



# Governance, accountability and transparency of conflict resolution in Nigeria: Is a new social contract possible in Boko Haram's heartland?

Nelson Takon <sup>1\*</sup>, Damien Short <sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Cross River University of Technology, Nigeria

<sup>2</sup> Institute of Commonwealth Studies, University of London, UK

## Abstract

Violently compelling activities arising from Boko Haram, an extreme Islamist group in Nigeria's north and middle-belt pose serious challenges in a variety of ways, and have present and future implications for the country in the particular and West African sub-region in general. The non-state violence, first, destroys potential development processes by the minimisation or the scaring away of much needed investments and participation in harnessing the vast economic potential in that part of Nigeria. Second, Boko Haram perpetuates a fragile relation between religions, humanitarian disaster and in-region migrations for the most vulnerable - such as women and children. Third and lastly, Nigeria is a key country in West Africa, and hence, potential spill over of violence in the sub-region is more likely because of proximity and shared precipitating factors. In this context, this paper seeks to explore more effective conflict-sensitive resolution options way beyond a military solution. Based on this study's empirical examination, I argue that the remedy exists in a more nuanced conflict resolution, which is driven by good economic and political governance, a *sine qua non* of the prospect of a showcase of "fourth generation warfare" with constantly changing frontiers outside of the birth place of the insurgency.

**Keywords:** Boko Haram, Poverty, Conflict, Governance, Nigeria

Published by ISDS LLC, Japan | Copyright © 2016 by the Author(s) | This is an open access article distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.



**Cite this article as:** Takon, A. and Short, D. (2016), "Governance, accountability and transparency of conflict resolution in Nigeria: Is a new social contract possible in Boko Haram's heartland?", *International Journal of Development and Sustainability*, Vol. 5 No. 3, pp. 98-104.

## 1. Introduction and background

*“Conflict tends to be associated with patterns of uneven development”* (Ramsbotham et al., 2007, p.101)

Arguably, Boko Haram began its insurgency in 2009. That group’s initial operation was in Borno State in the North-East geo-political zone of Nigeria where poverty prevails despite strong national economic growth for Africa’s biggest economy (The Economist, 2013). In a more analytic sense, the Islamist group has visibly evolved from using rudimentary bombs by men on motorbikes targeting police and clergy, and increasingly able to take and hold territory at the time of research. Thus the rise of Boko Haram presents an opportunity to discuss the search for more effective conflict resolution, and thereby contribute to Nigeria’s peace and stability. Arguably the elements, which support solution strategies are founded on the idea that the cause and source of Boko Haram violence must be understood if they are to be combated. In the context of this paper’s analysis, this study explores conflict resolution strategies that aim to transform non-state violence into non-violent processes of social and political engineering that would enhance peace building, and thereby address the history and contemporary rhetoric of Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria.

### 1.1. Methodology

In my view, substantial research do not support effective, empirically-based conflict-sensitive responses to the Islamist insurgency in Nigeria. In this sense, this paper adopts an eclectic qualitative research methodology – interviews, secondary and tertiary data types -, which like other methods, gives consideration to the kind of data to be collected, where they will come from and how they will be analysed to effectively answer this paper’s research task (Dexter, 1970; Rubin and Rubin, 1995; Takon, 2013). This data-gathering method helped capture empirical evidence and analysis of Boko Haram insurgency, as well as navigate conflict solution strategies.

In a more analytic sense, the data provided historical and contemporary information, and thereby illuminate narratives on the dangers of Boko Haram insurgency, its nature and consequences of the violence in Nigeria and the West African sub-region. Also the data was revealing of the connection between the global Jihadists movements - such as Shabab Islamist militia in Somalia and al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) - and the emergence and increasing phenomenon of Boko Haram, often translated loosely as ‘Western Education is forbidden’. Arguably, the data analysis contributes to a heightened interest in conflict resolution strategies leading up to the 2015 elections in Africa’s most populous country and the biggest economy on the continent.

## 2. Conflict resolution mechanism and applied responses to Nigeria’s jihadists

Academic works debate at length the terms conflict resolution, conflict management, conflict settlement, and conflict transformation, which are often used loosely and interchangeably (Ramsbotham et al., 2007). In many cases the terms refer to the same strategies, but they not only articulate varying approaches to

intervention in conflict but also reflect different conceptualisations of conflict. Though my paper is not intended to delve into the controversies surrounding conflict resolution, it holds an overlapping view of the subject. This is important considering the convoluted nature of Boko Haram terror group, which arguably has been triggered by contemporary resentment against perceived socio-economic and political grievances (Takon, 2013).

