BEYOND RELIGIOUS FUNDAMENTALISM: MULTIDIMENSIONAL POVERTY AND BOKO HARAM'S APPEAL AMONG NORTHERN NIGERIAN YOUTHS

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ABSTRACT

More than a decade into the self-proclaimed Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati Wal-Jihad's (Boko Haram) campaign of terror against Nigeria, local and international observers have struggled to explain the raison d'être of the emergence of the extremist group. While most scholars and researchers downplay some contextual factors in Nigeria and trace the source of the unrest to religious fundamentalism in northern Nigeria, this article argues that radicalisation and terrorists acts of the Boko Haram transcend religious fundamentalism and thus, should be seen as a product of an interplay between multidimensional poverty and failure of the Nigerian state to meet its statutory obligations to the people. It further demonstrates that widespread disenchantment and local grievances account for the Boko Haram's success in attracting significant local support in northern Nigeria. Finally, the article concludes that since it is firmly rooted in northern Nigeria's peculiar socio-economic environment, the unrest can only be quelled through a concerted effort to alter deep-rooted poverty ravaging the region.

Keywords: Boko Haram; northern Nigeria; multidimensional poverty; radicalisation; terrorism

INTRODUCTION

The history of Nigeria is replete with cases of militarised ethnic or sectarian groups threatening the continued existence of the state. Even by Nigeria's own ethnic and sectarian conflict-ridden post-independence standards, none of these ethno-religious militant groups have been most destructive and, at the same time, posed such a monumental threat to the country's security as Boko Haram. The increasing terrorists acts by the Boko Haram in northern Nigeria has drawn enormous attention, both locally and internationally, as Nigerian security forces struggle to cope with the spate of its attacks.

While the Boko Haram's threat and crimes against humanity and Nigerians linger, with the country's stability at stake, the unanswered question is: what are the underlying factors driving this religiously-motivated radical group? Opinions, depending largely on Nigeria's defining cleavages, differ. Analysts view the Boko Haram through divergent interpretative lenses. These interpretations, expectedly, follow traditional lines of religious, ethnic and regional cleavages in Nigeria. Some scholars believe that there is a transnational

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dimension to the emergence of the militant group (Onapajo, Uzodike & Whetho, 2012), a view supported by Oyebode's 'local tentacles of a global octopus' (Sahara Reporters, 2013). Similarly, for some other security experts and observers, the Boko Haram's emergence can be located in deep-seated religious fundamentalism in northern Nigeria that has plagued the country since its independence in 1960.

Nevertheless, even the most well-meaning proponents or advocates of the above school of thought can still lose sight of the persistent danger and vulnerabilities created by multidimensional poverty and the failure of the state to provide basic services, especially in countries prone to violent conflict (OECD, 2016). Radicalisation or extremism does not emerge or occur in a vacuum. Poverty-induced disillusionment, according to Okorie, Udochu and Bamidele (2016), can bring together groups of people who regard and identify themselves as economic and social outliers who are marginalised, dispossessed, aggrieved, and frustrated. This article, therefore, attempts to challenge the prevailing narrative that religious fundamentalism solely explains the emergence of the Boko Haram, and argues that multidimensional poverty in the northern part of the country contributes significantly to the group's acts of terror.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

To understand how multidimensional poverty drives the Boko Haram unrest and provides an enabling environment for its radicalisation process and recruitment, it is pertinent to contextualise the concept of multidimensional poverty. Although poverty is commonly defined by a one-dimensional measure (usually based on income), it is difficult to capture the multiple dimensions of poverty with a single indicator. With its Human Development Report (HDR) of 1990, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) broadened the concept of poverty measurement and started measuring developmental progress made by countries with the Human Development Index (HDI). Thus, Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) is a comprehensive approach towards poverty measurement that entails measuring poverty beyond monetary terms, namely by identifying how people are being left behind across three key dimensions: education, health, and living standards (UNDP & OPHI, 2020). These three dimensions are made up of ten poverty indicators such as the lack of access to potable water, quality education and adequate nutrition. The multidimensional poverty index provides a broader picture of poverty and plays a complementary role to traditional monetary poverty measures by capturing people's acute deprivations in education, health, and living standards (UNDP, 2018). Other issues often raised in multidimensional poverty include: are school-age children attending school? Do families and communities have access to electricity, healthcare facilities, potable water and regular sanitation (UNDP & OPHI, 2020).

These factors can explain multidimensional poverty and the MPI uses information at household levels to identify the number of individuals suffering from overlapping deprivations. Multidimensional poverty involves the various deprivations encountered by poor people in their daily lives, and when an individual is deprived in one third of the above said weighted indicators, he falls into the category of multidimensionally poor. To this end,

this study will draw from relative deprivation (RD) theory as expounded by Gurr in his book, *Why Men Rebel*. Gurr defines relative deprivation as a perceived discrepancy between men's value expectations and their value capabilities (Gurr, 2015, p. 24). Gurr explains that while value expectations are those conditions of life or socio-economic amenities to which the masses believe they are legitimately and justifiably entitled, value capabilities, are those socio-economic conditions they think that they can attain or maintain, considering the environment or the availability of the means to achieve those goals (Gurr, 2015). Deprivation is an attitude, a feeling of discontent or perceived injustice.

