HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF BOKO HARAM IN NIGERIA: CAUSES AND SOLUTIONS

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Abstract

Boko Haram emerged around 2002 as a local Islamic group. The word ‘Boko Haram’ means western education is forbidden. However the group members call themselves Jama’ah al-Ahlu al-Sunnah Li al-Da’wah wa al-Jihad. Boko Haram’s six-year-old insurgency has pitted neighbour against neighbour, and cost more than 13000 lives. The crisis affected six million Nigerians, while more than 300,000 people have been displaced. It destroyed hundreds of schools and government buildings, and devastated an already ravaged economy in the North East, one of Nigeria’s poorest regions. It also overstretched federal security services, with no end in sight, spilled over to other parts of the north and reached Niger, Cameroon, and Chad. This paper aims to examine the historical evolution of Boko Haram, its causes, recruitment, ideology, area of operation and the ways through which the problem can be solved. This is a review paper, which relies mainly on research works such as thesis, dissertations, research journals, newspapers and magazines. The study revealed that Boko Haram insurgency escalates to its present conditions simply because of the high rates of poverty in the region that led to illiteracy and unemployment. The study also revealed that misinterpretation of religion is another factor, which is believed to be among the major causes. It was also found that, Boko Haram recruits new members through kidnapping of children between the age of 15 and 30 who are later radicalised to become members of the group. It was also revealed that the initial ideology of the group was Salafist ideology; the group carries out its main activities in north eastern Nigeria. The researcher recommends that Nigerian Government should address the root cause of the problem by eradicating poverty; increasing school enrolment in the area; enhancing the security effort through provision of modern weapons; and limiting the operational space of the group; as well as neutralizing the core leaders of the group.

Keywords: Boko Haram, Nigeria, Poverty and Unemployment

1. INTRODUCTION

Nigeria has had a long and unfortunate history of communal conflicts and ethno religious violence. For example, in Plateau state, in Nigeria’s “middle belt,” there have been many outbreaks of bloody violence between different communities since the return of democracy in 1999. There have also been riots in the urban centres of Kaduna and Kano, and for several decades there has been a simmering conflict in the Tafawa Balewa district of Bauchi (Walker 2012).

The Northern Nigeria in particular had witnessed a religious conflict in 1980s known as Maitatsine crisis, which caused havoc in major cities of Northern Nigeria. Muhammed Marwa was an Islamic scholar who migrated from the town of Marwa in Northern Cameroun to the city of Kano in 1945. While in Kano he became an Islamic zealot concerned with the purification of Islam. He believed that Islam had been
corrupted by modernization (Westernization) and the formation of the modern state. His constant preaching became very abusive and provocative, especially against established institutions like the emirate and the political class to the extent that the then Emir of Kano, Alhaji Sanusi Lamido, expelled him from Kano. Marwa found his way back to Kano in 1966, presumably after the death of Alhaji Sanusi. Between 1972 and 1979 Marwa was detained in prison several times for his provocative preaching and acts of lawlessness against the state (Danjibo 2009).

There is a growing suspicion among Nigerians about the real identity and motive of Boko Haram sect. Most Muslims see it as an extension of Maitatsine sect which was established in 1945 to transport turmoil to Islam as it was confirmed that Maitatsine was not a Muslim until his death, while a reasonable number of Christians see it as an attempt to Islamize Nigerians while some are indifferent (Shehu 2014).

Boko Haram is an Islamic sect like Maitatsine sect of 1980 believes that northern politics has been seized by a group of corrupt, false Muslims. It wants to wage a war against them, and the Federal Republic of Nigeria generally, to create a "pure" Islamic state ruled by Sharia Laws (Walker 2012).

According to Shuaibu, Salleh, and Shehu (2015), Jama‘ah al-Ahlu al-Sunnah Li al-Da‘wah wa al-Jihad known as, Boko Haram in Hausa which means Western education is forbidden emerged around 2002 as a peaceful local Salafist Islamic movement whose original aim was preaching and assisting the needy. The activities of Boko Haram took violent dimension in 2009 and Nigerian security forces, clashed with the group in five day violent that resulted in death of its leader Muhammad Yusuf and many of his followers (Umar 2012). Since 2009 Boko Haram has been driven by a desire for vengeance against politicians, police, and Islamic authorities for their role in a brutal suppression of the group that year (Walker 2012). Hence, this paper aims to examine

2. METHODOLOGY

The study is a of research works such as thesis, dissertations, research journals, newspapers and magazines to examine Boko Haram the historical evolution of Boko Haram, its causes, recruitment, ideology, area of operation and the ways through which the problem can be solved.

3. HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF BOKO HARAM

The history and development of Boko Haram insurgents group in North Eastern Nigeria can be divided into two phase; its initial goals of peaceful movement when the group mainly organised a lectures and charity to the needy which covered a period of 2002 to 2009. And its second phase of violent movement which started between 2009 to date.

3.1 Peaceful Phase of Boko Haram Movement

According to Shuaibu, Salleh and Shehu (2015), Jama‘ah al-Ahlu al-Sunnah Li al-Da‘wah wa al-Jihad, known as Boko Haram emerged around 2002 as a peaceful local Salafist Islamic movement. The word ‘Boko Haram’ in Hausa means Western education is forbidden. Boko Haram was created in 2002 by Mohammad Yusuf (1970-2009), a radical Islamist cleric, in Maiduguri, Borno state, in North Eastern Nigeria. He set up a religious complex, called Markaz, following his expulsion from two mosques in Maiduguri by Muslim clerics for propagating his radical views. The
complex included a mosque and an Islamic school. Many poor Muslim families in Nigeria, and neighbouring countries, sent their children to the school to get a proper education. The centre had ulterior political goals to create an Islamic state and impose Sharia Laws, and it soon became a recruiting ground for future jihadist to fight the state (Chothia 2012).

The group was initially operating under the name *Shabaab* Muslim Youth Organization under the leadership of Mallam Lawal. When Lawal travelled to continue his education in Madina Saudi Arabia, Yusuf became the leader of the movement. In addition, Yusuf’s Leadership opened the group to the popularity and political influence (Chothia 2012). Subsequently, the sect had been conducting its activities peacefully for seven years of the existence of the exemption of Kanamma skirmishes in 2004 (Cook 2011).

The present *Boko Haram* crisis started in 2009, at that time there was new government legislation of wearing helmet for motorcycle riders. The government of Borno state gave the police order to enforce the use of helmet as part of the operation flush out the members of the sect went out on motorcycles for funeral without wearing helmet and the police stopped them. This resulted in a clash between the police and the sect members, which led to the death of four members of the sect and around eighteen of the members were injured.

Moreover, Yusuf became angered and wrote his famous tirade entitled ‘An open Letter to the Federal Government’ in which he threatened the government and urged them to respond within forty days with the view to a resolution between the government and the group, and if not then ‘jihadi’ operation will begin in the country which only Allah can stop it (Murtada 2013).

Consequently, after forty days, the ultimatum elapsed and the government did not respond to the situation which according to some analysts, the group members started preparing strategies and plans for war. After this incident, the leaders of the sect continued preaching for Jihad and army confrontation (Murtada 2013).

3.2 Violent Phase of Boko Haram

The Nigerian army on 28 July 2009 reportedly launched an offensive attack on the sect leader, Muhammad Yusuf’s compound and a nearby mosque used by the members in Borno state capital of Maiduguri. This violence between the *Boko Haram* and Nigerian security forces, which claimed the lives of 1000 people with over 700 killed in Maiduguri Borno State capital. This crisis later spread to Kano, Yobe and Jigawa states. In Maiduguri, 100 bodies were reported to be found beside police headquarters (Umar 2011). Thousands of people flee their homes in order to escape the violence, while several civilian corpses lie on the city’s streets; many were shot dead after being pulled from cars. (BBC Report 2009). This violence led to the killing of the sect leader Muhammad Yusuf while in police custody, which brought to the end of five days uprising (Murtada 2013).

