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Crisis within Crisis: COVID-19 Pandemic and the Exacerbation of Insecurity and Humanitarian Challenges in Nigeria's North-East

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Abstract:

The article examined the emergence of COVID-19 amidst existing complex insecurity and humanitarian challenges in Nigeria's north-east region. It argues the spread of the disease to the region and government responses have exacerbated existing challenges, while creating new ones. It adopts a qualitative approach, with data sourced from secondary sources and analyzed through content analysis. Findings reveal that Boko Haram and its affiliates exploited the lockdown to its advantage being part of the measures put in place to curb further spread of the virus. The group staged attacks on some communities and security forces in the north-east, killing more people than the COVID-19 did in the Northeast. This increased the number of internally displaced person (IDPs) and aggravated the region's humanitarian crisis. The effects of COVID-19 in the North-east have not only been on majority of people dependent on informal subsistence, but also, heavily on the IDPs, whose camps are already congested; making social distancing and other preventive measures difficult to implement. Notwithstanding stakeholders' responses, web of challenges including access to more land for new camps, scarce funds, issues of coordination and ongoing Boko Haram attacks, continue to hamper efforts at curbing of the region's multiple crises, including the recent COVID-19. The article recommends that in order to curb the multiple crisis including further spread of COVID-19 in the north-east, the government at all levels, humanitarian organizations and CSOs, should ensure synergy of efforts, while leveraging on good practices at local, national and international levels, towards addressing conflict, humanitarian challenges and public health pandemic.

Keywords: COVID 19, Insecurity, Humanitarian Crises,

Introduction

Since Nigeria returned to democratic rule in 1999, there have been recurring reports of increasing violence and criminality in various parts of the country. These include, but not limited to, militancy in the Niger Delta, ethno-religious

conflicts, farmers-herder's clashes, piracy, cybercrimes, armed robberies, armed banditry, kidnappings, and cattle rustling, amongst others. The North-east region of Nigeria has been plagued by a complex insecurity and multifaceted humanitarian and development crises, gaining international attention, largely as a result of terrorist activities of Boko Haram (hereafter BH), which intensified from 2009. The BH activities produced not less than 1.8 million Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) across three of its states, namely, Borno, Adamawa and Yobe, also known as BAY states.[1] Security challenges such as kidnapping, cattle rustling and armed banditry popularly referred to as "*Kwanta-Kwanta"* (hausa word meaning lie down, lie down) which hitherto operated on a low scale have intensified and generated proceeds that fuels arms supply for BH, thereby complexifying the security situation of the region.[2] [3]

From 2020, the North-east region has been confronted with new concerns arising from the COVID-19 pandemic, which threatens to exacerbate the security crisis in the region. Prior to the outbreak of COVID-19, the epicenters of conflict in the region, which are the BAY states, experienced deterioration of their health facilities and services. Vaccination campaigns and medical services for children and other vulnerable groups were disrupted and, in most cases, inaccessible. The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the humanitarian crisis by particularly impacting IDPs.[4] According to the report by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) on the Round 35 Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) assessment, as at December 2020, the estimated number of IDPs in conflict affected north-eastern states of Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Taraba and Yobe States was 2,150,243[5] as against 1,980,036 IDPs that were recorded in Round 27.[6] Data from Displacement Management Systems (DMS)/ Camp coordination, camp management (CCCM), Shelter and Distribution of Non-Food Items (NFIs) for Shelter revealed that one

[1] United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), "The Covid-19 Pandemic in Nigeria Potential Impact on the North-East", Brief 2, April 3, 2020.
[2] Freedom C. Onuoha, and James Okolie-Osemene, "The Evolving Threat of Kidnapping for Ransom in Nigeria, in *Internal Security Management in Nigeria: Perspectives, Challenges and Lesson*, ed. Oshita, Oshita, Alumona, Ikenna Mike, Onuoha, Freedom C. (Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 233-258.
[3] Al Chukwuma Okoli, "Cows, Cash and Terror: How Cattle Rustling Proceeds Fuel Boko Haram Insurgency in Nigeria", *Africa Development,* Vol. 44, No. 2, (2019), 53-76.
[4] Nextier Security, Peace and Development, Nigeria's Displacement Dilemma, last modified June 11, 2020, accessed July 26, 2020, https://nextierspd.com/nigerias-displacement-dilemma/.
[5]IOM Nigeria Displacement Tracking Matrix (DTM) North East Nigeria | Displacement Report 35. last modified December, 2020, accessed July 11, 2021, https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Northeast%20Nigeria%20-%20Displacement%20Report%2035%20%28December%202020%29.pdf
[6] IOM Nigeria. "Clean Water, Hygiene and Sanitation: Crucial to Contain COVID-19 Among IDPs in Northeast Nigeria", last modified March 17, 2020, accessed July 26, 2020 https://www.iom.int/news/clean-water-hygiene-and-sanitation-crucial-contain-covid-19-among-idps-northeast-nigeria

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in four of the IDP camps – where about 430,000 IDPs reside - in the BAY states are highly congested and have per capita space of less than 15m2. Among the Bay states, Borno state has been worst by the BH crisis. "Consequently, almost all of the LGAs hosting the over congested IDP camps in Borno were identified as 'high risk' areas by the Borno COVID-19 Preparedness and Response Plan".[7]

The COVID-19 pandemic presents another challenge to the existing intricate security challenges in the North-east. Given the measures instituted by the Federal Government of Nigeria through the Presidential Tax Force on COVID-19 to curtail the spread of the disease, the Nigerian military and other security forces became preoccupied with enforcing the lockdown order, together with the closure of schools, ban on social gatherings, closure of borders, and ban on international flights. However, violent non-state armed groups such as the BH and the Islamic State West African Province (ISWAP) exploited the void to further their insurgent activities in the North-east. During the COVID-19 lockdown, the insurgents ambushed and killed military officers on March 21, 2020, and also attacked communities in Gubio, Nganzai and Monguno local government areas of Borno State. The attacks on communities already struggling to cope with the dwindling economy due to the lockdown imposed to control the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, no doubt have aggravated the insecurity and humanitarian crises in the region.

The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs(OCHA), noted that as a result of COVID-19, the number of people in need of urgent assistance in North-east Nigeria rose from 7.9 million at the beginning of 2020 to 10.6 million by early July, 2020.[8] In this regard, the socio-economic deficits in North-east Nigeria could expose the youthful population and possibly make them vulnerable to recruitment and radicalization by violent extremists in the Lake Chad Basin like BH and ISWAP. Additionally, with COVID-19 on rampage, there were several concerns by agencies providing humanitarian support in the region of possibly IDPs leaving the camps on grounds pertaining to their safety, funding and precedence of issues. There have also been concerns that if vulnerable youths in the region continue to face harsh living conditions amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, the chances of them resorting to membership of BH could increase.[9] This concern is also hinged on the consideration that COVID-19 has slowed the pace of military operations and the activities of Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF).

It is against this backdrop that we examined how the emergence and spread of COVID-19 has altered the equation of violent conflicts and displacement, and specifically, the humanitarian crisis in North-east Nigeria. This article, therefore, examined existing humanitarian realities in the North-east Nigeria amidst the dynamics and impact of COVID-19 on peace and security in the

[7] UNDP, Brief 2, 6
[8] UNOCHA, Nigeria, Highlights, last modified July 2, 2020, accessed July 26, 2020, https://www.unocha.org/nigeria.
[9] Nextier Security, 2020.

region. The article argues that the trio of violent conflicts, displacement and humanitarian crises in the North-east have taken an abysmal dimension due to the increasing wave of COVID-19 pandemic. This article, therefore, proceeds in seven parts. After the introduction, the second part examined the context and complexity of crisis in Nigeria's North-east. The third part captured violent conflicts, displacement and humanitarian crisis as Nigeria's multiple jeopardies. While the fourth part examines the spread of COVID-19 pandemic and exacerbation of North-east crises, the fifth part focuses on the COVID 19 pandemic and emerging challenges in IDP camps in the North-east. The sixth part focuses on the imperative of coordinated responses in the North-east. The seventh part is the conclusion.

