EXTREMIST IDEOLOGY, POLITICAL VIOLENCE AND WOMEN ACCESS TO EDUCATION IN AFRICA: INSIGHTS FROM NORTH-EAST NIGERIA

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Abstract

The outbreak of violence has always generates untoward consequences for the education sector, impacting negatively on safety of learning environment, security of teachers and students alike. Underscoring the linkage between education and political violence, scholars have note that education often act as two edged sword. Since time immemorial, education has serves as instrument to prevent, mitigate and ameliorate conflicts between and within social groups. However, education can also serves as trigger, contribute to and a cause of conflict. This largely occurs through lack of qualitative access to educational services for the poor and through the nature and content of curriculum. When education emerges as victim of violence, women and girl-child are often impacted more as violence are often disproportionately directed at girl-child in their learning environment with the objectives of dissuading parents from sending girls to school. Drawing from the experiences in North-East Nigeria, this article discuss violence directed at learning institutions, teachers and students. It highlights how extremist ideology and violence of the Boko Haram group generates fears in the heart of parents, dissuade them from sending girl-child to school and thus restricts access to education for women and girl-child.

Keywords: Political Violence, Girl-Child, Education, Boko Haram, Nigeria.

Introduction

Wars and conflicts whatever their nature, dimensions and dynamics are destructive in nature as they impact people in negative forms and disrupt the dynamics of social relations. Studies have highlight the link between conflict and underdevelopment of nations. Cross-national and single country case studies have largely demonstrated the heavy economic and social cost of civil wars and violent conflicts (Brown and Stewart, 2015; Collier, Elliott, Hegre, Hoeffler, Reynal-Querol, and Sambanis, 2003; Stewart and Fitzgerald, 2001; Collier, 2000). One of the ways in which the social cost of wars, conflicts and political violence manifest is through the impacts of organized violence on the delivery of effective educational services. The educational sector constitute one of the most important human activities that suffers greatly the destructive impacts of violent conflicts.

Given, the impacts of conflicts on the delivery of education, scholarship have from time demonstrate strong interest in understanding the complex relationship and linkage between education and violent conflicts (Ostby and Henrik, 2011a;

Barakat and Henrik, 2009; Krueger and Jitka, 2003). Informed by the notion of relationship between education and political violence, it has been noted that education can act as two edge sword, promoting peace and in some instance acting as underlying factor and/or serving as trigger for violence. In relations to the theoretical contribution on the relationship between education and political violence, Ostby and Henrik (2011b) notes that it is important to distinguish between arguments relating to the levels, expansion, inequality, and content of education.

Since time immemorial, education has serves as instrument to prevent, mitigate and ameliorate conflicts between and within social groups. Educational curriculum and content can be devise as instrument to preach the culture of tolerance and peace. Indeed, there is the growing recognition of the important of incorporating 'peace curriculum' in learning especially in heterogeneous states. It is believed that increase government spending on education services delivery help to foster peace by reducing people grievances, makes engagement in violence less attractive to young people and that higher education promote the 'culture of tolerance and peace' within society. However, when educational opportunities is expanded to young people without commensurate efforts at expanding opportunities for gainful engagement/employment, it might result in frustration and aggression which might aid the initiation of political violence. The existence of inequality as it relates to availability of education opportunity between social groups can promote feeling of marginalization which can feed frustration, aggression and ultimately violence. Through curriculum,

education can also be used as instrument for indoctrination, thus fuelling the culture of militarism and/or aiding the promotion of extremist (religious and national) ideology (Ostby and Henrik, 2011b; Luzincourt and Gulbrandson, 2010). Thus, as it can serves as instrument for the promotion and advancement of peace, education can also become a trigger for, contribute to and cause of conflict.