In Runciman's formulation, an actor or individual is relatively deprived of B because he does not have B but knows and sees others who have B. Looking at others having B, the individual wants to get B and believes that having B is feasible (Runciman, 1996). Since the individual believes that having B is feasible, it helps him differentiate between unrealistic and realistic value as well as hope. If the individual realises that his desire is unrealistic, there will be no deprivation. Likewise, he will feel deprived if he knows that his desire is realistic.

Gurr provides a valuable explanation and insight into the radicalisation of groups like the Boko Haram. For Gurr, structural poverty, inequality and other social vices of bad governance within a country act as breeding grounds for violent or radical movements (Gurr, 2015). Put differently, relative deprivation leads to aggression and rebellion. According to Gurr, the level of an individual's expectation is often accelerated or angered by the demonstration effect of seeing other groups improve while his group does not. In every aspect of the human development index, the northern part of Nigeria, especially the north-east, is the least developed region in the country. Under these circumstances, it is arguable that Boko Haram members were largely drawn into violence because of their perception of the unacceptable socio-economic condition. Dissatisfaction and anger among northern Nigerian youths today are on the common premise that the state has been unfair to them.

There is a general sense of frustration and anger among the sympathisers and members of the radical group against the Nigerian state, rooted in the inability of these people to achieve what they feel belongs to them. They believe that the commonwealth has been hijacked by the political elites as the majority of the population live in abject poverty. In democratic societies, the campaign of terrorists, no matter how distorted it seems, reflects the economic and political aspirations and beliefs of the large segment of society (Reich, 1998). Their message resonates with the people, thus attracting sympathy and support.

The greater the disparity between the expectations and capabilities of the people, the greater is the depth of discontent. When people compare their current value position with others, especially in a society with inequitable distribution of social and economic goods, it triggers an atmosphere of tension that leads to violence. This theory explains how deprivation of social and economic goods leads to frustration, aggression, and ultimately collective violence. Hence, it is appropriate to explain how multidimensional poverty creates an atmosphere of discontent that drives the Boko Haram's radicalisation and

recruitment agenda. Multidimensional poverty in northern Nigeria increases the potential for recruitment by militant groups in the region, thus increasing Boko Haram's appeal among the youth. For the United States' National Counterterrorism Centre (NCTC), discontent and frustration about perceived social exclusion, unmet needs and unfairness, can drive an individual to participate in extremist activities/groups (NCTC, 2010). It is believed, this involvement reduces the sense of helplessness and meaninglessness caused by frustration, and aids the individual to gain the perception of accomplishing his goals. Goodhead (2001) observes that:

Poverty, particularly that which occurs in the midst of riches, can alienate citizens from the government and leadership, break down the solidarity between the citizens and the government, and undermine the stakeholder and proprietary interests of citizens in government and society. Because such citizens are aggrieved, they are vulnerable to radicalisation by individuals or groups which seek to manipulate them against the state, particularly in a setting of youth bulge and economic disparity.

THE ORIGINS AND EMERGENCE OF BOKO HARAM

Similar to other terrorist groups such as the Al-Shabaab, there are several accounts of the Boko Haram's beginnings, and most of these trace the origins of the group to 2002. Known as the Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati Wal-Jihad (People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet's Teachings and Jihad), it is believed that the group has been in existence since the 1990s, under the name – Shabaab Muslim Youth Organisation, led by Mallam Abubakar Lawal.

Apparently when Lawal departed for Saudi Arabia to further his studies, the group's leadership vacuum was filled by Mallam Muhammad Yusuf, who was known for his charismatic leadership qualities. In 2002, Yusuf formally founded the 'Islamic' group in Maiduguri, the capital city of the Borno State, in north-eastern Nigeria. Yusuf made the group popular and was able to steer its affairs such as charity, lectures and proselytisation in a non-violent manner until 2009. Reports also have it that Yusuf established a Quranic school and a mosque in the Borno State which attracted children from poor families across northern Nigeria. In line with this, Yusuf began the literal interpretation of the Quran and advocated for the '*haramisation*' (prohibition) of Western-styled education and culture, as according to him, it contradicted with the teachings of the Quran. This paved the way for the locals to dub the group as Boko Haram.