Understanding the Context and Complexity of Security Crisis in Nigeria's North-East

Since Nigeria's independence from the British in 1960, the north-east geopolitical zone comprising of Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Taraba and Yobe states have recorded relative peace and security. Notwithstanding, there were recorded incidents of armed banditry popularly referred to as "*Kwanta-Kwanta*" (Hausa word meaning lie down, lie down) which was not beyond the coercive apparatus of the state as at then. .[10] Notably, during the 1970s and 1980s, armed banditry in the region was largely blamed on illegal incursion of alien persons as a result of conflicts in neighbouring countries of Niger and Chad supported by domestic criminal collaborators.[11]

The ambience of peace and security in the North-east region further deteriorated in the 1980s with the outbreak of the Maitatsine uprising in the North-west which later spread into some states in the North-east. Even though the Maitasine uprising were eventually brought under control, it has been linked to criminal activities due to the nature and character of the group's operations such as attacks on soft targets. By 1990s, more criminal groups had proliferated assuming more dangerous dimensions, and now engaging in armed robberies, raids on villages, sacking of rural markets, ransom kidnapping and cattle rustling, a situation that has since made complex the security situation in the north-east.[12] Furthermore, factors including weak economy, ineffective security and intelligence apparatuses, failure to define national culture and identity as well as government's incapacity and political will to prevent the resurgence of violence at the aftermath of the Maitatsine uprising had paved way for other criminal groups to emerge. Consequently, these groups received

[10] Bassey E. Ate and Bola A. Akinterinwa, *Cross Border Armed Banditry in the North Earth Zone of Nigeria: Issues in National Security and Nigeria's Relations with its Immediate Neighbours,* ed. (Lagos: NIIA, 2011).
[11] Aliyu Mohammed, "Threat Perception, Rationalisation and Response to Internal Security in Nigeria's North East Zone", in *Cross Border Armed Banditry in the North Earth Zone of Nigeria: Issues in National Security and Nigeria's Relations with its Immediate Neighbours,* Bassey E. Ate and Bola A. Akinterinwa, eds, (Lagos: NIIA, 2011). 131-138).
[12] ibid

much motivation and momentum to wreak havoc, thus questioning the state's capacity to address and tackle such events.[13]

Since then, new dimensions of unconventional security threats ensued, coupled with the proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALWs) into the country.[14] The most complex crisis in the north-east has its roots in the emergence of the BH group, an assemblage of insurgents responsible for innumerable attacks, kidnappings, and cattle rustling on local communities across Nigerian states, Chad, Cameron and Niger.[15] The nefarious activities of the sect and the Nigerian army's counterinsurgency operations in the region has subjected Nigeria to the worst humanitarian crisis ever in its history after the Nigerian Civil War with millions of people seeking humanitarian assistance.[16] According to an estimate by the UNHCR[17], 1.8 million people have been internally displaced as a result of the crisis and about 5.8 million people in dire need of assistance as at 2018. Borno, being the epicenter of the crisis has recorded over 80% of IDPs with over 60% living in host communities, thereby exerting more pressure on resources and basic amenities of these communities. To better understand the trends and complexity of crisis in the North-east, there is a need to examine the historical formation of the region, its socioeconomic conditions and the gradual environmental degradation which have paved a way for the emergence of the dreaded BH crisis that has bedeviled and crumbled the socio-economic development of the region.

North-east Nigeria was once a home to the Kanem- Borno Empire (1617 – 1893 AD), one of Africa's longest reigning and influential empires due to its strategic location between Northern Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa. The empire extended to what is today known as Southern Chad, Northern Cameroon, Northeast Nigeria, Eastern Niger, and Southern Libya. It amassed religious, economic and military power over the region and the Bornu-Kanem Empire embraced Islam before any other part of what is now Nigeria. It predominantly had agriculturalists and pastoralists from different ethnic backgrounds that made

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[13] Adesoji, Abimbola O. "Between Maitatsine and Boko Haram: Islamic fundamentalism and the response of the Nigerian state." *Africa today* 57, no. 4 (2011): 99-119.
[14] Chris. I. Nwagboso, Security Challenges and Economy of the Nigerian State (2007 – 2011). *American International Journal of Contemporary Research*, vol. 2, no.6 (2012), 244-258.
[15] United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR), Violations and abuses committed by Boko Haram and the impact on human rights in the countries affected. Annual report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and reports of the Office of the High Commissioner and the Secretary-General, 2015.
[16] Noor Ashikin Hamid, Mohd Afandi Salleh, Nasa'i Muhammad Gwadabe, 1 12 Abd Majid Hafiz Mohamed and Abdullahi Ayoaede Ahmad, "Boko Haram and Humanitarian Crisis in North-East Nigeria", *World Applied Sciences Journal*, Vol.35, No.9 (2017), 1777-1782.
[17] *United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees* (UNHCR), North-East Nigeria, Monthly Situation Report, 2018.

up its socio-economic composition.[18] A study conducted by Akpoilih and Farazibi[19] concluded that the North-east has a poverty index of 49% which accounts for the highest in the country and there is very low access to education in the north-east states accounting for 31% of low national school attendance ratio[20]. In addition to these statistics, the World Bank[21] submits that chronic poverty is very rampant in the north-east which accounts for 22.2%, making the region the second highest in the country. The aforementioned contradictions foster the feelings of marginalization, frustration and hostility among societal class which can metamorphose into violence.[22] It is against this background that Adelaja, Labo, and Penar[23], argued that factors such as poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, extreme religious ideology among others are triggers of the terrorist activities of the BH.

Similarly, Northern Nigeria has a very sensitive climatic weather condition due to the Sahara Desert's annual expansion of about 1-10 km, stretching into the Sahel region of Africa. In this regard, the North-east is challenged by desert encroachment, which renders its wide expanse of land unsuitable for agriculture.[24] The local population is therefore incapacitated to carry out their activities efficiently which limits the quality of their lives due to these challenges. They are then forced to migrate to other places in search of alternative income. Given the occupation of most of the local population being farming and livestock rearing, thus scarcity of land and water for productivity is a grave challenge to sustainable living for these communities. According to Dingyadi[25], over 154, 725 people in five frontline states in Northern Nigeria lost their farm as a result of climatic conditions within seven years, a situation which propelled them to migrate elsewhere for survival. Consequently, many have ventured into criminal activities in order to make ends meet and satisfy

[18] Vincent Hiribarren, *A History of Borno: Trans-Saharan African Empire to Failing Nigerian State*. (London: Hurst & Company, 2016).
[19] Roland Akpoilih and Adesoji Farayibi, *Economic Growth and Inequality in Nigeria: Magnitudes and Challenges*. Munich Personal RePEc Archive (MPRA) Paper No 74156, 2012.
[20] National Population Commission (NPC), 2015 Nigeria Education Data Survey Education Profile. (Washington DC: USAID, 2016).
[21] World Bank Group, Poverty Reduction in Nigeria in the Last Decade. (Washington DC: The World Bank, 2016).
[22] Dokun Oyeshola, *Conflict and Context of Conflict Resolution*. (Ile-Ife: Obafemi Awolowo University Press, 2005).
[23] Adesoji O. Adelaja, Abdullahi Labo and Eva Penar, Public Opinion on the Root Causes of Terrorism and Objectives of Terrorists: A Boko Haram Case Study. *Perspectives on Terrorism*, vol. 12, no.3 (2018), 25 - 49.
[24] Henry Usiobaifo Agbebaku, Environmental Challenges and Climate Change: Nigeria Experience. *Journal of Research in Environmental and Earth Science*, vol. 2, no.4, 2015 01-12.
[25] Yusuf Dingyadi, *Desert Encroachment Poor Response on Managing Disasters*, last modified June 13, 2012, accessed July 26, 2020, http://www.gamji.com

their needs. .[26] Against this background, it is imperative to note that the history, the socioeconomic status and environmental changes in north-east Nigeria significantly contributed to the development of the current Boko Haram insurgency in the region.

Since the emergence of BH and its combative activities in 2009, it has become a metaphor for insecurity in the country. [27][28][29]. This is so because Nigeria is entangled in a struggle against violent extremism that has affected the country and its neighbours. Although the group's activities preceded 2009, the crisis has brought Nigeria to a pivotal phase where it requires deeper analysis as everything about the sect remains contested- the thought and meaning of its name, its emergence and radicalization, its affiliations and responses by stakeholder to contain the menace.[30], [31],[32],[33](There exists a universal consensus that BH conducted its activities peacefully before 2009 until the government's clampdown in the same year that led to the death of its leader, Mohammed Yusuf. In a retaliatory attack for the killing of its leader, the group executed their first attack in Borno state in January 2010 at the Dala Alemderi War. The sect, in January 2012, announced that Abubakar Shekau, a deputy to Yusuf, had assumed the leadership of the group. Since then, BH has intensified its activities across Nigeria with a high economic and humanitarian toll.

