

# **GENDER ISSUES AND BOKO HARAM INSURGENCY IN NIGERIA**

**Mbagwu Joan<sup>1</sup> and Alaiyemola Anne O.<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>*Department of International Law and Diplomacy, Babcock University, Ilishan-Remo, Ogun State.*

<sup>2</sup>*University Wide Courses Unit, Landmark University, Omu-aran, Kwara State, Nigeria.*

## **ABSTRACT**

This research highlights the activities of Boko Haram insurgents and the security implications. It majorly explores the gender issues in the ongoing Boko Haram insurgency, especially the abduction of women/girls and turning them into army wives. The study relying heavily on internet materials argues for women inclusion in post conflict reconstruction because of their perspectives which allow holistic approach in both planning and implementation. It identified some of the features that are women specific and therefore, making it a must for women to play leading role in the rebuilding of communities after violent conflicts.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The new issues and concerns about security in the post- Cold War era have centered more on the insecurity facing the individual persons and not the state. Current security concerns include massive migration and refugee movements; environmental degradation (including climate change), scarcity and conflict; spread of epidemics (including HIV/AIDS); rising population growth; rising food insecurity; rising unemployment and youth restiveness; rising poverty, inequality, and conflicts; explosion of ethnic, linguistic, religious and cultural identities and conflicts. According to Adekanye (2007) other forms of insecurities include growth of religious fundamentalism; rising incidence of intra-state armed conflicts and wars, including the phenomenon of state collapse or state breakdown; massive human right violations, including mass political killings and crimes of genocide; problems of illegal surplus

arms\* and their cross-border sales and linkages; trafficking in narcotic drugs and their associated economic and financial crimes like money laundering and in Nigeria today, is terrorism or precisely, Boko Haram insurgency.

## **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

Studies have shown specific challenges that women and girls face during armed violent conflicts because they are the victims of devastating forms of sexual violence used to reach political and military goals. This issue is receiving more attention because of the unanimous approval by the UN Security Council of Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, in 2000. The statement of the problem of this paper is addressing the question of sexual violence in the Boko Haram insurgency as an extreme expression of gender based violence.

## RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this paper are to:

- i. Highlight the activities of the Boko Haram terrorist group
- ii. Create visibility on the specific risks faced by women and girls during the insurgency
- iii. Describe the efforts of women on managing the risks they face
- iv. Explain the need to include women in the post Boko Haram peace processes as their inputs will enrich the post conflict reconstruct program

### Terrorism in Nigeria: The Case Study of Boko-Haram Insurgency

The biggest terrorist threat which Nigeria is facing today is from *Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati Wal-Jihad*, 'People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet's Teachings and Jihad', known by its Hausa name *Boko Haram* (Western education is sacrilege or sin). It is a Salafist jihadist terrorist organization based in the northeast of Nigeria. Boko Haram is an Islamist movement founded by Mohammed Yusuf in 2002, with the sole aim of abolishing the

secular system of government and establishing a Sharia system in the country as they strongly oppose man-made laws.

Analyzing the major targets of the attacks will reveal one of the key objectives of the group which is to destroy all the symbols and institutions of the Nigerian statehood which being arguably of European creation and of

westernization are considered anti-Muslim and therefore considered evil. The symbols and institutions of the Nigerian state concerned are obviously many, but include the country's military barracks and institutions, police stations, prisons and other security agencies (including customs and immigration offices, courts of law, government departments, industrial corporations, educational institutions (schools, colleges, polytechnics and universities) mass media (radio, television and newspaper houses) and more daring, even the seats of government itself at all the tiers of government (federal, state and local). All these have constituted the targets for Boko Haram's attacks.

Thus, on the 7<sup>th</sup> September 2010, there was the Bauchi prison break, 31<sup>st</sup> December 2010; there was an Abuja attack at the Mammy Market, Army Mogadishu Barracks on the 31<sup>st</sup> December 2010. A jail break in Yola, Adamawa State on the 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2011 organized by Boko Haram group led to the freeing of 14 prisoners from the country's prison based in that state. The height of the group's attack was the bombing of the Nigerian Police Headquarters, Abuja on the 16<sup>th</sup> June 2011. On the 10<sup>th</sup> July 2011, All Christian Fellowship Church, Suleja, Niger State was attacked, followed by the attack on the University of Maiduguri on the 11<sup>th</sup> July 2011. The UN Building, Abuja, housing most of the United Nations agencies representatives and organizations was attacked on the 26<sup>th</sup> August 2011.