Boko, a Hausa word for Western-style education, was combined with an Arabic word, *haram*, which means prohibited, to literally indicate that Western education is forbidden or unlawful in Islam. For the group, anything western is completely un-Islamic and must be banned and that the influence of western culture and values amongst the locals had in fact weakened Islam (Onuoha, 2018). The only way to rid Nigeria of public corruption and underdevelopment is through the establishment of an Islamic society where social justice, fairness and equality reigns supreme. Although personalities such as Ali Modu Sheriff and Kachalla assured Yusuf of their readiness to help in the actualisation of

this dream, they later reneged, thus leaving Yusuf and his 'lieutenants' angry at what they perceived as deception of the governing elites, especially those from the Borno State.

Although from the 1990s to 2008, the group remained relatively peaceful, 2009 became a turning point when the group graduated to a new phase characterised by clandestine regrouping, guerrilla warfare and terrorism. The event that ignited this phase was when the government introduced a law that mandated every motorcyclist to wear a helmet. The group refused to abide by that law, which in turn led to a confrontation with the state security apparatus during a funeral procession that resulted in injuries and deaths of many members of the group in Borno State.

When the demand for a dialogue and peaceful resolution to the matter was ignored by the government, Yusuf made a vow to avenge the deaths of his members. Making good his threats, in July 2009 Yusuf started an armed rebellion against the Nigerian state that resulted in the death of more than 600 people, including civilians, group members and security personnel. In retaliation, the authorities ransacked the hideout of the group in the Bauchi State, confiscating their explosive-making materials. A few days after the Nigerian security forces killed a significant number of Boko Haram members and managed to quell the unrest, a spokesperson for the group promised revenge (Thurston, 2019, p. 143).

> *We have started a jihad in Nigeria which no force on earth can stop. The aim is to islamise Nigeria and ensure the rule of the majority Muslims in the country. We will teach Nigeria a lesson, a very bitter one...From the month of August, we shall carry out series of bombings in southern and northern Nigerian cities, beginning with Lagos, Ibadan, Enugu and Port Harcourt...We shall make this country ungovernable, kill and eliminate irresponsible political leaders of all leanings, hunt down those who oppose the rule of Sharia in Nigeria and ensure that the infidels do not go unpunished.*

The full-fledged insurgent group decided to mobilise itself for reprisal attacks, resulting in the death of many more civilians and security personnel. Since then, Nigeria has undergone serious security breakdown and challenges perpetrated by this extremist Islamist sect (Boko Haram) that has been at war with the Nigerian state.

The five-day uprising came to an end when the Nigerian security forces captured Yusuf but a few days later, Yusuf was extrajudicially killed in police custody (Abegunrin, 2016). The death of Yusuf sent the remaining members of the group underground, prompting a jubilation by the security forces that *Yusufiyyah* (initially named after Boko Haram's founder – Muhammadu Yusuf) had been crushed. This was not meant to be. Terrorism experts believe that the arbitrary killing of Yusuf and human rights abuses by the Joint Military Task Force (JTF) were largely responsible for the ultra-radical turn and transformation of the group from a youth organisation to the terrorist group as it is known today. In other words, Yusuf's death served as a catalyst to foment pre-existing hostilities towards the Nigerian state and its security forces. This incident can be said to be the most pivotal moment in the transformation of the group as it triggered and facilitated the

radicalisation of Boko Haram's followers and members who embarked on a path of retributive and extreme violence. In the words of Marchal, the killing of Yusuf "provoked a staunch reaction from Boko Haram members who primarily wanted to settle their scores with the police and the army" (Marchal, 2012, p. 2).

For Thurston, the period between 2010 and 2013 was one of the murkiest in the history of Boko Haram – the period when the extremist group exploded back onto the Nigerian scene. The resurgence of Boko Haram, according to Thurston, "was marked by the formulation of its doctrine into a wartime ideology. Abubakar Shekau, Yusuf's successor, invoked Yusuf's ideas, adapting them to the movement's new direction… Shekau fit Yusuf's death neatly into the Boko Haram's presentation of itself as the victim of the state violence, rather than the aggressor" (Thurston, 2019, p. 142).

The group re-emerged a year after the killing of Yusuf under a new brutal and extreme leader – Abubakar Muhammad Shekau, who has not only conducted the affairs of the extremist group until today, but also internationalised it. With Shekau at the helm, the hardening of the Boko Haram's exclusivism (religious or ideological exclusivism that strongly opposes other value systems, which also includes rival interpretations of Islam), a change in rhetorical style (from peaceful preaching to propaganda) and outright abandonment of mainstream politics, have shaped the group. Under the ruthless leadership of Shekau, Boko Haram has intensified its attacks, often kidnapping individuals including women and children, attacking schools, police stations, churches and state institutions. Its deadly and sustained insurgency has largely targeted civilians through its various tactics – abductions, bombings and assassinations, invasion of neighbouring states and communities, seizures and control of more than 50,000 square kilometres of territory in north-eastern Nigeria. Sadly, in April 2014, it was reported that the Boko Haram kidnapped more than 200 schoolgirls in Chibok, the Borno State and later boasted to have 'sold and married them off.' Despite global outrage over this heinous crime, the group has continued to kidnap, torture, and rape innocent Nigerians and foreigners. Inhuman and degrading treatment, gender-based violence against women and children have been the hallmark of this group, especially in its north-eastern base. Due to this terror and violence perpetrated by the group, some observers and scholars, while downplaying or ignoring other social and economic drivers, are of the view that radicalisation and emergence of the Boko Haram is traceable to global jihadism and Islamic fundamentalism in northern Nigeria. Explaining the Boko Haram phenomenon solely from this paradigm is not entirely plausible.