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[26] Nwokeoma Bonaventure N. and Chinedu Amadi Kingsley, Climate Variability and Consequences for Crime, Insurgency in North East Nigeria. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, vo.8, no.1, (2017), 171 - 182.

[27] Peter L. Lacey, "The Emergence of Boko Haram: An Analysis of Terrorist Characteristics." paper presented at the *3rd Australian Counter Terrorism Conference*, Novotel Langley Hotel, Perth, Western Australia, 3rd-5th December, 2012.

[28]Kyari Mohammed, "The Message and Methods of Boko Haram", In, *Boko Haram: Islamism, Politics, Security and the State in Nigeria*, Antoine Pérouse de Montclos, ed. (Leiden: African Studies Centre, ASC, Institut Français de Recherche en Afrique, IFRA, 2014). 9-32.

[29] Seth Ahenkan Manful, "An Interrogation of the Economic Motivations of Terrorism in Africa: The Case of Boko Haram in Nigeria" (PhD diss, University of Ghana, 2019).

[30] William W. Hansen and Aliyu U. Musa, "Fanon, the Wretched and Boko Haram" *Journal of Asian and African Studies,* vol. 48, no.3 (2013), 281-296.

[31] Zacharias. P. Pieri, and Jaco B. Zenn, "The Boko Haram Paradox: Ethnicity, Religion, and Historical Memory in Pursuit of a Caliphate" *African Security,* vo.9, no.1 (2016), 66-88.

[32] Olabanji Akinola, "Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria: Between Islamic fundamentalism, politics, and poverty" *African Security*, vol.*8*, no.1, (2015), 1-29.

[33] Sibusiso Nkomo and Stephen Buchanan-Clarke, Violent extremism in Africa Popular assessments from the 'Eastern Corridor', Afrobarometer Policy Paper No. 65, May 2020.

Even though membership of the sect is recruited across a variety of social classes, majority emanate from the poorest groups. Although the common agenda that binds the sect together is the desire to promote Islamic law and overthrowing a secular government, the reservoir of poverty, the perception of social injustice, and the high level of youth unemployment in northern Nigeria combine to create the enabling condition for BH insurgency. However, the suicide attack carried out by Muhammed Abu al-Barra on the United Nations complex in Abuja on August 26, 2011 signaled a major transformation to incorporate international targets and indicated a stronger linkage with Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, which has similar propositions as they equally attacked UN offices in Algeria in 2007.[34]

The economic structure of Nigeria is gradually being influenced by BH's activity in Northern states. Critical resources needed for development is being diverted towards fighting insurgency. The changing economic condition of Northern Nigeria is evident in increasing migration across the states. The Human Rights Watch (HRW)[35] submits that the North has lost more than 935 of its human capital from 2009 to 2012. In the same vein, a World Investment Report (WIR) cited in Carson[36], estimated that the domestic economy lost a whopping N1.33 trillion Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), owing largely to the activities of insurgent groups including BH. Reacting to these developments, the then Minister of Information, Mr. Labaran Maku, stated that terrorism in places like Kano, which serves as the commercial stronghold of not only the North, but neighbouring countries like Chad, Niger Republic and northern Cameroon, is destroying the Northern economy.

Countering the threats posed by BH insurgency and its impacts on humanitarian toll in Nigeria has necessitated efforts by international organisations at continental and regional levels as well.[37] Despite the efforts by the UN at global level, there have also been the continental initiatives by the AU in the adoption of a Convention on the Prevention and Combating of Terrorism, the Algiers Convention, which was promulgated in 1999. The adoption of this convention resulted in the passage of "comprehensive CT laws and measures, including ratifying various international instruments and complying with

[34] Haruna D. Dlakwa, "United Nations (UN) agencies and humanitarian intervention in Nigeria's North-East", in *Perspectives on Contemporary Nigerian Politics and International Relations: Essays in Honour of Professor Warisu Oyesina Alli,* Usman A. Tar, Sharkdam Wapmuk and Efem N. Ubi, eds, (Lagos and Kaduna: NIIA and NDA, 2020).
[35] Human Rights Watch, 'Nigeria: Boko Haram Attacks Indefensible', 23 January 2012.
[36] Johnnie Carson, J. *Nigeria, One Year after Elections: US on Boko Haram, Democracy and Economy*. A press release prepared for Center for Strategic and International Studies, (Washington DC, April 9, 2012). 1-5.
[37] Usman A. Tar and Bashir Bala, "The Frontiers of CounterTerrorism and Counter-Insurgency in the Lake Chad Basin", in *New Architecture of Regional Security in Africa Perspectives on Counter-Terrorism and Counter-Insurgency in the Lake Chad Basin*, Usman A. Tar and Bala Counterterrorism, eds, (Maryland- US: Lexington Books, 2020). 49-65

legally binding UNSC resolutions".[38] Similarly, at the regional level, member states of the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC) and the AU pioneered the remodeling of regional security under the banner of the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) in an effort to curb the menace of the BH insurgency.[39],[40] At the national level, the Nigerian military has recorded considerable successes in its fight against the insurgent group notably among which are clearing the BH camps and intercepting their arms supply. The Nigerian Air Force in joint operations with the Nigerian Army has also rescued several women and girls held as hostages in the strongholds of BH. In most of these operations, "scores of young girls, women, and children who were abducted were rescued by Nigeria Armed Forces from BH on many defining operations in the theatre of operation".[41] Despite the counter insurgency and counter terrorism operations and efforts by various stakeholders, the emergence and spike of COVID-19 pandemic crisis has brought a new dimension to Nigeria's management and control of violent conflicts, displacement and humanitarian crisis.

Nigeria's Multiple Crises: Violent Conflicts, Displacements and Humanitarian Crisis

The aftermath of the Cold War has been characterized by a complex emergency paradigm in the form of armed conflicts or insurgency with the attendant effects giving rise to the proliferation of humanitarian crisis ranging from forced displacements, human fatalities, epidemics, food crisis and increasing high rates of diseases. Indicators of the emergence of insurgency in a nation include attacks on military and civilian targets, guerilla warfare, terrorism, ethnic cleansing, internal displacement, militarization, to mention a few.[42] Similarly, this era marked a momentum shift in the nature and conduct of warfare, bringing to fore the emergence of non-state actors waging war against the state and targeting its civilian population. As evidenced by most intrastate conflicts that occurred in Africa after the cold war, there has been a drift from massive refugee flows to augmented internal displacement figures globally. Thus, the

[38] Dauda Abubakar and Sharkdam Wapmuk, "Mapping Counter-Terrorism and Counter-Insurgency in Africa" in *New Architecture of Regional Security in Africa Perspectives on Counter-Terrorism and Counter-Insurgency in the Lake Chad Basin*, Usman A. Tar and Bashir Bala, eds, (Maryland- US: Lexington Books, 2020), 69-88.
[39] Usman A. Tar and Mala Mustapha, "Emerging Architecture of Regional Security Complex in the Lake Chad Basin: Paper Presented at the *International Conference on Security Regimens in Africa*. Organised by CODESERIA, Held at Azalai Grand Hotel, Bamako, Mali, September 28–29, 2016.
[40] Usman A. Tar and Bashir Bala., *New Architecture of Regional Security in Africa Perspectives on Counter-Terrorism and Counter-Insurgency in the Lake Chad Basin*.
[41] Ibid, 52
[42] Adedeji Bethel Oluwatosin, Adebayo Tosin and Udo, Emem Michael," Malnutrition among Internally Displaced Persons Children: A Consequence of Armed Conflicts in Nigeria", *Journal of Global Peace and Conflict,* Vol. 7, No. 2(2019), 31-38

internal displacement of civilians and the dire need to safeguard their human rights remains a global concern.[43]

Since Nigeria's democratic transition in 1999, the country has been bedeviled by a siege of violent conflicts which manifest in perennial ethno-religious riots, indigene/settler conflicts, inter/intra tribal wars, communal clashes, political conflicts, militancy and insurgency, thus causing scourges of increasing humanitarian and economic tolls. As the country's security challenges continue unabated, its attendant consequence is the displacement of people especially in Northern Nigeria who have been subjected to indiscriminate detention, human trafficking, sexual assault, lack of access to good healthcare, food deprivation, illiteracy and other ill predicaments.[44] The UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) asserted that: "The UN estimates that over 1.5 million people have been displaced, and at least three million have been affected by the insurgency in north-east Nigeria."[45]The living conditions of the displaced population were documented in the June 2014 Secretary-General report to the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), which states that in north-eastern Nigeria, the humanitarian situation continued to deteriorate, with a spike in internal displacements. Nearly 4.2 million people are food insecure and 510,000 children under age 5 suffer from severe acute malnutrition.[46] The drivers of violent conflicts, population displacement, and humanitarian crisis in Nigeria are complex with an overlapping and versatile nature, thus a selected few are discussed in subsequent paragraphs in relation to their propensity to aggravate internal displacement in Nigeria.

