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GENDER BASED TERRORISM AND ARMED CONFLICTS IN NIGERIA: THE *CHIBOK GIRLS'* ABDUCTION AND THE CHANGING NARRATIVES IN SAMBISA FOREST

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Abstract: Nigeria has had a chequered history of conflict situations such as civil war, inter and intra ethnic conflicts, religious conflicts among others. Northern Nigeria, in particular, has been greatly threatened by armed conflicts in recent years. Indeed, the remote northeast region is ground zero for many of the world's most vexing problems, including an Islamic militant insurgency, crippling poverty, and declining development. In 2014, no fewer than 276 schoolgirls were abducted in Borno state by the Boko Haram sect that has ravaged the region since 2009. The audacious kidnapping brought the insurgency to world attention, triggering global outrage that galvanised support from many local and international actors. The girls have become a symbol of Nigeria's brutal conflict. The failure of Nigeria's former government to act quickly to free the girls sparked a global *Bring Back Our Girls* movement. While the abduction sparked international outrage in a frantic bid to rescue the girls, some undercurrents were playing out locally that now deserve academic review. This essay is thus, an attempt to further interrogate the nature, nuances, shenanigan, politics and various rescue missions that characterise the Chibok girls' abduction. It particularly reviews the activities of both local and international dimensions of *#Bring Back Our Girls* campaign within the socio-cultural and political contexts of the time while putting on spotlight issues of post-trauma facilities expected for the rescued girls and the fate of those still in captivity.

Key Words: Armed Conflict, Gender, Terrorism, Abduction, Boko Haram.

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I. Introduction

The general breakdown in law and order which occurs during conflict and displacement leads to an increase in all forms of violence (WHO, 1997). Armed conflict and uprootedness bring their own distinct forms of violence against women with them (ibid). Violence against women is not a problem that affects only the poor or only women in the Third World; it affects women worldwide of all races and income groups (Carrillo, 1991:18). In all societies, to a greater or lesser degree, women and girls are subjected to physical, sexual and psychological abuse that cuts across lines of income, class and culture (United Nations, 2010). Violence against women and girls continues to be a global epidemic that wounds, tortures, and slays – physically, psychologically, sexually and economically. It is one of the most pervasive of human rights violations, denying women and girls' equality, security, dignity, self-esteem, and their right to enjoy fundamental freedoms. Violence against women is present in every country, cutting across boundaries of culture, class, education, income, ethnicity and age (Sandro, 2008:5).

Nigeria has been embroiled in a conflict with Jama'at Ahl as-Sunnah lid-da'wa wal-Jihad (popularly known as 'Boko Haram'), which has been designated a terrorist organisation by the United States, Nigeria and the UN. Boko Haram's campaign extends beyond education to include socio-economic inequalities and politics (Nti, 2014). Human rights groups estimate that some 2,000 people, most of them women and girls, have been kidnapped by Boko Haram since 2009. But there is no comprehensive tally of the disappeared, and some research suggests the total number could be much higher. Formed in 2002, Boko Haram has killed thousands in northern Nigeria and neighbouring Cameroon, Niger and Chad with the recruitment of child soldiers a continuing tactic used by the Islamist group. In 2014, the group tore through northeast Nigeria, capturing villages and towns, and taking their inhabitants hostage (Alfred, 2016). The high-profile Chibok kidnapping put a spotlight on the unique role of girls in armed conflict. This group claimed responsibility for the kidnapping of almost three hundred girls aged between 16 and 18 from the Government Girls Secondary School in rural Chibok, Borno State in Northern Nigeria. Shekau threatened to sell the girls as slaves and marry them off because 'God instructed me to sell them, they are his properties and I will carry out his instructions' (Campbell, 2014b).

In response to the kidnapping, a global movement started by women in Nigeria has focused on the issues of sexual terrorism, deformed masculinity and the trafficking of women internationally. This movement mobilized under the banner of #Bring Back Our Girls has

opened new avenues for political mobilization (Campbell, 2014b). The release of another set of girls in May 2017 was a significant victory in the Nigerian government's fight against Boko Haram. Its campaign under President Muhammadu Buhari has diminished the group so substantially that officials were unconcerned about releasing five detained Boko Haram commanders in exchange for the girls (Searcey and Sawab, 2017). This essay is an attempt to further interrogate the nature, nuances, shenanigan, captivity and various rescue missions that characterise the Chibok girls. It particularly reviews the activities of both local and international dimensions of #Bring Back Our Girls campaign within the socio-cultural and political contexts of the time while putting on spotlight issues of post-trauma facilities expected for the rescued girls and the fate of those still in captivity.

II. Conceptual Exploration

The US Department of Defense defines terrorism as “the calculated use of unlawful violence or threat of unlawful violence to inculcate fear; intended to coerce or to intimidate governments or societies in the pursuit of goals that are generally political, religious, or ideological objectives.” This definition focuses on threat as much as the actual act of violence and the targeting of the whole society as well as the government even though the definition did not distinguish between attacks on military combatant and non-combatant civilians. Nevertheless, three commonalities can be discerned from these official definitions; (1) the use of violence, (2) political objectives; and (3) the intention of sowing fear in the target population.

It is tragic that violence against women and girls is such a vast and wide-ranging topic. In addition to violence in intimate relationships, there are many other forms of violence that routinely undermine the well-being of women and girls. In some settings, the risk of violence begins prior to birth, with selective abortion of female foetuses and carries forward through childhood where girls and boys are at risk of harsh physical punishment, child maltreatment, and sexual abuse, often at the hands of the very adults charged with their care (Heise, 2011:2). In violent conflicts, vulnerability of all segments of the population increases, as poverty, hunger, fear and desperation is prevalent. Women and girls are at risk of exchanging sex for “food, shelter, safe passage, identification papers or other necessities for themselves and their families” (Machel, 2001).

Perpetrators of violence against women are most often their intimate partners. Women are abused physically and sexually by intimate partners at different rates throughout the world – yet such abuse occurs in all countries or areas, without exception. Younger women are more

at risk than older women and since the consequences of such violence last a lifetime it has a severely adverse impact on women's family and social life(United Nations, 2010). In conflict and displacement situations, some groups of women and girls are particularly vulnerable. These include targeted ethnic groups, where there is an official or unofficial policy of using rape as a weapon of genocide. Unaccompanied women or children, children in foster care arrangements, and lone female heads of households are all frequent targets. Elderly women and those with physical or mental disabilities are also vulnerable, as are those women who are held in detention and in detention-like situations including concentration camps (WHO, 1997). While rates of women exposed to violence vary from one region to the other, statistics indicate that violence against women is a universal phenomenon and women are subjected to different forms of violence – physical, sexual, psychological and economic – both within and outside their homes.