Instructively, some scholars assert that, many, if not most, current conflicts stem from the failure of political, economic, and social institutions to pay sufficient attention to the grievances and perceived needs of significant groups in the population (Mustapha, 2003; Rasmussen et al., 1997). For instance, Azar, though in a different context, argues that lack of basic needs such as fair access to political institutions, economic participation, and human security dilemmas, which are present in Nigeria from empirical investigation, contribute to protracted conflict (Azar, 1991, pp.93-120). Similarly, Amao asserts that as a part of human security, suppression of human needs ultimately generate and intensify conflict (Amao, 1997). In this context of analysis, the dynamics that underpinned the emergence and growing concern of Boko Haram activities since 2009 have become obvious.

Nigeria's statehood at the time of this research has arguably proven that national integration and local autonomy has been limited and inadequate in spite of the proliferation of states in Nigeria. Based on this development in nation-building, a former military Head-of-State, who created states while in office remarked that ethno-religious issues that had long been presumed resolved have once again come to the fore with greater clarity and compelling stridency since the emergence of the Fourth Republic in 1999 (This Day Newspaper, 2006 and Takon, 2013). Arguably, too limited sets of outcome were achieved as groups continue to explore a variety of federal and centrifugal options.

The new wave of Boko Haram from a band of fighters in 2009 conducting sporadic raids and bombings from the Sambisa and Mandarin mountain hideouts into a force able to take and hold territory in 2014 threatens the foundation of national unity and impacts on Nigeria's stability. More importantly for this paper's analysis, the group's current execution of terror and victims have raised lucid questions about the effectiveness and viability of conflict resolution architecture by the Federal Government of Nigeria. The applied responses to the problem of Nigeria's Jihadists include: heavy-handed military tactics to achieve a military solution, declaration of a partial State of Emergency in the north-east geo-political zone of Nigeria and fleeting efforts to negotiate with the Islamist group. Others are apparent incompetence of the Armed forces resulting to the sacking of the National Security Adviser despite a large increase in government spending on the army, as well as establishment of special committees.

Arguably, these intervention regimes are possibly influenced by the defects of federal practices in Nigeria. Also, they tended to be wholly restricted by their underlying assumptions, and do not significantly engineer a comprehensive conflict-resolution, which also recognises the global link and multinational composition of the Jihadists. This is demonstrated as state repression and coercion have failed to overwhelm Boko Haram to enforce peace-building. In a more analytic sense, the hitherto monopoly of the coercive mechanisms by State is now diffused, which implies that non-state actors must be recognised to be a critical part of the conflict-resolution process. In this context, intensifying Islamist insurgency questions the validity of a political and

economic governance system that has spawned conflict resolution mechanisms to the problem of the country's Jihadists and violence. This is evident in more killings, abduction of school girls and soldiers breaking ranks, while Boko Haram is taking and holding parts of Nigeria's territorial integrity. Furthermore, the cost of Boko Haram insurgency is huge, in terms of human development and security.

The increased militancy in northern Nigeria lends credence to the thinking for more effective conflict-sensitive responses aimed at transforming grievances that underpin the Nigeria's Jihadists. In this light, my paper argues that, the different state intervention approaches provide a clue to their lack of success in conflict mitigation, alongside their structural problems, which are undermined by a lack of political will, funding, and poor governance. For example, Chatham House - a London-based think-tank - pointed out that Nigerian soldiers in the north-east have been 'suffering from malfunctioning equipment, low morale, desertions and mutinies' (The Economist, 2014, p.50). That said, though the causal relationship between poverty and conflict may seem difficult, as pointed out by some scholars (Luckham et al., 2001), the connection is plausible to the research and analysis community and from knowledge and understanding of the North-East region and Boko Haram's rhetoric since its emergence in 2009 (see next section for more detailed analysis).

### **3. The pressures of poverty in Northern Nigeria - induced from socio-economic structures**

The link between poverty and conflict is advanced by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and relevant for the analysis of the emergence and growing Islamist insurgency in Nigeria. The OECD reported that the world's poorest and least developed areas experience violence and armed conflict for which the causes indicate that poverty is perhaps the leading source of conflict, and conflict exacerbates poverty (<http://www.oecd.org/dac/Indicators/htm/goals.htm>, accessed 08/10/2003). According to the organisation, of the 34 States furthest from achieving the international development goals of the OECD, six are affected by conflict, with a further 16 described as in transition and post-conflict.

