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# Insurgency and Extreme Poverty: Evidence from the Boko Haram Crisis in Northeast Nigeria

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**Abstract:** Since the return to civilian rule in Nigeria in 1999, successive political administrations have sought to create wealth and prosperity for the people as one of the dividends expected from a democratic government to her citizens. However, such measures have yielded little results as expected, as poverty continues to increase. This unexpected situation has thus elicited interest amongst social, economic and political researchers and analysts seeking to understand the trajectory's dynamics and consequences. This trend is met with a concomitant increase in crime and militancy, particularly the rise and expansion of Boko Haram's blood-curdling activities in the Northeast. This chapter, therefore, examines the activities of the Boko Haram insurgent group, intending to determine whether their activities have a significant impact on the poverty curve in Nigeria. The paper relies on secondary data collection methodology to arrive at the findings on the nexus between insurgency in Northeastern Nigeria and the growing extreme form of poverty. The chapter recommends that political and socio-economic approaches and implementing a sustainable development programme will reduce the potency of Boko Haram activities and de-escalate poverty in the region.

**Keywords:** Boko Haram, Extreme poverty, Development, Insurgency

## Introduction

On October 1, 2020, Nigeria marked her sixtieth independence anniversary from Great Britain amidst mixed reactions from her citizens. The event was characterized by demonstrations in some parts of the country by citizens/various groups who came out en mass to protest against the appalling state of the nation sixty years after her independence. The protesters carried placards with various inscriptions such as: “They are killing our gallant soldiers in a war created by some corrupt leaders to enrich themselves,” “Sack all service chiefs, provide standard weapons,” “Boko Haram sponsors must be brought to book,” “Provide standard weapons and increase salary of all recruits fighting on the frontline,” “End Poverty in Nigeria now,” “The poor have rights too,” “Kill Corruption Dead” and “Make Nigeria Poverty Free.” (Terhemba, 2020). The thoughts of the protesters as expressed on the placards could be said to be reflective of the mood of many Nigerians. Recent events have shown that civil protest if not properly managed/addressed with the required speed has the potential to snowball into a wilder fire with unimaginable devastating effects as seen in the events following the Arab Spring revolution. A critical analysis of the political, economic and social affairs in the once prided Giant of Africa calls for serious concerns for all stakeholders in the Nigerian project. With the Boko Haram insurgency raging in North-east of Nigeria, and pockets of dissensions across the country, there is urgent need to address the issues giving rise to the dissent from the citizens.

## Theoretical Viewpoint

The chapter adopts the Relative deprivation theory coined by the Psychologist Samuel Stouffer following his studies on American Soldiers in World War II and the Intentional Change Theory (ICT) developed by Richard Boyatzis as the theoretical viewpoints to systematically arrive at the findings presented in the study. Both theories are quite germane to the research hypothesis underlying this study. On the one hand, the theory of relative deprivation holds significant bearings for attitudinal and [behavioural](#) conducts. While on the other hand, the Intentional Change Theory lays the groundwork for a sustained desired change to occur through behavioural and attitudinal change.

The relevance of the theory of relative deprivation to the understanding of insurgent operations is rooted in the basic concept of the theory which is premised on the notion that “oneself or one’s group does not receive valued resources, goals, ways or standards of living, which others possess and one feels rightfully entitled to”. (Power 2018). This perception becomes a major influence of individual/group behaviour and ingrains the thought of “undeservingly worse off than others, and can explain various, contemporary forms of violent extremism”(Knust 2020). A mutual feeling of relative deprivation is an attraction for individuals and groups engaged in such contemporary forms of violent extremism. Rising social inequalities and corresponding economic,

social and political power gap continue to exacerbate the feeling of deprivation. A relative deprivation perspective has been identified as vital in explaining extremist violent movements such as Jihadism. (Knust, 2020). The failure of people to get what they feel they want in comparison with others usually results in anger and resentment. Heather (2011). The perceived exclusion by an individual or group from a common societal good, often results in the adoption of self help measures which could be antithetical to the acceptable norms of the society. Such exclusion could be political, economic or social. This underlying thoughts gives ascendancy to the ideologies of Insurgents groups like Boko Haram. In a study conducted by a group of Researchers on 5,491 Icelandic adolescents in 83 school-communities, there was sufficient evidence that gives credence to the theory of relative deprivation and its impacts on group behaviour. (Bernburg, 2009.)

While the Relative deprivation theory serves as a good theoretical basis for the understanding of the trajectory to social uprising, the Intentional Change Theory provides the framework through which any societal quagmire created by the perceived deprivation could be addressed. The Intentional Change Theory follows a five prescriptive approach for a sustained desired change at the individual, group, dyads/organisation, community/country and global level. These steps are:

1. A Discovery the ideal self
2. A Discovery the real self
3. Creation of a learning agenda
4. Experimentation/practice of new habits
5. Getting the necessary support (Boyatzis, 2006)

This paper used the Intentional Change

theory as a mapping tool to proffer solutions to the twin evil of insurgency and extreme poverty in Nigeria.

