

The Socio-Economic Impact of the Boko Haram War on Nigeria – A Preliminary Report

Ibiang Oden Ewa

Abstract

In 2002 a radical Islamic sect, known as Boko Haram, emerged in the northeastern region of Nigeria. The sect gradually became militant. From 2009 it began to have skirmishes with the Nigerian law enforcement agents. From the skirmishes it fought a full scale terrorist war against the Nigerian state and people. But by the end of December, 2015, the sect had been pushed out of some its strongholds in the Nigerian territories under its occupation. As it stands, the sect is still spasmodically harrying the country in surprise attacks by its tiquets and suicide bombers. Up to this time, the experience has made remarkable impact on the social and economic experience of Nigeria. It has scared foreign and local investors and tourists and disrupted business transactions and commercial activities, with great losses in the Nigerian economy, ravaging communities, with attendant forced migrations, displacement of tens and thousands of persons and spectacles of refugees. In such circumstances, unemployment, illiteracy, and poverty problems have been aggravated. Nevertheless, the Boko Haram insurgency has moved Nigeria to a higher level of nationhood and greater harmony and understanding between Christians and Muslims. Furthermore, the paper is of the view that it has brought the hitherto isolated northeast of Nigeria under national and international focus and impelled the upgrading, reorganisation, and repositioning of the Nigerian armed forces.

Introduction

Boko Haram emerged in the northeastern region of Nigeria in 2002 as a radical Islamic sect. Apart from detesting and rejecting Western education as anti-Islamic, it came with the ultimate goal of establishing an Islamic state with a government based on Sharia and other tenets of fundamental Islamic doctrine. This goal, which it sought to achieve by means of a jihad, has, since 2009, driven Boko Haram into a terrorist war

against the Nigerian state and civil population. The sect grew steadily in strength, and from its main base in Maiduguri, capital of Borno State of Nigeria, it occasionally and relentlessly unleashed surprise and nocturnal attacks on Nigerian military and police barracks and stations. It also attacked, and usually burnt down, government establishments and such civilian targets as markets, schools, churches, mosques, motor parks, shopping malls, and other public places with high concentration of people. By 2010 Boko Haram had established two additional bases of operation in Adamawa and Yobe States. It made use of sophisticated and devastating weapons of war, including bombs and such heavy weapon as SAM-7 anti-aircraft and anti-tank missiles.¹

The Nigerian military, under President Goodluck Jonathan, mounted a counter insurgency operation, which failed to stop the advance of Boko Haram. By mid November, 2014 about 21,545 square kilometres of northeastern Nigeria had fallen under the control of the sect.² The fortunes of the group changed rapidly in 2015, when the Nigerian military, under President Muhammadu Buhari, was reorganised and repositioned to deal decisively with the sect. Within three months - October to December, 2015 - the Nigerian military had almost pushed Boko Haram out of Nigerian territory. The sect's presence and capacity were thus reduced to isolated incidents of suicide bombing of soft targets.

While it is preposterous to seek to analyse the impact of such a historical phenomenon as Boko Haram, which is not yet completely ended, it is necessary, within the demands of contemporary history, to capture the fresh developments associated with the sect. That is why this paper is presented as a preliminary report. As such, it does not pretend to have dealt with its subject with any sense of finality. But it makes bold to offer itself as a contemporary historical analysis from which future historical investigation could significantly draw.

Socio-economic Impact

War is one of the greatest instruments of social change. The Boko Haram insurgency, being an aspect of war, has produced some dynamics of social change in Nigeria. The frequent attacks and uncanny operations recorded against civilian communities especially since 2009 have disrupted hitherto stabled populations in the northern states of Nigeria. The resultant forced migration of beleaguered, dispossessed, and traumatised people as well as relocation of human groups and settlements have become not only the hallmarks of a terrified region but also new

potent forces of socio-economic change. As a result of the forced migration of populations, many people have been displaced from their homes. Indeed, outside its civil war experience, Nigeria has recorded the greatest number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) under the Boko Haram insurgency. According to a study by the United Nations and the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) of Nigeria, about 1.4 million people had, by July, 2015, been displaced in the northeast of Nigeria as a result of the Boko Haram war.³ As Muhammadu Buhari has stated, the number of displaced persons had, by the end of 2015, soared to 2 million, with 75% being children and women.⁴

