Carter Ham, and security adviser to President Jonathan Owoye Azazi, thought aloud about possible links between Boko Haram and global terror network, no one believed them, not even Jonathan. Today, everyone including Jonathan agrees that Boko Haram indeed has links with other terror networks across the globe, especially with the Islamic State of West Africa Province (ISWAP). This concurrence made the Jonathan-led government to seek assistance from foreign powers. At a summit convened by Francois Hollande of France to discuss fresh strategies for dealing with the threat posed by Boko Haram and other terror organizations in West and Central Africa, Jonathan disclosed that 20,000 troops were deployed to rescue the over 200 Chibok schoolgirls who were abducted on April 14, 2014. He also painted a spectre of Al-Qaeda connection, saying that “the Boko Haram that started out in 2002 was not the same currently causing havoc in the country today, now operating clearly as Al-Qaeda”. Special Adviser to President Buhari on Media and Publicity, Femi Adeshina, subscribes to this submission: “If

you consider the nature of insurgency from the time when it started till now it has mutated in many ways. And the current shape and state of it cannot be compared to what it was in 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014 and 2015” (MacDougall, 2012; Olanrewaju, 2014; Taiwo-Obalonye, 2014; Seidensticker-Brickay, 2014; Ndubueze et al.2020; Usigbe, 2021).

Another angle to the crises, which is today affecting results is the politics of ethnicity. Those, who argue along this line believe that ethnicity is not only buoying down government effort in this area, but also affects those in the line of duty. While a cross-section of Nigerians accused the Buhari government of being “insincere in the fight against Boko Haram”, others frontally accused his government of supporting Boko Haram. Yet others believe that Boko Haram is a creation of some politicians for their own selfish benefits. One of the critics who belong to this school of thought is Bitrus Pegu, President of the Middle Belt Forum. Pegu accused Lai Mohammed, Minister of Information and Culture under the Buhari administration, of being economical with the truth. He argued further that “there are indications that suggest that government was not thorough in its campaign against terrorism”. Pegu said: “The press conference by the Minister was the usual “we have done this, we have done that, claims that end up not naming the terrorists and their sponsors”. Pegu went on to argue that “when the mercenaries were brought in from South Africa, they were doing the job and dealing with the terrorists, this president said they were killing his people.....”. In a public statement, the Minister had claimed that “96 financiers of terrorism involving about 33 companies and 23 bureau de change were behind acts of terrorism in the country without naming any”. If anything, what came close to naming the terrorism sponsors was when the Minister of Justice and Attorney-General of the Federation during the Buhari administration, Shehu Malami, told Nigerians that some high profile individuals had been identified and detained for “funding terrorist activities in the country”. Malami like Lai Mohammed did not disclose the identity of the suspects. His reasons, “I wouldn’t like to be pre-emptive in terms of making disclosures that would have the effect of undermining the success we are recording as far as investigation is concerned”. Even when the hats were down, none was indeed named and none was prosecuted (Onwuchekwa, 2021; Kalu et al.2022).

Frowning at these developments, Sokunbi (2015) had argued that “one of the reasons why terrorism has continued to fester in Nigeria is that few or none of its perpetrators have been brought to account. He argued: “Indeed it would appear as if those who have been responsible for the killings have been ghosts who simply drop from the skies to perpetrate evil activities and thereafter disappear. There have been really no public trials,

indictments or judgments pronounced on terrorists to serve as deterrent to them. Instead, people have continued to lose their lives and loved ones to the sect's activities ". It would be fatalistic to argue that not much is being done by the authorities to end the crises. The Boko Haram combatants are not having a free reign of terror anyway. In one instance, the army killed over 300 Boko Haram fighters. In another instance, 120 Boko Haram combatants were fatally wounded while their combat equipment were either destroyed or confiscated. At a certain point, the idea of creating a super-camp to monitor the activities of commanding officers in the line of duty was being mooted by the army. Yet, in spite of all this, some Nigerians are still asking for more from the soldiers. The feelings of state of insecurity in the country made the North-east leaders led by Zana Goni to call on the Buhari-led government to adopt better strategies aimed at winning the war. A similar pressure in the past had led the Jonathan-led government to change its service chiefs (Kilete, 2021).

