

## Loss Of Innocence... Boko Haram Attack On Children.

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Boko Haram, a hitherto indigenous salafist/Islamic Extremists Movement is waging a religious war on the West Africa regions since 2009. Boko Haram a colloquial noun which means “western Education is sin” in Hausa language. The sect as officially called **Jamā’atu Ahlis-Sunnah Lidda’Awati wal-Jihad (people committed to the propagation of prophet’s teachings and jihad)** propagates a version of Shia Islamic extremism that forbids any interaction with the western culture, education, tradition etc. and also the traditional Muslim establishment recognised by the government of Nigeria. In addition to the sect’s ideology of opposing western ideals, also aims at establishing a state based on strict Islamic tenets in Nigeria. Analysts today limit the reasons for sectarian violence in Nigeria to issues of religious fundamentalism and fanaticism (Atim, T. 2013). However the causes could be structured i.e. poverty, inequality, unemployment, illiteracy etc.

Nigeria former Security Advisor, Sambo Dasuki, also offers a new path to solve the problems claiming that corruption, injustice and lack of opportunity have led many young Nigerians to support or even join Boko Haram. (Stutz, 2014).

The extremist sect continues to commit unspeakable violence targeted at children, with a focus on the girl child and non-combatant

civilians in the State of Emergency (SOEs) of Nigeria. The attacks on schools, hospitals and the recent trend of the group’s use of young girls as suicide bombers (2010) is of particular concern. The scope and methods are shocking. Following these attacks, forced displacement has brought about an estimated 10.5 million children out of school throughout the country, the largest number in the world. (Save the Children 2013). Nigeria is reported to harbour 10.5 million out-of-school children and out of this, 60 per cent or 6.3 live in Northern Nigeria. (Human Rights Watch, 2015).

Many displaced people expressed their concern that their children were unable to go to school in camps for displaced people and host communities. The attacks on schools and limited educational opportunities for displaced children have further impeded access to education for already disadvantaged school-age children in the northeast. According to the most recent National Education Data Survey, in 2010 children in northeast already made up more than 60 per cent of Nigeria’s estimated 10.5 million children who are not in school (Human Rights Watch, 2015).

Between 2010 and 2014, Boko Haram has launched the under listed attacks on schools and innocent children in the North East, the attacks are chronicled below;

- 7<sup>th</sup> March, 2010 a group of armed men attacked the residents of Dogo Nahauwa, Jos Plateau state, leaving an estimated 150 children killed (Human Rights Watch, 2010).
- 16<sup>th</sup> June, 2011, four children were killed in a Boko Haram explosion detonated at Damboa, Maiduguri Borno state.
- 27<sup>th</sup> June, 2012. Damaturu, the Yobe state capital, gunmen of the sect attacked a police outpost in Sabo Pegi ward and killed at least two civilians and injured a woman and her child during the gun exchange with the Joint Task Force (JTF).
- The group claimed responsibility for an attack on 16<sup>th</sup> July, 2013 on a secondary school in Mamudo, killing at least 29 children and one teacher, some of them burnt alive. Also on 6<sup>th</sup> July, 2013, a government secondary school in Yobe state was attacked by armed elements at night while the school children were sleeping.
- On 29<sup>th</sup>, September, 2013, Boko Haram insurgents entered and opened fire in a male hostel at the College of Agriculture in Gujba, Yobe state killing 65 students and injuring 18 others.
- 9<sup>th</sup> April, 2014, suspected Boko Haram members killed four officials of the Borno state feeding committee, which runs a primary and secondary school feeding program while on an inspection tour.
- In February, 2014, ten female health workers were killed in attacks on a polio vaccination centre in Kano, depriving children of their rights to health care services and frustrating the gains already made on polio eradication
- On 25<sup>th</sup> February, 2014, 59 school children in the government secondary school Buni Yadi, Yobe state were reportedly burnt alive.
- 14<sup>th</sup> April, 2014. 279 school girls were abducted in Chibok, Borno state sparking international outcry (bring back our girls). The abduction of the school girls was a reminder of the toll taken by Boko Haram on women across the country. Fears for the safety of children have grown since the group's abduction of school girls in April.
- 27<sup>th</sup> July, 2014. A teenage girl with an explosive device concealed under her veil, blew herself up at a university campus in Kano, injuring five police officers.
- 28<sup>th</sup> July, 2014. A young woman joins a kerosene queue at a filling station in Kano unnoticed was a bomb which detonated, killing three people and wounding 16 others.
- 28<sup>th</sup> July, 2014. A teenage girl injures 6 people after exploding her device in a shopping mall in Kano State.
- 30<sup>th</sup> July, 2014. A teenage girl within a crowd of students at a college camps in Kano blew up herself, killing 6 people.
- In Kano state, on the 30<sup>th</sup> July, 2014. A ten year old female would be suicide bomber was arrested by the police, the fourth time Boko Haram Islamists were suspected of using young female attackers.
- It was reported (Daily Trust Newspaper) on 11<sup>th</sup> November, 2014 that at least 49 students were killed in a suicide bomb attack at the senior Science school Potiskum, Yobe state.
- On 13<sup>th</sup> November, 2014, a female bomber hit the Teachers' College in Kontangora killing 58 students.
- 23<sup>th</sup> December, 2014. A female suicide bomber disguised as a passenger and detonated a bomb at Dukku Motor Park in Gombe state, killing over 25 persons.