BEYOND RELIGIOUS FUNDAMENTALISM

When religious ideas are used as a justification for violence and recruiting tool by an organisation, such group is classified as a religious terrorist group (Bryant, 2003; Raj & Griffin, 2017). In this regard, groups like the Boko Haram, Al-Qaeda, Al-Shabab, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), Jemaah Islamiyah (JI), Harkat-ul-Mujahideen and many more, are considered religious terrorist groups.

In a bid to explain the emergence of Boko Haram, some scholars have often advanced the narrative that the former is in fact a by-product of the ultra-religious environment that had long existed in the northern parts of the country. To prove the point, the movement led by Mohammed Marwa (or Maitatsine) in the 1950s and into the 1970s is often cited as an example of the fact that the Boko Haram was merely an outcome of religious fundamentalism that have long subsisted. This is often done by understating economic deprivation as one of the major determinants of the Boko Haram terrorism. Although the eagerness or tendency to frame the emergence of the Boko Haram on religious fundamentalism due to what Okorie, Udochu & Bamidele (2016) see as a 'global climate of increased hyperactivity' of Islamist extremist groups can be high, it is apposite to note that religion, in the case of the Boko Haram, is in fact not main the motivating factor. Boko Haram's ideology fundamentally differs from individual motivations for extremism. In the context of radicalisation or terrorism, religion constitutes an ideology, not a motive or root cause. Individuals, in the words of Coolsaet, use a cut-and-paste religion/ideology to justify indiscriminate violence and overcome moral hesitations (Coolsaet, 2013).

Seul observed that religion was not, in essence, the cause of religious conflict, rather, it was merely the fault line along which intergroup identity and resource competition occurred (Seul, 1999). In agreement with Seul, Salisu, an Islamic cleric, argues that the level of poverty, resentment, and frustration among Nigerian youths are fertile grounds for activities of extremist groups such as the Boko Haram. In his view, the activities and conduct of the Boko Haram are totally un-Islamic, and they boil down to the failure of successive Nigerian governments to make the welfare of its citizens a priority. Salisu further states that a "nation that allows its youths to be idle is sitting on a time bomb because frustrated people seek relief in religion" (Tell, August 10, 2009:10 in Atim, 2013, 184). Violent groups such as the Boko Haram are driven by socio-economic grievances that are very real while using religion as a catalyst for agitation. In agreement, Agbiboa believes that issues such as political instability, social inequalities, and deepening poverty in Nigeria have pushed many youths into taking solace in religion, which not only reinforces their potency in Nigerian society, but also provides alternatives for struggles and political expression that frequently fuel conflicts in the country (Agbiboa, 2015).

Thus, it is important to observe here that radicalisation does not depend nor derive its root solely from religious ideas. Although religion, in the words of Tan, inspires the perception of enormous gratification and empowerment and represents a tremendous legitimising force for terrorist groups (Tan, 2010: 83), religion is not really a radicalising factor, but rather an umbrella that unites various radicalising factors. Individuals who live under conditions of economic deprivation and poverty may draw succour from their religion, but the move to draw meaning, inspiration or answer from religion was necessitated in the first instance, by an issue that is unrelated to religion. Although religious ideas can easily appeal to an individual, facilitate the radicalisation process, change an individual's perception of life and his environment (which could encourage such individuals to become so active in the society), religion cannot solely account for an individual's susceptibility or vulnerability to radicalisation.

## POVERTY, LOCAL GRIEVANCES AND THE EMERGENCE OF BOKO HARAM

Most scholars believe that explaining the Boko Haram exclusively as a terrorist group will definitely reduce any chance of fathoming what the group actually represents and why it has been able to attract large followership and local support in northern Nigeria. Instead of viewing it exclusively as a terror organisation, the Boko Haram should equally be seen as emblematic or the manifestation of how successive Nigerian governments have failed to deliver social, political, and economic dividends to the populace. Historical evidence shows that when nation-states fail to perform their primary responsibilities of delivering basic services to the masses, they lose legitimacy before the citizens, with many increasingly questioning their allegiance to the state. Similarly, it creates a vacuum which allows sub-state actors or radical groups to exploit. The goal here is to reduce inequality, ameliorate the plight of the aggrieved and neglected citizens, while enjoying absolute allegiance and support from them. Thus, Yusuf, (and later Shekau), decided to exploit this failure of the Nigerian political elites by co-opting the discontented and frustrated northern Nigerian youths to wage a war against the source of their frustration – the Nigerian state. This explains why grievances and attacks of the extremist group are fundamentally localised (Agbiboa, 2015). Agbiboa laments that the evilest forms of political violence and terrorism that have plagued Nigeria since the return of democracy in 1999 arose from the poorest zones of the country – northern Nigeria (Agbiboa, 2015).

