

COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN NIGERIA

*The CLEEN
Foundation
establishes
programs
to empower
citizens*

By Valkamiya Ahmadu

The wind of insurgency rocking Nigeria's North East Geopolitical Zone emanates from the terror group Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati Wal-Jihad, aka Boko Haram, and has experts comparing Nigeria to Syria, Iraq, Tunisia, Somalia, Afghanistan and a host of other countries that have been engulfed by Islamic extremism. Like any growing democracy, Nigeria is not immune to challenges. In a country of 170 million spanning the ethnic, cultural and religious spectrum it would indeed be peculiar if agitation and struggle were not part of the landscape.

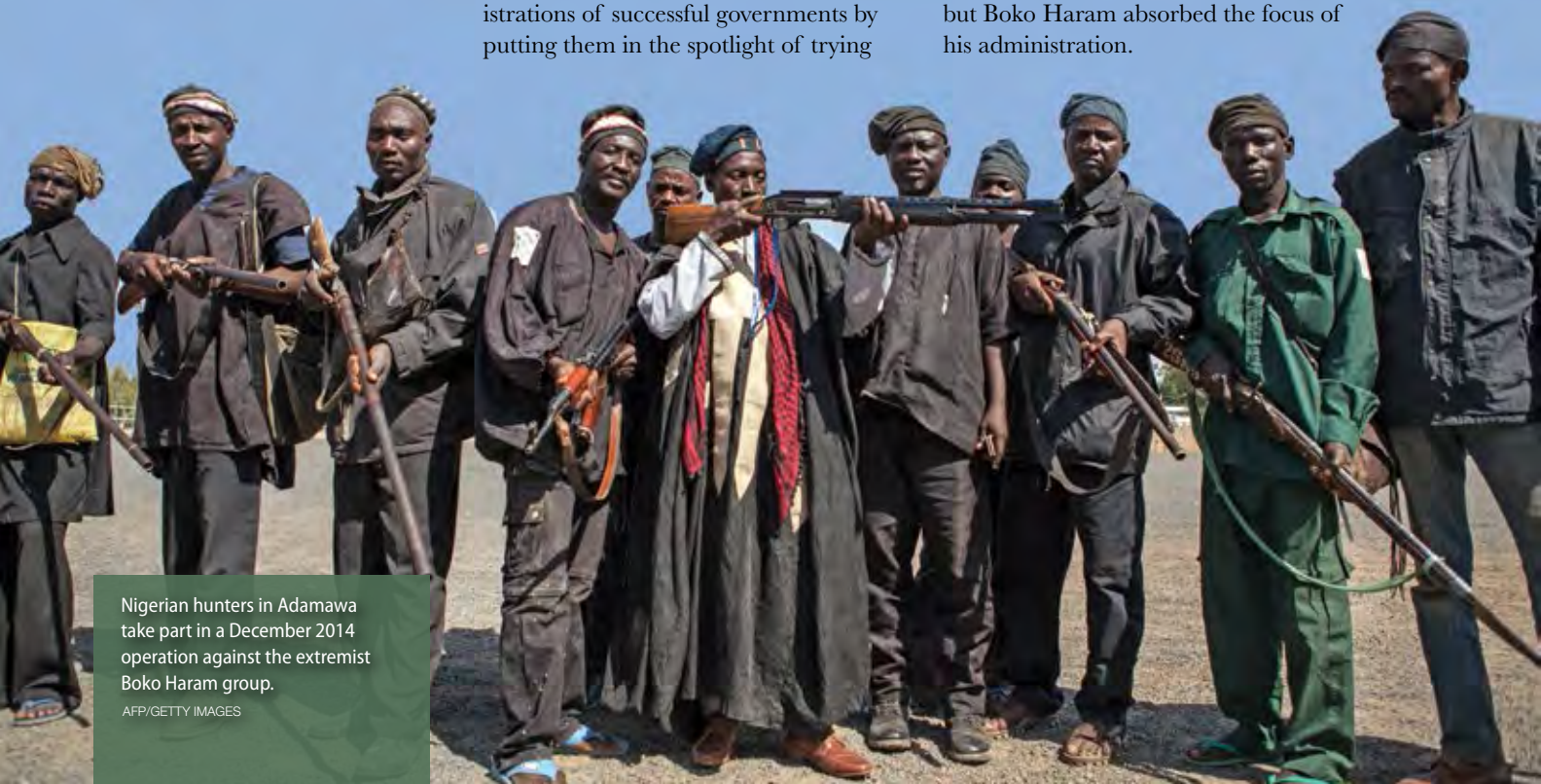
During Nigeria's 16 years of transitioning into a democratic state, certain conflicts have come to define the administrations of successful governments by putting them in the spotlight of trying

