

Child insurgents in West Africa: The Boko Haram example In Nigeria, Chad and Cameroon

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Abstract

One of the most shocking horrors of Boko Haram's rampage in West Africa has been the insurgents' ability to turn captured boys and girls into destroyers and killers. Since 2014, Boko Haram group has used hundreds of young boys and girls to terrorize north-east Nigeria and some of her northern neighbours such as Niger, Cameroon and Chad. A critical aspect of neglect in available materials on this subject is the inadequate presentation and documentation of child insurgents in Boko Haram insurgency. This study examines children's involvement in Boko Haram insurgency. Specifically it discusses the implications of child insurgents on national development.

Keywords: Boko Haram, child insurgent, Cameroon, development, insurgency, Niger, Nigeria.

Introduction

The involvement of children in war is a disturbing social and political phenomenon. It is a universal problem with adverse security and developmental implications in West Africa. In the 1990s and 2000s, most of the wars in Africa such as Sierra Leone, Liberia, Sudan, Angola, Cote d'Ivoire and Burundi were not without children. Children under the age of 18 were coerced, manipulated and recruited into fighting forces. Despite the protection of the International Convention and Customary International Laws over children, this underaged group is still widely used in armed conflict. The most worrisome is the recent phenomenon of child insurgents in the Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria, Chad and Cameroon. Since 2014, the use of child insurgents within the selected countries has been on the increase.¹ Young boys and girls have been recruited into Boko Haram terrorist group and are designated both destructive and non-destructive roles. For example, some are foot soldiers with AK47 assault rifles and other sophisticated weapons, while some are trained suicide bombers. Child insurgents perform home chores, intelligent and sexual roles.²

A more disheartening scenario of child insurgents in West Africa is that, unlike child soldiering in civil wars, where large number of children voluntarily joined the warring

factions,³ the majority of child insurgents were kidnapped, manipulated and brainwashed to be destructive.⁴ For example, in April 2014, some 276 chibok school girls were abducted in Borno State.⁵ Several other girls have been kidnapped by the Boko Haram terrorist group. According to Fatma Samoura, United Nation Humanitarian Coordinator in Nigeria, over 200 000 boys and girls are living in abduction and girls are perpetually in forced marriage and sexual slavery.⁶

The ability to turn captured boys and girls into killers has become a major source of concern to both the governments of Nigeria, Chad, Cameroon, and the international community. Rescued captives portend danger to the larger society, as the process of rehabilitation may not successfully detach former abductees from violence or the act of aggression. Child insurgents are a threat to national security and the stability of post-insurgency political order. The years of brutality and violence indoctrinate children into a culture of aggression and cycle of violence.⁷ The goal of this study is to examine the involvement of children (under the age of 18) in Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria, Cameroon and Chad and discuss the development implications of child insurgents in the three countries.

Conceptual framework

The search for definitions of a 'child' or what constitute 'childhood' is a difficult and complex exercise. To avoid the many problems surrounding the concept 'child' or 'childhood', this paper will adopt the definition of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). CRC defines a child as "every human below the age of eighteen years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier."¹⁸ In November 1989, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the above definition. In 1990, the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the child (ACRWC) adopted this definition. ACRWC advances a similar definition of childhood – that a child is every human being below the age of 18.⁹ The terms 'minor' or 'underage' are sometimes used synonymously to describe children under 18 years of age. A child insurgent is simply defined as any person under 18 years of age who is part of any kind of irregular force or armed group in any capacity, rising in revolt against established authority.¹⁰ This definition is often stretched to include any person under the age of 18 years who is a member of or attached to armed forces or armed groups, whether or not there is an armed conflict.¹¹

