

Boko Haram insurgency in Adamawa state: opportunities for dialogue and reconciliation

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Abstract

Boko Haram insurgency that has been waging in Adamawa state since 2009 has taken its toll on the lives of the people leading to the destruction of lives and properties and large population displacement. Although the group has been severely weakened and many of the towns and communities under its control have been liberated, it has demonstrated capacity to continue to attack and raid communities at will leaving in their wake death, destruction and a growing feeling of despondency. It has become clear that the military option may not be sufficient to end the insurgency and this has led to growing calls to the federal government of Nigeria to consider dialogue and reconciliation as another option for ending the insurgency. Although previous governments and some national leaders have tried to initiate dialogue with the group, the general opinion of observers especially victims and their communities, is that government has not demonstrated enough will to identify the right actors and engage them in dialogue. This research examines the nature of Boko Haram conflict in Adamawa state, the current situation and the perceptions of the major actors about dialogue and reconciliation as a viable option for resolving the insurgency. The research also identified those actors that can best promote dialogue and reconciliation and the strategies by which they can be approached. The methodology for the research is the mixed method utilising both the primary data (KII and FGDs) which were analysed using the interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) and the secondary data collected was analysed using content analysis.

Keywords: Insurgency, dialogue, peace building, reconciliation, Adamawa

Introduction

The insurgency waged by *Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-Jihad* also known as Boko Haram (BH) in the north eastern part of Nigeria has been raging since 2009. Though the rate of attacks and number of towns under the control of Boko Haram has considerably waned since 2015, Boko Haram remains a threat to peace and security in Nigeria particularly in the North East including Adamawa state. It began in Borno state where members of the insurgent group attacked communities, killed citizens, looted and destroyed homes, businesses, public utilities and forcing over 2.5 million people into seeking refuge as internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the north east, over 550,000 IDPs in Chad, Cameroun and Niger Republics and over 240,000 refugees in the four countries

(United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [UNHCR], 2019). The relative successes of the operations of the group in Borno state emboldened them to steadily spread their campaign of terror to neighbouring Yobe and Adamawa states and a few other targets in Bauchi, Plateau and Abuja.

In Adamawa state, the activities of Boko Haram have largely concentrated in the northern senatorial zone with Madagali, Michika and Mubi North, Mubi South and Maiha LGAs bearing the brunt of the attacks while other LGAs like Hong and Gombi to a lesser degree, also experienced destruction of property and large population displacement Shalangwa (2017) At the peak of the insurgency in 2015, Madagali, Michika and Mubi were overrun by the insurgents and they established a caliphate in Mubi town. Hong and Gombi suffered considerably and banks, police stations, markets, homes and businesses were attacked and looted. Many people were killed and many women and children were abducted and taken into captivity while many more fled to Yola and other towns and across the border to Cameroun, Chad and Niger Republics.

The insurgency began to abate towards the end of 2015 and many towns and villages that were under the control of Boko Haram like Mubi and Michika were liberated. Other towns that have suffered considerably and were frequently attacked and were living in fear, although they were not taken over by Boko Haram like Hong and Gombi, began to experience relative peace. Most people who had earlier fled these towns and villages returned home to begin the arduous task of rebuilding their lives.

No doubt, the Nigerian military has considerably degraded the insurgents and they have taken back many towns and communities previously under the control of the insurgents, however, the insurgency is far from over. In Madagali LGA of Adamawa state where the insurgents continue to hold sway, many towns and villages outside Gulak the LGA headquarters are largely inaccessible and people living there are at the mercy of the insurgents. Farming and other economic activities have largely remained skeletal as they are restricted to a few kilometres outside town. Kidnappings, abductions, cattle rustling and other criminal activities have become the new reality for the people living in Madagali and other LGAs. Michika, Mubi and Maiha are living in constant fear knowing that the insurgents can attack at any time. Clearly the use of brute force has its limitations and it

is becoming increasingly clear that perhaps it is time to try other non-military options that may bring the insurgency to an end.

This research examines the nature of the Boko Haram conflict in Adamawa state, the current situation and the perceptions of the major actors about dialogue and reconciliation as a viable option for resolving the insurgency. The research shall also attempt to understand those actors that can best promote dialogue and reconciliation, the strategies by which they can be approached and also how they can engage the dialogue and reconciliation initiatives.