## Methodology

The paper employed the secondary data collection method which was subjected to critical analysis to arrive at the findings presented.

## Conceptual Review

### Insurgency

An insurgency generally speaking refers to a violent, armed uprising against a lawfully constituted [authority](#) especially when the champions of such an uprising are not accorded recognition as belligerents (otherwise known as lawful combatants.) There is no universal consensus amongst academics and researchers as to the definition for the concept of insurgency. However, some scholars have attempted to define the concept. David Galula, the [French military](#) officer and scholar instrumental in developing the theory and practice of [counterinsurgency](#) warfare, sees insurgency as “a protracted struggle conducted methodically, step by step, in order to attain specific intermediate objectives leading finally to the overthrow of the existing order.” (Galula, 1964).

For Lieutenant General John S. Pustay, insurgency can be regarded as a “composite conflict phenomenon” which can be defined more specifically as “a cellular development of resistance against an incumbent political regime and which expands from the initial stage of subversion-infiltration through the intermediate stages of overt resistance by small armed bands and insurrection to final fruition in civil war”. (Pustay, 1965). Every insurgency is fraught with its own challenges and consequently

requires different tactics to tackle. For instance, the terrain of the Boko Haram insurgency is quite different from that of the various insurgents groups that operated in the Niger Delta region. However, all insurgencies, even today's highly adaptable strains, remain wars amongst the people. They use variations of standard themes and adhere to elements of a recognizable revolutionary campaign plan. (FM 3-24 Counterinsurgency Operations, 2006.)

### Extreme poverty

Poverty remains a subject of huge concern to global leaders. This is because of the rippling effect of its consequences. However, defining the concept remains elusive. Poverty is a "multi-dimensional social phenomenon, hence, the difficulty in definition. (Chidozie, et al., 2014). There is no universal standard definition of poverty. However, the concept of poverty is usually examined by scholars and researchers using the notion of poverty lines. Poverty lines refers to cut-off points separating the poor from the non-poor. Poverty lines could either be monetary or non-monetary. (Saji T., et al., 2002) There are basically two types of poverty; extreme poverty and relative poverty. Extreme poverty is also referred to as absolute poverty, abject poverty, deep poverty and similar synonyms, and is the worst kind of poverty any individual can ever face. It is characterized by the worst living condition with its attendant hazards such as:

1. Lack of Conducive shelter
2. Poor/absence of nutritious meal
3. Lack of access to quality education
4. Poor access to quality healthcare facilities

Extreme poverty is defined by the United Nations as "a condition characterized by severe deprivation of basic human needs, including food, safe [drinking water](#), sanitation facilities, health, shelter, [education](#) and information. It depends not only on income but also on access to services" (UN 1995 report of the World Summit for Social Development).

For Adawo (2011), Absolute poverty is a misery linked to an insufficient resource base, lack of income, narrow margin, high risk of failure, hunger, disease, etc. As Duriji (2008) put it, "poverty is an enemy of man, that humiliates and dehumanises its victim". The dehumanizing effects of poverty negatively impacts the ability of the affected individuals to be optimally productive mentally and economically, thereby pushing the individual deeper into the poverty hole.



Figure 1: Nigeria's Poverty metrics

Source: World Data Lab

Although Nigeria has no official metrics for measuring poverty, however, the international poverty line of \$1.90 (updated by the World Bank in October 2015 towards ensuring consistency of the "goalpost for the objective of ending extreme poverty by 2030") is the most generally used metric in measuring poverty level in Nigeria and other countries. World Bank (2016). Using the \$1.90 poverty line as a yardstick for poverty measurement, about 105,097,856

million Nigerians are said to be living in extreme poverty. World Data Lab (2020). This number represents more than half of Nigeria's estimated total population of 200,000,000 million individuals. The surge in extreme poverty level soon resulted in Nigeria being named as the poverty capital of the world by a Report published by the Brookings Institute in 2018. For a nation that is immensely blessed with both human and natural resources, the spate of poverty in the country continues to elicits concern.