- 26<sup>th</sup> December, 2014. 13 year old teenage girl, Zaharau Babangida, who was alleged to have attacked the textile market in Kano, told journalist that her father enlisted her into Boko Haram.
- 11<sup>th</sup> January, 2015. A ten year old girl (suicide bomber) kills 20, injures 18 in Borno state.
- 12<sup>th</sup> January, 2015. Female suicide bombers detonated bombs that killed eight people at Potiskum GSM in Yobe state.
- 16<sup>th</sup> February, 2015. A female suicide bomber, disguised as a passenger at Damaturu central Motor Park in Yobe state detonated a 'veil hidden' improvised Explosive Device (IED) killing nine people.
- 25<sup>th</sup> February, 2015. Suicide Bombers kill 30, injure 72 in Kano, Yobe Attacks.
- 27<sup>th</sup> May, 2015. 'Teen terrorists killed 37, burnt 400 houses in Gubio attack'. Boko Haram militants who invaded Gubio town in Borno State Sunday were young children aged between 12 and 16. They killed 37 people and destroyed over 400 houses, mosques, schools and vehicles. The terrorists killed 37 people, including two young boys.

Nigeria's first recorded female suicide bomber, a middle aged woman struck in June, riding a motorcycle she went to a military barracks in Gombe, where she detonated her explosive vest killing one soldier. (BBC news Africa, 2014).

As a result of the targeted attacks on school enrolment is already lower in North East states mostly affected for instance, in Borno, school enrolment is down by 28 per cent, worse than any state in Nigeria. In 2014, 14 schools were burnt down in Maiduguri, the state capital of Borno State, forcing over 7,000 children out of formal education and pushing down enrolment

rates in an already educationally disadvantaged region (IRIN, 2014).

Boko Haram is accused of unleashing a new weapon of war; the girl-child suicide bomber, the recruitment and use of children as child soldiers, in contravention of the UN Security Council resolution on children and armed conflict (1612). Thus, fuelling the concern that its insurgency has entered a more ruthless phase. The recent trend in the on-going attacks is generally symptomatic to the several deep rooted socio-cultural practices that shape the perception of children in Nigeria especially in Northern Nigeria

The groups tactic is completely condemnable and in violation of the fundamental rights of children to education, security, health, and protection. Malala Youfsazai, the Pakistani Nobel peace prize winner who stood up for girl-child education was shot by the Taliban, she advocates that:

*"Education is our right. Just as it is our right to sing, Islam has given us the right and says every girl and Boy should go to school. The Quran says we should Seek knowledge, study hard and learn the mysteries Of our world".*

The escalating violence and recurrent attacks on schools has severely disrupted the rights of children to education, with 15, 000 children in Borno State reportedly having to stop attending school between February and May, 2013 (UNGA, 68<sup>th</sup> session, 2014). According to a UN report, Nigeria has the largest number of children globally who miss school as increased insecurity in the North shuts down schools and learning centres.

