
Boko Haram Impacts on Education in North East Nigeria

Mausi Segun

Nigeria Researcher, Human Rights Watch

Ini Dele-Adedeji

Doctoral Candidate and Graduate Teaching Assistant, Department of Politics and International Studies,
SOAS

Chair: Elizabeth Donnelly

Assistant Head and Research Fellow, Africa Programme, Chatham House

26 May 2016

The views expressed in this document are the sole responsibility of the speaker(s) and participants, and do not necessarily reflect the view of Chatham House, its staff, associates or Council. Chatham House is independent and owes no allegiance to any government or to any political body. It does not take institutional positions on policy issues. This document is issued on the understanding that if any extract is used, the author(s)/speaker(s) and Chatham House should be credited, preferably with the date of the publication or details of the event. Where this document refers to or reports statements made by speakers at an event, every effort has been made to provide a fair representation of their views and opinions. The published text of speeches and presentations may differ from delivery. © The Royal Institute of International Affairs, 2016.

Introduction

Low levels of education and literacy in north east Nigeria have been exacerbated by the Boko Haram insurgency. The group has targeted teachers and schools, with more than 910 schools destroyed between 2009 and 2015, and 1,500 forced to close. In addition, government security forces have also used schools for military purposes, further reducing children's right to education.

At this event, speakers examined the effects of these attacks on children and on the future development of the region, in reference to the findings of Human Rights Watch's latest report, *They Set the Classrooms on Fire: Attacks on Education in Northeast Nigeria*. They also outlined how international partners can work with the government in Nigeria to protect the right of citizens to education.

The meeting was held on the record. The following summary is intended to serve as an aide-memoire for those who took part and to provide a general summary of discussions for those who did not.

For more information – including recordings, transcripts, summaries, and further resources on this and other related topics – visit www.chathamhouse.org/research/africa.

Mausi Segun

The speaker began by stating that the report, *They Set the Classrooms on Fire: Attacks on Education in Northeast Nigeria*, looks at the impact of the Boko Haram conflict on people's right to education in Nigeria. There are six states in North East Nigeria; Yobe, Adamawa and, particularly, Borno have all been badly affected by the Boko Haram crisis. The conflict has also spilled over into neighbouring parts of Cameroon, Chad and Niger. Attacks have also taken place in other parts of Nigeria.

The speaker noted that there is no valid census data for Nigeria, but of the estimated 30 million Nigerian children of school age, approximately 10.5 million are not in school. Of those not attending school, 62 per cent live in northern Nigeria. Half of the men in northeast Nigeria have received no education at all, and this figure rises to over 61 per cent for women. Historically, the education system was introduced to Nigeria by Christian missionaries during the colonial period, and a view that education is an attempt to convert Muslims in Nigeria's northeast persists.

The speaker expressed her belief that Boko Haram plays off these sentiments, combining Islamic opposition to the teaching of secular scientific principles and the co-education of boys and girls, with public anger over corruption, injustice and widespread poverty. Boko Haram's influence culminated in rioting in July 2009, resulting in founder Mohammed Yusuf being summarily executed in public view by firing squad. At the same time, 600 of his followers were also killed.

Authorities assumed that they had defeated Boko Haram, but the group resurfaced in 2010, led by Abubakar Shekau. Systematic human rights abuses by government security forces against suspected Boko Haram members, as well as on their wives and children, and raids on Quranic schools, prompted a campaign of violence against schools in northeast Nigeria, including the killing of male students and the abduction of girls. By February 2016, 910 schools had been destroyed and a further 1,400 forced to close. Over 600 teachers have been killed and 19,000 forced to flee. In total, almost a million children have been displaced, including 600,000 who have lost all access to education. The most infamous of these attacks was the Chibok school abduction, just one of the 219 kidnapped girls has been found in the last two years.

Segun noted that Nigerian security forces have also been implicated in the killing, arrest and torture of teachers and students, and for using schools as military bases. This has the effect of turning schools into

military targets for Boko Haram. Nigeria is a signatory to the Safe Schools Declaration, which states that schools and universities must not be used as military bases. A climate of fear in the northeast has resulted in parents withdrawing their children from school.

Ini Dele-Adedeji

The speaker began by stating that the word 'Boko' itself has roots as a pejorative term for secularly educated elites who were resented by the Nigerian underclass for their privilege and association with colonial rule. He noted that 'Boko Haram' is not a self-ascribed title, but was given to the group by locals in Bauchi State owing to the fact that the common thread that ran through their teachings was a rejection of secular education. Opposition to education has always been central to Boko Haram's ideology.

Prior to the emergence of Boko Haram, there has been a long history of attacks on schools in northern Nigeria. Islamiyah schools, a compromise by left-leaning politicians to encourage the secular curriculum by fusing it with Islamic studies, came under attack by thugs from the dominant Northern People's Congress (NPC) party in the 1970s. All but three of the 600 Islamiyah schools were destroyed.

The speaker expressed his belief that Boko Haram's hatred of secular schools is driven by a fear of the impact they have will have on Islamic values and the traditional way of life in northeast Nigeria. Boko Haram has gained so much support because their ideology combines two sources of contention: the fears of secular education as being in contravention of Islamic teachings, and anger at the historical marginalization of northern communities, particularly Muslims, by the central government.

