
THE LENS

A SMALL STEP TOWARDS INCLUSIVE SOLUTIONS THAT CAN HELP FOSTER PEACE: PERSPECTIVES FROM NIGERIA'S KANO AND BORNO

The continued attacks by Boko Haram on the Nigerian military and on civilians in North East Nigeria send a strong signal that the conflict in Nigeria's northeast region is far from over.

As people, especially those outside of the city centres, continue to live in fear of being attacked the need for sustainable solutions are urgent.

During September 2021, the IJR's Inclusive Economies Project conducted a five focus group interviews, three Borno and two Kano, to determine some of the material drivers of this conflict. During these focus groups, local youth, community activists and government workers were engaged on topics of safety and security, drivers of youth recruitment into extremist groups, their perceived role of the state in restoring human security and development as well as programmes that they believe would be most helpful in bolstering economic inclusion for youth.

Central to the barriers of finding work are ethnic and religious fracturing. Youth and community activists report that employers prefer to hire from their own ethnoreligious group, making it difficult for youth to leave home and seek out opportunities in neighbouring states. The underlying frustrations and disappointments are now affecting their ability to mediate or resolve minor conflicts peacefully, and as such, youth are reportedly resorting to violence over minor disputes, willing to participate in risky action and continue to be a source of recruitment for Boko Haram, Islamic State's West Africa Province (ISWAP) and armed bandit groups.

THIS ISSUE'S FEATURED ARTICLE:

A small step towards inclusive solutions that can help foster peace: Perspectives from Nigeria's Kano and Borno

- Jaynisha Patel

These groups offer them opportunities to not only earn an income or pivot themselves for upward mobility, but also right the injustices they perceive have been done to them by the state.

"IT IS CRITICAL THAT SOLUTIONS, ALTHOUGH NOT SIMPLE, PROMOTE INCLUSION THAT HELPS REBUILD SOCIAL COHESION AND ULTIMATELY MAKES COMMUNITIES RESILIENT TO EXTREMIST NARRATIVES."

When it comes to programmes that can help increase the resilience of youth to recruitment into armed groups, locals speak about the need for skills transfer programmes, mentorship opportunities and small loans for business start-up capital. Moreover, programmes such as skills transfers or mentorships would create an opportunity to breakdown ethnic and religious bias when it comes to employment. These programmes can be used to foster skills transfers and mentoring across ethnic and religious groups, helping to cultivate a broader sense of social and economic inclusion.

However, it is important that this is preceded by research that informs the skills that would be in demand in the coming decade so that the government, the private sector, and civil society can work together in exposing youth to meaningful skills development opportunities.

Other core concerns emanating from these interviews was the confluence of continued physical and economic insecurity. In terms of the latter, broken food supply chains have become a particular source of worry. The area being an agricultural stronghold, has seen farm workers staying home for fear of violent theft, kidnapping and in some cases, being killed. Locals share stories of kidnappings that, because of a lethargic response from law enforcement, have left those kidnapped with no hope of a safe return.

Workers staying home for fear of their life has not only resulted in diminished household income for many locals but has also impacted food supply chains and growing food insecurity for the region. A civil servant in Borno reflects:

We used to go far and wide to farm, but now we cannot go outside the immediate vicinity to farm and help ourselves because Boko Haram operates in those areas. Where we even go and farm, the fear is that in the end, our crops would be stolen, and some people will be killed in the process.

Communities are, moreover, no longer safe to trade with each other, as the roads used to travel between areas are wrought with bandits looking for easy targets to steal goods off. Sadly, and despite a successful bid to demobilise thousands of armed bandits, sporadic attacks continue to create a sense of insecurity that is severely undermining their livelihoods, causing capital flight, and disrupting supply chains.

Yet, material deprivation and human development deficits have preceded the emergence of armed extremists' groups and bandits. The northeast has suffered from decades of state neglect, resulting in literacy and educational outcomes far below the national average. As a result, even those young people with academic qualifications, report that opportunities for gainful employment are few and far between.

In Borno and Kano, locals believe that the state has failed them at even the most rudimentary level. Their development needs are of the most basic kind, and include things like easy access to clean water, safe and useable roads, quality healthcare and education. The absence of governance was noted by nearly all those consulted for this research, yet they still perceive the state as the legitimate supplier of these basic goods and services.

It is critical that solutions, although not simple, promote inclusion that helps rebuild social cohesion and ultimately makes communities resilient to extremist narratives.

Read more [here](#).