Boko Haram Crisis

The outbreak of the Islamist group BH in Nigeria and its activities since 2009 has enveloped its north-eastern region and neighbouring countries like Cameroun, Chad and Niger have been advertently affected by the menace, thus forming a regional conflict that has subjected the Lake Chad Basin to grabble with a complex humanitarian emergency. The group has launched indiscriminate attacks against innocent civilians including innumerable bombings, suicide attacks, kidnappings for ransom, mass shootings and destruction of properties worth billions which have all cumulated to compel

[43] Olanrewaju, Faith Osasumwen, Adekunle Olanrewaju, Femi Omotoso, Joshua Olaniyi Alabi, Emmanuel Amoo, Ejiroghene Loromeke, and Lady Adaina Ajayi. "Insurgency and the Invisible Displaced Population in Nigeria: A Situational Analysis." *SAGE Open*, (April 2019).
[44] Ibid
[45] UK Home Office: Country Information and Guidance - Nigeria: Fear of Boko Haram, last updated June 2015, accessed July 26, 2020, https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/435251/CIG_ NIG_Fear_of_Boko_Haram_v1_0.pdf
[46] United Nations Security Council (UNSC), "Report of the Secretary-General on the activities of the United Nations Office for West Africa", last update June 26, 2014, accessed July 26, 2020, http://www.refworld.org/docid/53bea76c4.htm p. 4

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millions of people to flee their home to safe havens within Nigeria and neighboring countries of Cameroun, Chad and Niger.[47] According to a report by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (2019), over 3.3 million people have been displaced since the inception of the insurgency, including over 2.5 million IDPs in north-eastern Nigeria, over 550,000 IDPs in Cameroon, Chad and Niger and about 240,000 refugees in the four countries.[48] This predicament has been termed the most bedeviling humanitarian crisis in Nigeria since the occurrence of the Civil War (1967-1970).[49] The Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (NRC/IDMC) describes some of the threats displaced populations face in a briefing paper dated April 2015:

> Today, the North-east is considered the epicentre of the crisis. There are 24.5 million people living in states under recurrent attacks by Boko Haram, where the militant group is reported to have killed more than a thousand civilians in the first three months of 2015 alone. The group's brutal ambushes and heavy-handed government counter-insurgency operations have created an unprecedented humanitarian crisis in Nigeria's North-east. Their actions have triggered massive population movements towards the Middle Belt region, where violence between communities has likely displaced hundreds of thousands over the past 15 years, and religious and ethnic tensions still run high. [50]

The deteriorating security situation in North-east Nigeria has often times led to the displacement of affected population and their largescale movements to safer havens. This has birthed a momentous expansion of towns and cities, and an increasing demand for basic social amenities that will cater for the enormous population. However, the living conditions of displaced persons in the light of political pressures, the increasing number of displaced persons in Niger, Chad and Cameroun as well as security concerns of potential attacks on camps have necessitated the need for some Nigerian refugees to return to their country.[51]

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[47] United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR), News - Boko Haram: Humanitarian crisis in North East 'terribly worse', last modified accessed April 16, 2016, July 26, 2020, http://data2.unhcr.org/en/news/12310.

[48] United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) -Nigeria Emergency, last updated October 2019, 31, accessed July 26, 2020, https://www.unhcr.org/nigeria-emergency.html

[49] A. Dirk Moses and Lasse Heerten, *Postcolonial Conflict and the Question of Genocide* (New York: Routledge, 2017).

[50] Norwegian Refugee Council/Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (NRC/IDMC), Boko Haram's terror ripples through the region, last modified April 16, 2015, accessed July 26, 2020, http://www.refworld.org/docid/5534b9874.htm

[51] International Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), "The Displacement Continuum: The relationship between internal displacement and cross-border movement in seven countries" last modified June 2, 2020, accessed July 26, 2020, https://www.internal-displacement.org/sites/default/files/publications/documents/202006-cross-border-report.pdf

On that account, a report from Amnesty International (AI) dated February 2015 also noted:

> The humanitarian situation in the North-east deteriorated as a result of the violence. Since May 2013, at least 1.5 million people, mainly women, children and elderly people, were forced to flee to other parts of Nigeria or seek refuge in neighbouring countries. Families were separated, children were unable to attend school and many people were denied their source of livelihood. Host communities, government authorities and international organizations struggled to meet the humanitarian needs of displaced people. Two towns, Maiduguri and Biu, experienced cholera outbreaks in camps for the internally displaced, resulting in more than 100 deaths.[52]"

The attendant threats and vulnerability of persons to the insurgency has attracted policy readjustments towards displacement matters at regional level. The pervasive agitation that is associated with any form of associations to the BH including displacement is treated as a tenacious security issue. Governments of countries rather prefer to embrace an in-camp approach as a means to accommodate BH displaced persons instead of a community-based style. However, host countries opt for the return of IDP's and refugees to their homeland as the best bet for stability which on the contrary can possibly be unsafe[53]. The protection of the displaced population and promotion of their human rights are challenged by Nigeria's socio-economic instability and the flagging of security situations in the country. Although there have been efforts by the government and international organisations to provide humanitarian aid and relief in 2019, there are about 3.5 million people in the Lake Chad basin who still require assistance.[54]

Climate Change

Another contemporary global trend modeling and reconfiguring the patterns of humanitarian crisis in North-East Nigeria vis-a-vis internal displacement is the threat posed by climate change and its impact on human settlements. Communities have been vulnerable to the risk of natural disasters due to the rising sea level that washed away many settlements as a result of flooding.

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[52] Amnesty International (AI), Amnesty International (AI) Report 2014/15 - The State of the World's Human Rights - Nigeria, last modified February 25, 2015, accessed July 26, 2020, http://www.ecoi.net/local_link/297309/419665_en.html.
[53] Muritala Babatunde Hassan, Boko Haram Insurgency and the Spate of Insecurity in Nigeria: Manifestation of Governance Crises. *Research on Humanities and Social Sciences*, vol. 4, no.18 (2014), 9-18.
[54] UNHCR, Nigeria Emergency: The Boko Haram insurgency has displaced nearly 2.4 million people in the Lake Chad Basin, last modified June 30, 2020, accessed July 26, 2020, https://www.unhcr.org/nigeria-emergency.html.

Equally, farming and livestock rearing, which are primary sources of livelihoods and sustenance have been affected due to drop in the frequency of rainfalls. Water and food are basic human needs which must be satisfied at all times. In instances when these essential needs are unmet, people are forced to move out from their homes in search of these provisions.[55] The tenacity associated with the humanitarian crisis induced by climate change has been presumed to increase displacement globally as disasters such as flood, mudslides and storms continue to occur more often than before. Similarly, the disastrous effects of droughts, rising sea level and desertification in addition to conflict as a result of limited resources for user groups could compel people to shift from affected areas to safer places.[56]

There have been growing concerns and formation of international alliances to adequately contain the emerging threats of climate change and its consequences on internal displacements worldwide. The war against climate change was initiated as a response to the general acknowledgement of climate induced displacement during a Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in 2010, which recognized human mobility as an adaptation mechanism to contain the trends of climate change. Other important models were also recognized and adopted as strategic approaches to sustainability which includes disaster risk reduction and prevention, promotion of human rights at all times, planned and pre-emptive movements and the need for a wider scope of research, coordination and collaboration to curb climate induced displacements globally.[57]

Nigeria has recurrently recorded an increasing number of IDPs as a result of the woes of climate change which exacerbates agricultural productivity, uneven weather conditions, flooding, desertification as a result of declining rainfall in the North, rising water levels causing harm to livelihoods and making land inhabitable. These are all drivers of displacement. Natural disasters in Nigeria like floods arising from rainfall, overflowing watercourses and dam reservoirs are also triggers of displacement.[58] The North-eastern part of Nigeria has suffered inaccessible water and grazing resources which has crumbled their sources of livelihoods for decades. According to the International Displacement

[55] Jianfa Shen, Increasing Internal Migration in China from 1985 to 2005: Institutional Versus Economic Drivers, *Habitat International*, vol. 3, no.9 (2013), 1-7.
[56] Ogenga Otunnu, "Population Displacements: Causes and Consequences". Accessed July 26, 2020, https://refuge.journals.yorku.ca/index.php/refuge/article/viewFile/21278/19949.
[57] Brookings Institution, Mapping the Response to Internal Displacement: The Evolution of Normative Developments. Brookings- LSE Project on Internal Displacement, last modified October 10, 2014, accessed July 26, 2020, https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Mapping-the-Resource-to-Internal-Displacement-The-Evolution-of-Normative-Developments-October-10-2014-FINAL.pdf
[58] A. Dirk Moses and Lasse Heerten, ibid.