to resolve certain issues. These issues range from resource control in the Niger Delta to communal and ethno-religious conflicts in virtually every corner of the country and include kidnapping, armed robbery and the proliferation of small arms.

For instance, when former President Olusegun Obasanjo was elected in 1999, he tackled militancy in the Niger Delta and kidnapping and armed robbery in the South East and South West zones of Nigeria. His successor in 2007, President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua, continued in the same vein. He fought militancy in the Niger Delta, sought peace by establishing an amnesty program and dealt with the early emergence of Boko Haram. Subsequently, President Goodluck Ebele Azikiwe Jonathan inherited these crises, but Boko Haram absorbed the focus of his administration.

Nigerian hunters in Adamawa take part in a December 2014 operation against the extremist Boko Haram group.

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BACKGROUND

The emergence of Boko Haram in the early 2000s was like gunpowder waiting to ignite. Its ideology was clear: “Western education is sin,” meaning education imported from the West often challenges local culture and belief systems. Therefore, cultural norms were seen to have been permeated by Western culture. Former Boko Haram leader Mohammed Yusuf was a charismatic preacher whose message quickly gained popularity and appealed to various followers, from elites and professionals to impoverished youths. Yusuf offered his foot soldiers motorcycles and prepaid phone cards. This helped him gather information and establish a strong loyalty base for speaking out against the police and political corruption.

Following Yusuf’s death in 2009, under the leadership of Abubakar Shekau, the group escalated from hit-and-run grenade attacks to direct confrontation with security agencies using suicide bombers and making improvised explosive devices. Not only have many lives been lost and much property destroyed, Nigeria has also been experiencing a surge in the number of internally displaced people — nearly 2.1 million according to the July 2015 report of the National Emergency Management Agency.

The Goodluck Jonathan administration’s efforts to crack down on Boko Haram were met with strong criticism as ineffective. The group’s recent successes, as seen by its increasing military capabilities and conquest of military bases with weaponry, reinforces perceptions of their power. The reach of its network, initially limited to Nigeria, now extends to Cameroon, Chad and Niger, and is reaching out to the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant.

Based on the above, there is indeed need to double efforts to counter insurgents, especially as they try to entice the unemployed, uneducated population wallowing in poverty with a so-called better alternative.

CHALLENGES

The polarization of the crisis by past administrations contributed to the rise of Boko Haram. Many felt the insurgents were being sponsored to destabilize the Jonathan administration. The abductions of the Chibok girls were met with doubts. It wasn’t until the government was pressured, from inside and outside the country, that it felt the need to act. We are still grappling with determining how many have been kidnapped since the start of the crisis. The credibility of the Nigerian Army was put into question when issues such as poor funding, lack of equipment and training for officers affected morale and its motivation to fight insurgents.

The Jonathan government’s approach was kinetic, which consisted of the deployment of military personnel, the establishment of a multinational joint task force, and subsequent declaration of a state of emergency in Adamawa, Borno and and Yobe states. It also took a soft approach to counterterrorism and implemented the following:

- Adopted the national counterterrorism strategy and the national security strategy
- Established Almajiri schools in select northern states
- Established the Victims Support Fund to assist those

affected by the war

- Used the criminal justice system to prosecute war crimes suspects
- Established the Terrorism Prevention Act as amended in 2013

However, little appears to have been gained since the declaration of war. The proposed 2015 defense budget, at \$4.8 billion, is 20 percent of the national budget, leaving many to question the government’s ability to bring lasting peace to the region.

