Written evidence submitted by the Handa Centre for the Study of Terrorism and Political Violence (CSTPV), University of St Andrews (IRN0033)

Introduction

Omeni is a Lecturer in Terrorism and Counter-Terrorism Studies with the Handa Centre for the Study of Terrorism and Political Violence (CSTPV), University of St Andrews. Omeni joined the CSTPV from the University of Leicester, where he was an Assistant Professor in African Politics and led the Africa Research Group. Omeni joined Leicester from King's College London where he taught at the Department of War Studies. He previously worked with the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) and was co-chair of the Africa Research Group at King's College London (affiliated to their world-leading War Studies department).

In 2019, Omeni won the prestigious "Rising Star" excellence award at King's College London. Omeni earned his PhD in 2015 at King's College London's Defence Studies Department, based at the Joint Services Command and Staff College, Defence Academy of the UK. He has published extensively, with three books on the police and politics in Nigeria, the Nigerian military and Boko Haram's insurgency. A fourth work, *Rebel: 500 Years of Civil Wars, Small Wars and Insurgencies in Africa*, is forthcoming with Cambridge University Press.

Reason for Submitting Evidence:

The recent death of the militant jihadist Abu Shekau, Boko Haram's leader, offers a natural juncture to reflect on the ongoing security crisis in North-East Nigeria and how it might be more rendered more amenable to positive intervention. Having lectured and published extensively on security in Nigeria, worked with the British Army expedition in Nigeria (and received a commendation for helping the unit), and done policy work with IISS and RUSI on the same theme, I am in a position to offer UK policy recommendations on the Nigeria Review, in the area of security.

Along with being invited to speak at Wilton Park and the FCO, I have also been twice invited to speak at UK Parliarment on security in Nigeria and have briefed the counter-terrorism team at the Cabinet Office on my fieldwork in North-East Nigeria. My project on security in North-East Nigeria also received a glowing review from the Head of the Africa Unit at Chatham House.

June 2021

Executive Summary

Since 2010, the insurgency by Boko Haram in North-East Nigeria has emerged as the country's top security challenge. The North East, already an impoverished region, historically has struggled with development challenges. Yet, over the past few decades, these challenges have been worsened by climate change. Desertification, deforestation, reduced annual rainfall, and Lake Chad's drying has eroded local economies and complicated ancestral farming, herding and fishing practices. However, due to Boko Haram's threat, these development and climate change questions are often absent within the debate on security in North-East Nigeria. Meanwhile, they are being exploited within the emergence of a "war economy" in areas controlled by Boko Haram.

Consequently, over the past decade, even as Boko Haram fought the Nigerian military to a stalemate in its counter-insurgency, development indices of North-East Nigeria have fallen even further behind the rest of the country. The region's youth now face an uncertain future. Millions of internally displaced persons (IDPs), victims of the insurgency, now reside in makeshift camps. Conflict between farmer-herder communities has flared up, and spread through the Middle Belt area of Nigeria.

This document discusses Boko Haram's origins, factions, the nature of its threat and why Nigeria's military forces have struggled against it. The paper also highlights the Herder-Farmer Crisis in Nigeria's Middle Belt and how both this and the Boko Haram insurgency interact with climate change and an emergent "war economy" to compound the security situation.

The document concludes with a set of recommendations, noting that UK policymakers, working with the Nigerian government, could help in six key areas: (1) the police, (2) the

military, (3) internally displaced persons (IDP) camps, (4) the environment, (5) youth