Gender-based terrorism is the systematic and repeated victimisation of women and girls that affects all of their rights (to life, liberty, health, education, play, freedom of expression and freedom of movement, etc.) and creates a situation of permanent anxiety concerning their personal security in a context of terrorist activity (in which they suffer kidnapping, rape, mutilation, exploitation, use as human shields, forced involvement in small arms trafficking, slavery, sexual exploitation by the group), aimed at demoralising the enemy (de la Luz,2008:19).

III. Violence Against Women and Girls During Armed Conflicts: An Overview

The end of the Cold War in 1989 did not, as had been expected, bring about a reduction in armed conflicts. More than two thirds of the poorest countries in the world are in conflict regions. The nature of armed conflict has changed. In the past, wars used to be waged almost solely between two sovereign states, but so-called modern wars are fought in quite different ways. The international community faces a completely new situation, an immensely complex nexus of diverse causes and warring parties (Austrian Development Agency, 2009). Today, warfare is increasingly taking on intra-national forms (domestic or cross-border armed conflicts among disintegrating states, civil wars or rebellions), now exceeding international conflicts in terms of absolute numbers but also of intensity. The former demarcated fronts between two well-trained national military forces are being superseded by new actors, such as warlords, rebels, mercenaries and child soldiers (Austrian Development Agency, 2009). Violence against Women or Gender-Based Violence is an age long psychological and social issue deep-rooted

in world societies: developed, developing or third world countries. In some societies, cultural practices, norms and beliefs fuel the behaviours and relegate woman to second class status.

Like men, women play a variety of roles during conflict, from peacemakers and political advocates to victims and perpetrators. Nonetheless, on average, women experience conflict differently from men. Men form the majority of combatants and are more likely to be killed in combat. Women are less likely to take up arms, but die in higher numbers from war's indirect effects—the breakdown in social order, human rights abuses, the spread of infectious diseases, and economic devastation (O'Reilly and Paffenholz apud Pluemper and Neumeyer, 2006). Violence against women not only maims and debilitates women, femicide, the death of women from gender violence, kills them on a large scale from pre-birth onward (Carrillo, 1991:22).

Adolescent girls and female children are at heightened risk of violence during times of conflict and crisis. Because of their age, gender, and restricted social status, girls can be exploited, harassed, and abused by family members, military, armed groups, police, peacekeeping forces and humanitarian aid workers (Siddiqi, 2012). When armed conflict weakens normal community structures of support and protection, their vulnerability is increased (Holste-Roness, 2006). Thus, violence against women is a global outrage. The experience or threat of violence affects the lives of women everywhere, cutting across boundaries of wealth, race and culture. In the home and in the community, in times of war and peace, women are beaten, raped, mutilated and killed with impunity (Amnesty International, 2004).

From birth to death, in times of peace as well as war, women face discrimination and violence at the hands of the state, the community and the family. Female infanticide deprives countless women of life itself. Rape and sexual abuse by relatives, other men, security officials or armed combatants are inflicted on millions of girls and women every year. Some forms of violence, such as forced pregnancies, forced abortions, bride-burning and dowry-related abuses are unique to women. Others, such as domestic violence – also known as intimate partner abuse, wife-beating and battering – are disproportionately suffered by women. During conflicts, violence against women is often used as a weapon of war, in order to dehumanize the women themselves, or to persecute the community to which they belong (Amnesty International, 2004). Violence against women is not confined to any particular political or economic system, but is prevalent in every society in the world and cuts across boundaries of wealth, race and culture. The power structures within society which perpetuate violence against women are deep-rooted and intransigent.

States have however, taken various initiatives to combat violence against women, including numerous criminal justice initiatives. Progress has been achieved in the effective

criminalization of various forms of violence against women in domestic law, the simplification of evidentiary requirements and the reform of criminal procedure to facilitate the prosecution of these crimes, the establishment of specialized courts and dedicated services to deal with various types of violence against women (Skinnider and Dandurand, 2015:40).

IV. Terrorism in Nigeria and the Gender Perspective

Throughout the 20th century, terrorism was largely limited to regional and national boundaries, and predominantly based on revolutionary nationalism in the fight against colonial powers. However, since the attacks in the United States in 2001 by Al Qaeda, smaller terrorist groups have been emboldened to strike far and wide, and to use terroristic tactics in waging bloody and asymmetrical warfare in numerous countries (Osita-Njoku and Chikere, 2015). In recent years, terrorist networks have evolved, moving away from a dependency on state sponsorship; many of the most dangerous groups and individuals now operate as non-state actors. Taking advantage of porous borders and interconnected international systems—finance, communications, and transit—terrorist groups can reach every corner of the globe. While some remain focused on local or national political dynamics, others seek to affect global change (Council on Foreign Relations, 2011).

In Nigeria, 2001 was also the year which saw the emergence of the Boko Haram insurgency which targeted what they saw as the “evil” of western education, including the education of girls (Osita-Njoku and Chikere, 2015). Boko Haram is an insurgent group in north-eastern Nigeria employing organized terror to advance its objectives. In its early days, it was supported by al-Qaeda and appears to have first become active in a noticeable way in 2002. Headquartered in an Islamic center in Maiduguri, Borno State, it recruited combatants from the children of poor, dispossessed Nigerians, as well as Chadian and Nigerien children enrolled in its Islamic schools (Chothia 2013; Wilhelm 2015). The Boko- Haram terrorist sect is motivated by the obnoxious philosophy-western education is evil and the groups’ adherents appear to be thoroughly indoctrinated in the incomprehensible doctrine of the absurd. The terror group has embarked on heinous human rights abuses and war crimes: forced conversion of people of other faith to Islam; murder, torture and persecution of members of other religions; wanton attacks on churches and mosques and killing of women, children and civilian (non-combatant) populations (Human Rights watch, 2013).