Monitoring Center, IDMC[59], the surface area of the Lake Chad basin has shrunk by 90% over the past 60 years, since the chronic droughts surged at the beginning of 1970s. The surface area of the lake was 26,000 square kilometres in 1963; it has now reduced to less than 1,500 square kilometres.[60] This has been largely due to climate change and anthropogenic factors which has prompted increasing migration of about 70 ethnic groups towards the south of the Lake Chad basin, thus, impairing tension and conflicts over resource control in the region. Magrin's study on the disappearance of the Lake Chad has affirmed that feeders of crisis in the Lake Chad Basin are not just persistence economic crisis; divisive reforms; poor governance; rising inequality and corruption among the ruling political elites, but more importantly, the ever-changing climate that has dramatically worsened the situation, amplifying food and nutritional insecurity in the region.[61] Changing seasonal and inter-rainfall patterns followed by increasing desertification have triggered food insecurity, consequently pushing communities into the arms of terrorist groups. The occurrence of high trends of IDPs in the country as a result of natural disasters is only in the North-east. According a report by IDMC[62]totals 122,000 in 2017 alone and about 2,667 homes in Niger state were destroyed in August and September of the same year. The report also asserts that disasters trigger 157,000 new displacements across the country yearly and about 143,000 people were displaced as a result of the disasters that occurred in 2017 alone.

Cattle Rustling and Armed Banditry

The era after the establishment of Nigeria' Fourth Republic has witnessed a proliferation of inter-communal clashes fueled by ethnic and religious intransigence. The North-western part of Nigeria has witnessed massive displacements as a result of the farmers-herders conflicts which have led to a rise of ethnic/vigilante militias to provide immediate security to local communities. However, this development metamorphosed inter-communal tensions and contestations between the ethnic militias safeguarding the interest of their localities and the cattle rustlers and armed bandits. Contemporary account on rural banditry in Nigeria presents a complex humanitarian scenario as it has posed a leading cause of violence and displacement in Nigeria over the

[59] Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), Nigeria: Country Information, last modified August 2019 accessed July 26, 2020, https://www.internal-displacement.org/countries/nigeria.
[60] Abhijit Mohanty, Kieran Robson, Samuel Ngueping, and Swayam Sampurna Nanda, Climate change, conflict: What is fuelling the Lake Chad crisis, last modified Tuesday 23 February 2021, accessed July 06, 2021, https://www.downtoearth.org.in/blog/climate-change/climate-change-conflict-what-is-fuelling-the-lake-chad-crisis-75639.
[61] Géraud Magrin, The Disappearance of Lake Chad: History of a Myth, Journal of Political Ecology, Vol. 23, no 1 (2016), 204-222.
[62] Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), Nigeria Profile, Last modified November 2017, accessed July 26, 2020, http://www.internal-displacement.org/countries/Nigeria.

recent years.[63] The transformation of rural banditry has largely been influenced by the prevailing national security concerns in Nigeria as posited by Bagu and Smith: [64]

> Gangs of criminal, often youth from farming and herding communities and/or local bandits, take advantage of growing insecurity, fear and cyclical attacks to loot villages, engage in highway robbery, and rustle cattle for personal gain. Both farming and herding communities suffer from this criminality.

Cattle rustling and armed banditry in North-western Nigeria is driven by certain factors peculiar to the region, prominent among which are ungoverned forestlands, hinterlands and borderlines which are characterized by extremely discrete rural settlements amidst farmlands and rangelands which harbor violent confrontations. The region is richly characterized by with a wide expanse and dense under-policed forestland which serves as a safe haven for bandits to carry out nefarious activities such as banditry and rustling, smuggling, human and substance trafficking and a host of transnational organized crimes.[65] These activities have been carried out efficiently due to the influx of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SAWLs) into Nigeria as an aftermath of the Ghaddafi rule in Libya. Criminal gangs, militants and terrorists have easier access to these arms which has given them the edge to carry out attacks and disrupt rural areas in the region.[66]

The activities of armed bandits and cattle rustlers have duly been affiliated to transnational gangs, some of which are mercenaries of the BH insurgent groups. Counter insurgency operations in the North-east is believed to have propelled the insurgents to take advantage of north central and north western region as alternative fields to explore and carry out criminality, thus worsening the spate of cattle rustling and armed banditry in the region.[67] A recent research by the Institute of Strategic Studies (ISS) reveals that there is a criminal network of relationship and communication between Boko Haram and armed bandits in North-east Nigeria. This is evident by the closed relationship between Adam Bitri who was a pioneer member of Boko Haram and close friend to the group's founder Mohammed Yusuf and its subsequent leader Abubakar Shekau. Adam Bitri is believed to the prime target that initiated alliance between bandits and BH according to the ISS's report. Bitri is also believed to have prior knowledge

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[63] Abul Azad, Emily Crawford and Heidi Kaila, *Conflict and violence in Nigeria: Results from the North East, North Central and South-South*. (Abuja: National Bureau of Statistics, 2018).
[64] Chom Baguand and Katie Smith, *Past is Prologue: Criminality and Reprisal Attacks in Nigeria's Middle Belt*, (Washington DC: Search for Common Ground, 2017). 5
[65] Serigne-Bamba Gaye. *Connections between jihadists groups and smuggling and illegal trafficking rings in the Sahel*, (Dakar: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, (2018a).
[66] Serigne-Bamba Gaye, *Connections between jihadists groups and smuggling and illegal trafficking rings in the Sahel*, (Dakar: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, (2018b).
[67] Al Chukwuma Okoli, *Africa Development,* 54.

of the terrain in the North West where the bandits operate having teamed up with kidnappers in Zaria and Birnin Gwari and re-established a link with BH. The argument of this report is further buttressed by the recent abduction of Kankara school girls where Boko Haram claimed responsibility for instructing and guiding bandits to carry out the operation.[68] Furthermore, weak regulation of pastoral activities gave rise to livestock bandits who are connected to local and transnational organized crime networks and have access to markets to disburse stolen goods. Such markets extend to other major Nigerian cities, including Maiduguri (Borno State) and Agege (Lagos State) through the criminal intermediaries.[69]

According to the IDMC[70], from January 2015 to February 2017, as a result of the activities of armed bandits and cattle rustlers, at least 62,000 people were displaced in Kaduna, Benue and Plateau states that in turn searched for shelter and protection within other poor rural communities, thus further rendering inequitable distribution of already limited resources. In the same vein, in report by the Global Camp Coordination and Camp Management Cluster, submitted that activities of bandits in Nigeria's North-west states of Sokoto, Kaduna, Kebbi, Niger, Zamfara and Katsina have displaced over 160,000 internally while causing about 41,000 more to flee to Maradi in neighboring Niger Republic.[71]The IDP camps continue to face challenges associated with inadequate resources and supplies for humanitarian assistance to r displaced persons as a result of the large number of people in need. There are instances of inconsistent distribution of food relief, proper medical services, and adequate resources that will provide shelter and cater the needs of the displaced persons, while in other instances, these resources and services are not available The West African Network for Peace building, WANEP[72] confirms this assertion in a survey conducted in Zamfara state which submits that 70% of the displaced population at the IDP camps has experienced irregular food distribution and relief materials. This was compounded by the closure of international airports as a result of the lockdown which led to uneven access to humanitarian cargo and supplies. However, the interventions on the path of the government and other stake holders to provide relief, food and healthcare have complemented

[68] Malik Samuel, "Boko Haram teams up with bandits in Nigeria" last modified March 03 2021, accessed on July 03 2021, https://issafrica.org/iss-today/boko-haram-teams-up-with-bandits-in-nigeria

[69] West Africa Response Network for Peacebuilding (WARN), Addressing Armed Banditry in the North-West Region of Nigeria: Exploring the Potentials of a Multi-Dimensional Conflict Management Approach, last modified August 18, 2019, accessed July 26, 2020, https://www.wanep.org/wanep/files/2020/Feb/POLICY_BRIEF_ON_ARMED_BANDITRY_IN_NIGERIA_-_18022020.pdf

[70] *Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre* (IDMC), Nigeria: Country Information, last modified June 16, 2019 accessed July 26, 2020, https://www.internal-displacement.org/countries/nigeria.