empowerment and (6) civilian grassroots initiatives and research funding for peacebuilding.
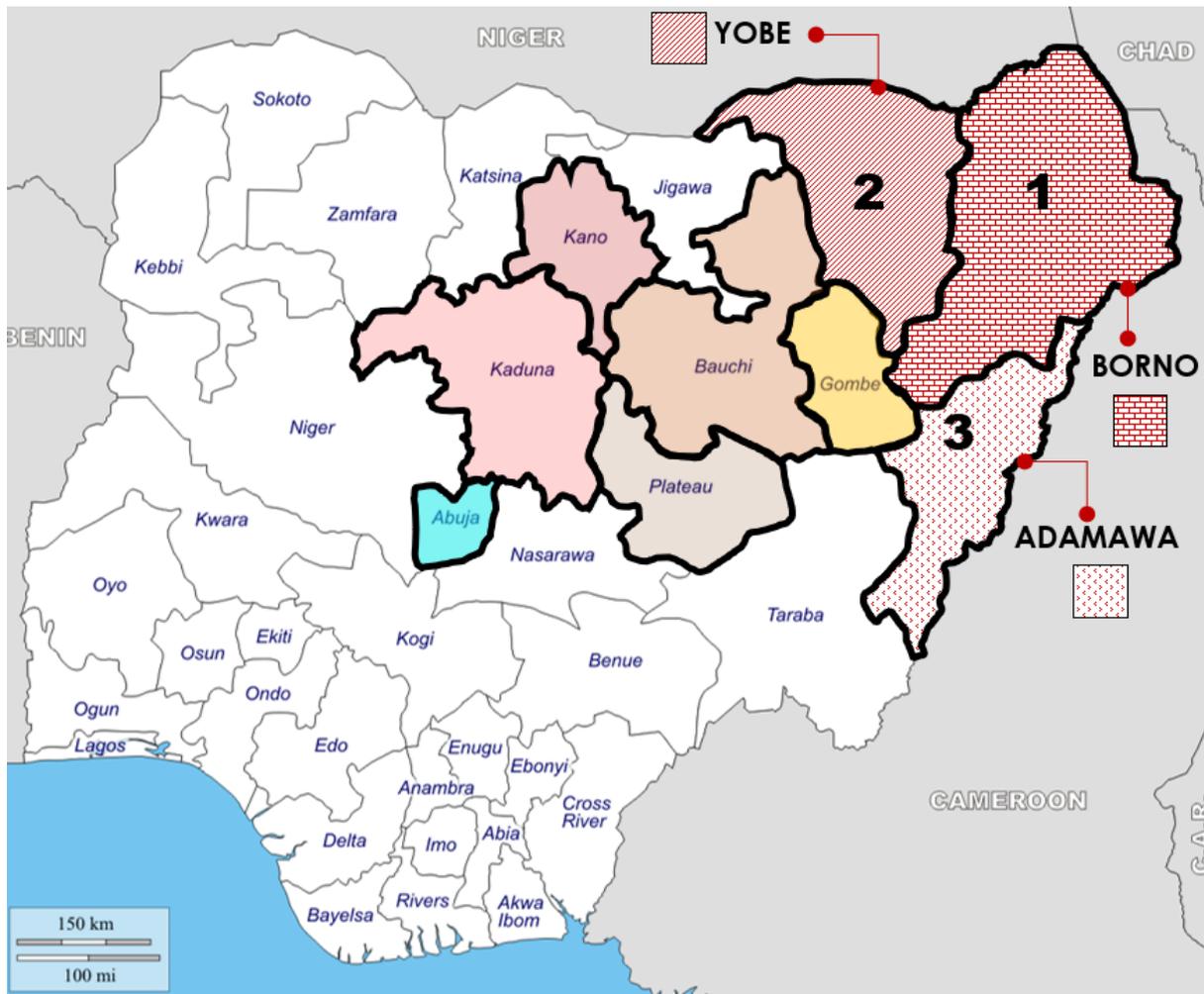
Figure 1: Borno, Yobe and Adamawa States — which are most affected by Boko Haram's insurgency — on a political map of Nigeria

Boko Haram: What's in a Name?

Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-Jihad (JAS), translated from Arabic as "People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet's Teachings and Jihad" is a radical Salafi-Jihadist movement in Nigeria. Commonly, the group is called Boko Haram. It originated when Muhammad Yusuf, a respected Salafi activist, issued a *fatwā* (or religious edict) to his followers in 2002 (Brigaglia 2015). In this *fatwā*, Yusuf "declared it impermissible (haram) for Muslims to attend public school (boko) or work for the government". This led to Nigerian Muslims mockingly referring to Yusuf and his group as "Boko Haram" (Brigaglia 2015).

Over time, this reference to Boko Haram's insistence on a boycott of both schools and government work stuck. However, what is often named "Boko Haram" consists of at least three competing factions since 2012 (Omeni 2019).

The first faction, JAS, is the oldest and has a more substantial presence in Southern and Central Borno. The Islamic State West Africa Province (IS-WA), a faction that splintered in 2016, is stronger in Northern Bono and the Lake Chad area, bordering Chad. A third faction, Ansaru — inactive since 2013 — operates in North-West Nigeria and Kano (International Crisis Group 2019). Territorial competition between JAS and IS-WA has been violent since 2017. As an example, communities under IS-WA's control in the Lake Chad area pay taxes and levies. However, such villages could also be attacked by JAS (Zenn 2020).