History of children's participation in insurgency

The history of childhood is that of participation. Children have always participated in the lives of their societies, not only on issues affecting them, but also on those affecting the entire society.¹² In Medieval Europe, 'children' were not only economic actors, beginning

apprenticeships at the age of 12 or younger, they were also active political agents, often initiating resistance and uprisings. For example, the Children's Crusade, a peaceful movement of the poor, mainly farmworkers and shepherds, began in the spring of 1212 near Cologne, and was initiated by a 12-year-old boy Nicholas, who led a crowd of approximately 20 000 children and adults over 700 miles across the Alps of Italy.¹³ In France, there was a similar movement led by another 12-year-old boy, Stephen, who ushered a crowd of 30 000 into Paris.¹⁴

Children and young people are political actors, sometimes alongside their parents and sometimes independently. In the 1900s and 1970s, children and young people in Britain were particularly noticeable in strikes and demonstrations.¹⁵ According to Afua Twum-Danso, young people made history by demonstrating against injustice, alongside 'adults' or independently all over the world. In the 20th century, children and young people were instrumental in the civil rights movements in the USA, where some as young as six years marched against segregation.¹⁶ In the 1960s, children and young people protested against the Vietnam War, and for this, they faced harassment from the authorities, including expulsion from school.¹⁷ The incidence that took place in Tiananmen Square, China, on 4 June 1989, is another noteworthy example.¹⁸ In 1989, in China, children, many of whom were students, demonstrated for the promotion of democracy. Most of these children protesters lost their lives.¹⁹

The history of children and young people's involvement in violence, armed conflict, demonstration or insurgency in Africa is not that different. Although there are stereotypes against young people just as there are against women, that subordinate children to the power of male elders, nevertheless, this group of people has, over time, been able to play major roles during demonstrations within their societies. Examples abound on children participation in demonstration in Africa. In the pre-colonial era, children and young people who were students of Quranic schools and Fulani pastoralists were actively involved in the Sokoto Jihad of 1804-1808.²⁰ As the war progressed, senior Shaikhs and older scholars resigned, and the Jihad army came to be dominated by youths.

During the colonial era, young people were part and parcel of the various nationalist movements that erupted in Africa. For example, the Somali Youth League led a protest march towards the attainment of independence in 1960. Lastly, the anti-colonial movement in northern Nigeria was not without youth participation. Young people during the colonial era worked audaciously to topple the colonial government. Politically, Africa's youth and children played a key role to the various liberation movements in the early years of independence. In addition to the aforementioned example of children participation,

other cases included the 1964 Sudan uprising in which Khartoum University students were instrumental in the deposition of the military government of General Ibrahim Abboud; the demonstration of radical students in Ethiopia that initiated the revolution and led to the overthrowing of Emperor Haile Selassie in 1974.²¹ A more noteworthy example is the involvement of children and young people in terminating British colonial rule in Zanzibar in 1963, and the 1964 revolution, which brought a permanent end to Arab political and economic hegemony in the Islands.²²

Children's involvement in the struggle against apartheid in South Africa must not be forgotten. In 1976, schoolchildren in Soweto started a protest against the insistence of the government on using Afrikaans as the medium of instruction in schools.²³ The revolt that spread like wildfire beyond Soweto, was brutally suppressed by security forces. Hundreds of people, including children, were killed. After the incident, Nelson Mandela, who was in prison at the time, paid tribute to the young boys and girls. He stated:

At the forefront of this 1976/77 wave of unrest were our students and youth. They came from the universities, high schools and even primary schools. They are a generation whose whole education has been under the diabolical design of the racists to poison the minds and brainwash our children into docile subjects of apartheid rule. But after more than twenty years of Bantu Education, the circle is closed and nothing demonstrates the utter bankruptcy of apartheid as the revolt of our youth.²⁴

In 1985, seven years after the Soweto uprising, South African children were once again at the forefront of demonstrations against the banning of the Congress of South African Students (COSAS). Thousands of children and young people were imprisoned by the South African regime for their participation in the resistance.²⁵ Children and young people played a significant role in the struggle to end apartheid in South Africa.

