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The Managing Conflict in Nigeria (MCN) Programme aims to support Nigerians with conflict resolution, at both the state and community level. Our work focuses on reducing violence, promoting stability and strengthening resilience so that Nigerians feel more safe and secure in their communities.

We work in North Eastern Nigeria in three focal states – Adamawa, Borno, and Yobe – some of the country's most conflict-affected regions.

The four-year programme (2017-21) is funded by the European Union and implemented by the British Council.

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ASSESSING COMMUNITY RESILIENCE AND PEACE-BUILDING INITIATIVES IN NORTHEAST NIGERIA

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The North East region of Nigeria has faced insurgency for over a decade. About 35,000 people have been killed and over 2.2 million people displaced, and the insurgency has spread out to neighbouring countries around Lake Chad. Before the insurgency, the region was saddled with unfavourable climatic changes, high demographic growth and a near-absence of state presence in almost every part of the region except in the state capitals. The challenging nature of the region is often considered as one of the root causes of the insurgency.

Government of Nigeria and other stakeholders have made some progress in stabilising the region and in providing solutions to the insurgency. The federal and state governments have provided security through the Nigeria military and other security forces in the Chad Basin. The Federal Government also established the North East Development Commission (NEDC) to coordinate efforts at the rebuilding of the region. However, there is slow progress in areas such as the reintegration of ex-insurgents, return of people to their communities, rebuilding of local economy and re-establishment of local governance structures. The resurgence of attacks by Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-Jihad (JAS), also known as Boko Haram and the Islamic State of West Africa Province (ISWAP) from late 2018 to date has also posed significant setbacks in government's intervention efforts.

With the protracted nature of the violent conflict, impacted communities have been developing mechanisms to either prevent violence or address the impact of violent conflict. These strategies include community security resilience programmes that help to counter violent extremism and peacebuilding efforts designed to enhance social cohesion and support reconstruction and recovery.

This study provides detailed insights on how communities in Borno and Adamawa states are developing resilience approaches and civic solutions to counter violent extremism and insurgency. Some of these community-based initiatives include the emerging role of women and youths to undertake peacebuilding and early warning activities, which have contributed to community resilience. The objective of this study is to document and share the results and lessons of these initiatives and the potential for learning and replication in other communities affected by violent conflicts in the North East region and also across Nigeria. The assessment was carried out by Nextier SPD, with support from the European Union-funded Managing Conflict Nigeria (MCN) Programme.

BACKGROUND

Nigeria's North East region has, over the last decade, been embroiled in an insurgency that has resulted in one of the most severe humanitarian crises in the world. Insurgency and terrorism-related violence associated with Boko Haram and ISWAP remain the driver of extreme insecurity across the North East of Nigeria and parts of the Sahel. A report by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) reveals that 14 million people across the six states in the region have been affected by the conflict. Another report by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) shows that the insurgency, which has spilt into the Lake Chad region, has left about 7.1 million people in need of humanitarian support and about 1.8 million people from the Borno, Adamawa and Yobe (BAY) states internally displaced.

The humanitarian impact of the conflict in the Northeast has exacerbated pre-existing structural factors stemming from the region's relatively weak socio-economic development status in the country. These factors include years of neglect of appropriate investments in education, the impact of climatic changes on economic activities, the influence of radical religious beliefs, amongst others.

In the face of these mounting challenges, communities in Borno and Adamawa have evolved new strategies to survive. They have devised and sustained community-based practices that have helped to build community resilience and maintain peace in the communities. Understanding these initiatives has become imperative given the need to support and strengthen the fledging initiatives and share lessons that may enhanced prospects for replication and sustenance in the context of the search for sustainable paths to peacebuilding. The focus on local

efforts by communities is underscored by the growing recognition of the need for adaptation of national and global policy approaches to local contexts and inclusion of local actors in peacebuilding processes.