An Anti-Fragile Threat

Waging low-intensity conflicts and embracing war avoidance as the weaker side's expedient since 2011, Boko Haram has confounded Nigeria's traditional military forces. This war avoidance doctrine has favoured the insurgent, even as state forces' likelihood of pitched victory has diminished. Indeed, as Figure 2 suggests, despite improvements in numbers,

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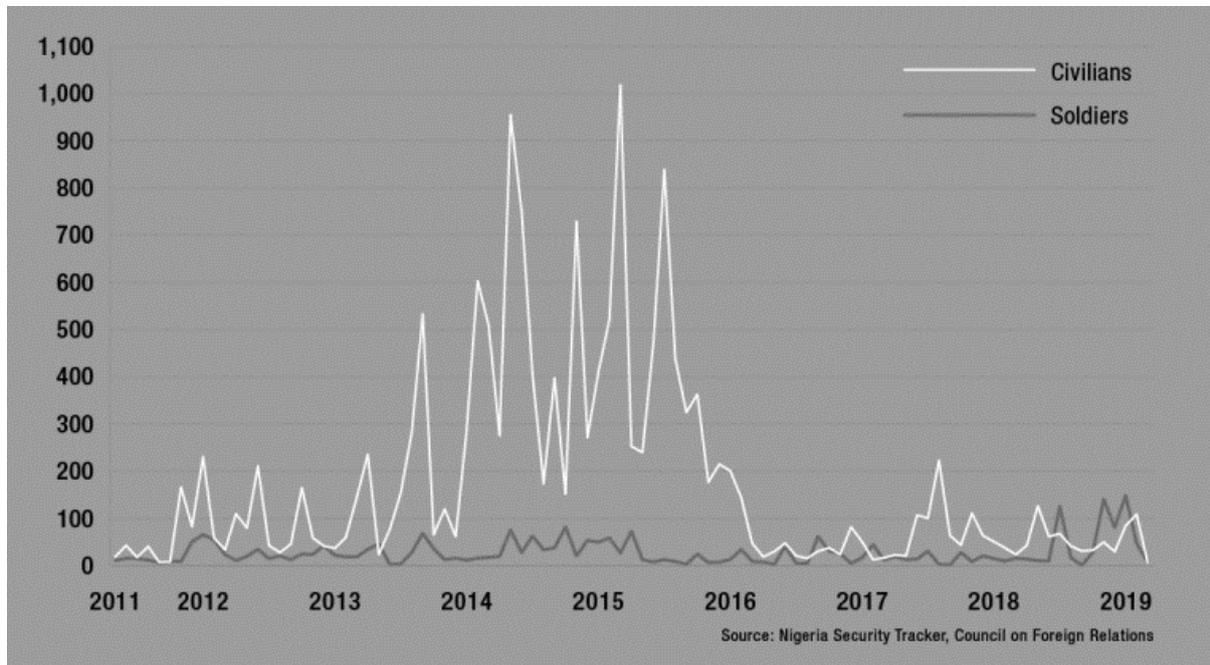training, equipment, *matériel,* and funding, Nigeria's military effort against Boko Haram has struggled.

Figure 2: Monthly Fatalities Associated with Boko Haram Conflict, 2011-2019: Civilians vs. Soldiers. Source: International Crisis Group (2019).

In this regard, Boko Haram has come to display a property called "anti-fragility" (Taleb 2012). The more the Nigerian Army has invested in counter-insurgency warfare and expanded its campaign, the more Boko Haram posed a more potent threat (Omeni 2021). Instead of being weakened by military stressors imposed on it, and instead of merely coping or adapting, Boko Haram has evolved, innovated and become more formidable.

Indeed, part of why Boko Haram's territorial threat remains so potent is precisely because the government's response is frontloaded with the military. Yet, stretched thin across large swathes of territory with only a nominal government presence, the Nigerian Army has struggled to simultaneously "clear, hold and build" restive areas. Whereas the Army is more effective at clearing Boko Haram from contested areas, a competent police force would have

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been more effective at holding. This then affords the local government and civil society the security to rebuild (Omeni 2019).

How Can UK Policy-Makers Help?