In more recent times, children and young people have been visible in civil wars, insurgencies, and armed conflicts around Africa. This group formed a reasonable fraction of combatants. Conflict is not just the business of older people. It has become the business of children, young people and older people.²⁶ Children are not only victims of war or insurgency, they are actors and stakeholders. The wars in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Uganda were not without the involvement of children and young people. The use of children as combatants in Liberia could be traced to the start of the conflict in 1989. Former warlord Charles Taylor, leader of the National Patriotic Front of Liberia, was infamous for the

abduction and use of boys and girls in war. It is estimated that over 6 000 children took up arms between 1989 and 1997.²⁷ According to UN sources, over 15 000 children were associated with the armed forces between 2000 and 2003.²⁸ Many of these children were recruited forcibly and involuntarily. Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD), the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL) and the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) widely recruited children between 2000 and 2003.²⁹

During the Sierra Leonean conflict from 1991-2002, children were not left out. Children and young people dominated the conflict to the extent that it was labelled a 'Youth Crisis'.³⁰ Children were involved in the war basically for the devastating effects of the All People's Congress (APC) rule since 1968. The APC rule arguably destroyed the possibilities for young people to carve out a meaningful life for themselves in the cities.³¹

Children's participation in armed conflict during the Ugandan crisis was worst still. During this conflict, the Lord's Resistance Army of Joseph Kony forcibly recruited children into the fighting force.³² More than 50% of recruits are children. Kony raided children at night time and also abducted children in towns and schools.³³ According to *The Lancet*, an estimated 20 000 children were abducted; about 8 400 of them between June, 2002 and June, 2003.³⁴

Children's participation in Boko Haram insurgency

Having discussed some cases of child involvement in demonstrations and armed conflicts, the focus will now shift to children's participation in the Boko Haram insurgency. Critical attention would be focused on the following areas: conscription, training, roles of child insurgents, security implications of child insurgents, and the government's role in preventing child involvement in armed conflict.

Boko Haram is a fusion of Hausa and Arabic words meaning Western civilisation is evil. Members of this Islamic sect blame the ills of the society on Western culture, especially Western education.³⁵ They uphold the preaching and establishment of a pristine Islamic state. The *modus operandi* of this group has been a major thorn in the flesh of the governments of Nigeria, Chad and Cameroon. The outrageous, violent activities of Boko Haram can be traced to 1999,³⁶ when the group resorted to attacks and incessant bombing in public places. In the pursuit of its proposed Islamic state, bombing and abductions of persons were widely embarked upon. Several cases of bombings and abductions abound. For example, the Yanyan bombing and the abduction of Chibok girls is worthy of note. A new dimension, which is the pivotal point of this paper, of Boko Haram insurgency, is the use of children in perpetrating havoc. Since 2014, children have been at the forefront of

bombing activities at different places such as fuel stations, churches, mosques, marketplaces, traffic, army barracks and so on.

Mode of conscription

Recruitment and the use of children for combat purposes during insurgencies or armed conflicts around the globe is outlawed by various measures of International Human Rights Law, Humanitarian Law, Labour Law and Criminal Law yet a chasm exists between these standards and their application.³⁷ The practice of using children in armed conflict continues. Despite the regulations outlawing the use of children for combat, little effective actions have been taken against states or individual violators.³⁸

In West Africa, the recruitment and use of children in insurgency and armed conflict is on the increase. The trend persists because children are cheap and obedient fighters, and because of their youthful energy.³⁹ Moreover, subject to persistent violent conflict, there is a shortage of 'eligible men', which necessitate the use of boys and girls.