The Boko Haram was founded by Mohammed Yusuf in 2002 in Maiduguri, the capital of the north-eastern state of Borno as a Sunni Islamic fundamentalist group advocating strict

Sharia law and opposing the westernizing of Nigerian society which accounts for the name 'Boko Haram' meaning 'Western Education is forbidden'. Yusuf used existing infrastructure in Borno of the Izala society, a popular conservative Islamic sect originally welcomed into government to recruit members before breaking away to form his own faction.. However, the sect initially operated in a quietist nature, conducting its operations more or less peacefully during the first seven years of its existence. They then withdrew from society into remote north-eastern areas but were soon to change into a Salafist-Jihadi group known for terrorist attacks since 2009 with political goal of creating an Islamic state (Egbue et al, 2015). Although Boko Haram has been linked with al-Qaeda over the years, it expressed support for the Islamic State (IS) in 2014 and pledged formal allegiance on 7 March, 2015.

Violent extremism has severely affected Northern Nigeria, resulting in death, kidnappings, abductions, sexual abuse and slavery, the destruction of property, political instability, the proliferation of small arms and light weapons, and deepening mistrust and enmity among different groups in the region.(Peace Direct, 2016:14). Boko Haram's rise and insurgency have dramatically changed the lives of thousands of women and girls, often casting them voluntarily or by force into new roles outside the domestic sphere. Some joined to escape their social conditions; others were abducted and enslaved (ICG, 2016). The group is not centrally organised. It operates in different areas with different local commanders, who often send fighters from one area to undertake attacks in another, or move units around.

While it could be argued that the history of Nigeria is replete with the activities of Islamic sects, it is a fact that a multiplicity of domestic actors and interests combine within the complex political environment that the Nigerian represents to sustain the philosophy of these groups (Adetayo 2014). The Nigerian military repression of Boko Haram's July 2009 uprising and the emergency rule imposed by government in Adamawa, Borno and Yobe states in north-east-Nigeria in 2012 certainly contributed to an intensification of violence and the group's transformation into a terrorist group. Equally contributory was the extra-judicial killing of Mohammed Yusuf in police custody in July 2009 which led to the enthronement of the more radicalized members of the group headed by Abubakar Shekau (The Guardian, 2012).

Prior to 2009, Boko Haram did not express commitment to the violent overthrow of the Nigerian government. Instead, Yusuf condemned northern Muslims for participating in what he described as "an illegitimate, non-Islamic state and preached a doctrine of withdrawal" (quoted in Okome, 2017:5). With increased conflict between Christians and Muslims, government crackdowns on Boko Haram in Maiduguri and elsewhere, as well as rampant police brutality and violent measures by state agents culminating in the deaths of approximately seven

hundred of its members (including Yusuf), Boko Haram became radicalized, with its central objective expanding to the creation of an Islamic state in Nigeria (Sergie and Johnson 2014).

Boko Haram's act of terrorism in Nigeria was the reason why "the country witnessed the largest increase in terrorist deaths ever recorded by any country, increasing by over 300 per cent to 7,512 fatalities and has become the most deadly terrorist group in the world" (Global Terrorism Index, 2015). According to Global Terrorism Index Report 2015, Boko Haram featured prominently in the world's 20 most fatal terrorist attacks in 2014. A Nigerian military offensive against Boko Haram reclaimed much of the territory once held by the radical group—which pledged allegiance to the Islamic State militant group (ISIS) in 2015. Although Boko Haram faces strong pushback and loss of territories, it remains capable of launching attacks just as the militants retain the ability to carry out regular suicide bombings and gun attacks in Nigeria and surrounding countries.

It is posited that all armed conflicts are gendered: "A gender neutral discourse may conceal that the post-war period is crowded with gendered decisions" (Enloe 1993: 261). Both women and men suffer from traumas, abuses and loss of control caused by war, but the impact of these factors is experienced differently by women and men. Gender plays an important role as women are often disproportionately affected by religious violence and conflict. On-going armed conflict in Northern Nigeria has led to divisions within communities that were once peaceful: rioting, looting, rape, killings, economic loss, and fear of other religious groups are some of its consequences (Peace Direct, 2016:9). For Boko Haram, its appeal to some women and the significance of women and girls for the group should be understood in the context of the North East's heavily patriarchal societies, a widespread adherence to Islamic tenets and challenges to established beliefs and practices (ICG, 2016:2). It is thus, patriarchal nationalism come to life, employing gender norms to define women as child bearers, and men as soldiers. The impetus to control women's reproduction and labour influenced them to abduct the Chibok girls and hundreds of other women and girls for use as "wives," sex slaves, and unpaid domestic labour (Okome, 2017:2). According to Bloom and Matfess (2016),

The group's conceptualization of females has also distinguished it from other Islamist movements in North East Nigeria; given the group's origins as a dissident movement, methods of differentiation are critical aspects of the insurgency. Analyzing the group's propaganda and the local religious-political context in which it operates shows how women, and their position within the group's ideology, allow Boko Haram to differentiate itself from other Nigerian Salafi movements. Other Salafi groups have advocated for women's education and have coexisted with the Nigerian secular state—by emphasizing its differences with such movements, Boko Haram portrays itself as the vanguard of 'true Islam.' (BLOOM; MATFESS, 2016).

Since its emergence in 2002, Boko Haram has paid particular attention to women in rhetoric and actions, partly because of the intense debate surrounding their role in society in the North East. Among other revivalist Islamic movements, the sect called for tighter restrictions on them in some areas of life but also promoted their access to Islamic education and offered financial empowerment. With patriarchy, poverty, corruption, early marriage and illiteracy long thwarting their life chances, some women saw an opportunity in Boko Haram to advance their freedoms or reduce their hardship. Many valued the religious and moral anchoring (ICG, 2016:i). Thereafter, Boko Haram began to abduct women and girls for both political and pragmatic ends, including to protest the arrest of female members and relatives of some leaders. The seizure of more than 200 schoolgirls near Chibok in 2014 was a much publicised spike in a wider trend. The group took Christian and later Muslim females to hurt communities that opposed it, as a politically symbolic imposition of its will and as assets. By awarding “wives” to fighters, it attracted male recruits and incentivised combatants. Because women were not considered a threat, female followers and forced conscripts could initially circulate in government-controlled areas more easily, as spies, messengers, recruiters and smugglers. For the same reason, from mid-2014, Boko Haram turned to female suicide bombers. Increasingly pressed for manpower, it also trained women to fight (ICG, 2016:i).