Consequently, since the 2009 uprising, the activities of the group appeared to be dissipated, but they regroup and re-emerged in 2010 under the new leadership of Abubakar Shekau. Since the rise of the new leadership, the attacks have escalated in terms of frequency and intensity. The group carried out its first attacks when it orchestrated a large prison breaks in September 2010 in Bauchi which led to the escape of more than 700 inmates including its members (VOA Hausa 2010).
Moreover, on 16th June, 2001 the group for attacks police headquarters this believed to be the first suicide bombing in Nigerian history (Reuters Reporters 2011). In August 2011, a suicide bomber attacked United Nation’s headquarters in Abuja, many people were killed and more than sixty were injured which the then spokesman of the group, known as Abu Qaqa claimed responsibility (Nossiter 2011).

The attacks from Boko Haram have increased both in frequency and intensity since 2009. In January 2012, the sect coordinated and carried out series of deadliest bombing in Kano, a largest commercial city in northern Nigeria. The attacks resulted in the death of more than 180 people including large number of security personnel and civilians which is believed to be among the highest death in a single day since the group began its violent campaign in July 2009 (Human Rights Watch 2012).

Furthermore, the activities and attacks from the group has escalated in 2013, as a result, the Federal Government declared state of emergency in three most affected states of the region in May 2013, extending the existing ones that have been declared in some parts of Borno and Yobe in late 2011 (Blanchard 2014). These attacks have increased substantially in frequency between 2013 and 2014 whereby the sect, in April 2014 adopted new tactics of kidnapping female students and women in the northeastern part of the country. On April 14th 2014, Boko Haram kidnapped nearly 300 students from Government Girls Secondary School Chibok, as a result of which the United Nation Security Council committee blacklisted the group on 22nd May 2014 (Nicholas 2014).

Between 2013 and 2014, more than 5000 people have been killed in Boko Haram violence. United Nation and Nigerian officials reported that more than six million Nigerians have been affected, and more 300,000 have been displaced. And at least 2000 have been killed in the first half 2014 (Blanchard 2014). Consequently, the threats posed by the group recently undermined the existence of Nigeria as one territory. On August 24th 2014, Shekau, the sect leader declared areas under his sect’s control as New Caliphate which would be governed according to strict Islamic codes (Sahara Reporters 2014).

Furthermore, allegation has been raised that the kidnapped school girls by Boko Haram insurgents earlier this year have been used as suicide bombers. This comes after series of female suicide bombngs in the ancient city of Kano during and after Eid-el-Fitr (Sallah Festival). A ten-year-old girl wearing an explosive device was also caught in Katsina State in North-Western Nigeria (Chothia 2014).

Consequently, the group carried out a deadly attack on Kano Central Mosque in November 2014. The members of the group set off three suicide bombs and fired the worshippers, killed more than 100 people and injured more than 200 (Nicholas 2014). In a related issue, Boko Haram carried out a deadliest massacre in the town of Baga in Borno state in which more than 2000 people were killed. The Amnesty International described the attacks as the worst in the history of the group (Mark 2015).

Nigerian Military has recently recaptured Gwoza, a historic town in Borno state on 27th March 2015. Gwoza had been previously captured by Boko Haram in August 2014 and was declared an Islamic headquarters by the group whose leader Abubakar Shekau called Islamic Caliphate. The Sambisa forest where the insurgents’ main camps are located and where the kidnapped Chibok girls were first taken to is also located in Gwoza local government area (Malik 2015).
Based on the conceptual explanations of unemployment and poverty as the main causes of Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria, the research tried to establish relationship between the variables of the study. Figure 2.1 below shows the predicted relationship between Boko Haram, unemployment and poverty.

![Figure 1: Conceptual Framework](image)

### 3.3 Boko Haram Recruitment

Surveys, interviews, and focus groups conducted by U.S. Institute of Peace commissioned a study from the CLEEN Foundation in Nigeria in 2013 revealed that poverty, unemployment, illiteracy and weak family structures make or contribute to making young men vulnerable to radicalization. Itinerant preachers capitalize on the situation by preaching an extreme version of religious teachings and conveying a narrative of the government as weak and corrupt. Armed groups such as Boko Haram can then recruit and train youth for activities ranging from errand running to suicide bombings (Onuoha 2013).

Moreover, in order to expand its fighting strength, Boko Haram attacked Bauchi prison in Bauchi state on 7 September 2009 and freed more than seven hundred inmates, including more than one hundred of its own members (Steinberg & Weber, 2015).