In armed conflicts in West Africa, recruitment of persons for combat and other war related roles vary enormously from one country to another. Children enter fighting forces in different ways such as active recruitment, volunteering, abduction or gang pressing.⁴⁰ In Boko Haram insurgency, abduction is the methodology. Most boys and girls fighting alongside the terrorist group are largely abducted from schools, marketplaces and social gatherings.⁴¹ A noteworthy case of abduction is the 276 Chibok schoolgirls who were abducted in 2014. Boko Haram adopts forceful conscription of children into the fighting force. It has been estimated that since 2012, Boko Haram has abducted as many as 2 000 children, both boys and girls.⁴² Generally, since 2012, between 2 000 and 7 000 women and children are living in abduction.⁴³

Training of abductees

Since 2014, captured boys and girls have been turned into suicide bombers and killers alike. Children are ideal weapons for Boko Haram leadership. At security checkpoints run by men, they are often searched less thoroughly, if at all. Explosives are easily concealed under the fabric of dresses or religious gowns worn by girls.⁴⁴ Since children are easily perceived to be innocent and less checked by security operatives, they become readily available weapons for the leadership of the group.

To be adequately prepared for suicide bombings and other destructive activities, abducted boys and girls undergo a systematic training programme, which exposes them to the

rudiments of bombing and killing. To Rahila Amos, a former captive of Boko Haram who escaped after months of training, the system of grooming potential bombers involved food deprivation and promises of eternal life. Rahila Amos' testimony reveals "Boko Haram incorporated lack of food into the training". Throughout her spell in Boko Haram captivity, she was fed one meal a day, which made her lose weight drastically. Abductees are kept in a long ditch for several days, eating one meal a day, a corn paste made from powder maize.⁴⁵

According to Rahila, a life and death question precedes the training. Abductees are asked: "Do you want to follow Christ, or do you want to be a Muslim?"⁴⁶ The fear of death has made many children, even adults, agree to follow Islam. Training begins immediately after the captives have decided to be Muslims.

In her narrative, there is a six-tiered daily education track to be followed by captives, including boys and girls. The six levels range from primary one to six. The six levels are divided into two: lower and upper levels. Primary one to three is the lower level while four to six is the upper level. The lower level is for open training. For example, the first two levels, primary one and two, are for Quranic training, which includes indoctrination. Among the six tiers of training, level three is fundamental. At this level, captives receive training in suicide bombing and beheading: "How to kill a person and how to bomb a house". Children are taught how to conceal a bomb either under their armpits or on any other part of their body. In addition, they are taught how to hide bombs in baskets and appear as a trader in a fish and vegetable market. To kill, they are taught to sever their enemy's head from behind to minimise struggling. "If you cut from the back of the neck, they die faster."⁴⁷ Levels 4, 5 and 6 are more of a cult. The instruction given at these levels of the training are closely guarded secrets among the fighters.⁴⁸

In an interview, Ahmed Abubakar narrates the essence of indoctrination, brainwashing and the use of drugs or substances capable of hardening the minds.⁴⁹ To him, this process helps to change the belief and mindset of children, and also hardens their conscience. These techniques are integral parts of the modules for training. According to an interview with Yakubu Gowon, a soldier who has fought against Boko Haram, the promise of easy passage to heaven and intercourse with virgins in the world beyond are parts of the training routine. In addition, child insurgents are drugged.⁵⁰ To Eshobuga Okpameh⁵¹, a Nigerian foot soldier, a liquid substance (concoction) consisting of leaves and seeds of Indian hemp soaked in local alcoholic beverages such as 'burukutu' are given to young insurgents. For girls not used to the consumption of alcoholic beverages, their foods are prepared with

Indian hemp. The brutality and heartlessness of child insurgents is the direct result of the intake of hard drugs and alcoholic beverages.

The hardship of a lack of enough food for child insurgents complements the hardness and brutality caused by hard drugs and other substances such as 'burukutu'. It could be deduced from the above routine that hostages under Boko Haram captivity received training both in the Quran and violence. Rahila's testimony and reports of interviews corroborates this, in that they point to the fact that children are involved in insurgency, trained, brainwashed, and drugged for active participation.