The imposition of Sharia law in the Northern States of Nigeria at the end of the military dictatorship in 1999 provided the context for the rise and open support for groups such as Boko Haram. As long as there was a military dictatorship to crush opposition to exploitation and economic terrorism, state terror supplemented domestic violence and the exploitation of young girls. However, the anti-dictatorship struggle had taken such deep roots that the resort to religion was deemed the most expedient force to divide the working peoples of Nigeria and to enforce the super exploitation of women (Campbell, 2014).

V. Chibok Girls: The Bumpy Road to Sambisa Forest

Boko Haram’s overall objective is to establish an “extremist Islamic State with a strict adherence to their own version of Sharia (Islamic law), which includes forbidding western education, particularly to females” (Giroux and Gilpin, 2014 cited in Nti, 2014). It blames western education and modernization for the “bad governance and acute corruption of political elites” in Nigeria. Therefore, while the group has attacked a variety of public spaces, schools are highly vulnerable as was witnessed in Chibok, Borno State, northern Nigeria (Nti, 2014).

2013 marked a significant evolution in Boko Haram's tactics. Boko Haram carried out a series of kidnappings, in which one of the main features was the instrumental use of women, in response to corresponding tactics by the Nigerian government (Zenn and Pearson, 2014:47). The use of violence and intimidation as well as kidnap, forced marriage and compulsory conversion to Islam is one tactical way Boko Haram plays on the psychology of women.

Between February 2013 and May 2013, the kidnapping strategy was brought into force with the abductions of more than a dozen government officials and their families in Boko Haram's main base of Borno State. In May 2013, Boko Haram carried out a mass assault on a police barracks in Bama, Borno State in which militants captured 12 Christian women and children (Agence France-Presse, 13 May 2013 cited in Zenn and Pearson, 2014:47). This was a prolonged attack, and the abductions followed a fierce battle with security forces in which more than 100 people were killed. On May 7, 2013, Shekau claimed the kidnappings of these 12 women and children in Boko Haram's name. In another video message, he then promised to make these hostages his 'servants' if certain conditions, such as the release of Boko Haram members and their wives from prison, were not met (Agence France-Presse, video, 13 May 2013 cited in Zenn and Pearson, 2014:47).

The availability of women for sexual purposes became a means of satisfying insurgents and cultivating loyalty. A Civilian Joint Task Force commander, who participated in a raid that liberated women and girls, linked the abduction of women to the Nigerian government's counterterrorism deployment of security forces to urban centers; he asserted that when Maiduguri (Borno's capital) became "too hot" for the insurgents, they abandoned their urban wives and began "picking up women anywhere and using them to satisfy themselves" (Bloo and, Matfess, 2016).

On the night of April 14-15, 2014 up to three hundred girls from different schools in Northeastern Nigeria gathered for their final examinations in the town of Chibok. Instead of taking their tests, they were kidnapped (Campbell, 2014a). Many schools in the northeast region had shut down. Boko Haram was targeting them because of their opposition to Western education, which the militants believe corrupts the values of Muslims. But Chibok had not been attacked before, so it was felt safe to use the school for the important final year exams. Many of the pupils were Christians. The gunmen arrived in the town late at night in a blaze of gunfire and headed for the school where they raided the dormitories and loaded the girls on to lorries (BBC News, May 8, 2017). For many around the globe, the mass abduction provided a stunning introduction to Boko Haram and increased pressure on the government to fight the militant group

which has raged through parts of northern Nigeria for years, burning entire villages and carrying out rape, beheadings, looting and other acts of violence.

This grew into a global campaign which spread to the streets of Nigeria with demonstrations led by women's organisations. Nigerian government officials and the then First Lady, Patience Jonathan, accused protestors of trying to discredit the government (Hassan, 2014 cited in Nti, 2014). She went further to request the detention of two of their leaders. Indeed, prior to Yousafzai Malala's visit -also, being at the forefront of government intervention to bring back the kidnapped Nigerian girls -the government of Nigeria had been avoiding taking public action against Boko Haram. However, after meeting with the president of Nigeria, Goodluck Jonathan, Malala announced that: "The president promised me... that the abducted girls will return to their homes soon" (Global Citizen, 2014).

Following the President's confirmation of the abduction, the Nigerian government and security services began providing details on the girls. But there was one problem about the actual number of schoolgirls abducted which kept changing. It ranged from 100 to almost 300, with similar confusion regarding the escapees. In May 2014, a police commissioner explained the confusion as due to the convening of girls from different schools (AlJazeera, 2014). Curiously, after the kidnapping, the Nigerian state continued to treat the question of Boko haram as a low level insurgency. It was full three weeks before the President of Nigeria made a substantial statement on the kidnappings in Chibok after women of Nigeria protested that the government was not doing enough (Campbella, 2014a).

Three weeks after the abduction, on May 5, Boko Haram's Abubakar Shekau claimed responsibility for the kidnapping. Some victims managed to escape, and the numbers still held in captivity are soft. The figure most often cited by the media is 276 (Campbell, 2014b). The kidnapping of the girls at Government Secondary School Chibok, Borno State, brought into international prominence the organization Jama'atu Ahlis Suna Lidda'awati Wal Jihad or Boko Haram. This incident heralded a new trajectory in Boko Haram's tactics and strategies. Before the 2014 incident, the Chibok community was that unknown Local Government Area (LGA) together with 26 others in Borno State. Its prominence in social, political, security and media circles is unfortunately hinged on pain and gloom (africanews, 2016). It is believed that the gunmen took the girls to the Sambisa forest near the Cameroonian border. Ever since, it has been a litany of tales regarding the fate of the kidnapped girls. It suffices to state that the tales indicate grave violations of international and domestic laws as well as an affront on the rights of the abducted girls.

Three videos have been released to date. On 14 August 2016, a Boko Haram tape showed about 50 of the girls and contained a demand for the release of imprisoned militants in exchange for them. The group also said some girls had been killed or injured in government air strikes. In April 2016 a video was broadcast by CNN, which appeared to show some of the kidnapped schoolgirls alive. In May 2014, Boko Haram released a video of around 130 girls gathered together reciting the Koran. Boko Haram leader Abubakar Shekau has said all the girls have converted to Islam and had been "married off". In 2016, three women who claimed they were held in the same camps as some of the Chibok girls told the BBC some of them had become fighters - though this testimony has never been verified (BBC News, May 8, 2017).