### 3.4 Ideology of Boko Haram

Initially, Boko Haram was a Salafist local movement in Borno State of North Eastern Nigeria before it was turned into insurgent group in 2009. Salaf means the pious people from amongst the past generation of the Islamic community of believers who are the companions of the Prophet (PBUH) and their followers, i.e. the first three generations of Muslims and those who followed their way in belief and deed. The Salafi da’wah literally means ‘call’, and in this sense it refers to calling to the truth, preaching and propagation of Islam - pure and free from any and all additions, deletions and alterations. It means adherence to the path of the Prophet (PBUH) and the faithful and pious believers of the past generation of the Islamic community and all those who followed in their footsteps in belief, actions and morals (al-Salafi 2015).

Moreover, after the dynamic change of its activities in 2009, Boko Haram becomes capable of carrying out major attacks including suicide and denoting bombs (Cook 2011). The group misinterpreted some parts of Islamic teaching in which they consider interaction with Western society as a sin. The group is against the activities of orthodox Islamic scholars (Bartolotta 2011).

### 3.5 Operation Areas of Boko Haram
The group exerts influence and operated in predominantly Muslim North Eastern states of Borno, Yobe and Adamawa. The violence later escalated to the neighboring states of Gombe and Bauchi and some parts of Northwestern states of Kano and Kaduna. But the attacks of the sect has now affected the entire northern region and the federal capital territory Abuja. Furthermore, most of its early attacks have been in the state capital Maiduguri. On 16 June 2011, Nigerian police headquarters was attacked by Boko Haram; the first suicide attacks in Nigeria. The group also launched another attack on United Nations Headquarters on 26 August 2011 (Liolio 2013).

4. FINDINGS

The study revealed that poverty and misconception of religion were the major factor that led to the development of Boko Haram to full terrorist organization. According to Campbell (2013), mentions factors that could attract the youth to join Boko Haram:

i. Financial incentives: Some members are paid to kill government officials or security agents, and attack army barracks and police stations. Some steal cars and rob banks in the name of Boko Haram.

ii. Kinship: Some northern Nigerians, including politicians may associate with Boko Haram members because they are related to them.

iii. Inter-religious and governmental violence: The history of violence between Muslims and Christians in Northern Nigeria.

iv. Radicalization: Nigerian Imams may have radicalized some members of the group.

Furthermore, unemployment and poverty were the main factors and facilitated the emergence and development of the group. Base on this poverty theory can be used to explain one of the major causes of Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria. According to Blanchard (2011: 10):

Understanding Boko Haram’s appeal among some citizen in Nigeria’s far north requires an examination of underlying development challenges facing northern Nigeria, where high rates of poverty and unemployment are exacerbated by extreme population growth and low level of literacy. These factors combined with weak governance, rampant corruption and inadequate public service delivery, has contributed to widespread disaffection that some suggest may facilitate Boko Haram recruitment.

According to Liolio (2013), the successful recruitment of the people into the group depend on the nature of the economic and poverty level in the area mostly insurgent gain members by claiming their struggle is for the people and that they would provide basic necessity for the general population if supported. He further stressed that the insurgent may succeed if such society embedded by poverty, illiteracy, ineptitude, corruption, discrimination to modernization and globalization, which create artificial poverty to many underdeveloped countries, such countries would became recruitment target of the terrorists.

Similarly, Adesoji (2010) stresses that, in Nigeria the marginalization and imbalance distribution or implementation of the resources made some radicalised scholars to preach against the government and democratic setting, which later gave birth to the present Boko Haram insurgency.
In addition, Olojo (2013) contends that one significant factor that has stimulated the drive towards violent extremism, recruitment and support for *Boko Haram* are economic deprivation. Several scholars believed that poverty and longstanding economic disparities in the northeast part of the country made the youth join the sect.

Moreover, the rate of unemployment in the country has continued to be on increase despite the abundant human and natural resources available in the country. Unemployment has become a major problem tormenting the lives of the Nigerian youths and this poses a serious menace to Nigeria as a country. Furthermore, 64 million Nigeria youths are unemployed while 1.6 million are under-employed. Unemployment causes dejection, frustration, desperation and dependency on family members and friends. This dependency situation has left the youths in vicious cycle of chronic poverty that daily erodes their confidence of bright future. In such a case, most of these unemployed youths are the primary target of the insurgents (Adebayo 2014).