Boko Haram: A brief overview

The group called *Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati Wal-Jihad* (People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet's Teachings and Jihad) also known as Boko Haram, is an Islamist movement which has been operating in north eastern Nigeria since 2003 but gained prominence from 2009 when its leader Muhammad Yusuf was killed under questionable circumstances by the Nigeria security operatives in Maiduguri (Mohammed, 2014). Following the killing of its leader and the brutal repression of its members, the group went underground, regrouped, armed itself and reemerged about a year later to commence its campaign of terror executing jail breaks, attacking police stations, worship centres, public utilities, government institutions and the likes. They also engaged in assassinations, suicide bombings and eventually abductions, raiding and plundering towns and villages, rape, forceful conscriptions and many other nefarious activities forcing hundreds of thousands to flee their homes to live as internally displaced persons in neighbouring states or as refugees in neighbouring countries like Niger, Cameroun and Chad.

Another account traced the origin of the group back to 1995 when one "Abubakar Lawan established the *Ahlulsunna wal jamaa'ah hijra* or *Shabaab* group (Muslim Youth Organisation) in Maiduguri, Borno state. The group was largely non-violent and continued to grow and win converts until 2002 when Mohammed Yusuf became the leader (Taiwo & Olugbode 2009; Adisa cited in Onuoha 2014). Over the years, the group assumed different names like the *Yusufiyya sect*, *Nigerian Taliban* and recently *Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati Wal-Jihad* (Onouha, 2014). A third account has it that Boko Haram was established from a group of radical Islamist youth who worshipped at

Muhammadu Ndimi Mosque in Maiduguri, Borno state where Mohammed Yusuf was a preacher and leader in the youth wing, Shababul Islam (Islamic Youth Vanguard), of Ahl Sunnah, a Salafi group. Mohammed Yusuf was considered a charismatic and well-liked preacher who made effort to influence the full implementation of Shariah in a number of northern states and his inability to do so made him to criticize government as insincere and deceptive and called for an authentic Islamist Revolution which marked the beginning of its confrontation with government (Walker 2012).

Ideology and evolution of Boko Haram

Most radical Islamic groups across the world have the same objective, which is for Muslims to revolt and change “apostate” states and government and to re-establish a proper Islamic state (Mohamed, 2014). Boko Haram like other radical Islamic groups have similar ideology rooted in Salafi Jihadism and which seeks to purge Islam of all external influences and return it to its pristine practice as it was in the days of Prophet Mohammed. A onetime spokesman of the group Abu Qaqa explained that their objective is to put Nigeria in a difficult position by destabilizing it and replacing the current political system with Sharia and possibly return the country to a situation like the pre-colonial days when Sharia was practiced (International Crisis Group [ICG], 2005).

Boko Haram also preached against bad governance and corruption especially in the north which has led to increasing grinding poverty, unemployment and underemployment, breakdown of public infrastructure leading to absence of clean drinking water and sanitation, broken down hospitals without drugs and skilled personnel, dysfunctional public transport system, absence of housing for low-income earners, absence of social safety nets for the poor etc. The north has consistently come up with the worst level of poverty and unemployment in the country and living conditions in most of the communities are simply appalling. While the poor and downtrodden wallow in poverty, angry, frustrated and alienated, politicians on the other hand with their family members and lackeys are living in affluence flaunting their ill-gotten wealth shamelessly without regard to the poverty of the majority of people around them. Mohammed Yusuf in his sermons condemned corruption and impunity in government, and also organized an informal micro-credit scheme which he used to assist his followers with money to start a business (ICG, 2014). The fiery criticism of government and financial inducement given

to members has been appealing to many poor and unemployed youths and many have converted and joined Boko Haram. The group has continued to use financial incentives as an effective strategy for recruitment till date.