Summary of question and answer session

Questions

Most of the schools that have been occupied by Nigerian troops are not functioning as schools; they have been abandoned and, in other cases, soldiers are guarding the students, thus fulfilling a humanitarian function. Does the speaker have any thoughts on this?

What is the age profile of Boko Haram fighters and recruits?

Mausi Segun

The first case that Human Rights Watch documented of the use of schools by Nigerian soldiers was in 2013, where soldiers were using classrooms as a base while lessons were taking place, probably because that school was the most reliable building structure around. The point that the Safe Schools Declaration makes is not to castigate the military for trying to protect students, but that soldiers should not be within the school compound itself. It is acceptable to have soldiers positioned outside of schools to protect children, but when you have the military in the school, or using school structures, it puts the students directly at risk of attack because they are made a party to the conflict. Even if schools have been abandoned, a military presence makes schools more generally a target, and also is likely to see school buildings destroyed by fighting. Post-conflict reconstruction will be much harder if all schools have been destroyed.

Few young people join Boko Haram voluntarily because the group doesn't currently have the financial resources to attract them. However, many are forcibly recruited. Part of the reason Boko Haram abducts and rapes girls is to breed the next generation of fighters. In the internally displaced persons (IDP) camps,

there is a higher proportion of women than young men; this is because many men will have either been captured by Boko Haram as fighters or detained by the Nigerian security forces.

The rejection of education that persists in many northern Nigerian communities must change but this will take time. One can visit a community where there is a school, and yet parents will not send their children there because people believe educated children will leave the community in order to find professional jobs. Many people in the region view education as the beginning of the breakdown of family life and this mind-set must be changed.

Ini Dele-Adedeji

Initially, Boko Haram only attacked school buildings, but in July 2013 the group massacred over 40 boys at a school in Yobe State. People familiar with Boko Haram allege that the change in *modus operandi* was because some of the male students were being used by the military to spy on Boko Haram cells in the local community. This cannot be confirmed, but it does show how dangerous potential connections between military personnel and schools could be.

The age profile of Boko Haram members is very broad. Some are recruited in their sixties and some are very young. Some claim to be recruited in their early teens because their young age means they can follow targets without arousing suspicion.

Questions

Why do you think it is that many Muslims in northeast Nigeria hate Western schools?

How much do you think the problem is to do with the underdevelopment and poverty of the whole region, and to what extent do you think it is defined by traditional social attitudes like those of religious leaders?

Has anyone tried to revive the Islamiyah concept that provides education while incorporating local Islamic values?

Has the speaker come across anything in her research about the provision of education for pupils with impairments or special needs, and how the situation may have changed in this regard in recent years?

Mausi Segun

Some of the hatred of secular education stems not just from its use by the colonial powers, but because secular education was a symbol of inequality, whereby the wealthiest students had access to universities and other enormous opportunities, thus fostering resentment. In the early days of Mohammed Yusuf's preaching, he mainly attracted university students who witnessed for the first time the lavish lifestyles of the wealthiest students. Poverty is not a cause of militancy in itself, but extremism often stems from a sense of social injustice, whereby people who feel like their poverty is a result of the actions of greedy elites. If a person is extremely poor, a wage paid by Boko Haram that offers some kind of security is very tempting, which is why the group's recruitment has been so successful in the poorest parts of Nigeria, Cameroon, Niger and Chad. A solution to this problem must deal with all of these different dynamics.

Activism is virtually non-existent in northeast Nigeria and most civil society functions through religious organizations. One of the largest civil society organizations is the Federation of Muslim Women's

Associations in Nigeria (FOMWAN), which is strong and very active, but they can only campaign within religious constraints.

The Islamiyah concept has worked fairly well in Kano. There have been some attacks in the state, but all but one of these attacks has been on tertiary educational institutions. Islamiyah schools set up by the previous state governor are doing well, and this is something that other policy-makers should consider in order to balance different needs.

Education and rights for people with disabilities are extremely limited in Nigeria. Some people in IDP camps report that they brought only their able-bodied children with them to the camps, abandoning their disabled child. There have also been reports of Boko Haram taking these abandoned children, then abandoning them again when they realize that they are disabled. A child that needs additional care is a burden that many people do not want to deal with. A similar situation exists with older people, and disability rights organizations in Nigeria must find ways to highlight this problem, particularly at times of conflict.

Ini Dele-Adedeji

When one considers Boko Haram's attacks on schools, one will find that the only type of school the group is fairly tolerant of have been the Islamiyah schools. Since attacks began on schools, many of these institutions have refused to reopen, but a school that has never closed its doors is one in which the children of combatants are educated alongside children of government workers under a combined Islamiyah model. As it seems there will not be an acceptance of secular education in the near future, the government should consider Islamiyah education as a potential compromise.

Culturally, in much of Sahelian Africa, one is not considered a man until he is married, but the costs of marriage are hugely prohibitive because it requires providing expensive gifts to potential in-laws. Boko Haram recruitment has exploited poverty, not just in offering microfinance for business, but also in sponsoring the weddings of recruits who would otherwise be unable to marry.