When education becomes victim of violence, women and girl-child are often impacted more as violence are often disproportionately directed at girl-child in their learning environment with the objectives of dissuading parents from sending girls to school. Rival armed groups, national armed forces and para-military agencies often occupied learning facilities, turning such into military encampment during civil conflicts and wars. By so doing, they impacted on the ability of school going children to get access to education in the course of conflicts and wars. In recent time, religious extremist groups waging war with the State have acquire the penchant to occupied educational/learning facilities, attacks schools, kill teachers and students and abduct students notably females as tactics to dissuade parents from sending their wards to school to acquire knowledge. This is particularly the case with the Boko Haram terrorist group in North-Eastern Nigeria. Utilizing secondary materials and drawing inferences from the area impacted by violent extremism of the Boko Haram group, this article discuss violence directed at learning institutions, teachers and students (girl-child). It highlights how extremist ideology and violence of the Boko Haram sect has generate fears in the heart of parents, dissuade them from sending girl-child to school and thus

restricts access to education for women and girl-child in Africa.

Children, Women and Armed Conflicts in Contemporary Africa

The incidence and occurrence of violent armed conflicts have emerged as one of the greatest crisis confronting states and societies in Africa in recent time. At any given year, there are multiple conflicts raging at different parts/regions of the continent. While inter-state confrontation do occur occasionally, an important character and nature of contemporary conflicts in Africa is that most are internal to the State, pitching state authority (political and the armed forces) against an armed group and armed group against another as the case maybe. While the causes of contemporary intra-state conflicts in Africa can be said to be context specific and particular to each conflict situation, yet there are triggering factors and/or cause of conflict that are shared and common to most conflict spots on the continent (Bowd and Chikwanha, 2010). Prominent among these factors are; internal struggles for political power/authority among competing political elites and/or power blocs within the state (South Sudan; Central African Republic); struggle by ethnic, religious or other social minority for greater autonomy and/or secession (call for restructuring and secession in Nigeria, Kenya, Senegal, Darfur-Sudan); failed or the collapse of state authority and the competition for power and control by ethnic militias, warlords, criminal networks and terrorist groups (Somalia, North-East Nigeria, Northern Mali) (de Villiers, 2015: 96-97; Bowd and Chikwanha, 2010: xi-xii; Solomon and Mathews, 2002: 7).

Giving the nature, dynamics and intensity of contemporary intra-state conflicts and the brutality that has emerged as its defining hallmark, conflicts in sub-Saharan Africa are noted to have been responsible for the direct and indirect deaths of millions of civilian (Michel and Robert, 2014: 62-63; Mkandawire, 2002; Solomon and Mathews, 2002: 1; IISS, 1999: 244). Arising from the nature, and dynamics of conflicts in Africa they have often results in explicit material and human cost to society. As it relates to physical infrastructure, roads, bridges, schools, hospitals and administrative buildings are often destroy in the course of prosecuting conflicts. Natural resources are plundered and appropriated by armed groups and warlords, while landmines are laid thus preventing the cultivation of land and grazing of animals and this largely impedes the prospect for economic revival and post-conflict reconstruction (Bowd and Chikwanha, 2010: xii). It destructive tendency means that conflicts has aid the reversal of developmental gains as a result of the destruction of social infrastructures. Thus, Africa's conflicts has contribute in significant manner to the low level of human security on the continent. The incidence of conflicts has also undermine the capacity and capability of States in Africa to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (Bowd and Chikwanha, 2010: x; Wordofa, 2010: 95-103).

While conflict had destructive impacts on physical infrastructure, it is the human and social cost of conflict that are devastating for those that witness and survive the horrors of armed conflicts that plague states in Africa. While the large number of civilian deaths that arise from violent conflicts in Africa is frightening, more serious are the attacks and atrocities against non-combatants by armed groups that has becomes widely used as deliberate strategies of warfare in conflict theatres in

Africa. Armed groups in Africa have come to reified systematic and group rape; mass executions of men, women and children; ethnic cleaning; and genocide to strategic arts of warfare. Such atrocities are often employed as weapon to demoralize, dehumanize and destroy the social fabrics of communities (de Villier, 2015: 89; Unicef, 2005: 6-7). The destruction that violent conflicts wrought on societies in Africa are compounded by the intimate exposure of children (notably girl-child) and women to inhuman brutality which leave deep psychological scare and the complex web of social relations and interactions that have been rendered tattered in the aftermath of conflicts (ACERWC, 2016: v; Bowd and Chiwanha, 2010: xiii-xiv).