How did this relatively small group evolve to become one of the deadliest terror groups in the world? Mohammed (2014) identified three phases of the group's evolution beginning with the Kanama phase which was between 2003 and 2005. This phase was led by Mohammed Ali a Nigerian who was said to have trained and fought together with the Mujahideen in Afghanistan, he unsuccessfully tried to wage war against the Nigeria state but failed. The second phase also called the '*dawah*' (to invite) took place somewhere between 2005 and 2009. Rising from the ashes of the Kanama uprising, the group won converts, indoctrinated and radicalized through debates with *Ulamas* (clerics) from other sects attacking western values, democracy and secularism as well as criticizing the corruption and misgovernance of the government at the state and national level. The third phase began with the brutal oppression of the group and the killing of Muhammad Yusuf its leader by the Nigerian security operatives. This forced the group to go underground, reorganize, armed itself and re-emerged to confront the Nigerian state. The successes of the group in Borno state emboldened them to spread their campaign of terror to Yobe and Adamawa states and other parts of the country like Bauchi and Plateau states and the Federal Capital Territory Abuja where it successfully executed a number of suicide bomb attacks (Shalangwa, 2017). The activities of the group in Adamawa state were largely restricted to the northern senatorial zone comprising the following LGAs Madagali, Michika, Mubi (North and South), Maiha, and two local government in the central zone namely Hong and Gombi. Like they had done in other places, the group raided communities, killing, abducting, raping and carting away foodstuff, livestock, vehicles, motorcycles and anything of value that they could carry. They also destroyed churches, homes, shops and other business premises as well as public buildings, bridges, schools etc.

It is important at this point to give a brief background about the state and its socio-economic profile to help us understand and explain why the insurgency has taken the dimension it has in the state and particularly in Madagali LGA.

Methodology

The methodology deployed for the collection of field data for this research is the Focused Group Discussion (FGD) and the Key Informant Interview (KII). These qualitative research methodologies were deemed most appropriate because they would help to a face to face interaction and afford the researchers opportunity to probe further and elicit even more responses from the interviewees. Secondary data from previous studies on Boko Haram have also been utilized by the researcher to get better understanding about the insurgency which also helped in guiding the data collection in the field and the analysis.

The Boko Haram insurgents in Adamawa state have lost most of the territories they previously controlled and are now located in Madagali local government area although they still carryout pockets of attacks on nearby towns and villages like Michika, Lahsa, Uba etc. This makes Madagali the study site although due to security concerns the researchers could not go to Madagali and had to conduct most of the FGDs and KIIs in Michika town which is about 55km away from Madagali and takes about one hour drive. In all four FGDs were conducted and ten KIIs were held with different actors who are directly affected by the insurgency. All the four FGDs were conducted in Michika with four categories of actors as follows; Men, Women, Male youths and Female youths. Seven out of the eight KIIs were conducted in Michika with representatives of groups like the hunters, vigilantes, civilian joint task force (CJTF), the Police, the Muslim council, Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) and the Police Community Relations Committee (PCRC). Three KIIs were conducted in Jimeta/Yola the state capital with a traditional ruler and two community leaders.

This study seeks to explore ideas about dialogue and reconciliation as options for ending the Boko Haram insurgency by gathering the views of different actors who are either directly or indirectly involved with or affected by the conflict. The choice of the respondents listed in the preceding paragraph is deliberate as they are the people directly affected by the insurgency in Madagali LGA of Adamawa state. Most of the respondents have gone through the experience of displacement, living as IDPs either in camps or with friends and relations in host communities. Although most of them have returned home, they still continue to face the harsh reality of the insurgency in their towns and

communities. Their views and opinions on dialogue and reconciliation with Boko Haram is essential and will contribute immensely to the discuss.

A brief overview of study area: Adamawa state

Adamawa state was created by Late General Sani Abacha led military government in 1991. It was carved out of the former Gongola state and it occupies an area of about 38,700 sq. kilometers. The state shares borders with Taraba state to the South West, Borno to the North West, Gombe to the West and the Republic of Cameroun to the East. The state has 21 local governments divided into three senatorial zones as follows; Adamawa North (Madagali, Michika, Maiha, Mubi North and Mubi South), Adamawa Central (Hong, Gombi, Song, Girei, Yola North, Yola South and Fufore) and Adamawa South (Demsa, Numan, Guyuk, Shelleng, Lamorde, Mayo Belwa, Ganye, Jada, Toungo) (Shalangwa, 2017).The state is estimated to have a total population of about 3,178,150 people (NBS, 2011) most of whom are farmers and traders with many also employed by the state and federal government. The state also has about 58 ethnic groups.

It is worth noting that socio-economic conditions in Adamawa state has been dismal since the early 2000s due to a number of challenges like desertification, land degradation and poor rainfall leading to poor farm yields. This has increased poverty, hunger and unemployment and the state has consistently ranked among the poorest states in Nigeria (Shalangwa, 2017). The National Bureau of Statistics in its report on poverty profile in 2010 estimated that the state had 55.4% of the population suffering from food poverty, 74.2 % were gripped by absolute poverty, while 74.3% were leaving on less than one dollar per day (Nigeria Bureau of Statistics [NBS], 2012). The table below shows the incidence of poverty in Adamawa state and across the north eastern region.