The introduction of super-camp is a good development for the campaign. But super-camp will deliver the goods when founded on strong camaraderie among the fighting forces. This may hardly be the case, when there is a seeming lack of synergy between the forces involved in the campaign. In a chance meet, where this researcher was sandwiched by two soldiers (an Air Force officer and a member of the Nigerian army) in between their conversation, it became revealing that one of the reasons insurgency is still in existence in the North-east is apparent lack of co-operation promoted by growing suspicion between the troops involved in the campaign. In an answer to the question put across to him by a member of the Nigerian Army, the Air Force officer interjected: "How can you see us, when our men are dying because of the activities of the black legs among the troops?" He went further to explain to this researcher that in one fell swoop, a colleague who had just resumed from a wedding ceremony died in the line of duty on his first day of fighting, while another whose wife had just put to bed died fighting shortly after a Tiktok interaction with his family.

Looking at the situation as it were, perhaps the politics of betrayal, which has been rearing its ugly head in the campaign is today strengthened by tribalism, ethnicity, religion, greed and corruption. In an in-depth interview, a soldier disclosed how they walked into a landmine laid by Boko Haram, who before their arrival had unknown to them intermingled with the natives:

As we conducted our campaign in one of the local communities, I thought aloud with a senior colleague about the possibility of collaboration between the natives and Boko Haram, but my estimation was quickly put down. However, it soon turned out to be true that Boko Haram had lived along with the natives during which they planted land

mines that our soldiers walked into (Aminu, Male, 38years, federal troop).

In another in-depth interview, a soldier narrated how in a surprise attack at night they were rounded up by the enemy group because of “what most of us believed was an infamous handiwork of an insider “. But the suspicion among the fighting troops became more revealing in a staccato between the soldiers in Maiduguri Barracks in 2014. On this day, sitting governor of Borno State, Kashim Shettima, worked fervently to defend the military aiding and abetting Boko Haram. “It’s dangerous linking the military to Boko Haram”, Shettima had said in a public statement (Omipidan, 2014). This statement came on the heels of a series of media reports quoting an unidentified soldier who alleged that top military leaders were aiding and abetting Boko Haram elements. In a further statement, Shettima said; “I do not want to bother about the credibility or otherwise of the soldier in question. I am sure the security forces take this allegation seriously and they are investigating it as they should. I am not holding brief for the armed forces but as Governor of Borno State, whose area is unfortunately the worst hit, who has been closely working with security agencies, I would rather encourage confidence building between citizens and the armed forces so that intelligence sharing can rise continually and we don’t lose focus in the counter-insurgency”. The governor however admitted that “the military has in the past arrested, made public and courtmartialled soldiers found to be collaborating with the insurgents”. The net effect was the removal of the General Officer Commanding (GOC) 7 Division Nigerian Army, Major-General Abubakar Mohammed and his subsequent replacement by Brigadier-General M.Y. Ibrahim. Two of his predecessors had earlier been removed under controversial circumstances and non-performance (Omipidan, 2014; Kilete, 2014).

One had thought that with the removal of GOC Division 7 of the Nigerian Army and his subsequent replacement by another officer, the issue of betrayal and sabotage was laid to rest. Unfortunately the last had yet to be heard on this variable. This time it was the turn of prison officials. Appearing before the House of Representatives over the deteriorating security situation of the country, Chief of Defence Staff, Major-General Christopher Musa, had accused some personnel of the correctional service of profiteering from insurgency by conniving with inmates “to finance the operations of proscribed terrorist groups”. Musa: “In the North-east, when we were debriefing some of the arrested Boko Haram, they were able to tell us how from the prison, they would plan operations out in the field. They pass funds across. They use some of the warders there. We are not

saying all of them are corrupt. They use their accounts and the idea; is that anyone whose account is used, they share it 50/50". Bizarre as it may seem, this is not the first time detained Boko Haram fighters are achieving this feat. In the past, Boko Haram members being held in a prison settlement in Abuja had been able to successfully conduct attacks from their prison locations (Nwosu, 2023; Ukehe, 2014).