Most of the displaced persons have been living as refugees in overcrowded camps in parts of Borno, Adamawa, Yobe, Nasarawa, and Niger States and in Abuja, the federal capital territory. The refugees, poorly fed and clothed, homeless, and ill disposed, are a great social problem, with dimensions beyond Nigeria's frontiers. By March, 2015 there were about 17,000 Nigerian refugees in Chad, 100,000 in Niger, and 37,000 in Cameroon.⁵ However, many of the southerners living in the northern states of the country chose, as soon as they were displaced, not to live as refugees but to return to their southern states of origin. Some of them also migrated to Abuja.

The Boko Haram operations have been significantly lethal, resulting in many casualties. Since 2009 Nigeria has been recording almost daily episodes in which people have been killed or wounded by Boko Haram. It is not possible, for now, to furnish the exact number of casualties sustained. However, drawing from different studies by other scholars, we can provide baseline computation of the number of people killed and wounded from July, 2009 to the end of 2013.⁶ In 2009, 4 people were killed, with none wounded. In 2010, 330 were killed with 10 injured. In 2011, 408 were killed and 117 wounded. In 2012, 422 were killed, while 252 sustained injuries. In 2013, 1,826 were killed, with 457 injured. Thus, up to the end of 2013 a total of 2,990 people were killed and 836 injured. With Boko Haram's growing striking capacity and higher frequency of attacks, the casualty figures for 2014 must have eclipsed those of 2013, as suggested by the London-based Institute for Economics and Peace.⁷ However, in a reverse trend, the number of casualties in 2015 must have been lower than those of 2014 because, it was in 2015 that Boko Haram was emasculated and effectively evicted

from the Nigerian territory by the superior Nigerian forces under Operation Lafiya Dole. Although the figures given here are not absolute, they are well within the range of probability and could give us an insight into the possible aggregate casualties as at end of 2015. In the process of the Boko Haram invasion and territorial occupation of northern Nigeria, women, girls, children, the elderly, and the physically and mentally challenged, who are usually the most vulnerable in populations under armed conflict, were greatly afflicted. Women and girls were killed, kidnapped, brutalised, or forced into marriages or raped. For example, in April, 2014 about 276 secondary school girls in the town of Chibok were abducted.

Although about 50 of them were alleged to have escaped the rest with the exception of the five were held until 2018 when they were freed. The Chibok girl's incident gave rise to a new civil society group in Nigeria, whose preoccupation has been the release of the girls. Popularly known and identified by their slogan, "Bring back our girls," the group has been continually exerting pressure on the Nigerian government and the international community to rescue the girls. Some of the women, children, and girls captured have been brainwashed and converted to radical Islam or used as expendable suicide bombers. While the condition of captured children can be understood along this line, the course of displaced children, who have been dismembered from their families, would remain a subject of speculation until such children survive and mature to narrate their experiences. For now we can only note, that many children have been dismembered from their families in different and usually unknown directions. In such circumstances such children have been deemed missing, killed, or dead. president Buhari laments that many of the children who have been separated from their families would never reunite with them again or even relocate or remember their communities of origin.⁸

Ironically, the persistent problem of poverty in the northeast of Nigeria, which had offered fertile grounds for the emergence and survival of Boko Haram, has been amplified with the activities of the sect. Just before the advent of Boko Haram, the region was grappling with one of the highest poverty indexes in the world, which must have been complicated by the terrorist and militant operations of the sect. While we cannot now determine the measure of poverty that is attributable to Boko Haram operations, we must note the devastation of public and private infrastructure and economic facilities, the stoppage or

disruption of productive economic and commercial ventures and services, and the destruction and desolation of communities, settlements, and farms in the northeast of Nigeria as self-evident features of worsening poverty in the region.