According to the Annex of Statistical Information Country Reports on Terrorism 2012 (May 2013) National Consortium for

the Study of Terrorism and Response to Terrorism (START), besides the Taliban in Afghanistan, Boko Haram in Nigeria had the highest number of terror attacks in 2012 and also killed the second highest number of people. The statistical report revealed that while the Taliban killed 1,842 people in 525 attacks in 2012, Boko Haram came second killing 1,132 in 364 attacks. From this record, both the Taliban and Boko Haram killed more than Al-Qaeda in Iraq, the Maoists in India, Al-Shabaab, Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula among other global terrorists groups.

The weapons used by the insurgents have included swords/knives, pistols, revolvers, rifles and magazines guns (including AK-47), hand grenades and bombs, cars and trucks filled with Improvised Explosives Devices (IEDs) capable of being detonated by remote control and even anti-tank rockets.

Their methods of arranged campaigns have covered such familiar ones as:

- a. Suicide attacks
- b. Mass destruction, including killings directed at civilian population
- c. Targeted assassination
- d. Organized prison break-ins (for freeing fellow criminals either already jailed or awaiting trial)
- e. Armed robberies, directed at banking institutions (in search of money), police stations or the armories (in search of weapons), food supermarkets (in search of food)
- f. Trade in illegal drugs, arms, ammunitions and explosives

- g. Kidnapping and extortion
- h. Summary execution and homicides
- i. Money laundering

Analyzing the Boko Haram's aims and objectives, the activities their members have engaged in and their methods and strategies of operations have shown that it has the characteristics of a terrorist organization. But, most importantly is the Terrorism (Prevention) Act, 2011 enacted in reaction to the rising tide of terrorism and insecurity across the country, thereby acknowledging the fact that what Boko Haram is doing is terrorizing the nation.

In October 2012, the Human Right Watch announced that Boko Haram may have committed crimes against humanity- an offence that can lead to prosecution by the international criminal court since they began documenting these actions in 2009. Finally, the official acceptance of responsibility for terrorist attacks by Boko Haram further confirms them a terrorist organization. Therefore, the phenomenon of terrorism has come to be a major security issue of both nationwide and international proportion.

Gender based violence during violent conflict is a common global issue that has received general condemnation and has led to international Conventions and Resolutions. The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), adopted in 1979 by the UN General Assembly, defines discrimination against women as:

...any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex

which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women, irrespective of their marital status, on a basis of equality of men and women, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural, civil or any other field

International instruments on violence against women argue that gender based violence during violent conflicts affect women and girls, especially with reference to sexual assault and exploitation are frequently employed as tools of war; victimization which leads to isolation, alienation, prolonged emotional trauma, and unwanted pregnancies that often result in abandoned children. During violent conflict, children are abused, raped, starved, drugged, and the abduction of girls further confirm the views of peace scholars like Carla Gomes, Francisco Leandro and Mónica Dias (2013) on the use of sexual assault and abduction of especially women and girls as weapons of warfare with the intention to demoralize, harm and destabilize the opponent. According to them, gender crimes are indeed, indignity crimes, and rape is a “cheap” and very effective weapon of war, which is used on a daily basis in today’s conflicts. Also, the UN Resolution 1325 explained that women are specially targeted during violent conflicts as they are abducted to serve as sex slaves and war wives.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The descriptive survey design was adopted for the study. In the interest of this paper, we

adopted the use of questionnaires and interviews. Triangulation method involving a mixture of quantitative and qualitative methods was utilized. Descriptive statistics involving frequency count of occurrence and percentage were employed in analysis of the quantitative data. The qualitative data were analyzed using content analysis.

## **Findings**

Just like records of violent conflicts show that women particularly suffer more than just death, as they are also killed, they further suffer sexual assaults gender based violence, this study of the Boko Haram insurgence also looked at the particular sufferings women went through, and are still going through. This study particularly explored the gender issues in the Boko Haram insurgence as reflected in the choice of respondents in this research because the researcher considers gender issues very important. There were 132 (35.2%) women who filled out the questionnaires and 15 (60%) who were interviewed for this study. Consequently, it was obvious that the voices and experiences of women were recognized. Even though the men respondents were not happy about the assaults on women, they were not as emotionally expressive as the women. Much of the concern of the men respondents were economic implications of the insurgency and the physical destruction of lives and properties, but they could not see the psychological pains, sexual assaults and torture the women are going through, just because they are women.