Table 1. State Incidence of Poverty by Different Poverty Measures in North East Nigeria

States	Food Poverty		Absolute Poverty		Relative Poverty		Dollar per day based on an adjusted PPP	
	Food Poor	Non-Poor	Poor	Non-Poor	Poor	Non-Poor	Poor	Non-Poor
Adamawa	55.4	44.6	74.2	25.8	80.7	19.3	74.3	25.7
Bauchi	54.1	45.9	73.0	27.0	83.7	16.3	73.1	26.9
Borno	33.2	66.8	55.1	44.9	61.1	38.9	55.1	44.9
Gombe	71.5	28.5	74.2	25.8	79.8	20.2	74.2	25.8
Taraba	45.2	54.8	68.9	31.1	76.3	23.7	68.9	31.1
Yobe	58.5	41.5	73.8	26.2	79.6	20.4	74.1	25.9

Source: Shalangwa (2017)

To add to this, Adamawa state has one of the highest levels of unemployment in the country which at 2010 was about 31.4 percent, higher than the national average (Aiyedogon & Ohwofasa, 2012). These figures have only marginally improved since then as the National Bureau of Statistics reported a slight decrease in unemployment rate in the state to 29 percent and the underemployment rate of 24 percent in the third quarter of 2018 (NBS, 2017).

Madagali is a town at the extreme northern corner of the Adamawa state sharing border with Michika (Adamawa state) to the north, Askira Uba (Borno state) to the west, Gwoza (Borno state) to the south and Republic of Cameroun to the east. A number of reasons make Madagali a suitable location for the insurgents and explains why it has been difficult to dislodge them from the LGA. First, its proximity to Borno the epicenter of the insurgency makes it vulnerable and insurgents have attacked Madagali and communities from Gwoza, Askira Uba and Cameroun mountains where the insurgents freely operate. Secondly, the topography of the area is mountainous which makes it convenient for the insurgents to move easily and they strike and run back into the mountains. Third and perhaps more importantly, the internal contradictions of the Madagali communities which gave rise to an army of resentful and angry youths and men who joined or are collaborating with the insurgents to inflict pain on communities that have treated them as sub humans for many years. Blacksmiths (matakam) and children born out of wedlock

are generally treated as outcasts in the area, many of these outcasts joined Boko Haram and their parents or guardians became collaborators and informants for the insurgents.¹

The current state of the Boko Haram insurgency in Adamawa state

At the height of the insurgency in 2015, Boko Haram had overrun seven local governments and had established a caliphate in Mubi the second biggest town and the economic hub of the state. The situation has considerably improved since then as the insurgents have been seriously degraded and many areas previously controlled by them have been liberated except for Madagali LGA which is still largely under the control of the insurgents. Although degraded, Boko Haram is still in control of most of Madagali local government area except Gulak the local government headquarters and a few other towns like Bebel, Vigirik, Vokolos, Vorkotok, Visik which are considered as relatively safe.² Many towns like Gubla, Sukur, Daurawa, Kamburu, Mazawa, Vengo, Borkoto, Hidik, Yibango, Makshe, Humshe, Jaje, Gatha, Chakama, Mandaka, Waga, Barngwaza, Gubla etc. are considered as no-go areas because the insurgents control those areas.³ Most of the respondents reported that they feel unsafe even inside Gulak as the insurgents can be encountered if one goes just a few kilometers (3 kilometers) outside the town. Most community people are generally afraid to go to the farms without been accompanied by hunters or vigilantes.⁴ The situation is almost like a stalemate, while the military is in control of the local government headquarters, Boko Haram is in charge of most of the surrounding towns and villages.

Movement for community people is highly restricted and difficult as the military now requires some form of identification at checkpoints. Although this has helped to control the movement of insurgents, it is also hampering the free movement of community people as most of them are farmers and do not have the national identity card that is required to pass through military checkpoints.

¹ KII with a traditional ruler

² FGD with group #3

³ KII with respondent #3

⁴ FGD with group #4

There is also a growing believe among the communities in Madagali that Boko Haram is regrouping and possibly getting funding from outside the country. It is also alleged that Boko Haram is looking inwards and raising funds locally by engaging in several criminal activities like kidnapping, cattle rustling, armed robbery, organ harvesting etc.⁵ One respondent explained that he believes the high rate of kidnappings, abductions and disappearance of people can only be explained by this.

