

## **INSURGENCY AND THE SEARCH FOR SUSTAINABLE PEACE BUILDING IN NORTHEAST NIGERIA: THE ERA OF GLOBAL PANDEMIC**

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### **Abstract**

*The Nigerian State appears to have gone through several stages in its history and development as a nation. For almost two decades, the northeast Nigeria in particular has been subject to the insurgency of the Islamist terrorist group (Boko Haram). This region is also known for its poor environmental conditions that mostly manifest in land desertification and water scarcity. Since the civil War the nation had continued to witness different forms of violence and conflicts, sometimes in the form of uprisings, inter-communal clashes or struggles related to resources, such as the Niger Delta Militancy and of recent, the Boko Haram insurgency which is by far the most devastating armed conflict that has ever taken place in the country since the civil War. Thus, as the COVID-19 pandemic has spread to fragile and conflict-affected contexts, there has been an impulse among some donors to focus on public health and humanitarian assistance, while cutting back on peacebuilding and governance programs that are not viewed as producing immediate, tangible impacts on the spread of the disease. These perceptions can simultaneously limit the willingness of communities to comply with public health regulations and can amplify other drivers of violent conflict, including increased resource scarcity, opportunistic behavior by armed groups, fraying social cohesion, and rapidly proliferating misinformation and disinformation. This paper tries to look at the Post-Conflict Peace-Building and Economic Recovery Efforts in the North East region of Nigeria and offer some recommendations among others; that the exercise of military power should be used to create the space for political progress while, tackling armed insurgents, increasing efforts should as well be channeled to economic, social and infrastructural development in the affected areas, in the bid to win the hearts and minds of the local people.*

**Keywords: Insurgency, Sustainable Peace Building, Global Pandemic, Unemployment, Boko Haram Islamist Terrorists.**

## **Introduction**

The global spread of COVID-19 has drastically disrupted our ways of life. This impact is mostly felt in fragile contexts where a combination of prolonged armed conflicts, bad governance, and inadequate healthcare systems have predisposed these nations for much more devastating effects of the pandemic (Ajayi, 2020). Also, what may be relevant for gauging how the coronavirus could increase the risk of an armed confrontation between the major powers will almost certainly be different to assessing how civil unrest could worsen in vulnerable fragile states (United Nations, 2019). The same uncertainty also surrounds current and prospective efforts to manage insurgency. For every news report of a cease-fire or breakthrough in peace talks there is a corresponding story that details a deteriorating situation. And just as progress in one area can help advance the cause of peace in another, so the reverse is often true. Although conflict is pervasive and pandemic all over the world, yet man needs peace for development and advancement. Ever since the end of the Cold War (1948-1989), nations, states as well as international organizations have continually involved in peacebuilding and peace-making with a view to solving national and international security problems (Idowu, 2013).

Since the inception of the insurgency, informal militia groups, such as the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF), have formed to combat AOGs and protect local communities in the absence of effective military presence (Ewetan&Urhie, 2014). Youth make up a large proportion of their ranks. As their influence has grown, the CJTF and other vigilante groups have become increasingly predatory against their own communities (Ezeoba, 2011). This has led to escalating conflict between CJTF and other local youth, who often struggle with a diminished sense of status in society, access to viable livelihoods, and even finding romantic partners, compared with their peers who have taken up arms (Adepelumi, 2018).

In this contexts where one or more of these governance factors are underlying causes of insecurity and pandemic, a widespread disease outbreak is exactly the time where additional resources and support are needed for governance and peacebuilding programming, logic in implementing humanitarian, public health, or economic recovery responses that are blind to governance and security dynamics not only eschew effective disease containment measures and response, but can also intensify conflict risks and miss opportunities to build long-term resilience(Adebayo, 2014).To complicate matters, the impact of the virus has varied between different regions and conflict zones, making it difficult to render broad judgments about its consequences (Adagba, Eme &Ugwu, 2012).However, the delivery of humanitarian assistance for COVID-19 also risks fueling underlying conflicts within communities as well as new conflict dynamics. These tensions are pervasive across States in Northeastregion of the country and undermine the ability of humanitarian actors to fulfill their missions and uphold their commitment to the principles of Do No Harm and conflict sensitivity (Akinbi, 2015).To this end, the paper therefore will try to explore insurgency and the search for sustainable peace building in northeast Nigeria in the era of global pandemic.