In the same vein, Boko Haram operations have exacerbated the problem of low literacy level in the northeast of Nigeria. Persistent low literacy index, sustained over the years by entrenched poverty, ignorance, competition with Arabic education, and a lackadaisical colonial policy on education in Northern Nigeria, has been one of the conundrums confronting the northeastern states of Nigeria. The destruction of schools and abduction and killing of students and teachers have occasioned the closure of schools in all the areas under threat of the sect. The invasion of schools and their closure for years, which have denied many people access to education, must have reversed the gains made in recent years in various efforts to address the literacy problem in the northeastern region of Nigeria. Buhari has also significantly pointed out, that many of the displaced children and those who have lost contact with their families have no access to education.⁹

The Boko Haram insurgency created an opportunity for corrupt practices in Nigeria. Buhari laments that money meant for procurement of arms for the Nigerian military was made available in foreign currency, which was carried in bags outside the country without due process.¹⁰ Outside this, the counterinsurgency operation has bred one of the greatest corruption scandals in Nigerian history. Before the Nigerian presidential election in March, 2015, the sum of \$2.1 billion was released to the office of the National Security Adviser. Sambo Dasuki, the head of that office, has not been able to account for all the money, much of which allegedly has gone into private pockets. Dasuki and Olisa Metuh, former National Publicity Secretary of the former ruling Peoples Democratic Party, as well as Alex Sabundu Badeh, a former chief of defence staff, are standing trial in court in Abuja on charges of corruption relating to the money. It would seem that corruption in the counterinsurgency operation was carried out to the great benefit of those who were saddled with the responsibility of stopping the Boko Haram insurgency. This would suggest that there was deliberate prolongation of the Nigerian Boko Haram conflict by those who were deriving pecuniary benefits from it. No wonder, as soon as the incorruptible political and military

leadership under Muhammadu Buhari took over the war against Boko Haram, the hitherto seemingly invincible militant sect was, within three months, reduced to a contemptible suicide squad.

The general insecurity associated with the Boko Haram insurgency has created problems for Nigeria's economy. Economic experts are of the opinion that sustainable economic reform would continue to be a great challenge to Nigeria as long as there is insecurity in the country. This opinion is rested on the conclusion, that insecurity is one of the core problems of Nigeria's economy. In 2012 Usman Muttaka, Professor of economics, explained the relationship between insecurity and investment in the Nigerian economy as follows:

Even if Jonathan (the then president of Nigeria) had gone to Switzerland for the World Economic Forum, it would have yielded no result. The President was in Australia for a similar submit with about 500 delegates and he has done nothing. He also went to France with about 300 delegates but there was no tangible result. The issue of investment is about the issue of security. No investor will come to invest in Nigeria with the current security challenge.¹¹

With the Boko Haram insurgency, Nigeria was brought into the list of terrorist and unsafe countries. This label has caused the Nigerian economy great injury, as it has made Nigeria unattractive to especially foreign investors. While potential foreign investors have been scared from coming to Nigeria, those who had established in the country have been withdrawing because of insecurity. The actual measure of the loss sustained by Nigeria from its dwindling regime of foreign direct investment remains indeterminate for now. The only clue to what could possibly be Nigeria's loss is provided by a certain United Nations estimate. The World Investment Report (WIR) of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) estimated, that as at 2012 Nigeria's domestic economy had lost a whopping ₦1.33 trillion (\$5.015 billion) foreign direct investment, owing to the terrorist activities of Boko Haram.¹²

The tourism industry, which has always been a good source of non-oil revenue for Nigeria, has also been adversely affected by the climate of insecurity. Ever since Nigeria came under the threat of the Boko Haram terrorist war, potential foreign and local tourists have been scared, leading to much loss of revenue in the tourism sub-sector. Losses

in the tourism industry must have been greater from late 2011, when other countries began to admonish their citizens against travelling to Nigeria because of the terrorist war. The United States, for example, alerted and warned its citizens of the risk of travelling to Nigeria or doing business in some parts of the country.¹³ Otonba Olusegun Runsewe's capitulation of the impact of the Boko Haram war offers the probable loss sustained in the tourism industry. According to him, "The industry which generates approximately ₦80 billion annually, is held to a standstill as all economic activities in this value chain, is {sic} being disrupted by the activities of suicide bombers."¹⁴

The macroeconomic environment in the northern region of Nigeria in general and in the northeast in particular has been significantly hurt by the deadly and devastating attacks on markets, shopping centres, motor packs, banks, entertainment centres, and business rendezvous. Given hostilities such as these, commercial transactions have been drastically reduced and business enterprises grounded, closed, or liquidated. Farming activities and other productive economic ventures and services have also been stunted, resulting in scarcity of food, goods, and services as well as in prolonged hunger and starvation.¹⁵