A number of the respondents were of the view that the current situation has been made possible because of military highhandedness and the unwillingness to join hands with community people to fight the insurgents.⁶ The community people alleged that the military are unfriendly and hard to communicate with. ⁷ There are reports that sometimes when vigilantes or hunters report Boko Haram movement to the military, nothing is done about it.⁸ An example was given of a particular situation where a non-state armed group (Yan-gora) from Gombi LGA came to Madagali and requested to go into Mandaka a town occupied by Boko Haram to confront them, but the military turned down the request and would not allow them enter the town.⁹ This may be due to low morale occasioned by poor equipment and lack of logistics which leaves the military less motivated than the insurgents (Obasi, 2015). The current state of the conflict can be summed up under four major themes thus;

1. General insecurity

There is serious threat to security of lives and properties especially outside Gulak where Boko Haram has demonstrated the capacity to attack at will. Most of the people who are well-to-do have relocated to Yola and other places because of the risk to their lives. Almost all the traditional rulers in the local government now reside in Yola the state capital from where they administer their domains. The general perception is that nobody is safe and anyone can fall victim at any time. Kidnapping for ransom, cattle rustling,

⁵ KII with respondent #7

⁶ KII with respondent #7

⁷ FGD with group #1

⁸ KII with respondent #2

⁹ FGD with group #4

armed robbery and the likes have become daily occurrences and many people have had to pay kidnappers ransom to rescue themselves or a family member. Criminal elements have no doubt taken advantage of the security challenge and joined the fray so much so that one cannot really tell such crimes are perpetrated by Boko Haram or otherwise, the important thing is to note is that Boko Haram created the situation which the criminals are taking advantage of. This view is corroborated by Stroehlein (2012) as Boko Haram has become a cover for all manner of criminal activity and political thuggery of all sorts. The group is generally assumed to be responsible for crimes like bank robberies, kidnappings, cattle rustling etc. even where they have not openly taken credit for the act.

2. Weak governance structure

Secondly, the people in the local government area have been denied the opportunity to enjoy the benefit of governance at that level and civil authority lacks complete control of most parts of the state. The courts, police stations, local government offices, hospitals and schools have all been abandoned leaving the people to their own devices. This has seriously worsened an already bad situation and heightened the feeling of despondency among the people many of whom want the insurgency to end because they are tired of the killings and destruction. Most respondents expressed desire for peace to return so that they can have their lives back.¹⁰

.....We are tired of the killings and just want peace to return. We want to be able to sleep well, go to the farms without fear and to see our children grow (FGD with women)

3. Dwindling economy

The insurgency has taken a huge toll on economic activities in Madagali and its surrounding local governments as most economic activities have dwindled to a trickle of what it used to be. Farming which is the main stay of the local economy has been the worst hit because most people cannot access their farms due to the fear of being kidnapped or killed by insurgents. This has seriously affected food production leading to scarcity and increase in cost beyond the reach of many, leaving them at the mercy of humanitarian organisations or benevolent neighbours and friends. Livestock owners have also suffered immensely from cattle rustling in the area. The rustled livestock are

¹⁰ FGD with group #2

usually moved through Boko Haram controlled territories to discourage the owners from pursuing them and taken to Gamboru where they are alleged to be transported to the eastern part of Nigeria with armed military men as escorts.¹¹ The economy of Madagali is in the hands of the insurgents and the military while the community people are left with very little. A respondent told the researchers that while Boko Haram is in control of the bushes and are the sole suppliers of resources like shear butter which is a major source of income for the community people, the military is in control of the sales of alcohol, fuel, collects rent for landed property and some farmlands.¹²

4. Weakening social cohesion

Social cohesion in Madagali is down to its lowest ebb due to the many years of suffering from the insurgency. The internal contradictions of the Madagali communities and the many years of alienation and maltreatment of some people gave rise to an army of resentful and angry youths and men who joined or are collaborating with the insurgents to inflict pain on communities that have treated them as sub humans for long. Blacksmiths (*matakam*) and children born out of wedlock are generally treated as outcasts in the area, many of these outcasts and their parents or guardians joined Boko Haram because of their appealing messages of equity and justice, became collaborators and informants for the insurgents.