## **Conceptual Clarification**

### **Insurgency**

Historically restricted to rebellious acts that did not reach the proportions of an organized [revolution](#). It has subsequently been applied to any such armed uprising, typically [guerrilla](#) in character, against the recognized government of a state or country. An insurgency is a condition of formalized resistance or revolt against a governing authority in which the perpetrating parties are not initially recognized as belligerents (Turner, 1997). Insurgent goals are political and focus on influencing who makes political decisions and who has access to political power within a given constituency (Schaefer, 2002). For example, an insurgency may renounce allegiance or subjection to a government; challenge political control; demand participation in the political process; or attempt to end the rule of one government and start a new one by means of subversion or interpersonal violence.

### **Peacebuilding**

Peacebuilding is the identification and support of measures needed for transformation toward a more sustainable, peaceful relationship and structures of governance, to avoid a re-lapse into conflict, (UN, 2005). Peacebuilding is also perceived as attempts to conquer the structural, relational, and cultural contradictions hastily causing conflict, especially in strong support of peacemaking and peacekeeping. Inspirations of peacebuilding are drawn from developmental imperatives facing mankind and conflict resolution initiatives (Ifesinachi, 2009, cited in Uzuegbunam, 2013).

Ibeanu (2006), sees peace as activities geared towards reducing conflict and increasing development within specific societies and the wider international community. Thus, to guarantee social, political, and economic development there must be peace. To Ahamefule (2013), peace is a condition where there is no war; where people are not annoyed by other people; and where there is calmness; without worries or anxieties.

Peacebuilding to Brinkmann (2006) means, transforming from a condition or situation of violence to more political, socio-economic equality, justice, fairness as well as security for all within cultural plurality. Brinkmann takes further steps to identify two aspects of peacebuilding. According to him, the first aspect of peacebuilding is concerned with reducing or transforming violence, while the second aspect is about improving on 'existing peaceful activities or to encourage new ones'.

To this end, sustainable peacebuilding is a complex undertaking that involves a multitude of actors such that each organization approaches the field of peacebuilding in a different manner.

### **Pandemic**

COVID-19 is a novel infectious disease caused by a newly discovered coronavirus strain SARS-CoV-2. It is an ongoing global pandemic first discovered in Wuhan, China, in 2019. The emergence of COVID-19 has affected the economy globally by directly affecting production in key countries that are sole manufacturers of raw materials, intermediate products, and consumer goods, thereby creating supply chain and market disruption, and by its financial impact on firms, security threats, and the financial markets.

## **Method**

The methodology used in this study was a desk based library method where the knowledge gained from various literatures as well as conceptual, theoretical, and empirical studies reviewed have been presented and analyzed to weigh the evidence they provide with reference to insurgency and the search for sustainable peace building in Northeast Nigeria.

## **Review of Some Relevant Literature**

Nigeria has struggled with constant conflicts among its highly diverse population in terms of religion, ethnicity, and political views (Dunn, 2018). One of the most notable and devastating conflicts in Nigeria in recent years is the Boko Haram insurgency. Boko Haram was created around 2002 in Borno state in northeastern Nigeria as a social movement to protest poverty (Pérouse de Montclos, 2014). Currently, Boko Haram is known as one of the most extreme Islamist groups in sub-Saharan Africa. Since beginning in 2009, the Boko Haram insurgency has killed more than 20,000 people. More than 2 million people have been displaced by the conflict (Human Rights Watch, 2018).