1. Police

One of the lessons to emerge from my latest project, *Policing and Politics in Nigeria: A Comprehensive History*, is that the Nigeria Police Force is a broken institution in urgent need of reform (Omeni 2022). Consequently, the British government and the Metropolitan Police should consider where substantive guidance, collaboration, in-country training, monitoring and recommended changes can be implemented with the Nigeria Police Force. The Army already has the British Military Assistance Training Teams (BMATT) for decades now. A similarly robust police initiative, in close intimacy with the Met Police, is relevant here. The aim here is not to further support or expand existing detective training and senior courses, which have existed for over half a century. Instead, the recommended police support from the UK should be collaboration on a larger scale and at a more basic level.

Questions of why the Nigeria Police Force failed to reform colonial-era practices require examination. The sort of UK policing reforms to de-emphasise military security within the country borders, for instance, which Prime Minister Peel saw as necessary, as far back as 1829 were absent throughout British rule in Nigeria (Omeni 2018, 37). Along these lines, the concept of policing via "citizen's consent" also never materialised within the culture of the Nigeria Police Force (Arase 2021).

These cultural and institutional challenges within the Nigeria Police Force are areas the Metropolitan Police Force and the National Crime Agency could potentially assist with. Such changes are necessary if Nigeria is to pivot towards policing and away from soldiering in

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response to internal security challenges. For this pivot to be effective, however, substantive police reform with the assistance of UK policymakers is not just important, it is critical.

2. Military

At a recent Wilton Park interview, I pointed out that Nigeria's approach to security has historically depended on military force. Consequently, over decades, peacebuilding has been neglected for solutions that prioritise the barrel of a gun.

However, even where the military is the primary actor, soldiering and an infantry-centric approach to counter-insurgency are problematic to a war form where the population is the centre of gravity (Kilcullen 2010). What I recommended in that interview, and what I likewise recommend here, is that peacebuilding — not warfighting — underpins the calculus of counter-insurgency operations in Nigeria. Along these lines, I will not recommend more *matériel*, equipment, guns, armoured vehicles, or a sophisticated Unarmed Aerial Vehicle ("drone") programme. Instead, I recommend that the broken interface between the Nigerian military and the locals be fixed. And guns are not needed for that.

The Nigerian Army, as an example, needs a human terrain programme, similar to that in Afghanistan, whereby it works with civilian researchers, sociologists, political scientists and war theorists, amongst others. Wars that are won on the battlefield require planning and contributions outside of it, and this should not be viewed as a military-only enterprise. Civilians could — must— play a role here too. Discussions with my mentor, Professor Theo Farrell, indicates that the British military has a wealth of hard-earned experience here. In other words, Global Britain has a role to play here.

The British government, working with the Nigerian government and Army, can help fund and organise such a programme, which could have enduring relevance within military warfare in

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Nigeria. Moreover, such a programme is a potential avenue to military reform, from the inside-out, which might see less pushback from the rear echelons. Such a programme should be led by a civilian and should have Nigerian and British civilians and military personnel working together to map out and reshape the human terrain of northeast Nigeria.

Ultimately, if the aim here is the "winning of hearts and minds", civilian academics, practitioners and warrior-scholars with experience in this area should play a collaborative and government-supported role.

A frequent Nigerian Army rebuttal is that it has indeed engaged civilians and communities in its counter-insurgency. Specifically, as combatants in the so-called "Civilian Joint Task Force" initiative. However, this approach is problematic and has fostered a militia and illegal firearms culture. Military-support civilian militias are armed with rifles and machetes and kill insurgents; sometimes, via gruesome beheadings (Zenn 2020). However, what happens when they have to reintegrate into society in peacetime?

More to this point, Nigeria today has a kidnapping-for-ransom problem. Large numbers of armed and organised pastoralists, skilled in riflery, raid the country's Middle Belt. Few have asked how these marauders became such skilled rifleman or where they learned basic infantry tactics. Thus, instead of contributing to the population of trained and armed killers — regardless of whom they were initially trained to kill — the Nigerian Army can engage with civilians more meaningfully. I recommend that British policymakers help it to do so and that civilian militias are no longer viewed as a viable policy solution.

3. <u>IDP Camps</u>

According to the UN refugee agency, Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in North-East Nigeria now number over 2.9 million (UNHCR n.d.). Factoring in IDPs across the wider

Lake Chad Basin area (Cameroon, Chad and Niger), that number goes up to 3.2 million. IDP Camps are challenging to live in even in the best of times. However, with Boko Haram maintaining an ongoing threat, recurrent epidemics and poor infrastructure and sub-standard basic amenities within camps, IDPs struggle even more. The Nigerian military, working with the Multinational Joint Task Force (MN-JTF) has tried to secure restive areas for repopulation (Africa-EU Partnership n.d.). However, even where IDPs and refugees can return to accessible areas, they are faced with ghost villages, with previous revenue streams gone, and the threat by Boko Haram still present.