Nigeria is a country replete with all the indices of state failure. These include poor governance, pervasive institutional corruption, endemic poverty, rampant unemployment, limited and poor healthcare delivery, neglected and decrepit public infrastructures, sharp economic decline, exclusion, group grievances and abandonment of the citizens to the forces of nature (Robert, 2004). It is a state that has consistently been pushed to the brink of utter collapse, with limited opportunities for permissible livelihood. These deficiencies and conditions have created a frustrated and vulnerable army of unhappy youths who are more inclined to join radical groups for survival. Falola observes that economic decline, usually exacerbated by public corruption and government mismanagement, serves to fuel various violent conflicts in Nigeria (Falola, 1998). This, in turn, creates irresponsive and weak governments whose citizens often violently challenge. When a state, wittingly or unwittingly, forfeits its role and obligations to sub-state actors, the aftermath is frustration and general discontent from aggrieved individuals as well as groups who become increasingly likely to choose the path of violence. With a strong sense of group identity, theories of violent conflict argue that shared grievances about social exclusion, injustice, and marginalisation lead to a group's violent responses against the root cause or source of their marginalisation (Andersen & Taylor, 2007). Afinotan and Olaleye (2016) argue that corruption-ridden public space, environmental degradation, and poverty, in the perspective of a failed Nigerian state, created a yawning social, economic, and political vacuum in governance, which was filled by opportunistic power seekers, using pseudo-religious clichés to mobilise the gullible, ignorant, and vulnerable northern Nigerian youths.

Despite its vast natural resources, Nigeria is home to the highest number of extreme poor people in the world (Kazeem, 2018). On the other hand, whether terrorists are middle-class, rich or poor, their staging areas and bases of operation, according to Sachs, are

unstable societies plagued by poverty, hunger, rapid population growth, unemployment and lack of hope (Sachs, 2016). Radicalisation and extremism have greater appeal to poor individuals or groups with fewer opportunities because they are expected to be more prone to commit crimes (Galston & Hoffenberg, 2010; Lister, 2004). Poverty rates are on the rise in Nigeria, and the socio-economic conditions of Nigerians continue to deteriorate, creating dissatisfied and frustrated youths who are ready to engage in 'anything' to survive. In all the six geo-political zones of Nigeria, and Abuja, this condition is more evident in the northern part of the country, especially the north-eastern state of Borno – the birthplace of Boko Haram, where rising poverty and income inequality is rife. The figure below demonstrates this further.

Figure 1: Chart showing zonal incidence of poverty by different poverty measures

Zonal incidence of poverty by different poverty measures
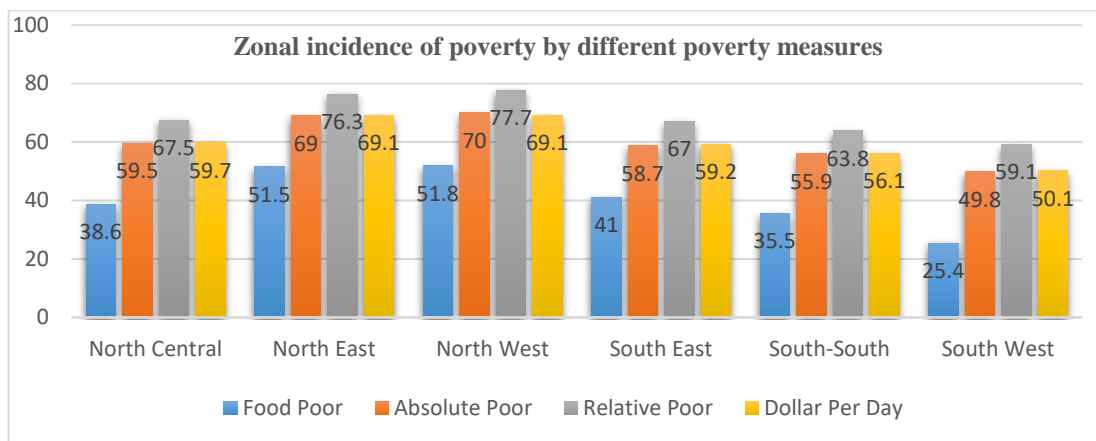
Source: NBS, *Nigeria Poverty Profile 2010 Report*.