### **Boko Haram Insurgency as a Trigger of Extreme Poverty in Nigeria**

Boko Haram was founded in 2002 in Maiduguri; the capital of Borno state, in North-east Nigeria, by the Islamic Cleric, Mohammed Yusuf. North-east of Nigeria comprises the six Northern states of Borno, Adamawa, Yobe, Bauchi, Gombe and Taraba. The group goes by the adopted name "Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-Jihad" an Arabic word which when translated into english language means "People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet's Teachings and Jihad". Upon formation, the Boko Haram group was "initially focused on opposing Western education" which they termed as "haram" meaning "bad." For the group, western education was bad and was to be rejected. The grievances of the Boko Haram group against western education has its historical roots in the sacking of the Sokoto caliphate by the British in 1903. The group however changed strategy in 2009 when it began to carry out armed attacks with the goal of establishing an islamic state. In 2014, Mr Shekau who emerged as the group's leader following the killing of Mohammed Yusuf in police custody in 2009, declared a caliphate in areas under Boko Haram's control, with the town of Gwoza its seat of power. (BBC News Report, 2016). The group

has been audacious in the pursuits of its goals through suicide bombings, gun attacks, abductions amongst other nefarious activities.



Figure 2: Boko Haram insurgents displaying their sophisticated weapons.

Source: BBC News

### **Implications of Boko Haram Activities in North-east of Nigeria**

The Boko Haram insurgent group on the onset, operated mainly in the North-eastern states of Nigeria comprising Borno, Adamawa, Yobe, Bauchi, Gombe and Taraba. Over the years, the sect has extended its operations outside of the North-east to include places like Abuja, Kaduna, Kano etc. The Boko Haram insurgency has brought about the deaths of thousands of lives, decimation of communities, villages, and towns resulting in huge numbers of internally displaced persons (IDPs), destructions of assets of production, social and economic systems thereby negatively impacting on the condition of living of the people. The fear of possible attack by the sect has crippled the normal processes of trade and investments. For instance, the poor economic activities that greeted the 33rd Kaduna International Trade Fair is attributed to a fear of a possible Boko Haram attack. (Ibietan, 2012).

These have resulted in serious implications on the economic activities of the people of the region who are majorly

farms and brought upon them hardship and deep poverty.

### Key Findings

1. A decline in local trade as a result of constant raids and bombings by the sect.
2. Decimation of Agricultural Activities due to attacks in rural communities. Considering the fact that more than 80% of the population in the region are farmers, the effect of this disruption of their primary source of livelihood has resulted in extreme economic hardship.
3. Psychological trauma experienced by members of the affected areas has a negative impact on the productivity of the victims.
4. Destruction of economic social infrastructures like schools, markets, hospitals etc also have negative consequences on the economic activities of the region.
5. The activities of the insurgent group have had a toll on the inflow of Foreign Direct Investment in Nigeria with its attendant effect on the economy.
6. The Boko Haram movement did not start because of poverty, neither was it because of illiteracy, but as a result of the historical hatred for Westernization represented by the British for the role they played in the collapse of the then Sokoto caliphate in 1903. The founder and former leader of the group, Muhammad Yusuf was himself a highly educated man who lived a lavish life and drove a Mercedes Benz (Bartolotta, 2011).
7. Sustainable economic

development that is a prerequisite for a sustained poverty alleviation is not achievable in the region without first arresting the insecurity challenge in the region.

8. The Boko Haram insurgency though primarily situated in the North-east, has had a rippling effect in other parts of Nigeria. This is evidential in the massive influx of Northerners into other parts of Nigeria since the wake of the devastation orchestrated by the insurgent group. The implication of this is that the economic/social infrastructures of these states have recently come under strain with the new entrants joining in the scrambling for the much needed scarce resources for survival. The effect has been a geometric growth rate in the number of unemployed people in the urban cities. Those that are lucky enough to be employed, are either underemployed or have a retinue of dependents to care for if gainfully employed.

The combination of the above have resulted in the exponential rise in the total number of people living in extreme poverty since 2009. Agreed that poverty did not ignite the fire of the Boko Haram insurgency, poverty however became the fuel that helped spread the fire of the insurgency. The devastating consequences of the insurgency in turn, multiplied the cases of poverty in Nigeria to extreme proportions through the decimation of markets and trades as evidenced in figure 3 below.

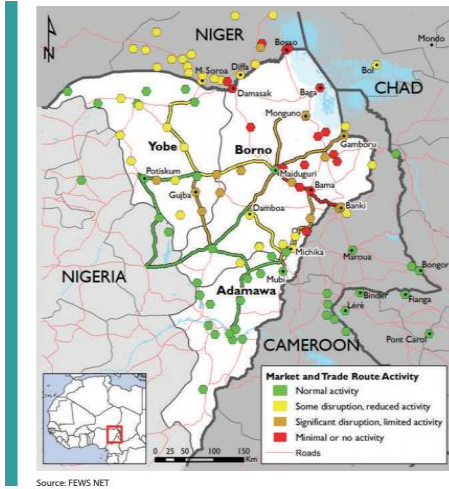


Figure 3: Markets and Trade Activity in North-East Nigeria, June 2017

## Conclusion and Recommendation

- 1. Development and deployment of “Education is Wealth” ideology:** All the evils that are now synonymous with the monster that has become of the insurgent group Boko Haram started with the simple ideology “Western education is Bad”. This simple ideology woven along with religion soon attracted adherents with a cult following. The events of the past 18 years of the operations of Boko Haram in Nigeria with the capitulation of the Insurgent group not in view calls for a review of the employed strategy in combating the menace. Hence, this study recommends the development and deployment of the “Education is Wealth” ideology as one of the strategies to be employed towards putting an end to insurgency in the North-eastern region of Nigeria and put Nigeria on the path of sustainable peace and prosperity.

