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Exploring Non-Combative Options: The Role of Social Protection and Social Inclusion in Addressing Boko Haram Insurgency in Nigeria

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Introduction Boko Haram was started by Mohammed Yusuf in the city of Maiduguri to campaign against western values, arguing that western education is forbidden. This is aptly captured in the derivation of its name. For emphasis, Boko is a Hausa word that means 'western education' while Haram is an Arabic word that means forbidden. Since its creation, Boko Haram has experienced an unprecedented metamorphosis from being a local extremist sect to an international terrorist group. More so, Boko Haram has witnessed dramatic shifts in tactics and methodologies especially in the areas of ransom kidnapping, hostage-taking, bombing and death accumulation. Akinola (2015) submits that Boko Haram poses existential threats to the Nigerian state and its citizens. Aghedo & Osumah (2015) add that in addition to human deaths, the Boko Haram menace has resulted in huge economic costs for the country, corporate bodies and individual business owners. The unhealthy security situation paralyzed and shut down businesses in many cities in the north, especially the northeast geo-political zone which serves as the sect's operational base. Boko Haram has ruined many local investments and foreign investors to move to other African countries.

Several scholars have attributed the emergence of Boko Haram to various socioeconomic factors such as unemployment,

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multidimensional poverty, deprivation, marginalization and social exclusion among other factors. Meanwhile, it has also been argued that the combative methods adopted by the government have further radicalized the group. Aghedo & Osumah (2015), argues that the counterterrorism strategy with coercive military deployment and brutal suppression conflated with some rapprochements in response to the insurgency is based on the Nigerian authorities' interpretation of insurgent activities as a threat to national security.

Hence, there is a need for a different approach that addresses the underlying socioeconomic factors that drives insurgency. This was corroborated by the World Bank (2016:19), that ‘‘the lack of inclusion seems to be a risk factor of radicalization into violent extremism. Moreover, unemployment certainly has explanatory power. Policies that promote job creation, therefore, not only benefit young people seeking jobs but may help thwart the spread of violent extremism and its attendant effects on national and regional economic growth.’’ It is as a result of this that this study advocate for social protection and social inclusion in combating the Boko Haram menace.

Concepts

Social exclusion

Exclusion encompasses an array of social problems: identity politics, conflicts, class, human rights, and joblessness. While poverty and deprivation emphasize individual difficulties, social exclusion stresses the systemic roots of individual difficulties (UOttawa, n.d.). Social Exclusion Unit [SEU] (1997) refers to social exclusion as a term for what can happen when people or areas suffer from a combination of linked problems such as unemployment, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime environments, bad health and family breakdown. According to Onuoha (2014:5), ‘‘unemployment and poverty are socioeconomic

challenges that are not only intricately interconnected but glaringly evident in northern Nigeria''. according to Agbiboa (2015), underdevelopment generally, then inequality, marginalization, poverty and exclusion are specific reasons why extremist groups like Boko Haram rebel. Social protection

According to Norton, Conway & Foster (2001:7), social protection is taken to refer to ''the public actions taken in response to levels of vulnerability, risk and deprivation which are deemed socially unacceptable within a given polity or society.'' Social protection deals with both the absolute deprivation and vulnerabilities of the poorest and also with the need of the currently non-poor for security in the face of shocks and life-cycle events. The public character of this response may be governmental or non-governmental or may involve a combination of institutions from both sectors. Systems of social protection enable societies to advance the well-being and security of their citizens by protecting them from vulnerability and deprivation so that they can pursue a decent life. On the one hand, social protection can meet the essential needs of human survival by ensuring that all men and women have basic social and economic security.

Social inclusion

Social inclusion is a process that reinforces social interaction between people with different social attributes to open up access to participation in all spheres of social life. Social inclusion is concerned with improving the conditions for individuals and groups to take part in society and improve their ability, opportunity, and dignity in society. This is aptly captured by the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). SDG 8 aims to promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable growth with employment creation; Goal 10 aims to ''empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or another

status''; Goal 11 aims to ''make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable''; and Goal 16 aims to promote peaceful and inclusive societies as well as inclusive institutions.

Social protection and social inclusion as a panacea to Boko Haram Insurgency

As Akubo & Okolo (2019) suggest, there is the need to build a bridge between potential terrorists, survivors and the government. The Boko Haram sect and the community of survivors in northeast Nigeria should be regarded as primary stakeholders and partners in a joint problem-solving process. Deradicalisation efforts must be jointly driven to engender reconciliation, restoration and community integration. Agbiboa (2015) claims that Boko Haram's membership consists of unemployed high school graduates, disgruntled youths, and street children. Aghedo & Osumah (2015), add that the foot soldiers of Boko Haram are essentially unemployed graduates, poor, and uneducated youths. The above submissions underscore why it has been easy for Boko Haram to recruit rebels given the context of the huge number of marginalized, alienated, unemployed, poverty-stricken, hungry, frustrated, and desperate people who are willing and ready to take up arms to participate in any risky behaviour. Therefore, addressing insurgency will require social protection and social inclusion-based measures.

Encouraging social protection and social inclusion will target the socioeconomic factors that sustain the insurgency. In a region laden with risks to education, including widespread conflict, education help students to learn about and critically reflect on sensitive social issues, such as marginalization in all its forms. In so doing, they learn that concrete actions can be taken to help strengthen social inclusion, which is all the more important in contexts where the insurgence community faces exclusion.

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Promoting social protection and social inclusion among the youths should be treated as a societal given. Social protection presents an opportunity for rural areas to participate in education programmes and access health care services. It will help the people of Northeast Nigeria to partake in community-based agricultural projects that seek to increase productivity and guarantee food security. Attention must be paid to the human capital development of youths through education. The creation of job training and job creation programmes should be given priority. Promoting peace education, designing robust programmes to aid destitute children, and embarking on a sincere welfare programme should be the government's priority. This will provide youths with meaningful employment and be less susceptible to recruitment by Boko Haram. According to the United Nations (2016:135), 'when exclusion and lack of awareness of rights reinforce each other, human rights education in schools presents a special opportunity to break this cycle. Moreover, promoting attitudes of inclusion, tolerance, peaceful resolution of conflict and respect for diversity among children and youth, helps embed these values more broadly'.

Conclusion

It is a truism that the Boko Haram menace in Nigeria has led to a multifaceted challenge of insecurity, loss of lives, destruction of properties, unprecedented displacement and colossal economic loss. Even though the Nigerian government has made efforts to combat the menace, the challenge lingers. This study, therefore, discourages the use of violence and encourages a two-faced social protection and social inclusion approach that addresses the socioeconomic drivers of the menace such as marginalization, unemployment, deprivation, multidimensional poverty and social exclusion. It is hereby recommended that Community Counterterrorism Watch be set up. This group will help to provide crucial feedback on how

counterterrorism measures have affected their communities and are perceived within them; this will provide insights into how they can be assisted. More so, Civil Society Organizations should undertake initiatives to strengthen human rights and the rule of law to combat discrimination and violations, as well as to foster social cohesion and inclusion and tackle negative socio-economic factors.

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