As farming, production of goods, and provision of services have been abandoned especially by displaced persons, the rate of unemployment in the northeast significantly increased. Many of the southerners leaving in the northeast were hit by unemployment, as they were forced by the terrorist war to abandon their jobs and business transactions and return to their southern states of origin for safety. For example, hundreds of traders of southern origin, who had established in Maiduguri and other northeastern places that are exposed to terrorist attacks, closed their shops and fled as unemployed persons. In Maiduguri alone, "about half of 10,000 shops and stalls in the market were said to have been abandoned by traders who have fled the city."¹⁶ This phenomenon of forced unemployment was not limited to the northeast. It also obtained in other parts of northern Nigeria that had come under the threat of Boko Haram. Ezeani Onyebuchi and Chilaka Chigozie have pointed out, for example, that "about 35 percent of the over three million Igbo businessmen and traders in Kano State, who are engaged in both small and medium scale businesses are reported to have fled to Abuja

and the south-east due to growing insecurity posed by the activities of Boko Haram."¹⁷

Godwin Onu further notes, that the Boko Haram war has caused the northern region of Nigeria mass repatriation of fund, dearth of skilled labour, loss of human capital, and distortion of existing economic patterns and structure.¹⁸ It is possible to submit, from the foregoing, that the Boko Haram war has caused Nigeria a monumental economic loss, which, for now, is easier to imagine than expressed quantitatively. We could, however, be guided in quantifying the economic loss by the computation of the London-based Institute for Economics and Peace, which puts the aggregate economic cost of terrorism in Nigeria at \$28.48 billion in 2013.¹⁹

It is not every aspect of Boko Haram's impact that is negative. The activities of the sect have occasioned some positive developments in Nigeria. One of such developments is greater national unity, solidarity, and integration. In an attempt to instigate religious, sectional, and ethnic misunderstanding, which they could exploit in their war against the Nigerian state, Boko Haram initially adopted the strategy of attacking churches and Christians alone, while sparing mosques and Muslims. They also attacked communities with non-Muslim inhabitants from the southern region of country. The Igbo, a major ethnic group in the southeast of Nigeria, who were most exposed to violence during the Nigerian Civil War, were again the most afflicted of the southern ethnic groups in the early Boko Haram attacks. This pattern of selective assaults initially caused worrisome tension between Christians and Muslims and aroused suspicion and distrust between southerners and northerners. It also aroused a feeling of insecurity among the southerners, who were beginning to make isolated separatist calls.

However, these divisive consequences of the Boko Haram incited attacks were quickly reversed before they were mature enough to be exploited by the sect against Nigeria. The reversal was due to three significant developments. First, reports of credible preliminary investigations into Boko Haram's early strikes revealed that the sect had no support from the orthodox Islamic leadership of Nigeria. Second, orthodox Muslim leaders quickly reacted against Boko Haram by open condemnation and execration of the sect. Third, Boko Haram itself could not go far in the subterfuge of presenting their activities as a Muslim-Christian conflict. They soon began to attack mosques and Muslim leaders perceived to be their enemies, thereby exposing the unreality of

the existence of a Muslim-Christian conflict. These three developments did not only reverse the divisive consequences of the early pattern of Boko Haram attacks, but also, more importantly, actuated the reconciliation of persistent religious, ethnic, and sectional misunderstanding, misconceptions, and antagonistic perceptions that had been a wedge in the unity and proper integration of Nigeria.

To wit, as soon as Boko Haram was known to be attacking both churches and mosques and their members, Christian and Muslim leaders quickly and occasionally came together in conferences and meetings, which afforded them the opportunity for greater knowledge and understanding of each other as well as bringing them together in a common and united front against Boko Haram. Members of the two religions have, by means of the conferences, continually interacted with each other and obtained greater knowledge and understanding of each others' thoughts. They have also resolved to live together in greater brotherhood and as citizens of a united and indivisible Nigeria. These gestures of brotherhood and solidarity were emulated by leaders of the Igbo and other ethnic groups of the southern region of Nigeria, who met with leaders of ethnic groups in the northern region to agree to live together and support the government of Nigeria against Boko Haram. Indeed, the Boko Haram insurgency has ushered Nigeria into a greater level of nationhood and solidarity.