Children as victims and participants in violent conflicts had been profoundly shaped and impacted by the consequences that arise from the prosecution of conflicts in which they are caught up. Whether through direct engagement as combatants or providing critical supports to fighting forces, being injured by stray bullet, being witness to horrific violence such as rape, maiming and bodily mutilation among others violent acts committed against family members, an injured and disabled father that aggravate household poverty, displacement and its attendant challenges, armed conflict has had the capacity across time and places to defines not only the childhood of its child victims but also their future (International Bureau for Children's Rights, 2010: 47). While children (Boys and Girls) have served as frontline combatants and played numerous combat related roles in armed conflicts throughout history, however, the dimensions of their agency and victimhood in recent conflicts notably in contemporary civil wars and insurrections in Africa calls for concerns.

The need to recognize the scale and magnitude of the impacts of armed conflict on children informed the setting up of an expert committee led by Grac'a Machel to this effect by the United Nation's Secretary General in 1996. In the introduction, of its report titled, 'Impact of Armed Conflict on Children', the Committee notes, 'that millions of children are caught up in conflicts raging in their communities in which they are not just mere bystanders, but are targets in such conflicts'. The report, notes that children fall victim to general onslaught against civilian population, die as victim of genocide, bore the effects of sexual violence, suffers multiple deprivations of conflicts which expose them to hunger and disease and multitude of them are systematically exploited as child combatants (United Nations General Assembly, 1996: para-1). Commenting further on the serious impact of conflict on children, the report notes that:

> Armed conflict across and between communities result in catastrophic levels of destruction in physical, human, moral and cultural terms. While many children are killed, maimed and suffers other forms of injuries, innumerable numbers grow up lacking the material and psychological needs, inclusive of the structures that gives meaning to social and cultural life of children and enhance their growth into socially responsible adult. This is because the whole gamut of social fabrics that hold their societies together, including their homes, schools, health systems and religious institutions have been torn into shreds (United Nations General Assembly, 1996: para 29).

Given the nature of its engagement, armed conflict violates every right of children be they that of the; the right to life, to the care of family and community, the right to health care, right to education, the right to personal development, nurturing and protection of parent and community. Indeed, that many of today's conflicts last for years or decades in some instances means that from birth to when they became adult, some children are and will experience multiple, overlapping and cumulative assaults on their persons and personalities. While the impact of violent conflicts on children's lives may be somewhat invisible and obscure, however, the implications such have on the children and community development is not only enormous but also catastrophic (United Nations General Assembly, 1996: para 30-31). Realising the devastating impact of armed conflict on children welfare and wellbeing especially in the light of the information provided in the Grac'a Machel report, the United Nations Security Council since 1999 has given the issue of children in war zones serious focus.

To this end, the United Nations Security Council adopted Nine (9) resolutions between 1999 and 2011. Each of these resolutions have embedded in them concrete provisions directed at protecting children caught up in conflict situations. Of particular significance among these, was resolution 1612 adopted by the Council on 26th July, 2005 that authorised the establishment of monitoring and reporting mechanism on six (6) egregious violations against children. These violations includes: the recruitment and/or use of children as combatant; killing and/or maiming of children in conflict situation; the use of rape and other grave sexual abuse of children in armed conflict as weapon/tactics of war; the conduct of armed attacks against schools, other educational facilities and hospitals; abduction of children; and denial of humanitarian access for children (United Nations Security Council, 2012: 4). The United Nations through its organs notably the (General Assembly, Security Council and Secretary General), national governments and other stakeholders continue to acts and take measured steps directed at reducing the impact of armed conflict on children.

These notwithstanding, and while there have been progress made, there continue to be numerous reported incidences of grave attacks directed at children notably girl-child in situations of armed conflict (Grac'a, 2001). Of particular devastating impact are those directed at educational institutions and carried out against girls in schools premises. This is because such attacks did not only represent direct physical assaults on the girls that are victims, they also represent assault on an institution (education) and constitute psychological assaults directed at scaring parents and communities from sending their daughters to school. The abduction of school pupils of which the Chibok case in North-Eastern Nigeria was highly notable represents an important highlight.