Under the present administration of President Muhammadu Buhari, the war against the insurgency seems to be reinvigorating as confidence is being restored to the Nigerian Army. A leading role is played by the Nigeria Chief of Army Staff, who is seen to be leading the war. Some of the successes recorded in mid-2015 include the dislodgement of insurgent training camps, intercepting and destroying their food supply and major arrests of men who supply hard drugs to the group. Also, most territory under the control of the group has been recaptured by the Army. This intensity stems from the three-month deadline set by the president to fight and win the war.

CLEEN FOUNDATION STUDY

To this end, the CLEEN Foundation, a nongovernmental organization formerly known as the Centre for Law Enforcement Education, launched a series of projects to gather empirical evidence on the causes of insurgency in the country’s North East Zone. The findings would inform pilot intervention programs aimed at addressing the contributing factors, evidence-based policy and legislative advocacy.

In 2013, the foundation, whose mission is to promote public safety, security and accessible justice, was the first organization to launch an in-depth study on youth and radicalization in northern Nigeria, titled “Why Do Youth Join Boko Haram.” The study covered six states across northern Nigeria, including four states that suffered numerous attacks (Borno, Yobe, Kaduna and Kano) and two others (Gombe and Sokoto) that were relatively peaceful and unaffected by Boko Haram attacks. The findings helped achieve a number of significant milestones, including increasing awareness among stakeholders of the root causes of insurgency. It also contributed to the development of the Nigerian government’s soft power countering violent extremism program, launched in March 2014 by the Office of the National Security Adviser. The research was adopted by security agencies to undertake a comparative analysis. Some of the findings include:

- Ignorance of Islam: It was unanimous in all the states surveyed that ignorance of Islam’s religious teachings is the leading factor influencing the adoption of extreme religious views, especially by youth. It was discovered that the activities of independent or roaming preachers, who claim to be Islamic scholars, oftentimes find impressionable young people to be easy targets for their poisonous ideological recruitment. In Borno, for instance, 93.2 percent of the respondents were of the view that ignorance of the full teachings of their religion is a factor that influences



Women and children eat at a Nigerian Army headquarters after being rescued from Boko Haram camps in Maiduguri, Borno State, in July 2015.

AFP/GETTY IMAGES

the adoption of extreme religious views by young people. In Kano and Sokoto, 37 percent and 33.2 percent of the respondents, respectively, were of the view that ignorance of the full teachings of their religion is a contributory factor to the adoption of extreme religious views by young people.

- **Unemployment and poverty:** The unemployed and the poor remain marginalized and highly vulnerable to behavior that's detrimental to peace and security in Nigeria. In Borno, for example, high unemployment and poverty rates were identified as the second most important reason for youth engagement in religious-based violence. The large army of jobless youths and *Almajiris* — child beggars — tells the story of this segment of the Nigerian population whose future appears bleak, thereby disposing them to social disruptions, religious conflicts and violent extremism.
- **Children with poor upbringing:** The growing number of children without adequate parental guidance has contributed to the problem of youth extremism in northern Nigeria. Widespread poverty has contributed to a growing population of *Almajiris*. Most of these children live in appalling conditions, roaming and begging for alms or hawking wares in major cities throughout Nigeria. The Borno and Yobe regions have witnessed the worst cases of youth extremism.

WOMEN PREVENTING EXTREMIST VIOLENCE

Women Preventing Extremist Violence (WPEV) in Nigeria is a flagship project of the United States Institute of Peace in collaboration with the CLEEN Foundation. It identifies and nominates local civil society organizations (CSOs) in the states of Kaduna and Plateau to offer training on the following:

- Understanding radicalization and its prevention
- Learning skills to prevent extremist violence
- Building relationships of trust with local police
- Creating one's own WPEV plan (tailoring CSOs to address local needs)

The forum provided an avenue for the CSOs to talk about

some of the challenges they encounter, such as building trust with law enforcement. A discussion about collaborating and enhancing a working relationship led to pledges from law enforcement and CSOs:

- Maintain continuous dialogue in terms of community policing to bridge the gap between the police and the public.
- Establish interagency collaborations with the public.
- Improve community-based engagements with local constituencies to help them police proactively, rather than reactively, which often results in conflict.
- Establish police reform awareness and sensitization programs.
- Create civil society-led police officer training.
- Maintain regular channels for complaints.
- Make available emergency communications services such as 911.