The above table shows that the northern zones (especially north central, northeast and northwest) have the worst indices of poverty in Nigeria and goes on to reveal widely-known relative poverty and deprivation of northern Nigerians. While regions like the South-south and South-west have 55.9 percent and 49.8 person in absolute poverty respectively, the north-east and north-west, hotbeds of Boko Haram, have 69.0 percent and 70.0 percent in absolute poverty, respectively.

For the Office of the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) of the UN, poverty breeds conflict, creating a vicious circle which constitutes an immense threat to global development, human security and poverty alleviation (United Nations, 2005). This also explains why northern Nigeria's poverty rate was put at 67.8 percent by the United Nations' Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) of 2015. It is therefore not surprising to understand why northern Nigeria in general, and the north-east in particular, has become synonymous with terrorism, violent crime, poverty, deprivation, and hunger. The World Bank reports that:

The composition of the populations in the north and in the south is consistently different in terms of a breakdown by three dynamic categories - chronic poverty, transient poverty, and the permanent non-poor. More than two-thirds of the   chronic poor in Nigeria reside in the north. The highest concentration is in the northwest. Among households that are

highly prone to shocks, 60 percent are also concentrated in the north. Only 30 percent of the permanent non-poor live there. (World Bank, 2016).

According to the World Bank report of 2016, all the six geopolitical zones, with the exclusion of the northeast, showed a decline in incidence of poverty over the 2004 to 2013 period. Based on poverty headcount index, the report further indicates that the north-eastern region (the epicentre of Boko Haram), showed a shrinking middle class, substantial increase in income inequality and increase in poverty incidence from 45.53 percent to 47.56 percent over the same period (World Bank, 2016, p. 103).

In its 2017 report, the UNDP and the OPHI (that covers the global MPI of 105 countries), provided three dimensions (health, education/knowledge and living standards) of global MPI. When these three dimensions (and their 10 indicators) of poverty are examined in the Nigerian context, the contribution of multidimensional poverty in the radicalisation and terrorism becomes evident. According to the UNDP, when an individual is deprived in one third of the indicators, he is said to be multidimensionally poor (UNDP & OPHI, 2019).

How did rising poverty contribute to Boko Haram's emergence and its radicalisation process? When compared to what is obtained in the southern part of the country, it becomes obvious that the Boko Haram act of terror is a consequence of poverty bedevilling the north-east and the north-west. When measured by the MPI, it becomes obvious that the north-eastern states are the most multi-dimensionally deprived regions in Nigeria. Based on Nigeria's Human Development Index (HDI) average of 0.521, table 1 below shows that north-eastern states' HDI/MPI scores are below the national average, compared to those of the Southern region.

Table 1: The Multidimensional Poverty of some selected States based on Nigeria's geo-political zones

States/Region	MPI	Incidence of Poverty (H) %	Intensity of Poverty (A) %	Severe Poverty %
Abia	0.043	10.7	39.9	1.4
Enugu	0.039	10.3	37.6	0.7
Imo	0.036	9.6	37.1	0.4
Delta	0.055	13.4	40.6	2.2
Edo	0.021	5.6	36.8	0.1
Rivers	0.029	7.3	40.2	1.3
Plateau	0.282	54.9	51.5	26.7
Kogi	0.136	32.1	42.4	7.0
Kwara	0.147	30.2	48.5	14.1
Lagos	0.010	2.4	42.0	0.4
Ogun	0.059	13.2	44.6	4.0
Osun	0.046	11.3	40.5	1.8
Gombe	0.458	77.4	59.2	55.1

Bauchi	0.504	81.3	61.9	63.0
Yobe	0.491	81.7	60.1	59.4
Kaduna	0.296	56.7	52.1	30.4
Kano	0.401	68.8	58.4	46.3
Katsina	0.464	77.5	59.9	55.6

Source: *Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative* (OPHI) (compiled by authors)

Nigeria, Africa's largest economy, is home to the largest number of extremely poor people in the world, estimated to be more than 100 million. Recently, the World Bank warned Nigerian leaders that failure to take necessary measures would result in the country becoming home to more than 25 percent of the world's extremely poor people by the year 2030 (World Bank, 2019). The 'giant' of Africa's position in the UN Human Development Index (HDI) value in 2015 was 0.527, placing it at very low position of 152 out of 189 countries (UNDP, 2016; Akpajiak Pyke, 2003), which shows that it is 'seriously off target' toward achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2030 (World Bank, 2015). According to the Nigerian National Bureau of Statistics, the number of poor people in the country in 1980 was 17.1 million. In 1985, it rose to 34.7 million, and 39.2 million in 1992. By 1996, it was at 67.1 million, at 68.7 million in 2004, and in 2010, it rose to 112.47 million. As more people descend into poverty, there is also an increase in crime rates and violent conflict. The north-eastern states remain the poorest states in Nigeria, while the southern states are those with lowest poverty rates. Most people in the northeast are economically and socially deprived hence creating insecurity and violence. The table below shows the headcount per capita poverty measure of selected states in Nigeria in the years 2004 and 2010.