It is argued that the girls kidnapped in Chibok in 2014 represent a small fraction of the number of people taken by Boko Haram. Exact figures are hard to come by, but in 2015 Amnesty International affirmed that at least 2,000 women and girls had been taken since 2014, with many of them being forced into sexual slavery. But some of those have been freed. Amnesty Nigeria's spokesperson Isa Sanusi said that since 2014 his organisation has recorded 14 mass abductions and that it still gets reports of kidnappings on a regular basis (BBC News, May 8, 2017). The rise of the Islamist militant group Boko Haram has forced more than 2.6 million people to flee from their homes across Nigeria, Cameroon and Chad, more than half of them children. Many survivors have endured horrific violence, including sexual assault (Graham-Harrison, 2017). The group, which surpassed the Islamic State as the deadliest terror group, has employed suicide tactics since 2011 and female suicide bombers since June 2014.

Apart from the core issue of terrorism which traverses the entire gamut of the debacle, it is imperative to situate the crisis in its proper legal context. In line with accounts reportedly narrated by some of the girls who escaped the kidnapping, they are being subjected to rape by the insurgents. Indeed, some stated that it was these grievous acts that made them to risk their lives by daring to escape. A 16-year-old Comfort Bulus who was reported to have escaped from the Sambisa camp said that some of the girls were raped and forced to convert to Islam. Those who refused had their throats cut (Adekoya, 2014). It is also reported that the girls were being subjected to doing domestic chores such as cooking and washing plates for the insurgents. There are also accounts to the effect that some of the girls are either being married off to the insurgents, or are being given out in marriages for a fee to other nationals (Adekoya, 2014). These stories have had debilitating impact on the families of the abducted girls. In a development considered an act of desperation, before the May 2017 release of the 82 girls, some Chibok residents had already performed funeral rites for their children, while others have asked the government to declare their children legally dead so that they can move on with their own lives (Freeman,

2016). Their desperation and frustration are understandable as parents. Since the abductions, at least 18 parents have also died of natural causes, with heart failure, stomach ulcers and other "stress" related conditions all blamed for such (Freeman, 2016).

As would be discussed in subsequent sections, women's and girls' importance for Boko Haram stems from their roles and how they are perceived in society – both in the North East and in Nigeria as a whole. As wives, they enhance social status and provide sexual or domestic services (sometimes forced), thereby becoming valuable incentives for potential male recruits. Their adherence, willing or forced, to the movement's version of Islam can also contribute to the spreading of its ideology among other women, but possibly also young men (ICG, 2016:6).

VI. Local and Global Advocacy: The Nuances and Outcomes

The emergence of violence as a crucial issue for women and development in the Third World has arisen from grassroots women's endeavours rather than being initiated by outside authorities or international agencies. Violence is increasingly identified as a priority concern among various regions of the world, and/or as a problem that limits women's participation in or capacity to benefit from development projects. Women have taken leadership in making violence against themselves visible, and in addressing its causes and manifestations, as well as its remedies (Carrillo, 1991:18). This is not unconnected with the fact that both women and children have been disproportionately affected by conflict as casualties of violence, as internally displaced persons and as refugees. Violence against women and children in conflict harms families, impoverishes communities and reinforces other forms of inequality. In addition, women and girls suffer direct violations of their physical integrity, for example through reproductive violations and enforced pregnancy (African Union, 2013).

The Boko Haram sect has abducted at least 500 women and girls in North-eastern Nigeria since 2009 and has perpetrated numerous physical and psychological abuses against them in captivity (Human Rights Watch, 2014; Haruna, 2014). The April 14, 2014 abduction of 276 girls from a Government Secondary School in Chibok, a rural town in Borno State, the biggest single incident of abduction by Boko Haram till date brought to the fore its strategic focus on women and girls. Indeed, the Chibok abductions and ensuing controversy provided the first nationally and internationally recognized symbol of the group's violence against women (Bloom and Matfess, 2016).

Though Boko Haram is known to be the most significant source of violence in Nigeria since the transition to democracy in 1999, the group's abuses against women have also earned

it international notoriety. When the group abducted the Chibok Girls from their school in April 2014, impassioned advocates around the world promulgated the #BringBackOurGirls movement and popularized the hashtag on social media, demanding that former President Goodluck Jonathan mount a serious effort to rescue the victims. Not only did human rights advocates marshal support through NGOs and public awareness campaigns, but Nigeria's international partners, including the United States, also provided supplementary military support (Bloom and Matfess, 2016). For instance, late in May 2014, President Obama announced that 80 military personnel will be deployed to Chad to fly surveillance aircraft and drones to aid in the search. This is in addition to an earlier dispatch of "experts" to Nigeria to advise the government, in collaboration with a team of U.S. intelligence and law enforcement officials (Lazare, 2014). In Washington, D.C., New York City, London, and other major cities, rallies were held calling for the return of the girls.

Many local and international organizations made public statements calling on the Nigerian Government for the release of the abducted girls, as part of the on-going global campaign. UNICEF, an organization focused on the realization of children's rights, has been vocal in their opposition to Boko Haram and their commitment to bringing back the kidnapped girls while Amnesty International has been prominent voice in the violence that surged through Nigeria at the time of the kidnapping (Global Citizen, 2014). Among organizations that are championing the clarion call for the "BBOG" global campaign include but not limited to; Women Arise against Terror, African National Congress of Women's League South Africa, The Global Partnership for Education (GPE), United Nations (UN), Nigeria's National Orientation Agency.

While following in the pattern of other terrorist groups, Boko Haram has also exhibited particular characteristics unique to Northern Nigeria in its conceptualization of women's roles and its use of rape as a weapon of war. In addition to rape for the purposes of torture, punishment, or humiliation, the group appears to be using rape to produce the next generation of extremists that will pursue Boko Haram's particular brand of jihad (Bloom and Matfess, 2016). The use of these women and girls—most believed to be between 15 and 18—began not long after many girls were kidnapped from the Chibok school. The corresponding time frame and the age has prompted widespread theories that Boko Haram enlisted the kidnapped girls, many of whom were Christian, in its jihad. It is not impossible that after more than three years in captivity some of the Chibok girls could be indoctrinated by their kidnapers enough to carry out such attacks, but there's no physical evidence to tie the two together (Strochlic, 2014).