On Wednesday, 12<sup>th</sup> November, 2014, Yobe State Government closed down schools in the wake of the gruesome suicide attack at government science school Potiskum. (Daily Trust Newspaper, November 2014). These attacks on schools have resulted in an unfortunate educational hiatus.

Borno state for instance, has closed down all schools prior to normal end of term in order to keep children and teachers safe.

The forced closure of schools is actually submitting to the wishes of the terrorist and rendering children idle and depriving them of the education which is their fundamental right. According to (Dabo, 2014), some 76, 300 girls are out of school in Bauchi state. He further states that this figure was collated from 466 communities in the state between March and April, 2014.

Boko Haram has killed an estimated over 25, 000 people since it commenced its terrible campaign of calumny against the Nigerian people in 2009 (Human Rights Watch 2014). Many of the victims are children who have lost their parents becoming orphaned, and victims of war easy prey to human trafficking, prostitution, theft while others could become child soldiers, conscripted in the terrorist's world as fighters or suicide bombers for survival.

Let the truth be told, Children are the real victims of Boko Haram insurgency, (for the girls) having premature marriage, rape, kidnapping, loss of parents, enslavement and general sense of helplessness are their different ways. They are victims of state and non-state actor's inability to offer little or no protection, as guaranteed by the United Nations Convention on the rights of the Child (1989).

According to Leila Zerrougui (2015) who was on assessment on the impact conflict on children said children in the Northeast Nigeria are in need of protection from relentless. Leila Zerrougui attests to grave violation committed against children thus; "I witness people's shock and disbelief at the devastation suffered by their communities. I saw trauma in children's eyes. The scale of the suffering is way beyond what I anticipated to find.

The people I met demand and deserve urgent protection"

The real tragedy of Boko Haram is not only that innocent, defenceless and voiceless children are caught up in this conflict, but that their government and international humanitarian actors are yet to fulfil their obligations to protect children in times of conflicts and emergencies as enshrined in United Nations Convention on the rights of the Child (1989).

If these attacks by Boko Haram on schools and the use of child suicide bombers continue at this pace, the freedom to education and security will be eliminated, leading to the downfall of youth's ability to actively compete in the harsh global economy. According to UNESCO 2014 report on education illiteracy leads to unemployment making children vulnerable to health problems and exploitation.

Zerrougui (2015), affirms when she says "in Northeast Nigeria, over 900,000 people, many of them women and children, have fled their homes. More than 300 schools have been severely damaged or destroyed; hundreds of children have been killed, injured or abducted from their homes and schools".

Throughout 2014, the armed conflict in northeast Nigeria was one of the world's deadliest for children. There was a dramatic rise in violence, growing recruitment and use of children, sometimes very young, as well as countless abduction and attacks on schools (Zerrougui 2015).

The fact that schools in larger parts of Northern Nigeria can no longer function appropriately nor guarantee the safety of children, seen as a failure of responsibility of the Nigerian government to provide security and welfare for other citizens as enshrined in the constitution. (Section 14(2) b. Government should provide alternative forms of

education in the interim while government intensify efforts to end the insurgency.

It is disheartening that in all of these violations, little action is taking place on the ground to help protect children from this conflict situation. Even though the federal government has declared the state of emergency rule in the Northeast states, Boko Haram has continued to operate unhindered; continue to attack and kill children in their schools with impunity, with little or no form of protection strategy from the state and non-state actors.

The humanitarian response has been slow, fragmented, and unable to meet the fast growing needs of the children affected by the conflict. Few international actors engaged in the Northeast, due to heightening security concerns, leaving government and local groups with little support for survivors.