Some of the women leaders at the #Bring

Back Our Girls campaign at the Unity *Park* in Abuja, for the abducted over 200 Chibok girls since 14<sup>th</sup> April, 2014, (although, 57 have escaped the forest and are back home with their parents) who were interviewed at the campaign ground in Abuja on the 22<sup>nd</sup> July 2014 (100 days of abduction of the girls) strongly condemned the Boko Haram insurgency in the country, especially in the North East zone. Deploring the gender-based violence being carried out in the North Eastern Parts of the country, as brought out in the wanton and systematic acts perpetrated by Boko Haram sect against women, men, girls and boys, the women interviewed in Abuja argued that the military actions of the governments at both Federal and State levels, were ineffective, insufficient, politicized and not addressing the fundamental causes of the insurgency. The respondents were visibly angry, agitated, and vocal and called on the government to do more for the villagers. They said that the villages in southern Borno and northern Adamawa are completely deserted as the Boko Haram sect members have displaced all the villagers.

They argue that there is very scanty military presence in the villages and the Boko Haram members are freely attacking at will for hours without anybody stopping them. They said that residents of fifteen LGAs have been sacked and heads of the communities have been killed by the insurgents. They explained that the media reports are not true and military officials are not telling the truth about the situation as there are daily killings, abductions, and displacements that are not reported.

However, some women who were interviewed at a rally in Abuja on the 22<sup>nd</sup> July 2014 strongly argued that the Boko Haram insurgency in the country, especially in the North East zone is an attempt to Islamize the region. They argued that there is a daily slaughtering of Christians in southern Borno and northern Adamawa, communities with over 90% Christians. According to one of them:

A pastor of a Redeemed Christian Church was killed in the third week of July and his two children and wife were taken away, and the church was burnt down. Today (22/7/2014) all the churches in thirty communities in these areas are destroyed and no single Mosque was destroyed. What does that tell you? Please, it is religious! I am from the region. Forget about the media and government talk. Boko Haram wants to wipe out Christians and people are not seeing it.

The women respondents in Kano corroborated these findings as they argued that women are specially targeted, either killed or kidnapped confirming the special pains and suffering that women and girls face and are still facing during this insurgency. A female nurse working with the National Orthopedic Hospital, Kano in her response asked the following questions:

How will these young girls handle their monthly periods? Where will they get water and sanitary towels? How can they ask for help with toilets from these terrifying men? Are there some elderly women in the bush to help them out?

How do they handle darkness in the forest?

Another woman respondent in Lagos interviewed in July 2014 expressed shock at the new horrific development of young girls as suicide bombers which was noticed in Kano. This respondent who is a civil servant argued that this is a dangerous dimension that show the extent at which women are further victimized in this insurgency, as these girls are not only used as sex slaves or war wives, they are brainwashed into killing themselves and others. The women are specially targeted by the warlords to carry out actions that the men will find difficult to do; like freely mixing into the crowd wearing the hijab and concealing their weapons.

So, the Boko Haram insurgence has exposed women and girls to more problems as the abductions of girls and boys are on the increase as there are cases of rape and sexual assaults reported by the few girls who escaped the terrorist hideouts. These findings are similar to Kvitashvili (2007:10) in which she recorded that:

Many of those abducted remained with the rebels for several years under deprived conditions. The method of conscripting fighters by abduction and indoctrination is more common than most people realize. The same pattern has been found in Uganda, Mozambique, Liberia, and elsewhere. The deep-seated problems that result from interrupted education, lack of medical care, harsh living conditions and psychological trauma require that

those who have been conscripted into rebel forces - boys and girls alike - receive specialized attention in order to be reintegrated into civil society.

According to the report released by the Human Right Watch on 27<sup>th</sup> October, 2014, over 500 women and children have been abducted by the Boko Haram sect from 2009 till date. The report clearly demonstrated that women and girls were particularly targeted for particular assignments. Another reason why women were targeted by the sect members was to force them into marrying them, as some of the escapees confirmed.

Rape and sexual violence constitute another major reason why women and girls are specially targeted by the insurgents. There were various reports of women who were raped and sexually assaulted. Women and girls between the ages 15 and 22 years were raped repeatedly as insurgents took advantage of the absence of a commander and sexually abused abductees who had yet to be "married". Women and girls abducted were also forced to participate in military operations to support the group as they were made to carry ammunition for their captors. A fourteen year old who was abducted said that after one month of her abduction, she was told to hold the bullets and lie in the grass while they fought.