Most of these people who joined Boko Haram or who have children or relatives in Boko Haram are known but people are afraid to speak up for fear of reprisal. One respondent told researchers that some Boko Haram members come to their family home at night to eat, rest and return back to the bush very early the next morning and no one dares say a word about that.¹³ The town is filled with Boko Haram informants and collaborators such that no one knows who to trust. Mutual suspicion and fear have almost paralysed and severely affected relationships between family members, neighbours and friends. Due to uncertainty and fear, most people are afraid to report to security agencies even when they see suspicious characters or movements.

¹¹ KII with respondent #7

¹² KII with respondent #7

¹³ KII with respondent #4

The need for dialogue and reconciliation

The Boko Haram insurgency has been going on in Adamawa state for the past ten years inflicting misery, sorrow, death and destruction on hapless communities. Although the insurgent have been largely 'degraded' and dislodged from most of the local government areas that they were controlling (seven local government areas as at 2015) to only one presently, the war is far from over. The Nigerian government has spent millions of Naira since the outbreak of the violence to equip and train the military with the hope that they would be able to bring the insurgency to an end, but that has not happened. What has happened however is that the death toll (civilian and military) continues to rise, public facilities are being destroyed, and communities continue to be raided and plundered and gross human rights violation inflicted on them. The situation cannot be allowed to continue and it has become pertinent for government and other actors concerned to explore other options that would lead to the resolution of this war.

Dialogue and reconciliation: the position of actors

For some time now the need to explore other means of ending the Boko Haram insurgency through dialogue and reconciliation has been gaining ground (Ibrahim et al., 2013, United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2018; Kukah Centre, 2018; Olojo, 2019). Interestingly, a good number of the actors either directly involved with or affected by the conflict are not averse to the idea. At the national level, several former leaders of Nigeria have at various times called for the insurgents to lay down their arms and embrace dialogue. Former President Olusegun Obasanjo in 2011 made effort to dialogue with Boko Haram and even visited Maiduguri, Borno state where he held talks with Babakura Fugu, the in-law to Mohammed Yusuf the late leader of the group who was killed in Police custody (Isine, 2015). Unfortunately, that did not yield the much and ended tragically with the murder of the man that received Obasanjo a few days after the visit. Former Head of state General Abdulsalami Abubakar in 2013 made a call to the government of Nigeria to dialogue with Boko Haram to end the insecurity and killings in north-eastern Nigeria. In his call, he urged the government to pursue dialogue with the insurgents as it is the only way to end the insurgency and end the bloodshed in the north (Uchehara, 2014). Former president Goodluck Jonathan also sought to dialogue with the insurgents when in May 2014 he declared that his government was ready and willing to

dialogue with the insurgents if they are also ready to renounce terrorism and embrace peace (The Cable, 2014).

The Datti Ahmed led peace initiative between the government and Boko Haram in 2012 unfortunately failed prematurely when some of the discussions with top government officials were leaked to the press which led to the withdrawal of Dr Datti Ahmed from the discussion. Also, many prominent Nigerians like former head of the interim government Chief Ernest Shonekan, former governors like Gabriel Suswam of Benue, Kashim Shettima of Borno, former minister of information Labaran Maku, the Shehu of Borno whose domain is the battle ground of the insurgency Alh. Abubakar Ibn Garbai have all at various times expressed their support for dialogue and reconciliation with the insurgents and called on the Nigerian government to seek ways to initiate dialogue with Boko Haram (Uchehara, 2014).

In Adamawa state both traditional and religious leaders especially in Madagali, are of the view that government should follow the path of dialogue and reconciliation with the insurgents to end the conflict because it has become clear that military might alone cannot end it.¹⁴ This view is also shared by non-state armed actors like vigilantes and hunters who have been in the forefront of the conflict. This group is of the view that although the insurgents have lost a lot of ground and do not have the kind of men and heavy firepower that they had some years ago, they have been able to hold their ground in Madagali and have demonstrated capacity to attack at will. In different FGDs conducted for community people, the men and youths (males and females) in Madagali, the general believe is that the insurgents cannot be defeated by sheer military might alone and that government should consider dialogue and reaching a peaceful resolution with the insurgents.