With the longstanding limited presence of government institutions in parts of North East Nigeria, various communities and groups have adopted coping strategies which are at varying degrees of success. It is imperative to understand these strategies as the government and international development partners continue to embark on the process of rebuilding the region. It is in this context that Nextier SPD, with support from the European Union-funded Managing Conflict in Nigeria (MCN) Programme, set out to study community resilience and peacebuilding initiatives in the North East region of Nigeria.

KEY FINDINGS

The assessment was based on six indicators including:

A Coping economic and cultural practices

B Role of religion and culture in peacebuilding

C Efforts of women and youth in peacebuilding

D Impact of displacement and resettlement

E Counter-extremist narratives and

F Early warning mechanisms

These indicators were used to select sample communities in both Adamawa and Borno states.

The study findings, based on the above indicators, have been classified into coping mechanisms and the challenges posed by the insurgency. The report shows homegrown efforts (below) of the understudied communities which have helped them survive the insurgency and entrench peace.

Coping mechanisms

Some innovative homegrown strategies by traditional and religious rulers, women and youths helped to stem emerging patterns of conflict and build resilience against insurgency. Furthermore, cultural practices, public sensitisations, use of technology and collaborations between and among community members, civil society groups and the government helped understudied communities to survive the consequences of the insurgency.

Indicator 1 – Coping economic and cultural practices:
In the face of collapsed livelihoods, some residents of the communities have relied on menial jobs and learned new skills to make a living. Women made efforts to provide for their families by venturing into various businesses including – knitting, hair making, clothmaking, amongst others.

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Indicator 2 – Role of religion and culture in peacebuilding: Inter-communal religious and cultural practices such as marriages, sporting competitions, cultural events and rotational markets were instrumental in building peace, promoting social cohesion and mobilising inter-communal resilience. Religious platforms were used to share information among communities.

Indicator 3 – Efforts of women and youth in peacebuilding: The insurgency redefined roles and blurred gender lines. Women and youth in the impacted states have played a substantial role in the communities by carrying out surveillance and intelligence gathering, they uncover plots of planned attacks and safeguard the community by identifying strangers and suspicious movements.

Indicator 4 – Impact of displacement and resettlement: The forced displacement and influx of people resulted in internally displaced persons (IDPs) and host communities having to share public spaces and facilities. This has resulted in increased competition over scarce resources and social services. This development has intensified conflicts between the host community and displaced persons.

Indicator 5 – Counter-extremist narratives: Hitherto ineffective local peace committees in the communities became quite active in peacemaking and in strengthening social cohesion. The findings affirm the authority and capacity of traditional and religious leaders in local governance and facilitation of conflict resolution among community members. While women and youth are part of the peace committees (communities where such structures exist), the consensus coming out of the study is that women's involvement is very low. However, the local peace committees became a grassroots structure for facilitating and promoting conflict transformation and peacemaking in communities.

Focal communities employed peace education, public sensitisations, and awareness programmes to promote non-violence in countering extremism and other violent conflict narratives.

Indicator 6 – Early warning mechanism: Despite enormous challenges posed by insurgency, early warning mechanisms have proven to be useful. Technology and social media platforms were greatly utilised in gathering and dissemination of local intelligence among stakeholders in focal communities. This greatly helped in predicting insurgency attacks.

Collaboration between civil society actors and the government resulted in a Humanitarian Response Plan that was instrumental in unlocking support for millions of people impacted by the conflict.

Government is the primary provider of security and sundry support in the region. This role is accomplished with the support of local groups.

Challenges posed by the insurgency

The insurgency has had far-reaching consequences for the local populace, ranging from displacements; distortion of farming patterns, commercial activities and logistics; losses of livelihood and investments, amongst others. The challenges identified by respondents in the studied communities include:

- The insurgency significantly disrupted social and economic life (agricultural practices, business, etc.) with many residents now living in abject poverty and displaced from their homes.