Child insurgents and Boko Haram terrorism in Nigeria, Cameroon and Chad

Despite the various measures embarked upon by international bodies, the use of children during armed conflict or insurgency persists. The abduction and use of children by Boko Haram is worrisome, and a new trend in the group's *modus operandi*. Abducted boys and girls are major actors in bombing, killing and other destructive activities. They perform roles least expected in the Boko Haram insurgency – as suicide bombers and killers. Despite being under military pressure, the use of children has been able to strike fear across an expansive battlefield covering Nigeria, Cameroon and Chad. Since 2014, as a change of methodology, Boko Haram has deployed young children as newly minted terrorists capable of inflicting a devastating toll.

The Boko Haram terrorist group has used at least 105 women and girls in suicide attacks since June 2014, when a female bomber blew herself up at an army barracks in Nigeria.⁵² Since 2014, girls, often with bombs hidden in baskets or their clothes, have killed hundreds of people in attacks on fish and vegetable markets, schools, river docks and even camps for people who have fled their homes to get away from the violence. In addition, according to UNICEF⁵³, 85% of the suicide attacks by women globally in 2014 were in Nigeria. In May 2015, it was reported that children have been used to perpetrate three-quarters of all suicide attacks in 2014. Since 2012, according to a recent report from humanitarian groups, young boys have been used as suicide bombers.⁵⁴

In Cameroon, according to Issa Tchiroma Bakary, the Minister of Communications, 22 female bombers, including children, were identified at the beginning of 2016. In Cameroon, girls in their early teens have carried out many of the recent bombings. It was during one such bombing operation that Rahila Amos escaped from her Boko Haram captors. Amos escaped from her captor when they assembled for evening preaching and

prayers. After the preaching, she ran to the Cameroonian border. Amos escaped because she did not want to be a suicide bomber. Her accounts, according to the Cameroonian and Nigerian authorities, matched the experience of other women and children who have escaped from Boko Haram, or who have been arrested before they could detonate bombs.⁵⁵ According to Amos, some women and children are happy performing the bombing role. Seven girls out of the 30 female captives enrolled in training with her were enthusiastic about carrying out suicide missions.

In December 2014, bombers attacked Cameroon's far north. In this attack, 80 civilians, 94 militants and two Cameroonian soldiers died.⁵⁶ In January 2015, boys and girls were among the suicide bombers who attacked the Kolo Fata area and villages in northern Cameroon. In Kolo Fata, the Cameroonian military lost one officer, while the Boko Haram group lost between 143-300.⁵⁷ During the attacks on villages in North Cameroon, 80 people were kidnapped and three others died.⁵⁸

Like in Nigeria and Cameroon, young boys and girls have perpetrated many of the suicide bombings in Chad. The first attack on Chad by Boko Haram took place in Ngouboua on 13 February 2015, the very day that 30 Boko Haram insurgents crossed Lake Chad in four motorboats.⁵⁹ On 24 February 2015, Chadian soldiers engaged Boko Haram insurgents in a severe battle. In the ensuing debacle, over 200 Boko Haram fighters and bombers were killed, including boys and girls, while one Chadian soldier lost his life and nine others were wounded.⁶⁰

In mid-2015, twin suicide bomb attacks were unleashed in N'Djamena, the capital of Chad. Major targets of the suicide bombers were the police headquarters and police academy. The bomb attack killed 24 people and left more than 100 people wounded.⁶¹

A grier and disheartening role played by child insurgents, particularly girls, is one of a wife to male fighters. Girls are not just abducted to carry bombs; some are sex machines, while others serve as 'bush wives'. They are tools for sexual satisfaction of male insurgents or commanders.⁶² Girls are raped or gang raped several times a day. Examples of raped girls and bush wives abound. The case of Fati, who was kidnapped in 2014 and later rescued by the Nigerian soldiers in 2016, is quite revealing.⁶³ She was sexually abused by Boko Haram male fighters. More importantly, Amina Ali's ordeal in Boko Haram captivity is an indication of the 'bush wife' role that girls played. Amina was among the Chibok girls abducted in April 2014. Today, she has a little baby boy, whom she delivered while in Boko Haram captivity. Amina's story is similar to that of the Rwandan lady, Alphoncina Mutuze, who delivered a baby in captivity. She belongs to the minority Tutsi tribe. Mutuze, like Amina, was gang raped, became a sex slave and a wife to several Hutus soldiers and hooligans.⁶⁴