Table 2: Percentage of selected states' in head count per capita poverty measure

State	2004	2010
ABIA	40.9	50.2
ANAMBRA	41.4	53.7
BAYELSA	40.0	44.0
RIVERS	56.7	47.2
OSUN	44.6	37.5
OYO	38.0	50.8
BENUE	64.7	73.6
NIGER	64.4	51.0
YOBE	88.0	81.7
BAUCHI	87.8	84.0
KATSINA	72.9	77.6
KADUNA	54.2	64.0

Source: NBS, *National Poverty Rates 2004 and 2010* (compiled by authors)

A look at the above table shows a stark contrast in poverty headcount of these selected states. In 2004, the Oyo state (south-western) had the lowest poverty rate at 38.0, while Yobe (northeast) had the highest poverty rate of 88.0 percent. Abia (south east)

estimated to have the lowest poverty rate of 50.2 percent in 2010, outperformed Bauchi (north east) that had the highest poverty rate of 84.0 in the same year.

For most scholars, poverty provides a fertile ground for terrorism. Again, where human needs are great and service gaps persist, people tend to accept help from almost anyone willing to provide it (Brainard & Chollet, 2007; Guiora, 2008). In the Nigerian context, Boko Haram has been able to provide 'help' in the form of basic social services for the rural communities, and in doing so, has recruited and radicalised many young men in the process. This view confirms with those of Gitterman (2007) and Heitmeyer & Hagan (2005) who believe that poverty breeds violence. In other words, poor people are always in search of immediate solutions to their problems, which include taking up arms. The 2010 poverty headcount/measure of some selected states in different zones in Nigeria also shows the same worrying gap and trend in household per capita expenditure between the north and the south.

Table 3: 2010 Poverty rates for Absolute, Relative, Dollar/day and Food Poverty measures (%)

Zone	State	Food Poverty	Absolute Poverty	Moderately poor based on 2/3 of the weighted mean household per capita expenditure regionally deflated (Relative poverty)		US$ per day
	Bayelsa	23.3	47.0	57.9		47.0
South-south	Rivers	26.3	50.4	58.6		50.6
	Anambra	34.2	56.8	68.0		57.4
Southeast	Imo	33.3	50.5	57.3		50.7
	Lagos	14.6	48.6	59.2		49.3
Southwest	Osun	19.5	37.9	47.5		38.1
	Nasarawa	26.8	60.4	71.7		60.4
North central	Kwara	38.1	61.8	74.3		62.0
	Jigawa	71.1	74.1	79.0		74.2
Northwest	Katsina	56.2	74.5	82.0		74.8
	Gombe	71.5	74.2	79.8		74.2
Northeast	Yobe	58.5	73.8	79.6		74.1

Source: NBS, *Nigeria Poverty Profile 2010 Report* (compiled by authors)

From the table above, it is obvious that relative poverty and widened economic disparities between the Northern zones when compared to the Southern zones and how it contributes to grievances and unrest in the zone. When states like Lagos and Osun recorded the least percentage of 14.6 and 19.5 in food poverty, Gombe state and Yobe (Boko Haram hubs), recorded the highest percentage of 71.5 and 58 percent, respectively. Radicalization and violent extremism is therefore inevitable in these circumstances.

Radicalisation and violent extremism are inevitable in these circumstances. With fewer assets and entitlements than other members of society, the poor man becomes the victim of social discrimination. Where these inequalities coincide with regional identities, the potential for conflict appears to rise (Shepherd & Brunt, 2013). In this context, Boko Haram is afforded an opportunity to use poverty and economic inequality to motivate and recruit vulnerable youths.

Acknowledging the fact that the level of poverty in northern Nigeria gives rise to insecurity, Kashim Shettima, former Chairman of the Northern State Governors Forum, points out that in 2050, 70 percent of Nigeria's poor will be living in the northern parts of the country. He laments that joblessness, desertification, illiteracy, lack of access to basic facilities and unemployment, will surely create the environment necessary for insecurity and disaster. Nigeria, in the view of Shettima, is a country of two nations, the south is much more stable and prosperous, while the north on the other hand, is in a poverty trap. He further stresses that if you are looking for a poor man, get somebody wearing a northern cap because, and poverty wears a northern cap in Nigeria (Odunsi, 2016). Various World Bank reports and statistics in different indicators of human development (education and poverty) point to the fact that social and economic underpinnings surrounding the emergence and militancy of Boko Haram should, as a matter of urgency, be given far more attention.