- The insurgency has exacerbated the precarious situation of communities caused by inability of the government to provide security, lack of access of community members to farmlands, lack of access of community members to markets (local and international), reported extortion by security agents, poor coordination among security agencies, lack of capital for business start-ups, and lack of formal training for vigilante and local hunters.

- The insurgency has led to worsening of social problems including a high rate of sexual abuse, theft of all kinds, teenage pregnancy, gender violence, high rate of communicable diseases such as HIV/AIDS and cholera, high rate of drug abuse in the communities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study was carried out with an overarching goal of enhancing the local initiatives for community resilience and peacebuilding against insurgency. The recommendations have been informed by a critical analysis of the findings and pragmatic thinking on the way forward towards countering extremism and mobilising locally-owned resistance to the insurgency.

1 As the government embarks on demobilisation, disarmament, rehabilitation and reintegration

(DDRR) programme for ex-Boko Haram members, sensitisation of the public on the DDRR process is very important. Government needs to seek the buy-in of the people and ensure their views are incorporated in the DDRR for credible reintegration of the ex-terrorists into the communities.

2 Public awareness programmes through radio and other media channels should be designed by the government and promoted by faith-based actors on the need for forgiveness, reconciliation and

acceptance of repentant Boko Haram members back to the communities.

3 More coordinated efforts should be made by the government at all levels to effectively manage the humanitarian interventions in the region. This calls for more effective synergy to be established among the government, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), Development Agencies, and Community-based Associations in disaster management. Continuous consultation among these change agents should be done to reduce duplications, contradictions, and faulty perceptions of each other's roles and responsibilities.

4 Developmental partners should liaise with the government to ensure that more women association are formed in the communities. This will help create safe spaces where women can freely deliberate on issues affecting them. Women should be given high ranking positions in the community committees to encourage and get them committed to community governance and decision making.

5 Government should intensify her efforts in supporting cultural activities that facilitate interaction and communication among communities such as marriage ceremonies, festivals, and sports.

6 The disaster response strategy of the NEDC should be one that is integrative and inclusive in ways that it targets all vulnerable categories including women, girls and children, people living with disabilities (PWDs), as well as host communities that have been stretched as a result of the support they provided to displaced persons that are affected by the insurgency.

7 Security agencies must intensify effort to defeat insurgent groups and restore enduring peace in the affected communities. The government should embark on a clean-up of arms that have found their way into the hands of idle youths, including the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) and unemployed youths.

8 Religious and traditional institutions that have expanded the scope of their responsibilities to include conflict resolutions, mediation and peacebuilding should be strengthened. For instance, government-led peacebuilding initiatives should incorporate the already existing local platforms. Furthermore, these approaches to peacebuilding should be adopted and implemented in other areas that are affected by conflict.

9 Intercommunal cultural events and competitions have helped to build peace and resilience between and among communities. Such events should be encouraged through sponsorships to strengthen its capacity. Further to this, intercommunal events and competitions should be encouraged in other communities across Nigeria, especially those knotted in conflict as a peacebuilding strategy.

10 The use of technology which was found to be useful in building early warning mechanisms and has helped communities to avoid attacks by insurgents should be encouraged. Also, information dissemination through mainstream media, which has been useful in broadcasting security alerts and educating the public should be continued. Government and media practitioners should strengthen this practice as a veritable channel for easy dissemination of information.

CONCLUSION

The war against insurgency is not for the government alone. This study provides collective actions by community members to protect themselves, govern ungoverned spaces, and reduce the chances of new recruitments by Boko Haram or any of the other insurgency groups. As peacebuilding interventions increasingly move to a bottom-up approach, these endogenous civic institutions and resilience strategies offer an alternative process for entrenching sustainable peace to the government and her development partners. Working with these local communities and institutions presents an opportunity for the government to win the hearts and minds of the people. It provides opportunities to create programmes for external actors to strengthen community cohesion, promote peacebuilding, and aid counterinsurgency actions.