Security and development implications of child insurgents in West Africa

The Boko Haram terrorist group sees child bombers and killers as ideal weapons. Civilians and security personnel suspect children less. They are cheap and can easily be indoctrinated and brainwashed. After years of destructive activities, these children become a menace to society. The most worrisome of all issues concerning child insurgents is the threat to security and the stability of the post-conflict political order. Child insurgents are a source of threat to national and international security as they pose a major challenge to peace and tranquility to the society. The years of brutal and destructive activities have indoctrinated children into a culture of aggression and a cycle of violence. Moreover, the brutalisation and militarisation of childhood has led to disrespect for constituted authority and elders, and even the sanctity of human life.⁶⁵ To former child insurgents, the inclination to use violence and aggression for dispute settlement has become the norm. It should be noted that most of the child insurgents lack family support and have come to perceive the terrorist group as their only family link.⁶⁶ The children are seriously traumatised, with their normal educational, social and moral development disrupted and retarded, and they have become both victims and perpetrators of brutality, including bombing and killing.

Furthermore, during the rehabilitation and reintegration process, not much commitment and sustained effort is devoted to the social and psychological reintegration of ex-child fighters beyond the immediate pre-occupation with disarmament and demobilisation. Examples abound in cases of neglect, abandonment and ill-treatment of ex-child combatants. In Liberia, the Disarmament, Demobilisation, Rehabilitation and Reintegration (DDRR) programme of the post-conflict era served less than one third of the estimated 15 000 children associated with the fighting forces during the country's civil war. In addition, children and young people who disarmed during the 1997 DDRR programme did not find viable employment opportunities.⁶⁷ As fighting resumed and escalated in 2000-2003, many children who were not adequately catered for under the DDRR programme returned to the armed groups.⁶⁸

One other notable case of ill-treatment and neglect of ex-child combatants is the emergence of the Niger Delta Avengers (NDA) in South South Nigeria. The activities and statements of the group have led to restiveness in the region, an indication of a return to the pre-2009 militancy level. The NDA has claimed responsibility for the bombing of pipelines and gas plants, and the economic terrorism perpetrated in the Niger Delta region in recent times.⁶⁹ According to Sheriff Mulade, the coordinator of Centre for Peace and

Environment Justice (CEPEJ), NDA is an aggrieved group, which perhaps may have perceived that their benefits were monopolised by their leaders. They therefore resorted to violence to draw attention to themselves and possibly be invited to discuss their own terms and receive their proper benefits.⁷⁰ According to Alizie Maureen, these boys (NDA) are not just new recruits, they are younger militants who did not benefit from the 2009 Amnesty Programme of late President Yar 'Adua. They are out to get their own benefits.⁷¹ From the above analysis, it is clear that neglected, ill-treated ex-child fighters have often taken to the streets, protesting against authorities for their failure to fulfil settlement promises, which include the non-payment of reintegration allowances. These demonstrations by the NDA and other militant groups threaten the fragile peace of the society.

More importantly, the recruitment of children into armed conflict affects their education and has its corollary effect on the society. Since November, 2014, it is estimated that 1 million children have lost access to education.⁷² Children's lost years of schooling reduce societies' human and economic development potential, and also damage the chances of stable democracies that are demonstrably linked to human and social well-being.

Findings

Based on the study's analysis, the following findings were established:

- Poverty within the family has engendered children's involvement in insurgency;
- Illiteracy/a lack of primary and secondary education increases children's vulnerability and restiveness;
- An increased unemployment rate and inadequate job creation cause young people to indulge in criminal activities;
- Porosity/an unsecured school environment enables the abduction of children;
- The use of children during insurgency affects the human capital resources needed for sustainable development;
- A lack of child-centered development projects gives rise to children's involvement in anti-social activities; and
- Poor governance and citizens' disenchantment breeds' criminality.