On April 14, 2014, the militant group Boko Haram abducted 276 girls from Chibok, Borno State, Nigeria (Ashionye Ogene 2014 cited in Maxfield, 2015:4). Days later, Nigerian lawyer Ibrahim Abdullahi tweeted quotes from a public address on the abductions by the former Nigerian Minister of Education, Obiageli Ezekwesili. Abdullahi included Ezekwesili's phrase "Bring Back Our Girls," which became a "viral" hashtag, spreading across national boundaries to users well-removed from (and previously oblivious to) Boko Haram's violence (Anne-Marie Tomchak 2014 cited in Maxfield, 2015:4). Michelle Obama made a rousing speech a few weeks after their abduction, demanding the girls' return. Millions of people showed their support for the #bringbackourgirls campaign. The hashtag was shared more than five million times (Mazumdar, 2015).

The "BBOG" global outrage campaign was thus, launched to raise conscious awareness of challenging the Nigerian government towards ensuring safe return of the abductees. Several institutional means of consultation with the Nigerian government was initiated via social media campaign and face-to-face discussion by concerned citizens of Nigeria as well as world leaders and international organizations who express solidarity across continents for the abducted school girls (Olutokunbo et al, 2015:65). With the instrumentality of BBOG Nigeria, the #BringBackOurGirls hashtag 'caught fire' in the wake of the abduction of the girls, #BBOG was tweeted over 400,000 times by people from all over the world. It seemed that the world was looking for the abducted girls. At the center of the activism, the famous Abuja Unity Fountain "sit-out" sessions that pooled together people from all walks of life, irrespective of colour, race, creed, age, educational and social status, constantly and ceaselessly meeting to ensure that the 'pressure is on'(africanews, 2016).

Especially in the aftermath of Shekau's video, with threats to sell the girls into slavery, there was international outrage. Even First Lady Michelle Obama, Hillary Clinton and celebrities including Mary J Blige and Alicia Keys, publicly rallied around the hashtag #BringBackOurGirls. The United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Israel, and other countries all offered assistance. There was widespread criticism of the lethargy of the Jonathan administration in taking concrete action (Campbell, 2014). With the likes of Obiageli Ezekwesili, Aisha Yesufu, Hadiza Bala Usman and others leading the charge, there has been a sustained and very well calculated effort to demand that these girls are found. The strategy of the BBOG campaign has seen it consolidate its base and reach from the local level through to the State and Federal levels. Beyond Nigeria to the sub-regional, continental and international levels, the girls of Chibok have entered political and diplomatic circles across the world (africanews, 2016).

Born out of a need to ensure the plight of the girls was not dismissed, BBOG filled the leadership vacuum that emerged after the slow response by the government, and became an authoritative voice with its marches, daily sit-ins and online activism. Kadaria Ahmed, a journalist and media entrepreneur, describes the movement's efforts as "amazing, particularly because they are operating in an environment where civic and civil advocacy is fairly new. Nigerians are not used to the idea that regular people get behind a cause and support it - not for personal gains but with a view to promoting a shared cause" (Otas, 2016).

The Nigerian and diasporic activists routinely referred to the strength of the Nigerian people and the necessity of their on-going commitment on behalf of the missing girls. In particular, Nigerian activists pressed their fellow citizens and supporters to insist that the Nigerian government, including the nation's military, take action to rescue the missing students. Unlike the version of Bring Back Our Girls spread by White users in the Global North, the Nigerian focus remained local and included significant outrage toward the Goodluck Jonathon administration, which it viewed as both "deceitful" and "inept" (Obiageli Ezekwesili 2014 cited in Maxfield, 2015:7). For two years, the federal government kept making moves to find the girls and reunite them with their families but it all proved futile.

Of the girls initially seized, scores escaped in the hours after the kidnapping (Kamouni, 2016). The Nigerian president, Muhammadu Buhari, came to power in 2015 after promising that his government would release the girls, who have been paraded in several Boko Haram videos posted online since their kidnap. After he was elected, though, he said that much as he wanted to, it may not be possible to find them (Maclean, 2017). The government has however, demonstrated more commitment to the release of the girls than the previous administration. Hence, hope remains high, as President Muhammadu Buhari has promised the government will "redouble efforts to ensure that we fulfill our pledge of bringing the remaining girls back home. Already, the credible first step has been taken and Government will sustain the effort until all the remaining girls return safely" (Otas, 2016).

In May 2016, an army-backed vigilante group in the Sambisa Forest, a Boko Haram stronghold close to the border with Cameroon, found one of the girls with her four-month-old child. Two other girls managed to escape in September 2016 and January 2017 (BBC News, May 8, 2017). October 2016 saw the first mass release with 21 girls being freed following negotiations between the government and Boko Haram, brokered by the ICRC. It is believed that Boko Haram prisoners were freed in exchange (BBC News, May 8, 2017). The terrorist group also freed 82 girls on May 6, 2017 after intense negotiation with a faction of the militant group (Sahara Reporters, 2017). The Nigerian government confirmed that 82 Chibok girls were

freed by the West African Islamist group as result of “lengthy negotiations” and “in exchange for some Boko Haram suspects held by the authorities” (RT News, 2017). The operation involved efforts by a variety of national and international actors, including the Swiss government, the International Red Cross, the Nigerian military and security services, as well as local and foreign non-governmental organizations.

VII. Some of the Key Events Surrounding the Chibok Crisis

The table 1 briefly lists some of the key events surrounding the Chibok Crisis.

Table 1. Some of the Key Events Surrounding the Chibok Crisis

April 2014	Boko Haram extremists kidnap 276 schoolgirls from Chibok in northern Nigeria, the region where the insurgency emerged several years ago.
November 2014	Extremists seize Chibok, and Nigerian army takes back the town.
May 2015	New President Muhammadu Buhari is sworn in, pledging to tackle Boko Haram “head-on.”
April 13, 2016	Boko Haram video appears to show some of the Chibok girls, and tearful mothers recognize their daughters.
May 18, 2016	Relative says one of the Chibok girls is found, pregnant, in a forest; pressure grows on Nigeria’s government to rescue the others.
August 14, 2016	Boko Haram video says some Chibok girls are killed in airstrikes and demands release of extremists in exchange for the other girls’ freedom.
October 13, 2016	Spokesman for Nigeria’s president confirms 21 Chibok girls have been freed, a result of government negotiations with Boko Haram. Nigeria’s government says another 83 girls would be released “very soon.”
November 5, 2016	Military announces the first army rescue of a Chibok girl, during a raid on a forest hideout.
December 24, 2016	Nigeria’s president declares that Boko Haram has been crushed, driven from its last forest hideout.
January 5, 2017	Nigeria’s army says soldiers find one of the schoolgirls wandering in the bush near the forest stronghold.
April 14, 2017	Nigerians mark three years since the mass abduction.
May 6, 2017	Nigeria’s government says another 82 schoolgirls are released.