Also, the Boko Haram insurgency has brought, for the first time, the economically and educationally backward northeastern region of Nigeria under national and international focus. There are indications that deliberate efforts would be made nationally and internationally to address the naughty socio-economic problems of the region. On 18 January, 2016 a representative of the European Union (E.U) and ambassadors representing different countries in Nigeria met in a conference in Abuja, where they resolved to contribute to the rehabilitation of the northeast region of Nigeria.²⁰

Significant changes have also occurred in the Nigerian military as a result of the Boko Haram insurgency. The Nigerian Army, for example, has been upgraded in respect of equipment and training to enable it to meet the challenges of insurgency and offer adequate protection to the people. The establishment in August, 2013 of the 7 Infantry Division of the Nigerian Army in Maimalari Barracks,

Maiduguri, Borno State, which also provides the headquarters of Operation Lafiya Dole, the code name of the counterinsurgency operation, is also a significant change. It has appropriately brought the Nigerian Army nearer to the people it is meant to protect. The army's presence in the northeast region has created opportunity for greater interaction between the soldiers and the civilians and has thus enhanced civil-military relations and cooperation for the security of the region. It has also created awareness among young civilians in the region of the great responsibilities of the military. This has resulted in the clamour among the young men in the northeast to enlist as soldiers into the Nigerian Army.²

The security challenges posed by Boko Haram necessitated a further expansion of the Nigerian Army. In January, 2016 the Nigerian Chief of Army Staff, Lt. General Tukur Burutai, announced the establishment of two more divisions of the Nigerian Army. They include the 8 Division, with headquarters located in Kur Muhammed Barracks, Mongono, Borno State, and the 6 Division, with yet an unspecified location in the deltaic south-south region of the country.²² In line with the increasing number of divisions, the strength of the army was, in January, 2016, provisionally increased from its prevailing 100,000 to 208,966 soldiers.²³ Outside enabling Nigeria to meet its security needs, the increase in the strength of the army would mean employment for about 108,966 persons in the army. A most recent innovation within the Nigerian Army was the inauguration at the end of February, 2016 of a motorcycle battalion for more efficient and effective patrols and surveillance. The motorcycles would also improve the tactical engagements of the battalion in the course of these responsibilities.

The Nigerian Navy, the Nigerian Air Force, and the Nigeria Police Force have also been tinkered with in response to the Boko Haram threat. On 3 February, 2016 Muhammadu Buhari addressed a parliament plenary of the E.U. in London, where he declared: "We have reorganised the Nigerian Armed Forces and repositioned them to deal decisively with Boko Haram terrorists."²⁴ It is a well known principle of deterrence, that the very existence of armed forces, especially of known sophistication, in any country has a deterrent effect on the behavior of the country's real and potential enemies. This is true of the existence, since mid 2015, of an upgraded, reformed, reorganised, and repositioned armed forces in Nigeria. Given the sophistication and battle worthiness and readiness of the armed forces, Boko Haram has, since 2016, not been able to relapse

into its usual frontal attacks for fear of deadly reprisals from the Nigerian military. It was therefore possible for Buhari to declare at the end of February, 2016, that Boko Haram was no longer a threat to Nigeria.²⁵ How long this no-threat situation will last is a matter of studied speculation.

Conclusion

Indeed, apart from the Nigerian Civil War, no other conflict since independence in 1960 has had as much socio-economic impact on Nigeria as the Boko Haram war. Outside engendering unprecedented understanding and unity between Christians and Muslims, the veritable impact of Boko Haram on the religious life of Nigerians is yet to be unravelled. It is also yet to be known how many people have been either persuaded or forced into conversion from their faith into fundamental Islam. It would appear that despite its claim to Islamic purity, Boko Haram has failed to bring people into its Islamic doctrine. Had many people been actually converted into its doctrine, Boko Haram could have been more deeply entrenched as well as mustered greater capacity to survive longer than it has done. An investigation into the reasons for its failure is, therefore, of parallel significance. Such an investigation would most likely pose the question of whether or not the Boko Haram war is a jihad. If the war had actually been intended to be a Jihad, then it has so far failed to make the expected impact of spreading fundamental Islam on a large scale, as was done by Usman dan Fodio's and other jihads in the 19th century. The inability of Boko Haram either to advance Islamic fundamentalism or establish an Islamic state by the instrumentality of a terrorist Islamic war shows how fast-changing the world has been since the 19th century jihads and how unappealing, anachronistic, and impracticable the idea of a jihad is in the 21st century.