But it was vintage Nasiru El-Rufai, former Governor of Kaduna State, when he accused the police and military personnel of being stakeholders in the business of aiding and abetting terrorism in the country. In a public statement in February 2022, El-Rufai disclosed that "preliminary investigations had linked some serving police and military personnel of terrorism financing". El-Rufai: "As I alluded, when I was answering this question, the preliminary report of investigation into Boko Haram financing also showed some links to bandits and pointed to some police and military officers in service as having some communication or connection with the bandits. So, there's that risk in any system you have traitors and we're concerned about that" (Olaniyi, 2022).

The last had yet to be heard of this vicavicious monster, when Chadian leader, Mahamat Idris Deby Itno, pulled Chadian troops from the Multinational Joint Task Force. Itno had blamed the withdrawal of his men on "perceived shortcomings in coordination and effectiveness in combating terrorism operation directly" (Okoye, 2024). One man's meat is another's poison. Perhaps, the benefits from insurgency account for one of the reasons insurgency in the North-east is yet to become a thing of the past. At least, this is the thinking of former Chief of Army Staff, Lt.Gen.Yusuf Buratai (rtd). In an interview with the British Broadcasting Corporation, Buratai disclosed that insurgency in the North-east still persists because of some people who are benefiting from it. Buratai said:"Boko Haram insurgency is a people's war. Sometimes people create a situation of insurgency because there is something they want to take from it" (bbc.co.uk/focusonafrika). The Nigeria Radio Corporation is in agreement with Buratai that insurgency in the North-east today appears unabated because of personal benefits. In one of its commentaries monitored by this researcher on August 28, 2022, it reported that a soldier committed suicide in Taraba State after he was caught while passing information to insurgents. The same source also revealed that another soldier was arrested as he was sending N60 million to the insurgents in the North-east.

Apart from the aforementioned, another angle to the insurgency question in the North-east is the issue of poverty. It is because of survival strategy that some individuals have decided to take up arms against the nation. It is because of poverty that somebody decides to throw his or her

life to the winds through suicide bombing. In most cases, payments are made upfront. Under an in-depth interview with one of the repentant Boko Haram members, it was revealed that not only were suicide bombers paid for their acts, but also that they knew well ahead that they were going to die along with their victims:

Yes, they receive money for their roles in suicide bombing. It does not come to them by surprise. They know what is involved. That is why they always demand for payment before indulging in the task of mass killing (IDI, Yusuf, Male, 36, Repentant Boko Haram member).

On the use of drugs before engaging in suicide bombing, another repentant Boko Haram member under in-depth interview admitted that in most cases suicide bombers were hypnotized before indulging in the dastardly act to make them fearless. Umar:

Apart from giving them money, they are made to operate under the influence of drugs. More importantly, the suicide bombers know too well what is involved. That is why they demand for an upfront payment before indulging in the act of mass killing (IDI, Male, 43, repentant Boko Haram member).

In his agreement with this submission, MacDougall (2012) argues that “although there is a glaring rate of poverty in the country, there is disparity between the Northern and Southern part of Nigeria”. In his own contribution, Shehu Sani (Mugera, 2012), agrees that disparity between North and South on the poverty index chart makes the North vulnerable to extremist ideas. According to the National Bureau of Statistics, 69 per cent of the North-east, the home base of Boko Haram, live in absolute poverty, a situation that is worsened by the collapse of Northern industries and high rate of unemployment among the youth ((MacDougall, 2012 in Mugera, 2012).

This researcher also conducted a Focus Group Study (FGD) with the repentant Boko Haram members, where most of them expressed dissatisfaction with the government’s programme of De-radicalization, De-mobilization and Rehabilitation. They went further to reveal that following these developments, many of their colleagues, who once laid down their arms have now gone back to the bush to rejoin their unrepentant colleagues (FGD, Abdullah & Umoren, 37 & 40, repentant Boko Haram members).