- 2. Increased Border Security:** The monitoring of all entry points though the use of technology is recommended by this study as a way of checkmating influx of undocumented foreigners into the country who could be easily recruited by deviants and enemies of the state to foment trouble.
- 3. Bi-annual Interfaith Prayer Meetings:** Nigeria no doubt is highly polarised along religious and ethnic lines. From our study, we observed that this has only exacerbated the gulf between the predominantly Christian South, and the Predominantly Islamic North. This divide has led to mutual suspicion amongst the two camps. Such suspicion will only help to further elongate the timely elimination of the Boko Haram menace as a house divided against itself cannot stand. Consequently, we recommend a Bi-annual Interfaith Prayer Meeting of religious and traditional leaders of both religions with the view of reducing religious tension in the country which has been heightened in recent years.
- 4. Need to awaken the humanity in the Insurgents through custom programs:** One thing is certain, guns and bombs may not be able to completely eliminate ideas and ideologies. Beyond the deployment of machine guns, fighter jets, and armoured tanks in tracking down the insurgents, we recommend the employment of custom built programs with the sole objective of awakening humanity in the insurgents. The insurgents are not aliens. They

are sons, brothers, cousins and some are even father(s). They only became insurgents and killers after a process of radicalization. We proposed a reversed approach of deradicalization using the intentional change theory.

**5. Need for Transparency and Accountability in the Fight Against the Boko Haram Insurgency:**

A glaring observation from our study is that the government has not done enough to demonstrate transparency and accountability in the fight against the insurgency. For instance, no one knows for sure how much has been spent in fighting the insurgency since it began. Lack of accountability gives the impression that some elements in the corridors of power are deliberately sabotaging the efforts at combating the insurgency for their own selfish gains.

**6. Need for Individual Centric Policies:**

We recommend that the government put in place policies that are focused on empowering the individuals to achieve their dreams and aspirations. It is not just enough for the people to be packed into IDPs camps. Putting the people in IDP camps without well mapped out strategies geared towards reintegration into the society will make the people ready tools for all manner of crimes.

**7. A Spirit, Mind & Body (SMB) Solution Driven Approach:**

For the Internally displaced persons, and those insurgents that have/will voluntarily surrender to

be fully reintegrated into the society, we recommend a Spirit, Soul and Body focused therapy. It is our view that it is only when the tripartite components of Spirit are fully in sync, that the individual can become productive. Our view is supported by the Intentional Change Theory (ICT) which was presented as the theory framework for the study.

**8. Starvation of the Sects from external and internal funding:**

As long as the source of funding of the Sect is left unchecked, the Sect will keep growing and keep wrecking havoc. From some of the weapons at the disposal of the group as seen in figure 2, it is self-evident that the sect has huge financial backing, be it external or internal. Hence, we recommend that the government put in place a special tactical team to track down the source of funding of the Boko Haram sects. Solving the financial puzzle will go a long way in the total annihilation of the Sect.

**9. Need for Government to Display Sincerity in Combating the Boko Haram Insurgent:**

One of the reasons the Boko Haram insurgency have tarried this long is because of lack of sincerity by the government in putting an end to the crisis. A former Governor who later became Senator was onced fingered as a sponsor of the Sects by a captured member of the sect. Yet, no substantial multilayer investigation was done. If it was done, the government should show transparency by briefing the



public of its findings. By so doing, the government will be building the confidence of the people in the counterinsurgency process.

This paper examined the Boko Haram insurgency in the North-east of Nigeria with a view of establishing whether or not a nexus exists between the insurgency and the spate of extreme poverty in the country. Literatures of previous research conducted were examined, after careful analysis, there was sufficient evidence that point to the fact that the Boko Haram insurgency in North-east Nigeria have indeed triggered the number of people living in extreme poverty in Nigeria. The study ended with some recommendations of what should be done to end the insurgency and put the country on the part of peace and progress. It is our view that the government should prioritize bringing the war against the insurgency to a logical conclusion before embarking on massive capital projects in the North-east in order to prevent wastes of scare sources that would arise should such projects be attacked by the insurgents if the insurgents are not first tamed.

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