Government and UK policymakers can empower IDPs to relocate to their home communities to live beyond internal displacement. As for those in the camps, measures can be taken to improve their condition.

Case Study:

"I Prefer Life With My Boko Haram Husband": A Conflicted IDP's Experience

"Aminata, 20, escaped from Boko Haram's captivity in 2015 with seven other female abductees. At the time, she had no doubt it was the right thing to do. She was at least returning to the land of freedom and opportunities. But, having lived the dependent life of an Internally Displaced Person (IDP) in Maiduguri, Northeast Nigeria, for over five years, she is having a rethink — that perhaps freedom alone is not enough" (HumAngle 2021).

Case studies like Aminata can be prevented or redressed by an increased effort at IDP-specific support and empowerment packages. Such packages could help restore their dignity and give them purpose beyond just food and shelter in camps.

There could also be changes to camp conditions and the relocation process for IDPs whose former communities may be safe enough to return. Invariably, relocation should be a joint effort involving the police, military, local government and civil society—the current process is too military-heavy.

Furthermore, improved support packages for IDPs can be facilitated by the UK through DFID, NGOs, the UNHCR and local council funding. This final point is critical as funding should be disbursed at the local government level, not just at the state or federal level—where such foreign spending may be less likely to trickle down to the most vulnerable in North-East Nigeria.

4. Environment

The environment and Boko Haram's insurgency interact in complex ways, with one research study from the International Crisis Group noting that "increasingly, the security implications of changing weather patterns are visible in deadly land resource disputes between farmers and herders" in Nigeria (International Crisis Group 2020, Eberle, Rohner and Thoenig 2020). Indeed, the Herder-Farmer Crisis in Nigeria's Middle Belt has gradually eclipsed Boko Haram as a threat to internal security (Barnett 2021). Climate change helps us understand this crisis and how it is part of a broader security challenge in Northern Nigeria and the Middle Belt (International Crisis Group 2020, Eberle, Rohner and Thoenig 2020).

An estimated 35 per cent of Nigeria is threatened by desertification. Much of this threat is in Northern Nigeria. Blessed with swathes of arable land, Northern Nigeria is also faced with

the threat of Sahara Desert encroachment at the rate of 6.0 annually (Vanguard 2010). This threatens food production and revenue streams of farmers, ranchers and fishers. Over the past decade, the implications are that cattle herders travel further than their ancestral routes, because there is less grass to forage (International Crisis Group 2020, Eberle, Rohner and Thoenig 2020). This has led to an escalating conflict in the North, Middle Belt and South-West of Nigeria between cattle herders and farmers (Barnett 2021, Sunday 2020).

Compounding the situation for both sides is the significant reduction in rainfall. According to the National Meteorological Agency, the rainy season in the north has dropped to 120 days from an average of 150 days just 30 years ago. The result of this is a drop in crop yields by 20 per cent (Vanguard 2010). Consequently, wooded areas have been replaced by flat savannah and mostly even desert.

Moreover, this desertification is due to part to human actions. As an example, despite visible changes to the environment, cattle herders still follow the same ancestral routes that were viable decades ago but not today. Forests are still being cut down for firewood, as though this is sustainable. The same plants, methods of irrigation and fertilisers are being employed, despite consistently lower yields.

Case Study: "That's what drives me crazy"

"The people here stick to familiar agricultural patterns: they divide their plots into the same size every year, they use the same crop varieties, and they eat the same food," Sidikou said. "That's what drives me crazy. They repeat the same devastating cycle over and over again. All they need to do is look at what they are doing, just once, and take some lessons from the previous year's disaster."

- Sociologist Harouna Sidikou Sidikou (Abdou and Goebel 2010).

Another critical point of discussion within the environmental challenge of North-East Nigeria is Lake Chad. Once one of Africa's largest freshwater bodies and a source of livelihood for about 30 million, Lake Chad borders four countries — Chad, Nigeria, Niger and Cameroon. However, the Lake Chad "Basin" is much larger, covering almost 8% of the continent, and spread over seven countries: Algeria, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Libya, Niger and Nigeria. Since the 1960s, Lake Chad has dried up by 90% due to overuse and climate change (Omeni 2019). The situation is compounded by the presence of Boko Haram (IS-WA) in the region.