[71] *Global Camp Coordination and Camp Management Cluster*, Nigeria, last modified June 2020, accessed July 26, 2020, https://cccmcluster.org/operations/nigeria

[72] West Africa Response Network for Peacebuilding (WARN), 4.

the efforts of the government in ensuring stability and sustenance in containing the menace.

The Spread of COVID-19 Pandemic and Exacerbation of North East Crisis

Since its outbreak in Wuhan, China, in December, 2019, the coronavirus pandemic has continued to escalate with globally confirmed cases as reported by the World Health Organisation (WHO) at 14,971,036, including 618,017 deaths as at 23 July, 2020. The first COVID-19 index case was confirmed in Lagos Nigeria on the 27th of February 2020, by 23 July, 2020, about 38,948 cases had been confirmed, out of which 16,061 cases had been discharged and 833 deaths have been recorded in 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT). This number was derived from 251,893, tests conducted in a country with population estimated to be 200 million people. Following criticisms of the slow nature of and low testing capacity by Nigeria, the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) leveraged on GeneXpert equipment for COVID -19 testing, which is used for the diagnosis of tuberculosis. This scaled up testing for COVID-19 in the country.[73] Despite efforts by all the states in the north- east to contain the virus from reaching the region through restrictions on movement, the virus gained entry while the country was still under lock down through people who had contact infected persons and who in turn spread it other people in the region. The spread of COVID-19 in the north-east and government responses has created new challenges for the region that was already severely affected by BH insurgency and counterinsurgency by the Nigerian military.

Since the first index case was reported on the 18th of April 2020 in Borno state, the COVID-19 pandemic has continued to spread in the north east states. For example, by 23 July, 2020, Borno had a total number of 603 confirmed cases, 47 on admission and 521 discharged, and 35 deaths. Yobe had a total of 64 confirmed cases, 3 on admission and 85 discharged, and 9 deaths. Adamawa had a total of 115 cases, 21 on admission, 85 discharged and 9 deaths.[74] Even before the emergence of COVID-19 and it's spread in Nigeria, 35 percent of health facilities in the affected states of Borno, Adamawa and Yobe were damaged as a result of BH and other conflicts in the region. There have also been significant disruption of vaccination campaigns and other essential health services for children and other vulnerable groups in inaccessible areas. In addition, funding has been a major challenge. It was reported that in 2019, the health sector working in the north-east received only 25 percent of its funding requests.[75]

[73] NCDC, Clarification of COVID-19 Testing Expansion in Nigeria in light of Comments by Officials of Cross River State, last modified June 20, 2020, accessed July 26, 2020, https://ncdc.gov.ng/news/256/clarification-of-covid-19-testing-expansion-in-nigeria-in-light-of-comments-by-officials-of-cross-river-state.
[74] Ibid.
[75] WHO Nigeria, Health Sector Bulletin, September 2019.

The deployment of military personnel to various parts of the country to enforce lockdown directives of the government created an impetus for violent non-state armed groups particularly the BH and ISWAP to exploit the void created resulting from the change in operational priorities towards enforcement of lockdown, and increase their own operations. In one of its daring operations during the COVID lockdown, the BH ambushed a military convoy and killed military officers and over fifty security forces that were on their way to Alagarno forest in Borno State, on March 21, 2020. On Saturday, June 13, 2020, they also attacked three local government areas in Borno State, namely, Gubio, Nganzai and Monguno local government councils. For example, in Kolloram village, in Gubio Local Government Area of Borno State, 81 residents including women and children were killed, and 1,300 cattle and camel were slaughtered.[76] The attack was reported to be in retaliation to the killing of insurgents to prevent theft of herd animals.[77] The number of persons killed in the attack was more than number of people killed by the COVID-19 pandemic in Borno state.[78]

The attack resulted in displacement of more people in the local government areas. It was reported that over 120,000 IDPs were being sheltered in 33,000 households in Monguno. Following the attack, the Nigerian Army reported that its troops had decimated over 1,000 insurgents within two months and that it had drafted a large contingent of military personnel in the general area to track and apprehend the perpetrators.[79] Following the attacks, the Nigerian President, Muhammadu Buhari, had also acknowledged that the BH terrorists were taking advantage of the COVID-19 pandemic and consequent lockdowns to wreak havoc on communities.[80] While the position of the Nigerian government is that BH has been technically defeated[81], the UN argued that some areas remain more risky than others. Based on security risk assessment to support its work, the UN zoned the North East into three. First, is the 'conflict zone' where

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[76] Thisday News, Nigeria: Boko Haram Attacks 3 LGs in Borno, Kills At Least 29 Persons, June 6, 2020, accessed July 26, 2020, https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2020/06/14/boko-haram-attacks-3-lgs-in-borno-kills-at-least-29-persons/

[77] Ibid

[78] John Campbell, "ISWAP's Recent Attacks Could Signal a New, Deadlier Approach in Nigeria" last modified June 19, 2020, accessed July 26, 2020, https://www.cfr.org/blog/iswas-recent-attacks-could-signal-new-deadlier-approach-nigeria.

[79] Danielle Paquette and Ismail Alfa, "A massacre in Nigeria's Borno state left more people dead than months of coronavirus" Washington Post, last modified June 10, 2020, accessed July 26, 2020, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/africa/nigeria-borno-state-attack-coronavirus/2020/06/10/0147e06a-ab1b-11ea-a43b-be9f6494a87d_story.html.

[80] Thisday, June 6, 2020.

[81] The Punch News, "Boko Haram technically defeated, Buhari insists", February 6, 2016, accessed July 26, 2020, https://punchng.com/boko-haram-technically-defeated-buhari-insists/

the conflict is still active; secondly, the 'transition zone' where there is continued insecurity but also more possibility of a return to normalcy; and, thirdly, the 'at-risk zone' which is as yet unaffected by direct conflict but, without preventive actions, is at risk of conflict emerging. This categorization also guides the UN's responses to the COVID-19 disruptions in the north-east.

The spread of the Coronavirus to the north-east did not only exacerbate the physical security of people in the region. The economic impact of the restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic has been no doubt severe in the region. Following the imposition of restrictions including curfews, most Nigerians that depend on informal subsistence could not earn their daily living. One of the immediate impacts of the COVID was the increase in prices of food, commodities and transportation. A report by the Rapid Market Monitoring Initiative (RMMI) launched by REACH in collaboration with the Food Security Sector (FSS) and the Cash Working Group (CWG) to support humanitarian actors noted that food and fuel skyrocketed due to spread of COVID 19 to the North East.[82] This no doubt created severe hardships for a region that was already experiencing severe deprivation due to crisis in the region. More so, during the lockdown most Nigerians working in the informal sectors could not go out to work or travel to conduct their business. Some local vendors and traders hoarded food items and fuel, some refusing to sell for fear of not knowing when the government will ease the lockdown. Even after the government eased the lockdown, the prices of food items, commodities and transportation have remained high with grave implication for humanitarian outreach in the north east.