Dialogue and reconciliation Advocates

From the interviews and FGDs conducted, most actors are favourably disposed to dialogue as an option for ending the conflict. Traditional and religious leaders, the men, the youths and non-state armed actors like vigilantes/hunters all agree that dialogue and

¹⁴ KII with respondent #7, #3 and #4

reconciliation are feasible options and are willing to give their support if called upon to do so.

.....We do not believe that the insurgents can be defeated by military might alone, so other options like dialogue should be tried and we are willing to give our support (FGD with Male youth)

They also agree that traditional and religious leaders are the people that can best promote dialogue and reconciliation because they are respected and trusted by their communities and this is corroborated by the Governors' forum on building peace in the Lake Chad basin convened by the UNDP in 2018. A respondent in one of the KIIs suggested that parents of Boko Haram members should not be left out in the dialogue and reconciliation effort because most of them communicate with their children and even send supplies to them in the bush or drop-off such supplies at certain pre-arranged spots. The point here is that if these parents can be convinced to speak to their children to lay down their arms and come home, the insurgency will end in no time.¹⁵

Military Approach Advocates

Interestingly, the women hold a contrary opinion, for them Boko Haram can be defeated militarily and government just needs to muster the will to adequately arm both the military and non-state armed actors and Boko Haram will be crushed.¹⁶ Another group that is skeptical about the idea of dialogue and reconciliation with the insurgents is the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF). For them, the crimes committed by the insurgents are too heinous to be forgiven and considering that some of these people killed their own parents or guardians, women and children should be enough to show that they cannot be trusted.¹⁷ In another interview, a respondent explained that the military option may work if the military changes the way that they engage with both the community people and the insurgents. He alleged that often times the military personnel seldom move from their checkpoints even when they are informed of Boko Haram activities close by and

¹⁵ KII with respondent #7

¹⁶ FGD with group #2

¹⁷ KII with respondent #5

unless that changes, it is unlikely that the military would be able to defeat and flush out Boko Haram any time soon.¹⁸

Engagement Strategies

In the course of the FGDs and interviews, a number of interesting suggestions were made by the various groups and individuals on how to approach the various actors involved in the conflict. The first is that government should kick start the process by reaching out to all the actors and bringing them to the table. A second suggestion is that government knows how to contact all the actors including the leadership of Boko Haram and initiating dialogue with them separately and eventually bringing all the actors together for reconciliation. Some respondents believe that government can explore the same channels through which they were able to secure the release of some of the Chibok/Dapchi girls and initiate dialogue with the insurgents.¹⁹ The third suggestion is that government should establish a dialogue and reconciliation committee and co-opt repentant Boko Haram members into the committee. The assumption is that these repentant Boko Haram elements may still have contact with their people in the bushes and they may also offer valuable suggestions as to how to reach the insurgents and possibly begin dialogue and reconciliation.

Competing demands

It is unclear if the insurgents as a group or as individuals have expressed any demand for dialogue and reconciliation to happen. For instance, the Shekau faction has consistently scoffed at any talk of dialogue and the other factions have not publicly made any demands whether to government or to communities as to what needs to happen before dialogue or reconciliation can take place. What is clear however is that a number of individuals from within Boko Haram are willing to lay down their arms and embrace peace if they get the assurance that they and their families would be safe.²⁰

..... Some Boko Haram members have told us that they are ready and willing to lay down their arms and surrender but they fear for their lives and the lives of their families (KII with Muslim leader)

¹⁸ KII with respondent #1

¹⁹ FGD with group #1, KII with respondent #1 and #4

²⁰ KII with respondent #4

Some of them are commanders with close to a hundred people under their command, but they hold back because of the fear of persecution and what may befall their families. As for communities, what they want and have been demanding for is the cessation of conflict and for peace to return to their communities. A respondent puts it like this;

..... “we are tired with everything and just want peace to return, we want our old lives back”.²¹

Risks in promoting dialogue and reconciliation

Some of the respondents interviewed do not think there is any risk involved in promoting dialogue while others are of the view that it would not be known until it is tried.²² A respondent explained to the researchers that the risk in promoting dialogue that he is concerned with is that government may not be able to sustain the peace process and also the possibility of politicians betraying the trust of both community people and Boko Haram.²³ Some respondents identified personal risk as their main concern in promoting dialogue. They explained that some of them who have helped in negotiating the release of people abducted by Boko Haram and have tried to seize that opportunity to try to persuade the Boko Haram members that they negotiated with to lay down their arms and surrender, have been branded as Boko Haram collaborators.²⁴