Extremist Ideology and Women Access to Education in the context of Conflicts-Insights from North-East Nigeria

Education, describe by Fafunwa (1974: 2) as the aggregation of the procedures and processes by which a child develops the abilities, attitudes and other forms of behaviour that add positive values to society is crucial for the advancement and growth of the individual and by extension

the society. Given the centrality of education to human advancement and development, international treaties, conventions, protocols and declarations upheld the rights to education for individual notably children. Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948; Article 13-14 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 1966; Article 28-29 of the Convention on the Rights of Child, 1989; Article 17 (1) of the African Charter on Human and People's Rights, 1981; Article 11 of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, 1990; and the African Women Protocol (part of the African Charter on Human and People's Rights), 2003 among other important international documents uphold the rights of children to education. The Geneva Convention, 1949 and the Additional Protocol, 1979 all emphasizes the protection of children in armed conflicts, the protection of schools and educational facilities and the rights of children caught up in situations of conflict to education (United Nations UDHR, 2015: article 26; Additional Protocol I: article 77-78).

Affirming the centrality of the provision of education to its citizens, the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria under Chapter II (Fundamental Objective and Directive Principle of State Policy), Section 18 notes that government shall direct policy towards ensuring the provision of equal and adequate educational opportunities at all levels (FRN, 1999: Chapter II, article 18). In the same vein, Section 15 of the 2003 Child's Right Act, guarantees the right to free, compulsory and universal basic education for the Nigerian Child (CRA, 2003: article 15). It is to this end, that the Universal Basic Education Act, 2004 tries to address

the issues of access, equity, equality, inclusiveness, affordability and the quality of basic education provision for all Nigerian children. There is no doubt that government at all levels continues to face challenges as it relates to meeting the obligations of providing access to qualitative education for Nigerian children. However, the incidence of conflicts especially that waged by the Islamist Boko Haram group against the Nigerian state had seriously constrained government efforts at delivering educational services to millions of children in safe environment in the North-Eastern part of the country.

Although the protection of schools and other educational facilities is guaranteed and assured under international humanitarian law and law of war, however, indiscriminate attacks directed at learning facilities, students and teachers alike have becomes a rampant issues in contemporary armed conflicts. Such grave attacks can include but not limited to; killing, abduction, kidnapping, illegal detention, torture, sexual abuse, force recruitment of children of school going ages and teachers to the rank of armed groups. Attacks damaging educational facilities, occupation of school buildings by armed groups, direct attacks on educational activities such as the conduct of examination and the prevention of the repairs of school facilities destroyed during attacks all constitute serious crisis that the provision of educational services faces in the context of environment of insecurity and fear that arise from the waging of armed conflicts between armed groups and between armed groups and national armed forces as the case may be (Isokpan and Durojaiye, 2016: 7; O'Mally, 2010: 59-60; United Nations General Assembly, 1996). This is particular the

case in North-Eastern Nigeria where the Boko Haram group have waged a war of terror against the civilian population and specifically targeting school children (with particular focus on the abduction of girls) and teachers, their schools and other educational facilities.

The Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati Wal-Jihad also known as Boko Haram appeared on the social radar in North-Eastern Nigeria around 2002. Although when translated into English language, Boko Haram literally convey a meaning that suggests that 'Western Education is Sinful'. However, the group ideology and belief rather affirms the supremacy of Islam, Islamic culture, civilization and value as against a mere opposition to western education (Olojo, 2013; Animasawun and Saka, 2013; Osumah, 2013; Alao, 2012; Adesoji, 2011; 2010; Waldek and Jayasekara, 2011; Onuoha, 2010). From 2004, the activities of the sect becomes worrisome as the group members engaged in occasional skirmishes with the Nigerian Police Force that often turned violent. Of particular importance was the raids carried out on police posts in the towns of Bama and Gworza, killing policemen and looting the stations armoury (Onuoha, 2010: 55-56). Boko Haram violent face-off with security establishments in Nigeria actively picked up from July 2009 and went full blown after the death of Muhammad Yusuf, then leader of the sect in the custody of the Nigerian Police Force (Animasawun and Saka, 2013: 12-13; Salaam, 2012: 149; Onuoha, 2010: 58-60). At the height of Boko Haram insurgent attacks against Nigerian and state targets, the nation's security seems to be largely incapable of stemming the tide of the group's violent actions against whatever targets they choose to strike especially in Borno, Yobe