The enforcement of the lockdown and restrictions on intra-state movements also affected humanitarian activities in the north-east. While some states like Adamawa and Yobe announced partial lockdowns, Borno state adopted the approach of complete lockdown and severe restrictions of movement. While intra-state movement and exemptions for humanitarian actors were possible in Adamawa and Yobe States, it was not the case for Borno State. According to WHO[83]:

> The lockdown obstructed the movement of humanitarian personnel, the movement of vendors who supply water trucking, food voucher assistance and cargo movement's processes imposed by the military. During the period of the lockdown, only 103 exemption passes were provided to the humanitarian community, representing less than one-fifth of

[82] ReliefWeb, "COVID-19 Rapid Market Monitoring Initiative Maiduguri and Jere Local Government Areas (LGAs), Nigeria", Last modified July, 14, 2020, accessed July 26, 2020, https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Nigeria_COVID-19_Rapid-Market-Monitoring_14-July-20-July-2020.pdf.
[83] WHO, Multi-sector Joint Support Framework-COVID-19 Northeast Nigeria, last modified, June 2020, accessed July 26, 2020, https://www.who.int/health-cluster/news-and-events/news/Multi-sector-support-framework-16-June-2020.pdf?ua=1

> the 350 individual and 500 vehicle passes issued by the State Government, and less than 5 per cent of the number requested by the humanitarian community, despite being declared to be exempt from the lockdown measures.

Beyond preventing the spread of COVID-19, the lockdown and restriction of movements had other side effects. During the lockdown in the north-east, healthcare service delivery including the healthcare response to COVID-19 and the care of patients suffering from other health conditions were affected. Health workers reported that they were unable to trace suspected cases of COVID-19, to isolate suspected cases in camps, to collect samples for testing, and to conduct surveillance.[84] According to WHO, the cessation of services and the disruption of healthcare logistics in the north east had significantly impacts on all segments of healthcare including, among others, reproductive health, nutrition care for children, and mental health services.[85]

COVID 19 Pandemic and Emerging Challenges in IDP Camps in the North East

The penetration of further spread of the COVID-19 pandemic into the North-eastern states necessitated closer observations of the IDP camps. The population most affected by COVID-19 was not only the communities in conflict-afflicted areas, and returning refugees from Cameroon, Chad and Niger, but also IDPs. The local government areas most impacted by COVID-19 already had a high prevalence of other diseases such as endemic cholera and malaria, current outbreaks of Lassa fever and measles, and chronic malnutrition. The huge risks arising from the presence of the COVID-19 also stemmed from the fact that most people were either living in congested camps and camp-like settings, most public health facilities were damaged, making it difficult for populations to access healthcare. Most children are unable to receive vaccinations and other essential health services.

Another challenge that confronted the North-east following the outbreak of the COVID-19 is difficulty of observing social distances in IDP camps. Part of the measures recommended by the government to curtail spread of COVID-19 was social distancing, which required people staying at least two metres apart. However, the congested nature of the IDP camps makes social distancing difficult.[86] According to the Health Sector Nigeria, out of 413,271 IDPs sheltered in 51 highly congested camps, Borno, being the largest state in the region, had

[84] WHO, Multi-sector collaboration in Nigeria's COVID-19 Response, last modified June 2020 accessed July 26, 2020, https://www.who.int/health-cluster/news-and-events/news/Nigeria-multi-sector-covid-19/en/
[85] WHO, Multi-sector Joint Support Framework-COVID-19 Northeast Nigeria, ibid
[86] UNDP, in Nigeria, COVID-19 threatens to hit three fragile northeastern states hardest, UNDP studies find. Ibid.

28 in Maiduguri metropolitan area and 23 in deep field locations.[87] About 80 percent of the estimated 840,000 IDPs in Borno State alone lived in makeshift and temporary shelters .[88], [89] In three camps/settlement centres in "Jere, Gwoza and Kala Balge LGAs which collectively host almost 64,000 persons, the static crowd per capita space is less than or equal to one square metre".[90] It was clearly understood that the implications of the virus in IDP camps would be catastrophic, given the extremely congested living conditions. Even before the first case of COVID was recorded in Borno state, the state government had fumigated IDP camps in Maiduguri and established a COVID-19 centre in the state. Even so, the congested nature of the camps and increasing number of IDPs due to recent attacks in some communities in Gubio, Nganzai and Monguno local government councils, further burdens the already limited supply of shelter, food, water, sanitation and medical care and supplies for the IDPs in the North-east. Communities in Adamawa and Yobe states also reported the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted access to services including food, markets, WASH, health, education, protection, water trucking, etc.

Apart from the problem of congestion, another major challenge that accompanied the outbreak of the COVID was fake news, misconceptions, misinformation and mistrust of the government.[91] Despite the increasing number of cases across the North-east region, some people did not believe the pandemic is real.[92] With poor communication and fake news spreading across the region, as with other parts of Nigeria, many believed that the pandemic is a hoax by the state governments to attract international donations and funding from national treasury.[93] This was further deepened by the poor handling and alleged corruption in the distribution of palliatives in cash and food items, a situation which further fueled mistrust of r the government. From the initial target of reaching 2.6 million beneficiaries with the Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT), the President, Muhammadu Buhari, later directed that the number be expanded to 3.6 million, and focusing on the urban and rural poor, who depend on the informal sector to earn their livelihood. This was in response to

[87] IOM, Clean Water, Hygiene and Sanitation: Crucial to Contain COVID-19 Among IDPs in Northeast Nigeria, July 17, 2020, accessed July 26, 2020, https://www.iom.int/news/clean-water-hygiene-and-sanitation-crucial-contain-covid-19-among-idps-northeast-nigeria
[88] Ibid.
[89] Health Sector Nigeria, COVID-19 situation update- North East Nigeria, last modified July 18, 2020. accessed July 26, 2020, https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/documents/files/covid-19_weekly_situation_update_18_july_2020_ne_nigeria.pdf.
[90] WHO, Multi-sector Joint Support Framework-COVID-19 Northeast Nigeria, p. 11
[91] SayNo Campaign, FCT Administration and the Palliative Distribution: Citizens demand for Transparency, last modified April 15, 2020, accessed July 26, 2020, https://saynocampaign.org.ng/suspicions-soar-as-fcta-introduces-other-phases-of-palliative-items-distribution-across-the-area-councils/.
[92] Mercy Christopher, Civil Society's Role in Nigeria's COVID-19 Response. *Social Action*, Last modified April, 28, 2020, accessed July 26, 2020, http://saction.org/civil-societys-role-in-nigerias-covid-19-response/.
[93] Ibid

complaints of government mishandling the distribution of palliatives. Despite claims of Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs, Disaster Management and Social Development of reaching out to this number, most people, especially in the rural areas complained that palliatives promised by the government never got to them.[94] The controversy over the distribution of the palliatives is not unconnected to the politicization of the process and trading of blames between the two major political parties, namely the All Peoples Congress (APC) and Peoples Democratic Party (PDP). Civil society organisations have also attributed the poor handling of the distribution of the palliatives to corruption[95], and lack of coordination between the Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs, Disaster Management and Social Development, Presidential Task Force on COVID-19, the NCDC, state governments and other relevant agencies, including the civil society organisations themselves.[96]

COVID 19 and the Imperative of Coordinated Responses in the North East

Since the emergence of COVID-19, the responses of stakeholders in the country have been varied. Taking the lead, the Federal and State governments outlined various measures aimed at addressing the novel situation in the country. These included increase restrictions imposed on free movement in order to limit the transmission of COVID-19. These restrictions include a total ban on social gatherings, closure of schools, businesses and government buildings, and curfews. Despite these restrictions, the COVID-19 virus has succeeded in spreading from the first case in Lagos to the 36 states and the FCT. The response by the government is largely coordinated by the Presidential Tax Force on COVID-19, which launched a National COVID-19 Response Plan revolving around 10 pillars. These include: scaling up surveillance, testing, isolation, contact-tracing, infection prevention and control; case management of COVID-19 patients; risk communication and community engagement; emergency preparedness, security, and logistics for mass care; and resource mobilization.[97]

Response by the Borno State government was being described as proactive, having taken steps even before it recorded the first case in the state. The state also worked with the national government and humanitarian organisations to mitigate further spread especially in IDP camps. The Borno State Government provided a functional 100-bed capacity isolation centre in Maiduguri, equipped with ventilators, Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and other supplies.

[94] The Guardian Newspaper, Why controversy over FG's COVID-19 palliatives persists, April 26 2020 accessed July 26, 2020, https://guardian.ng/news/why-controversy-over-fgs-covid-19-palliatives-persists/.
[95] Mercy Christopher, *Social Action*, 3.
[96] OSIWA, Covid-19: Joint Memo by CSOs In Nigeria, last modified May 20, 2020, accessed July 26, 2020, http://www.osiwa.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/COVID19-CSOs-Joint-Memo-final.pdf.
[97] UNDP, in Nigeria, COVID-19 threatens to hit three fragile northeastern states hardest, UNDP studies find. Ibid.