Further to leadership failure by the Nigerian government in dealing with the insurgency problem was a public statement made by the then president's wife (Patience Jonathan). Her claims that the story about the kidnapped Chibok girls was a mere political game to discredit her husband's administration exposed the governments' lack of concern and coordinated approach in combating the Boko Haram (Maiangwa and Olumuyiwa, 2015).

Because of the limited access to vaccination services during armed conflicts, such conflicts can have devastating effects on disease outbreaks. Despite the potential importance of conflicts, there is an extremely limited number of studies on the effects of conflicts on immunization. Grundy and Biggs (2019) used national and sub-national levels of vaccination coverage among 16 conflict-affected countries and qualitatively observed the consequence of conflict on immunization coverage. Mashal et al. (2007) categorized geographical regions in Afghanistan based on insecurity and examined the association of insecurity with immunization coverage. In addition, the inability of government leadership to tackle corruption on funds allocated to combat Boko Haram was considered as another failure in the strategy to curb the radical Islamic group. This is because over 1.55 billion Naira (US 7796794.5000) was reportedly invested in 2013 in the procurement of heavy weapons to fight the sect. However, frontline soldiers still complain about lacking heavy weapons to fight effectively while it is alleged that the terrorist group makes use of weapons more sophisticated than those of the Nigerian military (Samson, 2013). The failure of the Nigerian government in combating the Islamic insurgency demonstrated, according to Rotberg (2003), state fragility particularly in the area of governance. As confirmed by Cilliers and Sisks (2014), poor governance facilitates the inability of the state to provide the basic necessities to its citizens leading to poor standards of living. Uzodike and Maiangwa (2012) also confirm that the inability to provide basic social and economic amenities to its citizens was an important factor why the Nigerian government under Goodluck Jonathan was unable to deal with the Boko Haram problem.

Arguably, state's attentions to effective quelling of security threats are seen to be biased and unpopular, and thereby the sustained security breaches are detrimental to the socioeconomic development of the country. Thus, insurgency is hardly a new phenomenon in Nigeria, its

impacts have been wide ranging and far reaching. Furthermore, Sustainable peacebuilding focuses on helping nations recover from violent conflicts, whether internal wars or wars between States. Recovery from violent conflict is a long-term process, and it requires the expenditure of vast amounts of resources, specifically people and money.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This paper adopts the functionalist theory, as its theoretical framework, with particular reference to the works of Talcott Parsons (1902-1979) and Robert K. Merton (1910-2003). The major concern of functionalist theory is to explain how social life is made possible. The theory majorly assumes that certain degree of order and stability is very fundamental to the survival of social system. In an attempt to explain the origin and maintenance of order and stability in human society, many functionalists use the concepts of “shared norms and values and values consensus” as key to the explanation and as pre-requisites. The function of social integration is performed by value consensus, as it forms the basis for social unity and solidarity. Value consensus provides the foundation stone upon which co-operation, mutual memberships, social solidarity, social stability and social unity are based. Thus, shared norms and values lead to this value consensus. The social order, in question, is maintained through social control mechanisms (Parsons, 1937, Merton, 1969).

In his famous work *Theory of Social System*, Talcott Parsons (1937) argues that, any system of action (a society, an institutions, a small group etc.) exhibits general features; for in order for it to successfully operate as a system, certain “functional prerequisite have to be fulfilled. These are, in ascending order of importance (a) adaptation (b) goal attainment (c) integration and (d) pattern maintenance. Correspondingly, within the social system as a whole, the most basic need is for (a) adaptation to the environment through economic activity, but this only provides the conditions for higher aspects of social life. Actors pursue (b), socially shaped goals, in ways that are governed by (c), the norms and sanctions institutionalized in society, ultimately these goals derive from (d), an overarching cultural system of values, on which there is consensus. Thus, the cultural system controls other aspects of society, and to explain social change, it is necessary to look first at change at its cultural level. Parsons therefore, posits that, disruptive forces are minimized by the society, because the conservative cultural patterns and shared norms and values provide the needed resistance to radical change. He maintains that, examining the institutionalization of value orientation in social system, with emphasis on the process of socialization, whereby internalization and transmission of value, from one generation to the next, was the main task of sociology.