and Adamawa states (Osumah, 2013: 536-537). The group was also able to hold territory controlling 20 local government councils at the peak of its attacks. From what appears to be a radical Islamist fringe group in between 2002 to 2009, the group through it mindless terror activities had graduated to a full blown terrorist movement (Salaam, 2012: 149).

While, the Boko Haram campaign of terror have been directed at symbols of state authority notably Police stations and military barracks, however, religious institutions, both churches and mosques have also not been spared. In the same wise, the group have target markets, motor parks, recreational centres, and residential areas (IRIN, 2013; Osumah, 2013). Indeed, nothing shows the indiscriminate nature of the Boko Haram's attacks on civilian targets better than its attacks on schools and educational institutions in the areas impacted by the group's insurgency. The gravity of the impacts and consequences of the group's attacks on institutions of learning, teachers and students in North-Eastern Nigeria becomes clearer when one considered the state of education in the region compared to other parts of the country before the insurgency becomes a national security threats. In relation to share of national population, the three northern geo-political zones contribute less than 30 percent of university enrolment. This attest to the gap in primary and secondary school enrolment between the Northern and Southern parts of Nigeria. To drive home the low level of school enrolment particularly in the North East, it is estimated that around 70 percent of children between the ages of 6-16 have not attended schools once in their life in Borno and Yobe states, the epicentre of the Boko Haram insurgency (Salaam, 2012: 151).

Boko Haram attacks on schools, students and teachers adversely impacts enrolments, parent willingness to send their children particularly (girls) to schools and the enthusiasm of teachers to go to work giving the lack of secure environment. Education authorities in the North-East notes that at the least 338 schools had been destroyed as a results of Boko Haram attacks and at least 194 teachers killed between 2012 and 2014 alone. In Borno alone, the National Emergency Management Agency, NEMA notes that at the least between 50 to 60 percent of schools in the state had been destroyed in Boko Haram attacks. There is also the reports that more than 200 schools were closed in Borno state alone, while services in those that were operating are susceptible to disruption owing to the tenuous security situation (ACERWC, 2016: 56).

While countless number of attacks were carried out against educational institutions, students and teachers, some are more widely reported given their atrocious nature. For instance on 16 December, 2011 there was an attacks on Air Force Comprehensive Secondary School, Dawakin Kofa in which 6 persons were reported dead. Boko Haram gunmen storm a student dormitory in a secondary school in Damaturu, Yobe State killing 7 students and 2 teachers. On 18 June, 2013 gunmen open fire on an examination hall in the Ansarudden Private School in Maiduguri killing 5 students. On 6 July, 2013 Boko Haram attack Government Secondary School, Mamudo killing 41 school children. On 29 September, 2013 Boko Haram members attack the male dormitory in the College of Agriculture, Gujba, Yobe State killing at least 44 students and teachers. On the 25th

February, 2014 Boko Haram gunmen attack Federal Government College Buni Yadi, Yobe State slaughtering and burning to death 59 students in their dormitory and abducting some female students.

The most daring and outrageous till date was the 14th-15th April, 2014 attack on Government Secondary School, Chibok Borno State in which the group abducted 276 female students from their school premise (The Guardian, 2014; IRIN, 2013, McElroy, 2013). The Chibok girls abduction generate controversies given initial Federal Government denial of the abduction, inertia and lacklustre attitude that characterised security agencies responses, and lack of coordination between the Federal Government and the Government of Borno State on what should be the line of response to the abduction and support for the families and the Chibok community. The audacious nature of the attack on the school and the outrageous numbers of girls abducted attracted widespread attention and solidarity both within Nigeria and from the international community. The hashtag #BringbackOurGirls# being a coordinated call on the Nigerian state to do everything possible to bring back the abducted girls to their parents and community went viral on social media platforms. The abduction also highlights the precarious nature of the security situation in the insurgency impacted areas. Offers of assistance on the rescue of the girls and to aid the military campaigns against the sect was made, notably by the United States, Britain and France. International assistance and support for the military efforts and on the humanitarian front becomes more forthcoming and coordinated after the 2015 general elections and the inauguration of the Muhammadu Buhari administration (Onapajo, 2017: 66-67).