Meta-analysis of Activities of Nigerian Government to tackle Boko Haram

At the beginning, it was a caloric of denials by Boko Haram leader, Abubakar Shekau following claims and counter-claims between the group

and Federal Government on the achievement of truce on the release of kidnapped Chibok schoolgirls and some members of Boko Haram being held by the military. Smoking hot, Shekau had dismissed the idea of releasing the girls to the federal government. According to Shekau (Idris, 2014), “anybody who says that plans are underway for the release of the girls is just daydreaming”. Full of himself, Shekau threatened to marry off the girls. Of course he ended up marrying off the girls to himself and to some of his colleagues, but it soon turned out that there were indeed underground moves to release 200 of the kidnapped Chibok schoolgirls in exchange for 16 Boko Haram members, who were being held by the military. Things thus began to look up for good in the campaign against insurgency in the North-east, when a seeming truce was reached between Boko Haram and the federal government. Signs of better days ahead began to emerge, when sometime in 2022, 180 of the over 200 Chibok schoolgirls were freed by the Nigerian military. According to Umahi (2022), most of these girls, who were forcefully married off to Boko Haram members, at the time of their release were already having one or two children for Boko Haram fighters (Okoye, 2024).

But it was more a heroic outcome for the Nigerian military, when in November 2022, 300 Boko Haram fighters willfully “gave up their arms to the Federal Government, and surrendered to the Nigerian military, bringing the total number of Boko Haram members who had surrendered to the Federal Government since July 2021 to 82, 237. Of this population (Kilete, 2022), 886 described as “hardened” by Major-General Christopher Musa, Theatre Commander, North-east Operation Hadin Kai, were to be prosecuted. Musa, who is presently the Minister of Defence, disclosed in a public statement recently that about 120, 000 Boko Haram fighters have thrown in the towel. This mass surrender led the Muhammadu Buhari-led government to create a safe corridor for Boko Haram fighters who have laid down their arms and those willing to lay down their arms, through the programme of De-radicalization, Demobilization and Rehabilitation (DDR). Elated by these developments, Borno State Governor, Babagana Zulum, had predicted that Boko Haram was going to become a thing of the past by 2023. Zulum said: “God willing”, and given the massive laying down of weapons by terrorists, insurgency will end by 2023”. An apostle of non-kinetic approach to Boko Haram crises, Zulum had on behalf of the government given each repentant Boko Haram the sum of N200, 000 to build up their lives (Taiwo-Obalonye, 2022).

Unfortunately, in spite of these well intended receptions, insurgency in the North-east, has continued, thus provoking thoughts on the way forward. Although the Jonathan-led administration did not see reason to

negotiate with those who have taken up arms against the Federal Government, the Buhari administration saw it differently. And this need to bend backwards by the Buhari government has begun to yield dividends. The idea of negotiating with Boko Haram fighters was first mooted by Femi Adeshina, Special Adviser to President Muhammadu Buhari on Media and Publicity. Adeshina had in a public statement in July 2015 expressed the willingness of Federal Government to go into talks with the separatists. Adeshina: “Nigeria’s government will not be averse to talks with Boko Haram. Most wars however furious or vicious often end around negotiation table” (Wakil & Opoola, 2015). This gave way to series of negotiation between Boko Haram and the Federal Government. The first middleman in this regard was one popular Sheik from Bauchi, then there was the Aisha Wakil, also known as “mama Boko Haram”, experience and later the Fred Eno involvement. So far, there are about 120,000 Boko Haram returnees, among them, 180 kidnapped Chibok schoolgirls (Kilete, 2022; Ibrahim & Omirin, 2022; Umahi, 2022). This was followed by amnesty granted the repentant Boko Haram combatants by the Buhari-led Federal Government. In February 2020, former Governor of Yobe State, and Senator representing Yobe East Senatorial District, Ibrahim Geidam, had sought national amnesty for repentant Boko Haram fighters in his bill “National Agency for the Education, Rehabilitation and De-radicalization and Integration of Repentant Insurgents in Nigeria”. Sponsoring this bill, Geidam had argued “that there are many Boko Haram members who want to lay down their arms, but are afraid that they will be killed “. Although some Nigerians opposed this bill, it eventually scaled through the National Assembly. Hence, the Federal Government’s amnesty programme of De-radicalization, Demobilization and Rehabilitation (DRR) as we know it today (Kilete, 2022; Ibrahim & Omirin, 2022; Umahi, 2022). Under this programme, each male adult receives N10, 000 monthly, 25 kg bag of garri, 25kg bag of maize, oil, magi, salt, beans, while his wife receives N5, 000 monthly allowance, another N5, 000n for charcoal amounting to N10, 000 and collectively N30, 000 for each family every month. And where the man is married to two wives, he collectively collects N50, 000 in addition to food items.