In his attempt to refine and develop functionalist analysis, Robert K. Merton (1968) argues that society should be analyzed in terms of their effects or consequences on the individuals, and groups within the society, since these effects can be functional or dysfunctional (Holmwood 2005:100). Merton, therefore, believed that social structure of any given society has many functions, some more obvious than others (Ritzer in Gingrich, 1999). To portray this picture clearly, Merton introduced the concept of deviance and made distinction between “Manifest and latent functions of social actions.

Manifest functions, according to Merton, are the intended effects of social actions. They are the functions of social institutions that are open, stated, and conscious. They are the

recognizable consequences of an aspect of society such as the obvious role of religious institutions in promoting social integration and cohesion. By contrasts, latent functions are the unconscious or unintended effect of social actions that may reflect hidden purposes of an institution. For example, one obvious functions of institutions of religion is promoting social solidarity. Another is to serve as a breeding ground for religious intolerance that promotes ethno-religious violence in Nigeria. Merton finally uses the concept of dysfunction to refer to any element or process of society that may actually disrupt a social system or bring about a decline in stability. Example, dysfunctional behaviour patterns, such as suicide bombings, kidnapping and homicide in the present day Nigeria are undesirable effects of social actions capable of disrupting social order in the country.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of this paper, the following recommendations were made:

1. The present government should work hand-in-hand with various peace stake-holders, through people's participation on matters affecting them.
2. Developmental partners should liaise with the government to ensure that more women association are formed in the communities. This will help create safe spaces where women can freely deliberate on issues affecting them. Women should be given high ranking positions in the community committees to encourage and get them committed to community governance and decision making.
3. Public awareness programmes through radio and other media channels should be designed by the government and promoted by faith-based actors on the need for forgiveness, reconciliation and acceptance of repentant Boko Haram members back to the communities.
4. Security agencies must intensify effort to defeat insurgent groups and restore enduring peace in the affected communities. The government should embark on a clean-up of arms that have found their way into the hands of idle youths, including the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) and unemployed youths.
5. Government should intensify her efforts in supporting cultural activities that facilitate interaction and communication among communities such as marriage ceremonies, festivals, and sports.
6. Religious and traditional institutions that have expanded the scope of their responsibilities to include conflict resolutions, mediation and peacebuilding should be strengthened. For instance, government-led peacebuilding initiatives should incorporate the already existing local platforms. Furthermore, these approaches to peacebuilding should be adopted and implemented in other areas that are affected by conflict.

### **Conclusion**

The war against insurgency and search for sustainable peacebuilding is not for the government alone. From what has been said so far, the paper concludes that the North East region of Nigeria has faced insurgency for over a decade. About 35,000 people have been killed and over 2.2 million people displaced, and the insurgency has spread out to neighbouring countries around Lake Chad. The paper is also of the view that, before the insurgency, the region was saddled with unfavourable climatic changes, high demographic growth and a near-absence of state presence in almost every part of the region except in the

state capitals. The challenging nature of the region is often considered as one of the root causes of the insurgency and thus search for sustainable peacebuilding. Government of Nigeria and other stakeholders have made some progress in stabilizing the region and in providing solutions to the insurgency couple with the global pandemic. Also, the paper gives stress on the efforts made by the Federal Government in establishing the North East Development Commission (NEDC) so as to coordinate efforts at the rebuilding of the region. As peacebuilding interventions increasingly move to a bottom-up approach, these endogenous civic institutions and resilience strategies offer an alternative process for entrenching sustainable peace to the government and her development partners. Working with these local communities and institutions presents an opportunity for the government to win the hearts and minds of the people.

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