The overall expertise on child protection in conflict-related emergencies have left the gaps in response, including inadequate protection related data, a lack of standard operating procedures (SOPs) to manage children encountered in conflicts, and limited emergency preparedness planning to address the continued attacks on schools and killing of children.

Child rights experts and other stakeholders have denounced the attacks on children and are calling upon the authorities to launch prompt and thorough investigations to hold perpetrators of these atrocities accountable and bring them to justice. Thereby, upholding their responsibility to protect children in conflict situations as enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the rights of the Child (1989).

The United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 2143(2014) encouraged all UN member states “ to consider concrete measures to deter the use of schools by armed forces and non-

state groups in contravention of applicable international law.” Children have the right to education under the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights to which Nigeria is party (Human Rights Watch, 2015).

According a Unicef (2015) report, around 800,000 children have been forced to flee their homes as a result of the conflict in North East Nigeria between Boko Haram, military forces and civilian self- defence groups.

According to Manuel F. (2015) the abduction of more than 200 girls in Chibok is only one of endless tragedies being replicated on an epic scale across Nigeria and the region. He states that, “ scores of girls and boys have gone missing in Nigeria – abducted , recruited by armed groups , attacked ,used as weapons, or forced to flee violence. They have the right to get their childhood back.”

Missing childhood outlines how the conflict is exerting a heavy toll on children in Nigeria and across the region. 14<sup>th</sup> April, 2015 marks first anniversary (one year) since the Chibok schools were abducted by Boko Haram, Pakistani girl – child activist, Malala Yousafzai is urging the Nigerian government and international community to do more towards rescuing the and uniting them with their families and communities.

## CONCLUSION

The paper focuses on the negative impact of Boko Haram insurgency on children. It looks at how the violent attacks on educational institutions have not only led to loss of lives of thousands of Nigerian school children, but also how the destruction of educational facilities have put the future of Nigerian children to jeopardy. As the United Nation Secretary- General, Ban Ki Moon recently told the global body’s Security Council on Peace Operations;

*“Schools must be safe and secure learning spaces. Getting an education is every child’s right...Going to school should not have to be an act of Bravery”.*

The paper also considered the loss of lives of children particularly the girl- child in several of the Boko Haram attacks on soft targets such as schools, market places, motor parks, religious worship places, all of which put survivors in an untold state of trauma.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The study has made the following recommendations to find long term solutions to insurgencies in Nigeria:

- The federal government should consider the option of rehabilitation programme for former insurgents who genuinely renounces violence.
- Proper border surveillance that entails management of immigrants and aliens which demands intelligence to regulate the influx of foreigners into the country.
- The government should take concerted steps to improve access to education for children in Nigeria, including for children displaced by conflict in the Northeast.
- Enhance collaboration and intelligence sharing among security agencies.
- Develop and effective mechanism for conflict mediation, resolution and transformation and also Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR).
- Encourage a platform that enhances the citizen’s security agencies relationship towards maintenance of internal security stability.
- Government should establish effective and functional skill acquisition centres for Almagiri children across the Northern

parts of the country the enhance poverty alleviation.

- Creation of employment opportunities and focus particular attention on illiteracy level, school enrolment/retention issues in the country.
- Governments should collaborate with child focused NGOs such as UNICEF, Save the Children, etc. to establish safe spaces for children in the states of emergencies.
- Psychosocial/Trauma counselling programmes should be organised for parents and children who have been traumatized by the insurgency.
- Child Rights Act/law mandates the establishment of Child Right implementation committee to ensure protection and compliance with CRC.
- The provision of toll-free helplines, shelter for children in distress or emergency situation, trauma and counselling, trained service providers will go a long way in helping children caught up in the Boko Haram insurgency.
- Government should collaborate with child protection actors to develop and enact comprehensive trainings on the rights and needs of children in emergency/conflict situations and provide this training to all members of Nigerian security forces and relevant civil service members.

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