Source: NewStage, 2017²

During the first phase of the two-step operation, the two commanders, escorted by representatives of the military and Red Cross, were handed over to Boko Haram in Banki. Honouring their part of the deal, the militants then reportedly took the schoolgirls outside the town, where they were subsequently picked up by the military (RT News, 2017). According to Vanguard (2017), apart from releasing some Boko Haram suspects, as confirmed by President Muhammadu Buhari and Chairman, Senate Committee on Foreign and Local Debts, Senator

² Available at:<http://newstage.com.ng/2017/05/11/kidnap-rescue-chibok-school-girls-3-years-later-timeline/>
<http://newstage.com.ng/2017/05/11/kidnap-rescue-chibok-school-girls-3-years-later-timeline/>

Shehu Sani, some money was also spent to ease the process. The release brings to 103 the number of Chibok girls so far freed, apart from those who escaped on their own since abduction on April 14, 2014.

The split in Boko Haram, which Gaffey (2016) envisaged could complicate the release of the remaining girls did not eventually stall further negotiation after all. Boko Haram pledged allegiance to ISIS in 2015 under the auspices of its long time leader, Abubakar Shekau. But after an ISIS publication named Abu Musab al-Barnawi, a former Boko Haram spokesman, as the leader of ISIS's branch in West Africa, Shekau disavowed Barnawi and claimed to be the group's rightful leader. Clashes have since been reported between Shekau's faction and Barnawi's. It is not clear how many of the Chibok girls are being held by each group, nor even how defined the division is, but any split could mean the Nigerian government is forced to negotiate with more than one group to secure the release of the remaining girls (Gaffey, 2016).

BBOG's work, according to Otas (2016), has experienced its fair share of challenges. The group has endured many years of daily vigil, police tear gas and sometimes personal attacks from people who misunderstand their campaign. But they kept the faith and roused the world, using all media, to look in their direction and to help their campaign in getting the girls released (Daily Trust, 2017). A more serious challenge to the movement came when it started being viewed as the opposition by the government. This is the narrative that played out leading up to Nigeria's hotly contested 2014 general election. The more BBOG became vociferous with its demand for the girls to be rescued, the more antagonistic the relationship between state and the advocacy group became. This led to their sit-ins and protest marches being disrupted by the police. Ezekwesili tells me that the government of the then president, Goodluck Jonathon, "banned the BBOG from coming out at all to the Unity Fountain (where they had their daily sit-ins), as well as marching on the street. Then the FCT Police Commissioner, who later became an Assistant Inspector General of Police, made it formal that he was banning our movement from engaging in our protest. So, we went to the courts to assert our rights as citizens, and as enshrined in the 1999 Nigerian Constitution. The court ruled in our favour" (Otas, 2016). In September 2016, that scenario repeated itself when the administration of President Buhari tried to stop the group from marching in the capital city of Abuja.

VIII. Post- Abduction Recovery, Re-integration and Holistic Development

It is estimated that one in three women is subject to violence over the course of her lifetime, even as gender mutilation and child marriages persist. This is coupled with the

vicissitudes of Nigerian customary law which generally tends to subjugate the girl-child. It behoves on government to provide adequate security especially in the North East zone of the country to enable children return to schools, even as efforts must be made to rescue the remaining Chibok girls and reunite them with their families (Adekoya, 2014). The repercussions of violence against women reverberate throughout the family and community. Studies show that children exposed to violence are more likely to become both victims and perpetrators (Buvinic et al, 1999).

Violence against women impoverishes society economically, politically and culturally, by limiting the active role that women can make in the development of their community. While it is difficult to determine the full cost to society of violence against women, a growing number of studies point to the serious economic consequences, including loss of productive time, loss of earnings and medical costs (World Bank, 1994). There is a pervasive assumption that girls in captivity are subjected to sexual and domestic servitude, sometimes forced to engage in acts of brutality in an effort to harden them, and kept in line by acts of barbaric violence and brutality (Derluyn et al. 2004). During the three years of captivity, many of the girls have gone through adolescence and may appear different than when their parents last saw them.

Indeed, frequently, returning to their families and communities is the beginning of a new ordeal for the girls, as the sexual violence they have suffered often results in stigmatization. People are also often afraid the girls have been indoctrinated by Boko Haram and that they pose a threat to their communities. The use by Boko Haram of children – mostly girls – as so called ‘suicide’ bombers has fuelled such fears (UNICEF-Nigeria, 2016). Use of young females as suicide bombers, the first instance of the tactic in Nigeria’s history, has attracted much publicity. The attacks, which have killed hundreds, have become symbolic of the insurgency’s brutality. Between January and April 2017 for instance, a total of 27 children died after detonating bombs strapped to their bodies that they were ordered to carry into markets, checkpoints and other public places. The number is almost the same as the total who died over the whole of 2016, according to a report by UNICEF (See Ruth Maclean, 2017).

The blurred lines between Boko Haram member, abductee, slave, wife, supporter, victim and sympathiser have left many women and girls with the stigma of association. That stigma – heightened if they have children born to Boko Haram fathers, even if the pregnancy was against their will – is a major obstacle to reintegration into community life (ICG, 2016:15). Such social exclusion, coupled with a lack of tailored support, can mean that mental health problems can be amplified as children who need a warm welcome and psychosocial support continue to be victimised. President Muhammadu Buhari, who said he was “delighted” to meet

the newly-freed girls also promised to “personally oversee” their “rehabilitation” (Sridharan, 2017). These girls, like the ones released previously, will be held in custody in the capital of Abuja for medical attention and trauma counselling. The Muhammadu Buhari-led administration was however, urged to ensure the girls were not kept in lengthy detention and security screening which can only add to their suffering and plight (Daily Trust, 2017). As observed by Pernille Ironside (cited in Sridharan, 2017), they will face a long and difficult process to rebuild their lives after the indescribable horror and trauma they have suffered at the hands of Boko Haram.