However, it was reported that the sect has abducted numerous other people, both before and since Chibok case and those abducted were forced to marry, convert and endure physical and psychological abuse, forced labor and rape in captivity. The April 14<sup>th</sup> abduction of over 200 schoolgirls from

Chibok, a rural town in Borno State, was the biggest single incident of abductions by Boko Haram. The report which was tagged: "Those Terrible Weeks in Their Camp: Boko Haram Violence against Women and Girls in Northeast Nigeria," was based on interviews with witnesses and victims of Boko Haram abductions in Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa states, including the escaped chibok girls, suggested that the Nigerian government had failed to adequately protect women and girls from a myriad of abuses, provide them with effective support and mental health and medical care after captivity, ensure access to safe schools, or investigate and prosecute those responsible for the abuses. The relative ease with which Boko Haram carried out the Chibok abductions seems to have emboldened it to step up abductions elsewhere.

According to the Africa's Director at Human Rights Watch, Daniel Bekele, the Chibok tragedy and #BringBackOurGirls campaign focused the much-needed global attention on the horrific vulnerability of girls in North-east Nigeria. He said,

Now the Nigerian government and its allies need to step up their efforts to put an end to these brutal abductions and provide the medical, psychological, and social needs of the women and girls who have managed to escape. Human Rights Watch (2014)

#### ***The Effects of these Abuses on the Women***

"It is now more dangerous to be a woman than a soldier in modern wars."

**Major General Patrick Cammaert, Former Deputy Force Commander, MONUC ("Sexual Violence against Women and Children in Armed Conflict")**

In no other area is our collective failure to ensure effective protection for civilians more apparent and by its very nature more shameful than in terms of the masses of women and girls, but also boys and men, whose lives are destroyed each year by sexual violence perpetrated in conflict. (Ban Ki-moon, Secretary-General of the United Nations 2007)

The effects of violent conflicts on women, especially in terms of sexual abuse has taken a dangerous dimension and opinion leaders and scholars have generally condemned it as noticed in the above quotations. Veuthey (2013) argued that even though women are affected in many ways by war, but there are some that are as because they are women, their plight does not receive the attention it deserves, as the law protecting them is too frequently not empowered enough to be observed. Women, during the war are both victims and actors. In the case of Boko Haram, the effects of the frequent abductions and serial rapes and torture have negatively affected the victims which of course are mostly women. There are cases of infections of Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs), HIV/AIDs and pregnancies. Mental and psychological breakdowns are reported and sometimes death.

***Reasons for Women Participation in Transforming Boko Haram Insurgency in Nigeria***

The issue now is not just overcoming the menace Boko-haram has come to be not only in Nigeria but all over the world. What happens to countless girls and women who have been detained, dislodged and demoralized by these insurgents? When we talk about post conflict reconstructions we think women must be involved, because they have important and necessary roles to play in all the phases of post conflict reconstruction.

'It is not because we think better than men, but we think differently. It's not women against men, but women and men. It's not that the world would have been a better place if women had run it, but the world will be a better place when we as women, who bring our perspectives, share in running it' Betty Bumpers (Founder, Peace links USA). International Alert (1999:10)

Women are in a better position to explain or talk to women who took part in the fighting in terms of demobilization and reintegration, because they are quite knowledgeable about fellow women and these ex-combatants will be willing to open up to fellow women and share their fears and concerns. In addition to these reasons scholars have identified other reasons putting into consideration one of the objectives of this paper and some of the reasons proffered are:

***Unequal Opportunity:*** The affirmative actions enshrined in many human rights charters were there because women have never been given opportunities like the men.

Even the constitution of Uganda for example, affords equal right and opportunities to women with men in political, economic and social activities and the right to participate in affairs of government individually or through representation. Although such provisions indicate equal opportunity and participation for women in all official initiatives to address the war, but in reality, the rights of Ugandan women have merely been formulated as part of mainstream human rights with no corresponding consensus about the meaning of justice in relations to men and women. If women are given opportunities to share their perspectives like Betty said above, the world will be a better place. So, women should be allowed to contribute their quota to national reconstruction, be it before or after the conflict.