Furthermore, the isolation ward and ICU were prepared at the University of Maiduguri with a functional NCDC reference lab for testing of suspected cases.[98] However, beyond Maiduguri metropolis, other local governments and communities lacked fully equipped isolation/treatment centres, functional wards and hospital equipment for COVID-19.[99] Therefore, in comparison to other North-eastern States, Borno State showed more state of readiness to confronting the outbreak of the Coronavirus than other North eastern states.

International organisations, led by the UNDP and other agencies made preparatory arrangements for efficient prevention and control for COVID-19 in the north-east even before it recorded the first case in Borno State. This was largely in anticipation of the challenges that may arise, especially in a region that was already affected by conflict and facing humanitarian crisis. The UNDP reported that it shipped in ventilators and other essential medical supplies in preparation for possible spread the virus in the north-east. According to the UNDP, an initial shipment included 50 A30 ventilators and personal protective equipment procured with funds from the COVID-19 Basket Fund, launched in April, 2020. Furthermore, the UNDP and other actors in the humanitarian sector reported that they helped to create emergency employment opportunities by restoring trade flows and supporting the smooth functioning of markets shoring up food security in the hardest-hit communities. They also supported the creation of public service announcements with celebrities aimed at tackling gender-based and domestic violence, which spiked globally during crises.[100]

Another stakeholder that responded to the COVID-19 pandemic in the North-east is the Victims Support Fund (VSF). On 30th March 2020, the Chairman of VSF, General TY Danjuma (Rtd), inaugurated a Task Force to drive the VSF one-billion-naira intervention on the COVID 19 pandemic[101]. The special task force was specifically mandated to provide palliatives to IDPs, vulnerable groups as well as institutions and agencies supporting Nigeria's efforts in the fight against Covid-19. They covered six states: Borno, Adamawa, Yobe, Taraba, Lagos, Ogun, and the FCT with the distribution of food items and medical facilities. According to VSF, it provided support to a total of 175,416 people in 27,000 households. The support provided in respect of COVID included food, PPE, and hygiene kits comprising of masks, surgical masks, gloves, alcohol-based hands sanitizers, soap, and liquid disinfectant that were distributed to vulnerable populations as well as government agencies.[102]

As part of the efforts to coordinate humanitarian responses to COVID-19 in the North-east, on 31 May 2020, the Operational Humanitarian Country Team (OHCT) in Nigeria released the Joint Support Framework to ensure a

[98] Ibid.
[99] Ibid.
[100] ibid
[101] Victims Support Fund, Victims Support Fund distributes food and medical consumables to 175,416 Nigerians, last modified May 4, 2020 accessed July 26, 2020, https://victimssupportfundng.org/victims-support-fund-distributes-food-and-medical-consumables-to-175416-nigerians/
[102] Ibid.

coordinated approach to managing the COVID-19 emergency across partners and sectors.[103] The main objective of the framework was to formalize the multi-sectoral work happening to address the humanitarian crisis and pull-together these collaborations for an effective response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The plan placed more priority on preventing the spread of COVID-19 in IDP camps and camp-like settings. Although, very few cases in IDP camps were quarantined, the density and conditions in camps create a high risk setting for rapid spread.[104] In the North-east, the Camp Coordination and Camp Management (CCCM) Sector, Water Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) Sector, and the Shelter Sector, together with the Health Sector, pledged to initiate a response based on their complementary areas of expertise.[105] They adopted a decongestion strategy targeting the over 400,000 individuals living in highly congested camps or sites.

The decongestion strategy adopted had other implications. First, additional land would be required for decongestion as a precondition for implementing social distancing recommendations. Secondly, additional funding is also needed to extend water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) operations within and outside IDP camps. Thirdly, additional land would also be required for other basic facilities such as roads, shelters, markets, schools, and hospitals, amongst others, including protection walls and other safety facilities to mitigate security challenges in the campsites. The criticality of additional funding was underscored by IOM Nigeria, which noted that its COVID-19 Strategic Preparedness and Response Plan would require USD 19.3 million to mitigate the pandemic's socio-economic impacts and ensure the continuity of life-saving assistance in emergency settings.[106] The availability of more funding, no doubt, will go a long way in supporting governmental and non-governmental actors to curb the spread of COVID 19 in the north-east. Furthermore, curbing the spread of the virus will necessitate coordination not only among the humanitarian actors working in various sectors in the north-east, but also, with the national, North-east state governments, and civil society organisations.

Conclusion

The emergence of COVID-19 has no doubt exacerbated the existing insecurity and related crises in Nigeria's North-east. The region has been plagued by a complex security challenges and multifaceted humanitarian complexes situations that emerged since the intensification of BH in 2009. This deadly insurgent group has, over the years, unleashed immense deaths, pillaged and destroyed many communities in the north-east. Its deadly activities fueled by the illicit flow of small arms and light weapons and webbed with other forms of criminality such as armed banditry and kidnapping for ransom, have resulted in the killing of many people and displacement of not less than 1.8 million in the

[103] WHO, Multi-sector collaboration in Nigeria's COVID-19 Response.
[104] Ibid.
[105] Ibid.
[106] Ibid

region, particularly in BAY states. The complexity of the crisis in the region has also been examined from the lenses of nature induced occurrences at the same time such as climate change with its multiplier effect of desertification and alarming rate of shrinking of the Lake Chad leading to migration of people in search of arable land for farming and grazing spaces.

The recent outbreak of COVID-19 has created further disruptions to the vulnerable health sector, public life and livelihoods in north-east. While the majority of people in the North-east have been affected by the COVID-19 induced disruptions, concerns have heightened with respect to its impact on the humanitarian challenges, particularly for the IDPs due to the already congested nature of the camps. Moreover, the situation is being made worse by ongoing BH attacks in the North-east despite the pandemic, including in areas close to humanitarian operations. While the COVID-19 pandemic has prompted responses from various actors before and after its emergence in the North East, it is evident, against the backdrop of complaints such as poor handling of government palliative distribution, misinformation, fake news and mistrust of the government, that a comprehensive coordination framework involving all stakeholders towards addressing the spread and reducing the impact of COVID on the population in the north east is lacking and in areas available, ineffective. In order to curb further exacerbation of existing crisis in the North-east, particularly due to emergence of COVID-19, it is imperative that governments at federal, state and local levels, as well as humanitarian and civil society actors should ensure synergy of efforts. There is also a need to leverage on good practices at local, national and international levels, and draw lessons from other countries, towards addressing the conflict, humanitarian challenges and public health pandemic.

While claims of coordinated activities are often made, the frictions between critical stakeholders such as the military and humanitarian actors working the North-east suggest otherwise.[107] Even though national attention has recently focused extensively on the COVID-19 pandemic in the country, the uninterrupted provision of security by the military and other security agencies in the North-east and other troubled spots in the country should remain national priorities as well. The recent exploitation of COVID-19 lockdown by violent non-state actors to attack communities, resulting in more deaths than the number of people killed by COVID in Borno state and the attendant increase in humanitarian challenges, attest to the importance of not losing sight of security as a priority in the region. Accordingly, a whole-of-society and a whole-of-government approach that brings together security forces, all sectors and partners operating in Nigeria's COVID-19 response from the national governmental authorities, non-governmental organizations, UN agencies, donor

[107] Yomi Kazeem, Nigeria's military is in a battle with humanitarian NGOs in the country's troubled northeast, *Quartz Africa,* last modified September 26, 2019, accessed July 26, 2020, https://qz.com/africa/1716064/nigerian-army-shuts-mercy-corps-ngos-amid-boko-haram-crisis/

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agencies, and the affected population, will go a long way in producing desired results in the fight against COVID-19 side by side the crisis in the north- east. The whole-of-society and a whole-of-government approach would also depend on effective leadership and collaboration to help address issues of fragmentation, decision making, and coordination of resources between the government, private sector, research centres and the public. While the Nigerian leadership should continue to provide strategic direction through the Federal Ministry of Health, Presidential Task Force on COVID-19 and the NCDC, other ministries, departments, agencies, private sector, civil society organisations and political parties, should be effectively engaged as important actors for facilitating multilevel and multi-sectoral coordination with the local levels and the centre. They also play important roles in supporting government efforts through donations of personal protective equipment (PPE), research, communication, advocacy and access to sometimes very difficult terrains in conflict areas such as the North-east.