In addition, International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD 2007) said “despite Nigeria’s plentiful resources and oil wealth, poverty is widespread to the extent that the country is ranked one of the 20 poorest countries in the world”. Indeed over 70 percent of the population is classified as poor, with 35 percent living in absolute poverty. Poverty is what is seen by many observers and analysts as the cause of most ethnoreligious crisis in Northern Nigeria which *Boko Haram* insurgency included. With the death of infrastructure development, 90% of Nigerians are permanent of crippling poverty. The country was ranked 153th out of 177 poor economic countries on the human development index (2008), despite its rich cultural endowment and abundant human and natural resources (Adenrele 2014).

Northern Nigeria in particular has the highest figure of relative poverty in comparison with South-West and South-East zones which have relative poverty of 67.0% and 59.1% respectively. The North-East and North-West zones have the higher figure of 76.3% and 77.7% relative poverty respectively (NBS 2012).

Moreover, a country with legacies of economic stagnation, higher level of unemployment and uneven economic development such country is a fertile ground on which terrorist seed can flourish. Individuals and group grievances such as poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, discrimination, and economic marginalization can be used as mobilising instruments by sinister group to get support and recruit for terrorist violence. This explains how economically deprived youth can easily be recruited by the extremist group, due to the economic hardship in the region (Umar 2013).

The increasing rate of unemployed youth in the region, which were economically deprived, mostly was the recruiting target of *Boko Haram*. The connection between unemployment, poverty and *Boko Haram* insurgency is indirect and complicated. But the huge number of young people living on the margins of North-Eastern Nigeria society intensified these linkages.

In 2013 the federal government released some detainees of *Boko Haram* mostly wives and children of the sect members, some children confessed of providing kegs of fuel to *Boko Haram* to set school and other buildings ablaze in Maiduguri for the sum of 5000 naira (Olojo 2013). These show how the people in the area were living in absolute poverty due to the failure of government to provide education and economic opportunity in the area for more than a decade. These socio-economic
problems had contributed to the escalation of *Boko Haram* violence in North-Eastern Nigeria. Ojolo (2013) noted that:

> Individuals and groups grievances such as poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, discrimination, and economic marginalization, can be used as mobilizing instruments by sinister group to get support and recruit for terrorist violence. The predominantly Muslim northern Nigeria provide the group a steady stream for recruitment, the deprived youths and Almajiris are willing to join any movement for them to find an alternative to the current economic and political inequalities that existed in the country; believing that the sect version of radical Salafism to be the answer to their problems.

Osita & Princewill (2015) stresses that, the growing poverty in Nigeria is one of the root causes of *Boko Haram* insurgency. This is in spite of the fact that Nigeria is blessed with abundant human and material resources. When there exist wide gap between the rich and poor, there comes a breaking-point where there is bound to be a class conflict that materializes in various forms of revolution.

Conclusively, the conceptual explanations of the paper shows that poverty remains the major problem that causes, frustration among the you which later became the recruitment target of the insurgents group.

**CONCLUSION**

For any solution to a security situation like that of *Boko Haram* to be effective, a multi-dimensional approach that address both the symptoms of terrorism and root causes must be adopted to address the problems and create enabling environment.

The study also recommend that government should deny the group the required operating space to carry out its attacks by preventing the sect from organising or re-organising, recruiting and launching attacks; any form of support for the sect most be denied. The entire porous border network through which the group might get weapons, and supports from other Islamic movements outside the country must be blocked. It is significant to deny the group any access to weapons, technology, manpower and funds from al-Qaeda in the land of Islamic Maghrib (AQIM) and al-Shabab. Joint border operation should be solicited from the neighbouring countries of the region to accomplish this task.

Finally, the ideology of the youths needs to be neutralised. The ideology plays a significant role in the recruitment process of the group and remains the core strength of the *Boko Haram* adherent. Ideological battles are in many ways more important than physical battles and that once the ideology is defeated, the terrorist movement withers and dies.

**REFERENCES**