Notes

- ¹Brendan O'neill, "Editorial: Quit your crying, Cameron – you boosted Boko Haram," *Spiked*. 12 May, 2014.
- ²See map of the "21,545 km² Seized by Boko Haram," <https://www.google.com.ng/search?q=diagram+of+territory+under+boko-haram+control+2014&+bm=isch&prmd=ivn&ei=8QqeVEYLyUMfnq4A1&start=O&sa=N#mhpiiv=O>.
- ³Abimbola, Interview on "World Population Day: Examining the Challenges of the Vulnerable," Channels Television News, 10:00 p.m., 14 July, 2015.
- ⁴Muhammadu Buhari on Nigeria Television Authority (NTA) News, Nigeria, 6:00 p.m., 26 December, 2015. Buhari was speaking as the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, having been so elected for a term of 4 years with effect from 29 May, 2015.
- ⁵Channels Television News, 12 noon, 8 March, 2015.
- ⁶The figures for 2009, 2010, 2011 and 2012 were computed from reports provided by Ezeani Emmanuel Onyebuchi and Chilaka Francis Chigozie, "Islamic Fundamentalism and the Problem of Insecurity in Nigeria: The Boko Haram Phenomenon," *Internal Security Management in Nigeria: A Study in Terrorism and Counter-Terrorism* ed. Ozoemenam Mbachu and Umar M. Basteure (Kaduna, Nigeria: Medusa Academic Publishers, 2013), 214-217. Those for 2013 were obtained from the Institute for Economics and Peace, London, as provided in Editorial, "Nigeria's ranking on Global Terrorism Index," *Daily Sun* (Abuja, Nigeria); Wednesday, November 26, 2014:19.
- ⁷Editorial, "Nigeria's ranking on Global Terrorism."
- ⁸NTA News, 6:00 p.m., 26 December, 2015.
- ⁹Ibid.
- ¹⁰Buhari, speaking on NTA News, 9:00 p.m., 21 December, 2015.
- ¹¹Leke Baiyewu, "Boko Haram, Bad signal to foreign investors," *Sunday Punch* (Abuja, Nigeria) January 29, 2012: 9.
- ¹²Chikodi Okereocha, "Heartache for the Economy," *Tell* (Abuja, Nigeria), May 14, 2012: 46.
- ¹³Jonnie Carson, "Nigeria, One Year after Election: US on Boko Haram, Democracy and Economy (press release prepared for Centre for Strategic and International Studies, Washington D.C, April 9, 2012), 1.

- ¹⁴Tajudeen Suleiman, "The wages of Evil," *Tell*, May 14, 2012: 50. Otunba Runsewe was reporting as the Director General of the Nigerian Tourism Development Corporation (NTDC).
- ¹⁵Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) News, reporting on the effects of Boko Haram, 9:00 pm, 13 January, 2016.
- ¹⁶Onyebuchi and Chigozie, "Islamic Fundamentalism in Nigeria," 218.
- ¹⁷Ibid.
- ¹⁸Godwin Onu, "Terrorism, Insecurity and Challenges of Development in Nigeria," *Internal Security Management in Nigeria*, 96.
- ¹⁹Editorial, "Nigeria's ranking on Global Terrorism."
- ²⁰NTA News, 9:00 p.m., 18 January, 2016.
- ²¹NTA News, 9:00 p.m., 15 January, 2016.
- ²²News, "Army establishes new division in Borno," *The Nation*, Thursday, January 14, 2016:45.
- ²³Tukur Burutai, speaking on Channels Television News, 10:00 p.m., 13 February, 2016. Tukur Burutai is a Lieutenant-General and was speaking as Nigeria's Chief of Army Staff.
- ²⁴Buhari, Addressing the Parliament Plenary of the E.U. in London on 3 February, 2016, NTA News 9:00 p.m., 3 February, 2016.
- ²⁵MTN Play, Newsalert, 29 February, 2016.