Most scholars and intergovernmental institutions agree that Boko Haram is a class movement against rising poverty and poor governance. Their views also collaborate with official statistics within Nigeria which present the country as a paradox – a rich country with extremely poor people. Despite its vast resources and economic growth, poverty is rising in Nigeria on a daily basis, with more than 90 million people in extreme poverty. This number has continued to increase, leaving more Nigerians, especially those from the northern parts of the country, frustrated, aggrieved and vulnerable to radicalisation. Frustration nurtures apathy and rebellion among the citizenry, resulting in restiveness, violent conflict, insurgency, terrorism, and other anti-social activities (UNDP, 2018). In his response to the question – 'what makes the youth inclined to recruitment and radicalisation by Boko Haram', Dauda stated:

> *What do you expect when the society does not care for you? These youths believe that our leaders only care about their immediate families. While the children of the elites eat more than 5 times a day, and provided with everything they need, those of the poor man are left to die on the street, in a country that God blessed with every kind of resources." (Dauda, interview, 1 June 2016)*

Goodhand (2001) suggests that poverty inflames violence in two dimensional ways: first, poverty contributes to frustration and grievances which can turn into violence especially if it coincides with ethnic, religious, or regional boundaries. Secondly, those living in poverty can easily be organised into banditry. He further posits that poverty, especially that which occurs in the midst of vast wealth (as in the Nigerian case), is capable of alienating the masses from the leadership and government, breaking down solidarity and social cohesion between the government and the governed, and resulting in the undermining or weakening of the interests of citizens in society and government. When citizens are aggrieved and frustrated, they become vulnerable to radicalisation by groups or individuals which seek to exploit and manipulate them against the government and the state. Poverty, argues Atwood, contributes to feelings of exploitation, dependency and alienation (Atwood, 2003). These feelings in turn, result in the breakdown of order and violent conflict. This conforms strongly to the *2005 Armed Conflicts Report* 2005 which observed that over 47 percent of the countries with a low index of human development keep witnessing violent conflicts (Project Ploughshares, 2005). Cold-Ravnkilde and Plambech are in agreement with the above submission when they noted that Boko Haram easily recruits impoverished and poverty-stricken youths as members and fighters by offering them jobs, money, and addressing their deep-rooted grievances related to public corruption, failed governance, and underdevelopment in some of the country's poorest regions (Ravnkilde & Plambech, 2015) – the north-east. Boko Haram emerged under the context of biting poverty in northern Nigeria, an environment that makes youths targets of extremist groups.

CONCLUSION

Based on the foregoing, this paper views Boko Haram as a social and economic movement by poverty-stricken Nigerians of north-east extraction, and a by-product of widespread unemployment, dysfunctional governance, economic deprivation and poor economic conditions ravaging the country. There is no overstating that extremist groups such as Boko Haram, usually face little or no hurdle in recruiting aggrieved and frustrated followers. The increasing insurgency success of the Islamic State West African province (ISWAP) in the Lake Chad region clearly shows that economic neglect and poor service delivery in the north-eastern part of the country have been driving local support for Boko Haram. Again, available evidence shows that aggression and frustration make communities susceptible to radicalisation and recruitment. Put differently, the radicalisation and emergence of extremist groups should be seen as a protest on poor governance and absolute poverty.

While it is true that Boko Haram is known for its religiosity, it must be stressed that the main reason for its emergence and sustenance is state failure which gave rise to poverty and widespread disenchantment in the northern part of the country. Suffice to say therefore that Boko Haram's war against the Nigerian state and its security forces are retaliatory moves by economically disadvantaged and marginalised sections of the country. Theories pertaining to human needs and social conflict also contend that the failure of a human being to fulfil his basic needs often leads to the outbreak of violent conflict (Doyal & Gough, 1991). These theories are consistent with the relative deprivation theory by Gurr that argue

that the inability of an individual to obtain the desired values leads to anger and frustration – the precursors to violence (Gurr, 2015).

Thus, the task of the war against Boko Haram now is to unravel how to dry up its pool of fighters and deter more recruits through poverty reduction, development, and public services delivery. To this end, rather than excessive reliance on military solutions, there is a need to mitigate the drivers of the unrest for enduring peace and stability. Facing a challenging economic situation, Marchal argues that efforts at peace require economic improvement for states in northern Nigeria – the most destitute zones of the country's population. As argued by Agbiboa,

> *While the overriding goal of Boko Haram is to wrest control from the Nigerian state and to impose Sharia legal code across the entire country, the cocktail of political corruption, chronic poverty, and youth unemployment in northern Nigeria continues to fuel members and supporters of Boko Haram. (Agbiboa, 2013).*

To tackle the phenomenon, there is the need to provide public goods and services such as employment, health and quality education. This can play a significant role in alleviating aggression, despondency, frustration, sense of neglect, and marginalisation that put people at risk of radicalisation and extremism. Again, this will not only help in dissipating the unrest caused by Boko Haram, but will also deter the emergence of other groups. Put differently, unless issues of weak institutional capacity and multidimensional poverty are urgently confronted, any military success that has been recorded against Boko Haram will be *pro tempore*.

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