The women have continued their work and passed the workshop on to other CSOs in other states. They have also conducted quick interventions, particularly with young children who are seen to be drawn toward extremism. There is an improved partnership with local law enforcement agencies through forums to deliberate on security issues that affect the state as a whole.

THE GOVERNANCE AND SECURITY NEXUS

Another CLEEN Foundation study looked at the relationship between governance and security by raising questions about how the character of governance affects or influences security in six states in the North East Zone — Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Taraba and Yobe. The aim was to create a platform for a bottom-up approach to governance through constructive engagement by building the capacity of citizens to hold the government accountable. Some of the findings were similar to the research on youth and radicalization. Drivers of conflict included unemployment, public sector corruption, socio-economic depression, tribal/religious conflicts used as tools by government and politicians to create insecurity, and an overly tolerant attitude toward religious preachers whose unregulated activities are often not discussed because of Nigerian sensitivity surrounding religious issues.

The CLEEN Foundation's flagship strategies of engagement include discussions of necessary issues that bring stakeholders together. Following completion of the study, CLEEN collaborated with the Nigeria Stability Reconciliation Programme to organize a validation workshop on the research findings to determine the way forward during a two-day summit in Gombe.

The CLEEN Foundation has established training and mentoring programs to fill an identified critical gap. One such program is the mapping of human rights defenders in the North East Zone of Nigeria. The project is designed to:

- Improve the capacity of human resource departments to report on human rights issues and ensure victims speak for themselves about the impact of the insurgency on their communities.
- Increase awareness of human rights violations occurring in communities and encourage them to demand justice.

Activists from more than 40 African women's organizations march in May 2014 on the streets of Nairobi, Kenya, demanding the release of more than 200 schoolgirls abducted from northern Nigerian schools by Boko Haram.

AFP/GETTY IMAGES



Project beneficiaries have begun to collate, document and analyze data and take action against human rights violations. To build a close network of human rights defenders, they have shared their findings among stakeholders through a link-serve between regional human resource departments. While this is ongoing, work still needs to be done. A periodic platform for discussing the current issues also needs to be organized.

THE WAY FORWARD

The way to fight insurgency is by winning the hearts and minds of the people; without this, no progress can be made. It is noteworthy that the current administration, under President Buhari, as part of his priority to restore security to the Northeast, began with a change of guard in the appointment of new service chiefs as well as the national security advisor to restructure the military command. Also the pledge made by the administration of \$100 million to the Lake Chad Basin Commission of the Multinational Joint Task Force to launch a full onslaught against the insurgency is a welcome development that is yielding tangible results. However, there is still much to be achieved:

1. Political will: There is a need to sustain political will to ensure that the war against insurgents is won. The Review of the Kinetic Approach (change of strategy to proactive measures) must be adopted, and welfare incentives to security agents are of utmost priority, as this is the only way to sustain troops' commitment to the war.
2. Transparency and accountability: Monitoring defense and security spending by oversight agencies must be stepped up, because Nigeria's defense spending over the last five years has doubled despite less accountability on the part of the federal government to justify the spending. As the federal government doubles efforts to restore peace

to the region, state governments, particularly those in the Northeast, must complement the activities by providing good governance and must be held accountable to their citizenry.

3. The Victims Support Fund: Set up by the past administration, this fund needs to fulfill pledges to access the camps for internally displaced people. Some of these camps are overcrowded, with cases of abuse and worrisome living conditions. It is imperative that the government set up makeshift schools and hospitals to address some of the the immediate challenges before beginning long-term resettlement, as well as provide vocational skills to displaced people by way of engagement
4. Development: Developmental issues such as education, empowering youth, creating an enabling environment, eradicating poverty and establishing industry to revive the economy of the North East — particularly in the worst-hit states of Borno and Yobe — must be addressed for there to be productive change. The security provided by the \$2.1 billion World Bank loan is a step in the right direction, but a clear and justifiable plan with efficient monitoring must be in place to ensure that end users receive the money.
5. Capacity building: Nigeria's military needs more counterinsurgency training to help it carry out its duties with sensitivity to human rights, and to establish a more open approach to civil-military relations.
6. International assistance: It is critical that international partners fulfill pledges made in support of the war. Providing capacity building for Nigerian troops, assistance in intelligence gathering and equipment (lethal and nonlethal) will complement the efforts of the Nigerian government. □