As a way of radically addressing the healing process, Allamin Foundation, a Maiduguri based quango, organized a meet-the-people workshop, designed to bring perpetrators and victims together. At the parley, repentant Boko Haram members sought forgiveness from the local population, especially those who lost their loved ones to Boko Haram. Under what is today known as Borno Model, a special school known as Muhammadu Buhari Orphans School, children of Boko Haram victims, especially those who have lost their care givers to Boko Haram, are being

taken care of by the federal government. In addition, the educated Boko Haram returnees are being provided with employment in government-owned institutions, while others who are involved with vocational programme are given a start-off capital of N100, 000 each to rebuild their lives.

Yet, in spite of these provisions aimed to address their socio-economic needs, some of the repentant Boko Haram members under in-depth interview expressed pessimism, believing that government should do more to address their situation. More specifically, Abu Ibrahim, another returnee Boko Haram member, suggests that government should increase their monthly allowance of N10, 000. He thundered:

What can N10, 000 buy you in the market today given our economic situation? This is just like a drop in an ocean. So, government should do more for us to help us survive (IDI, Abdu Ibrahim, Male, 41 years, repentant Boko Haram member).

Others argue that government should provide them with enough capital to rebuild their lives once again. For those who kow-tow to this line of argument, the N100, 000 “settlement fee” is not enough. This should be reviewed upwards. Tijjani Umar:

It is not enough giving us N100, 000 each as settlement fee, which comes at the end of the programme of DDR. Although we are grateful to them for even giving us this much, we shall be grateful to them if the allowance is reviewed upwards so that we are not stranded at the end of our rehabilitation programme (IDI, Tijjani Umar, Male, 37 years, repentant Boko Haram member).

On whether the repentant Boko Haram members have been fully recycled into the society, some of them who fielded this question under Focus Group Discussion (FGD) were in the affirmative, while others answered in the negative. While some of them disclosed to the researcher that they have been fully forgiven by their victims or relations of victims, others flayed the hostile situation of the community. Those in the latter category argue that although they have been granted amnesty by the Federal Government, the hostility and rejection by the natives are still there. Mustapha Ba’aba:

Yes, agreed we have been given amnesty by the Federal Government. We are thankful. But there is more to it than meets the eye. We still find it difficult to break into the society, because of hostility and rejection. As a result, some of us have even gone back to the bush, because they believe they are not safe out there. Apart from increasing our floating capital or “settlement fee”, government should resettle us properly by giving us adequate protection (FGD, Mustapha Ba’aba, Male, 38 years, repentant Boko Haram member).

Conclusion and Recommendations

Investigation reveals lopsidedness in the rehabilitation programme of the federal government. While much attention is paid to repentant Boko Haram, little or no attention is paid to their victims. This seeming gap is generating hostility and rejection from the local communities. Reparation is a healing balm to all wounds. It is not enough leaving it to non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Government should equally reach out to both the perpetrators and victims. The business of dialogue is formalized between the two groups. The act of forgiveness is more important than any other thing involved in the business of De-radicalization, De-mobilization and Rehabilitation (DDR). This is because it allows the repentant Boko Haram members to operate freely in the society without the fear of being attacked by the offended parties. Even with the little being given to them by the Federal Government they can survive like others provided their freedom is guaranteed.

In Mato Oput Model, (Nwoye, 2012), perpetrators and victims or victims' families are brought together to play out the act of reparation, forgiveness and acceptance. This is cemented by making the parties involved to drink Mato Oput substance, which is a form of oath taking that they will never go back on what is agreed upon to do otherwise. And once this process is accomplished, the matter is declared "sini die". It officially enunciates the healing process. A model recognized by the United Nations, Mato Oput is today working for countries like Uganda, Mozambique, Rwanda, Tanzania and Angola. Given the success level of Mato Oput, this paper stands on the Ugandan model to recommend that Federal Government find a way of making both the perpetrators and victims show commitment to the act of reparation, forgiveness and acceptance. It is not enough bringing everybody together and drawing a conclusion that sins are forgiven even without identifying the real victims. Much as back-to-school initiative of the Federal Government is commendable, government should go a step further to identify the real victims and compensate them accordingly. This way, the act of repentance, reparation and forgiveness may have been sealed with a healing balm.

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