Stockholm International Peace Research Institute also contributed to the poverty-conflict debate in its assertion that most major armed conflicts in the world occur in parts of Africa and Asia, the world's hitherto underdeveloped areas (Stockholm International Peace Book, 1995). This background similarly illuminates the peculiar relationship between Boko Haram and poverty, and enhances understanding of this dimension of Islamist insurgency in Nigeria. Arguably, poverty becomes an issue when people become aware of their relative poverty.

The concept of poverty in Boko Haram discourse seems to be beyond the traditional shortfall of income and consumption in the north and middle belt regions of Nigeria. In this light, institutions and scholars alike corroborate with the view that poverty is more comprehensive than the narrow economic prism (World Bank, 1990, 2000; UNDP, 2006b). Arguably, a common view of the concept of poverty in the context of Boko Haram's heartland is that of the World Bank, which states that poverty is more than inadequate income or even low human development, but also the lack of voice, adequate representation, corruption, and fundamental freedom of action, choice and opportunity (World Bank, 2000). In this sense, the north-east geo-

political area is an important part of the statistical evidence in general, and some of the communities are remote from clinics, schools, shops and other essential services. The lack of social services or absence of government in some communities creates gaps, which Jihadists pride themselves in filling in those communities that shelter and support their activities. These social indicators as well as the asymmetry of the harm and / or neglect suffered by communities, arguably reinforce poverty in northern Nigeria, and feed Boko Haram insurgency. Thus the conflict matrix has often expressed itself in resentment, sabotage, and abductions, arguably as a means to an end.

In a more analytic sense, the emergence of the Fourth Republic in 1999 was critical to development, benefits of dividend of democracy. On the contrary, the phenomenon of poverty is widespread in Borno State and in the wider context of northern Nigeria despite the country's huge oil revenues. For example, the Energy Information Agency of the United States' (US) Energy Department reported that Nigeria was said to have made \$55 billion from oil exports in 2007 of course leading up to the emergence of Boko Haram. Though this made the country the fourth highest revenue earner among members of the OPEC, according to the US Energy Department, Nigeria was ranked the second poorest member of the organisation with a per capita income of \$406. The other OPEC countries in Africa, such as Angola and Algeria, fared better with total oil revenues of \$44 billion and \$51 billion and per capita incomes of \$43,566 and \$41,516 respectively (<http://odili.net/news/source/2008/feb/29/436.html>, accessed 2/29/2008).

In a similar report, the United Nations Development Programme had noted that Nigeria had benefited immensely from oil, but that it had not translated these gains into a better standard of living for majority of its citizens (UNDP, 2006). The UN specified poverty line ranks Nigeria 151<sup>st</sup> out of 175 countries in the UN Human Development Index. The regional disparities in Nigeria have been confirmed by the UNDP reports of 1996, 1998, 2000 and 2001 on Nigeria as a whole, which suggest that wide regional disparities of this nature are Nigeria's Achilles' heel, as seen in the proliferation of violence in parts of northern Nigeria.

The impact of country-wide poverty and deprivation sows frustration and resentment. Goodhand, in a separate analysis asserts that when horizontal inequalities, social exclusion and voicelessness, coincide with mobilised identity, a society's predisposition towards violent conflict is on the increase (Goodhand, 2001). Another facet of the poverty analysis in northern Nigeria is related to Douma's work, which in a separate situation also addressed the correlation of poverty and conflict in the frustration - aggression theory, which is equally relevant to the analysis of Boko Haram in Nigeria (Douma et al., 1999). Though none of these foregoing debates about poverty-conflict are very conclusive, the ideology of Islamic insurgency easily manifest obvious poverty, and has shown a growing will to respond to the Federal Government's heavy-handedness in enforcing conflict management in its heartland via a military solution.

To this extent, nature and peculiarities of Islamic insurgency in Nigeria has compelled a context-specific analysis. In this sense, the rise of Boko Haram does not seem to fit very well the definition by Kriesberg et al. of intractable conflicts, that is, one that is difficult to resolve, or of the conflict actors resisting solutions (Kriesberg et al., 1989). Nor is the violence in parts of north and middle-belt akin to Duffield's strict description of complex political emergencies (Duffield, 1994, pp.50-69), given the equally important role of the potential of mobilised violence in Nigeria.