It is important to note that despite the unavailability of accurate figures of child insurgents in Boko Haram terrorist attacks in the aforementioned countries in the sub-region, the study reveals that young boys and girls are physically involved in suicide bombings and other destructive activities. It is a demonstration of the fact that children are still perpetually involved in armed conflicts, including insurgency across West Africa, despite

all the measures stipulated by concerned agencies to protect children. Children under the age of eighteen have been forcibly conscripted into fighting forces, especially as suicide bombers in the three West African states. Some are raped or gang-raped, while others are coerced into 'forced marriage' as they served as 'bush wives'. Children's participation in insurgency and in any form of armed conflict is a regress for both the children and government. Their involvement in conflict has health, mental/psychological, socio-economic and political repercussions. The years of rape have introduced the girl-children to sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/Aids. The trauma associated with rape and being an ex-fighter impairs social relationships within the society. Ex-fighters face the problem of societal acceptability. Children and young people are stigmatised and rejected by their peers and even the larger society. It is instructive to note that these children have been denied the right to contribute meaningfully to the growth of their communities, and the sustainable development of their countries. Suffice to say that children's involvement in conflict impacts negatively on the development goal of nations, in that even though they constitute a viable human resource capital and workforce, they have been cut off.

Conclusion

The history of children's involvement in armed conflict, demonstration or insurgency in West Africa and Africa in general is not a new phenomenon. Children have participated in a number of conflicts from the pre-colonial period to the 21st century. For example, children were fighters during the Sokoto Jihad of 1804-1808; the Somali liberation struggle in 1960; the 1964 Sudan Uprising; the resistance against British rule in Zanzibar in 1963; the struggle against apartheid in South Africa in 1976 and 1984; the Liberian Civil War from 1989-2003; the Sierra Leone Civil War from 1991-2002; and the Lord's Resistance Army Insurgency in Uganda between 2000 and 2003.

Children's participation in the Boko Haram insurgency in West Africa started in 2014. Although about 2 000 women and children, both boys and girls, have been abducted since 2012, the use of child insurgents, bombers or killers began in 2014. The abduction or forceful recruitment and the use of children for destructive activities by the Boko Haram Terrorist Group have serious security implications for Nigeria, Cameroon and Chad and even the children. The periods of brutal and destructive activities indoctrinate children into a culture of aggression and a cycle of violence. Children's education is affected and this reduces societies' human and economic development potential.

To halt or help prevent the involvement of children in insurgency and other forms of armed conflicts, governments' policies should accommodate a robust welfare package for children and their parents. To start with, governments should institute measures to

ameliorate poverty, such as the creation and even distribution of jobs in each country. There is a need for a compulsory and free primary and secondary education. Security alertness and sensitivity is quintessential in the fight against the use of children in insurgency. Governments should beef up security operations within each region, provide sophisticated weapons for security operatives, and be responsive in the wake of distress calls from school heads. The need for children-centered development projects across the various states is imperative. This entails a children empowerment scheme, which promotes skills acquisition, an inculcation of positive and progressive orientation towards development, and a bi-annual children summit to help chart a course for a better child. Above all, both the state and federal governments should sincerely pursue democratic principles and good governance.

The governments of Nigeria, Cameroon and Chad should be proactive in their quest to protect and prevent the use of children during conflict. The various governments should sincerely uphold integrated diplomacy in the fight against Boko Haram terrorism. In conflict-prone regions, a heavily armed security task force should be deployed to secure schools, market areas and other crowded areas where children are found. Finally, there is a need for children empowerment in the following areas: more attention to formal education, vocational training, enlightenment training on how to escape abduction or forced recruitment, and lastly, government should provide alternatives to soldiering to demobilised children, so as to prevent the re-recruitment of this group into fighting forces.

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