Hence, educating families, community members, religious leaders and schools on reintegration practices and how to welcome children back is vital (International Business Times, 2017) because the possibility of being shunned by communities can lead to some girls choosing to stay with armed groups, while others do so as they perceive life there to be better. As a matter of fact, a schoolgirl who was among the kidnapped girls, according to the federal government refused to be part of a release deal because she is now married to a militant fighter. The disclosure underlines the complex psychological effects of a lengthy captivity, and gives an indication of the work required to rehabilitate and reintegrate those released (Xie Zhenqi, 2017).

Health and education experts as well as other stakeholders have suggested fundamental issues they want government to address to properly integrate the freed girls into the society (Sanni, 2017). Furthering their education (I mean with all other displaced children in the region) may seriously be constrained by the lack of shelter and other basic education facilities such as good buildings, instruction materials and others. In the last few years, many school children have been forced out of school recently because of Boko Haram activities, making them to be educationally disadvantaged. To achieve the clandestine purpose of truncating western education, schools have been targets of choice for Boko Haram since 2009. The United Nations (cited in Sanni, 2017), estimated that 1,500 schools were destroyed since 2014, with at least 1,280 casualties said to be teachers and students. According to UNESCO, Nigeria now has the world’s highest number of out-of-school children, due mainly to the terrorists’ activities (Otoo, 2015). It becomes imperative that the government, more than anything else, must prioritise the girls’ integration into society, support relevant institutions to help them reclaim their paused dream of acquiring education and provide proper psychosocial support to ensure their well-being.

The psychosocial health of the abducted girls, their parents, and their communities must be attended to, starting with the girls who have escaped or been rescued thus far (Okome,

2017:20). When they do reach safety, girls who have been held by Boko Haram are often ill, malnourished, traumatized and exhausted; they are in need of medical attention and psychosocial support so they can begin to come to terms with their experiences and reintegrate with their families and communities (UNICEF-Nigeria, 2016). Psychosocial support for victims should include counseling from professionals and strategies for victims and their families to facilitate reintegration into the community. Not all returned abductees can depend on more than family assistance, which while important, even crucial, may be more successful when combined with culturally appropriate psychological intervention (Okome, 2017:13-14). In a broader perspective, Okome (2017:21) suggests that:

Given the urgency of the situation, the Nigerian government must meet its constitutional obligations to all Nigerian citizens and work to build peace and security through the comprehensive provision of psychosocial support for escapees, those rescued, their families and communities, and eventually for the (remaining) Chibok girls who are still in Boko Haram captivity, once they are rescued and reunited with their families. (OKOME, 2017: 21)

When the Chibok girls were kidnapped from their schools and ripped from the safety of home and family, they lost their freedom and their futures (Thomas, 2017). It is a truism that several attacks carried out by the Nigerian Islamist group have had a devastating effect on education in the country's north-eastern region. In the entire region almost one million school-aged children are out of school and many have been out of school for at least the last two years, some up to three, four years. This means that almost an entire generation of children has been robbed of their right to education, which is an intrinsic component of their development (Deutsche Welle, 2016). More focus on rehabilitating the education system is therefore required, including both building new schools and reinforcing positive messages of peace through the curriculum. Thus, Becker (2017) avers that "assisting the girls with the completion of their education is an important step toward rebuilding their lives and working toward the future". Although, the African Development Bank (AfDB) says it has committed \$1 million for the rebuilding of Government Girls Secondary School (GGSS), Chibok, Borno state (The Cable, 2017), more forms of synergy are required among government institutions and international partners. For instance, since January 2016, UNICEF and its partner International Alert have been providing psychosocial support for women and girls who have experienced sexual violence at the hands of Boko Haram. UNICEF and International Alert are also working with affected communities through a network of trained religious and community leaders to promote acceptance and to address negative perceptions that hamper the reintegration of women and girls who have suffered such violence (UNICEF-Nigeria, 2016). It is projected that all of

the 24 girls who were rescued from Boko Haram in 2016 will be returning to school this September (Becker, 2017).

Generally, there is concern for the growing number of children unable to access education, as a result of the conflicts in this region, the displacement of many and proliferation of IDP camps, and the direct loss of life during communal clashes over land and resources (Peace Direct, 2016:26). The challenge common to many conflict issues in Northern Nigeria is to find productive ways to support young people who, as well as being victims or survivors of conflict, are often drawn into violence. Only through an ambitious strategy to support young people and provide fairer economic development can they be offered a better future – and their involvement in violence reduced (Peace Direct, 2016:3). There is a tendency to associate Northern Nigeria solely with the violence of Boko Haram. In fact, a wide range of conflicts and issues affect the region. Only through a more nuanced understanding of these issues, and how they have given rise to Boko Haram as well as other violence, will peace-builders and their partners be able to address them.

IX. Conclusion

The growing incidence of gender-based violence no doubt constitutes a serious threat to gender development and equality globally. Women's rights are constantly under assault thereby undermining gender rights, equality and development (Adekoya, 2014). Thus strategies need to be developed which educate the media and public institutions and which sensitize the general public, including women themselves, on the disastrous personal and national consequences of continued violence against women (Carrillo, 1991:18). Also, a way forward to combat impunity and prevent the different crimes women and girls often suffer from during armed conflicts, is to organise sensitisation campaigns through electronic and other mass media means of communication, that should aim at potential victims (by informing them about their rights and related International Instruments protecting them); offenders (by drawing their attention on their responsibilities and the related instruments organising their prosecution); and the field Civil Society Organisations (on their obligations or responsibilities). The sensitisation should focus on the sure and subsequent prospect of accountability for any act of human rights abuse by all those responsible (Sita, 2008:36).

How gender dynamics play a part in fuelling the Boko Haram insurgency should be a clear warning that women's integration into decision-making processes at all levels is critical to a durable peace. Countering the sect and rebuilding a peaceful society in the North East

requires the government and its international partners to tackle gender discrimination, better protect women and girls affected by the violence and support women's economic and social reintegration, as well as enhance their role in building sustainable peace (ICG, 2016:ii). All development and reconstruction plans, public and private, should be based on gender-sensitive analysis of the insurgency and counter-insurgency. Programming should acknowledge that in the North East religion can facilitate assistance and be a driving force for promoting positive change for women generally (ibid). In the final analysis, more research is also needed on the triggers for recruitment into violent extremist groups in Northern Nigeria, to help more effective programming by local groups.

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