***Psychological Emotional Trauma:*** Conflicts have psychological, physical and material impacts on the lives of women. For many of them seeing their children sometimes forcefully conscripted into the army by the government, and subsequently come back as handicapped invalids can be very shocking and sad experiences for them. For example, during the Ethiopia wars against Eritrea, they were forced to contribute utensils to the war front and prepare food for soldiers in wars that they never supported. All the women could do was comfort one another to overcome the psychological feelings. An Ethiopia woman, Naamat Issa a prisoner explained:

"In prison, we tried to comfort one another to overcome the psychological emotions, we shared food and other



necessities that we receive from friends and relatives, and we tried to establish a sort of communal life. Those who had no children with them tried to share the burden of bringing up children born in the prison, helping with their education. We share knowledge and experience; we enhance the future participation of women in political, social, cultural and economic activities in peaceful and democratic atmosphere by raising each other's political consciousness." International Alert (1999:25)

The psychological damage will not be repaired without a real solution to these miserable situations, and this explains why women must take part in the post conflict reconstructions of the countries they find themselves after the conflict.

*Conflict Resolution Experiences:* Some neighborhoods, families and individuals suffered multiple and repeated losses. Women have been directly affected by the conflict as victims of violence, as bereaved relative and friends and as the people who have often had to cope with direct and indirect effects of conflict in families and communities. Manchanda, (1999:32) explains, that "...when the repression is strong the men retreat because they are too vulnerable. Instead the women came out in their traditional roles, as nurturer and as protectors of community. It is an empowering experience".

It is the women who negotiated with the security forces and the administration. It is both women's importance and weakness that

gives them the rights to access the powerful and say "give me justice".

"When the struggle is most spontaneous, women are most visible, when it is much more hierarchically structure, women are much less visible." Manchanda (1999:32).

*Women Are Successful Negotiators:* In April of 1915, world war was raging across Europe for nine months. According to some estimates, more than 5.500 soldiers died every day in a war that would ultimately leave 8.5 million dead. People were numbed by the devastation, but a group of women activists decided they could not sit and wait for the end of war. Instead, for the first time in history, women crossed borders in wartime to talk about how to end the conflict. About 1000 women from 12 warring and neutral Countries convened the first International Congress of Women (ICW) in The Hague. The ICW sent 30 delegates on the first Women's Peace Mission to bring the plan of action to the heads of European states. There are many examples where they have courageous intervened in battle to forge peace, for instance, in Ethiopia, Somalia and Sudan. Women have also taken up opportunities for peacemaking between groups of warring man. Many women activists express their values, behaviours and codes explicitly as factors of their gender. As one female peace activist in the Philippines writes. "Both men and women have the potential for peacemaking and the responsibility to build and keep peace. The women, however, seem more creative and effective in waging peace. It is the women's emotional strength to transcend pain and

suffering, and their predisposition to peace that provides them with greater potentials for peacemaking". Some women's organizations have developed the capacity to work openly to protect and extend human rights. This is especially the case in many Latin American Countries.

*UN Resolution 1325*: The UN Resolution 1325 provided the mandate for women inclusion in peace building. The realization of the important role women can play in peace process went far to convene a session to deliberate on the role of women and led to the development of the Resolution shows that women can play important role, and therefore, should be given the opportunity. The Communications Of The Beijing Declaration And Platform For Action (A/52/23) as well as those contained in the outcome document of the twenty-third Special Session of the United Nation General Assemble entitled "Women 2000 Gender Equality, Development and Peace for the Twenty-first Century" (A/S-23/10/Rev), in particular those concerning women and armed conflict, sex discrimination is a pervasive pattern that harms women in their dialing law around the world. In Africa just like other regions of the world, several countries have laws that explicitly discriminate against women, and this should be stopped.

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## CONCLUSION

Concluding on the research findings with reference to the objectives, the study has shown that the frequency and severity of attacks recorded within the chosen period (2009 to 2014) clearly shows that the nation has suffered series of attacks that prove beyond reasonable doubt that the Boko Haram sect has declared 'war' on Nigeria and can be rightly termed a terrorist sect.

The experiences of the abducted women and girls have made headline news as seen in the #BringBackOurGirls campaign. The stories recorded by the Human Rights Watch and International Alerts have all confirmed the bitter experiences women went through and are still going through. Women too are playing huge roles in intervening as various women groups are constantly speaking out on the deadly flight of women. Malala, the young Pakistani lady visited the country and added her voice to the call to better protect young girls and support their education. It is very appropriate that women be actively involved in the post reconstruction of the North East Nigeria after the dislodging of the terrorist group in the region.

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