Arising from the Boko Haram insurgency in the North-East, the United Nations reports that more than One (1) Million children had been forced out of school and more than Six Hundred (600) teachers killed. In order to forestall their daughters from been abducted and forced into marriage by the insurgents, as Boko Haram had done in the case of the Chibok Girl, it is reported that parents in the North-East notably Borno and Yobe states started engaging in the practice of marrying off their daughters of school going ages (ACERWC, 2016: xxv-xxvi). Without doubt, the challenges of insecurity occasioned by the Boko Haram insurgency, the group mindless attacks on schools, students and their teachers resulting in death, maiming, kidnapping and abduction of school children notably the girl-child severely impacted on access to education in the affected communities in North-East Nigeria especially for girls and women. Given that the region has been the least developed in relation to students enrolment (primary, secondary and tertiary) has meant that the attacks on educational institutions, students and teachers would have the effect of worsening the problem of access to education service most especially by girls and women in the region. Thus, the Boko Haram insurgency cannot but be said to be a bad news for the education sector in the North-East especially on the people and communities mostly impacted by the conflicts.

Conclusion
The inauguration of President Buhari administration has breath a new lease of life to Nigeria's counter-terrorism campaign against the Boko Haram. The regime has spared no efforts in dealing decisively with the Boko Haram issue inclusive of revamping and re-arming the Nigerian Armed Forces, creating a new Brigade with headquarters in Maiduguri with the intention of bring the fight to the terrorist group. The regime seems to give greater attention to intelligence gathering and the creation of a new position of Chief of Intelligence give credence to this. There has been more coordination both with security agencies and the Nigerian state has given more commitment to the transnational force, the Multinational Joint Task Force (comprising Nigeria, Niger, Chad and Cameroon) created to combat the scourge of Boko Haram. These and other efforts of the Nigeria State since 2015 has raised the fighting spirit of the Nigerian Armed Forces. The coordinated and intense attacks carried out by the Armed Forces and their collaboration with neighbours notably through the MNJTF has resulted in the weakening of the fighting capacity of the Boko Haram and degrade the intensity, persistence and brutality of the group attacks against targets in the North-East. While, it would be wrong to assert that the war against Boko Haram has been won, however, it will be disingenuous not to recognize the progress that has been made so far by the Buhari's regime on the war against the Boko Haram (Onapajo, 2017: 68-69).

At the height of the Boko Haram terror campaign in Nigeria's North-East, human soft targets, institutions and symbols of authority of the Nigeria state notably, military and police were prime target for attacks. The group's terror campaigns and the brutality that characterized it has means that people of the North-East were made to live in constant state of fear and insecurity as the group can make unannounced visit to any communities and targets within reach. More particularly impacted by the Boko Haram campaign of terror are facilities delivering essential

services notably health and educational institutions. Given, the group's ideology that looks down on western education and value, schools, students and teachers were prime target of Boko Haram attacks. The mindless attacks on schools, students and teachers resulted in thousands of deaths, maiming, kidnapping and abduction of school children notably adolescent girls. Many of the abductee (girls and women) were forced into marriage with insurgents, provide sex services and make to become sex slave. The brutality of the group campaigns against all segments of the population but notably girls and women forced many parents to withdraw their daughters from schools. This invariably means school enrolment for girls is seriously impacted by the group terror campaign. The destruction of schools also means that even for those that might want to risk going to school their access had been greatly constrained by the group's attacks on school facilities. Without doubt, the terror campaigns of the Boko Haram sect adversely impacted access to education by women and girls in North-Eastern Nigeria.

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