Since 2017, IS-WA has exploited a war economy to charge taxes and levies on desperate fishers around the Lake Chad area. Indeed, this war economy has matured as a territorial driver of the conflict between Boko Haram factions: JAS in Southern and Central Borno, and IS-WA, which is stronger in the Northern Borno and Lake Chad areas (Nwankpa 2021).

Conflict between angry and deprived fishers, herders and farmers has become common even as this war economy is exploited to their detriment. Livelihoods have been undermined by Boko Haram's insurgency, climate change, and state failure. Less land, less rainfall, increased desertification, climate change and the war economy pose unique problems for communities historically dependent on patterned environmental practices for generations (Barnett 2021, Sunday 2020, Eberle, Rohner and Thoenig 2020, International Crisis Group 2020).

However, the environmental reality is that everyone — herdsmen, farmers, fishers and even entire communities that once depended on the environment — have to change their habits. As McChrystal et *al*., point out, "we're not lazier or less intelligent than our parents or grandparents, but what worked for them simply won't do the trick for us now. Understanding and adapting to these factors isn't optional; it will be what differentiates success from failure in the years ahead" (2015, 4).

The government and UK policymakers are advised to: (1) commission a comprehensive research project to first study the extent of environmental damage, degradation and change—to Lake Chad, to seasonal rainfall patterns, to the forests, to Savannah, to farmlands. (2) Arrive at evidence-based recommendations on how to reverse changes and damage, where possible. (3) Sponsor a grassroots-based environmental campaign supported by religious and traditional heads and local government area offices. This should be aimed at helping communities understand the need for a change in subsistence, farming, and fishing practices. (4) Explore the provision of alternative sustainable income streams for agrarian and fisher communities in northeast Nigeria. This might start with a pilot. (5) Work with the Nigerian military and security forces to deny Boko Haram its "war economy".

5. Youth Empowerment

Initiatives to build security in Nigeria have historically lacked a youth emphasis. Even so-called youth empowerment schemes fail to have robust structures that involve youth as knowledge co-creators and solution seekers and implementers. Consequently, youth empowerment schemes may have leadership and organisational structures without a single person in decision-making positions in their 20s, 30s, or even 40s (Wilton Park 2021). Indeed, this topic of youth exclusion within the national security debate was recently a point of significant political conversation (see case study).

Case Study: The "Faceless" Youth in Nigeria

The comments below were made by the Ooni of Ife, one of the most respected traditional leaders in Nigeria, in a video that went viral.

"Who are the active participants whenever we have a breakdown of law and order? It is the average age of 18 and 39, and that is the truth. Are they ghosts? Are they invisible? The answer is no. They are human beings. But every time we are talking the talk, they are faceless. How well are we carrying along with these people in that age bracket? Who is representing that age bracket in this hall? The answer is no one."

- Oba Adeyeye Enitan Ogunwusi, Ojaja II (The Street Journal 2021)

As the Ooni's comments above indicate, Nigeria's youth are seldom, if ever, part of the substantive discussions and formulations of peacebuilding and security policy. At best, this is far from inclusive practice and at worst it is problematic with practical consequences.

UK policymakers looking to build security in Nigeria could change this pattern. UK policymakers could facilitate inclusive practices that integrate the youth and empower the next generation of leaders. Identifying and working with leadership organisations and local youth empowerment initiatives is recommended.

6. Research Funding

Finally, policy solutions to the question of security in Nigeria should refocus to have an academic, research-driven and evidence-based core. There are a wealth of local research ideas on Boko Haram's insurgency: regarding, as an example, how the security question in Nigeria is evolving (Wilton Park 2021). There is also untapped local research potential: on the limits of military force; on why Boko Haram can still recruit and boast about helping the poor (Adebajo 2021); and on why local communities may not see moving away and refusing to join Boko Haram as straightforward choices.

Such research potential can be empowered by a new research initiative supported by UK policymakers. This could explore the nexus between security and peacebuilding in Nigeria, but also that between development and peacebuilding. Seed grants, quick-impact funding, and operational pots of funding to support peacebuilding efforts by researchers and civilian society can ensure that the best research ideas and grassroots structures emerge over time. Driven by Nigerians telling Nigerian stories and working with Nigerian communities, in the long term, such research and grassroots initiative may further influence UK government policy on Nigeria.

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