#### 4. Conclusion

Drawing therefore from empirical evidence, the intervention strategies have depended on the whims and caprices of governance of the day, rather than genuinely being conflict-sensitive approaches to the challenge of Boko Haram. In this context, it is compelling to reshape interventions – fair and nuanced - to reflect new knowledge about Nigeria's Jihadist. That said, this paper argues that inclusive economic development and engagement of the local communities are important to conflict resolution in Borno State, such as targeting attention on youths and their link to global jihadists, such as Shabab and AQIM.

In this light, beyond the military option, a comprehensive conflict resolution approach is a key remedy to Boko Haram violence, which must be inclusive, participatory, and ownership-driven. According to Lederach's work this implies long-term building on people, resources, and livelihood in his discourse on the concepts of peace-building and conflict transformation (Lederach, 1995). Similarly, this paper suggests that a human security and development perspective is important in conflict resolution, giving the absence of basic needs, governance, and development in a great many parts of Boko Haram heartland. Finally, though potential impact of Boko Haram's insurgency in sub-Saharan Africa – Cameroun, Chad, Niger and Nigeria - makes the case for regional collaboration, the debate is how to enhance each country's ability to meet the threats and human security needs of its citizens. Arguably, the tenets of democracy, sound principles of economic and political governance and the rule of law would enhance peace building and cultivate an enduring social contract.

#### Acknowledgement

Thanks to Prof. Richard Crook, Prof. Alice Hills, Dr. Funmi Olonisakin and Dr. Damien Short, the Institute of Commonwealth Studies, University of London and the Cross River University of Technology, Calabar, Nigeria for providing me with important insights and institutional support.

#### References

- Takon, N. (2013), 'Non-State Violence, State Responses, and Implications for Human Rights and Security in Niger Delta', *Journal of Human Rights in the Commonwealth*, Vol. 1 No. 1, pp. 38-55.
- Amao, S. (1997), *The Challenge of Ethnicity and Conflicts in Africa: The Need for a New Paradigm*, UNDP Emergency, New York.
- Dexter, L.A. (1970), *Elite and Specialized Interviewing*, Northwestern University Press.
- Douma, P., Frerks, G. and Van de Goor, L. (1999), *Causes of Conflict in the Third World*, The Hague.
- Goodhand, J. (2001), "Conflict Assessments: A Synthesis Report", *Conflict, Security and Development Group*, University of London, London (UK).

- Kriesberg, L., Northrup, A. and Thorson, S. (ed) (1989), *Intractable Conflicts and Their Transformation*. Syracuse, Syracuse University Press, New York.
- Lederach, J.P. (1995), *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies*, United Nations University, Tokyo.
- Ramsbotham, O., Woodhouse, T. and Miall, H. (2007), *Contemporary Conflict Resolution: The Prevention, Management and Transformation of Deadly Conflicts*, Polity Press, Cambridge.
- Rasmussen, J., Lewis, J. and Zartman, W. (eds) (1997), *Peacemaking in International Conflict: Method and Techniques*. United States Institute of Peace, Washington, DC.
- Rubin, H. J. and Rubin, I.S. (1995), *Qualitative Interviewing. The Art of Hearing Data*, Sage, California.
- Stockholm International Peace Book (1995), *SIPRI Yearbook: Armaments, Disarmament and International Security*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- The Economist (2013), "The World in 2014", London (UK), 30 October.
- The Economist (2014), "Nigeria's Jihadists – The other Caliphate", London (UK), 6 September.
- This Day Newspaper: Lagos (2006), "African views on Global News", 18 August.
- UNDP (2006), *Human Development Report*, Oxford University Press, New York.
- World Bank (1990), *World Development Report*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- World Bank (2000), *World Development Report (Attacking Poverty)*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Azar, E. (1991), 'The Analysis and Management of Protracted Social Conflict', In Volkan et al (ed), (1991), *The Psychodynamics of International Relationships*, vol.2, Lexington, Mass.: D.C. Heath.
- Duffield, M. (1994), 'The Political Economy of Internal War', In J. Macrae and A. Zwi (1994), (eds), *War and Hunger: Rethinking International Responses to Complex Emergencies*, Zed Books for Save the Children Fund (UK), London.
- Luckham, R., Ahmed, I., Muggah, R. and White, S. (2001), 'Conflict and Poverty in Sub-Saharan Africa: An Assessment of the Issues and Evidence', Working Paper, 128, IDS, IDS Brighton (UK).
- Mustapha, R.A. (2003), 'Ethnic Minority Groups in Nigeria: Current Situation and Major Problems', Queen Elizabeth House, University of Oxford, Oxford (UK), May.