..... I was involved with the negotiation for the release of a relation of mine who was abducted by Boko Haram. I tried to use the opportunity to persuade the Boko Haram members to surrender and people began to say that I am one of them....
(KII with Muslim leader)

For another respondent, the risks for him is that there is so much suspicion and distrust among community members because anyone can betray you for getting involved. The implication of this is that people who believe in and are willing to promote dialogue and reconciliation become reluctant to openly discuss or promote dialogue because they fear for their safety.²⁵ One suggestion for addressing this is to involve traditional and

²¹ FGD with group #2

²² FGD with group #3

²³ KII with respondent #1

²⁴ KII with respondent #7

religious leaders as well as other respected community leaders to get involved in the dialogue and reconciliation process. These people should identify and reach out to all community people who have grievances against the insurgents and get their buy-in for the dialogue process otherwise it would end up as an exercise in futility.

Actors to be engaged in dialogue and reconciliation

From the discussions and interviews that have been held, it is clear that the people of Madagali except for the CJTF and the women group, believe that dialogue and reconciliation is a viable option for a peaceful resolution of the Boko Haram insurgency as against the use of military force.

.....We the traditional leaders are ready and willing to support dialogue and reconciliation and we are sure that with good enlightenment many community people will support it too (KII with traditional ruler)

The major actors in the conflict were identified as important for the dialogue and reconciliation process. The military and non-state armed actors like hunters/vigilantes have been at the forefront of the conflict and have apprehended many of the insurgents including commanders and foot soldiers. Contact with the insurgents may have provided the opportunity for them to gather valuable Intel about the insurgents that may be very helpful in a dialogue and reconciliation process. Repentant Boko Haram members and their parents including parents of active Boko Haram members (who are generally known in Madagali) are also important to the dialogue process because many of them are believed to be in touch with their children and comrades in the bushes. These people can be used to reach out to Boko Haram members especially those that are willing to lay down arms and surrender to initiate dialogue with them or through them.

Also, the communities including traditional and religious leaders, men, women and youth are all important to the dialogue process because without their cooperation and support, the process is bound to fail. As victims who have suffered from the insurgency, their willingness to forgive the insurgents and embrace dialogue and reconciliation is a big boost to the discussion. Traditional and religious leaders were unanimously agreed to lead the process because of the respect that they command amongst the people while government is expected to facilitate the process by reaching out to all the actors and providing the logistics and whatever that is required for dialogue to happen. For dialogue and reconciliation to happen, government has to demonstrate its sincerity and the will to

see it through because most actors are worried about the lackadaisical manner that government has been handling the insurgency.

..... A lot of us in Madagali believe that dialogue is possible even with Shekau's faction, but politics has prevented government from dialoguing with Boko Haram (KII with Christian leader)

Government must therefore muster the courage to do whatever is necessary to end this conflict because it has been going on for too long and many families and communities have suffered irreparable losses and despondency is beginning to set in. Many people in the conflict zone and surrounding environments have expressed their weariness and are praying for the conflict to end. For the communities in Madagali, the conditions are right for dialogue and reconciliation as the people have expressed readiness to forgive those who have killed their loved ones, destroyed their homes and their means of livelihood, and have generally made their lives a living hell for the past ten years. In spite of all that they have suffered, they are willing to support the dialogue and reconciliation process so that peace can return to their communities. This is not a small sacrifice that they are willing and ready to make, it is up to government to take the lead and continue to seek ways to dialogue with the insurgents.

Conclusion

The Boko Haram insurgency which has been ongoing in Adamawa state and other parts of the north east for the past ten years has taken its toll on the people. Many have lost loved ones while others have lost homes, businesses and the likes. Communities are still being attacked and the number of casualties rising daily, it is apparent that the military option favoured by government is not yielding the desired result. Although the government of Nigeria has at various times tried to initiate dialogue with the insurgents and failed, that does not mean that government should stop trying. Government must use any and all available means to reach out and bring the insurgents to the dialogue table so that this needless carnage can end. It behoves on government to seriously consider the non-military option and expedite action in reaching out to all actors and organize a dialogue and reconciliation initiative that is all inclusive and addresses the needs and grievances of all (especially the victims). Through dialogue and reconciliation, workable

resolutions can be reached to first end the conflict and subsequently build peace and bring live back to these troubled communities that have suffered for too long.

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