
INSTITUTIONAL APPROACH TO PREVENTING AND COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN NIGERIA— NATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION IN PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

The article discusses the institutional approach to preventing and countering violent extremism through the role of the National Human Rights Commission, Nigeria. It uses primary and secondary materials to argue that extreme violent activities by the Boko Haram sect, armed bandits, kidnappers etc, have impact on the enjoyment of human rights by citizens and jeopardize peace and security, as well as threatening social and economic development. The article recommends that the average citizen in Nigeria ought to be given a reorientation to instil in them value for human life, property and dignity of the human person and patriotism to checkmate and prevent violent extremism in the country, among other recommendations.

Keywords: institutional approach; violent extremism; human rights; National Human Rights Commission, Nigeria.

[A] INTRODUCTION

The crises of insurgency activities of Boko Haram and the menace of banditry, kidnapping, herders/farmers clashes, and ethno-religious difficulties have predominantly ravished the northern part of Nigeria. The situation has left millions of the citizenry devastated. This calls for urgent intervention of both state and non-state actors. In 2020, Nigeria was ranked the third most impacted country by terrorism after Afghanistan and Iraq (Global Terrorism Index 2020: 10). The religious violence which started in the northern part of the country in the 1980s continues until the present date but in changing forms and nomenclature (Higazi 2019). The Kano riots, the Maitasine attacks, the Zaingo-Kataf crisis of Kaduna

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and the Jos-Plateau crises have left one with no other option than to agree with the assertion that northern Nigeria is synonymous with ethno-religious conflict (Yake 2015).

There have been a large number of incidents of communal violence across the north, including some appalling episodes in Plateau, Taraba, Benue and Kaduna states in which hundreds or even thousands of people have been killed. However, this does not mean that other forms of conflicts are not in existence in the northern part of Nigeria. Kidnapping, militancy, pipeline vandalization, communal conflicts, ethno-nationalism, communal and socio-economic conflicts have all been endemic and constituted the triggers of crises in the southern part of Nigeria (Olaifa 2017).

The question that yearns for an answer is whether these unwholesome activities such as violent ethno-nationalism, violent communal and socio-economic conflicts, kidnapping, militancy, pipeline vandalization, insurgency, farmers/herders clashes and armed banditry have impacted on human security in the country and on the enjoyment of human rights by the citizens.

This article argues that these occurrences constitute extreme violent activities. They have real and direct impact on human rights and human security with devastating consequences for the enjoyment of the rights of victims to life, liberty and integrity, health, education, housing, water, sanitation, agriculture and food security. In addition, these extreme violent activities can destabilize governments, undermine civil society, jeopardize peace and security, and threaten social and economic development.

Having commenced with this introduction, the article follows with definition of key terms. It analyses the international and regional commitments, domestic policies and legal framework in place in Nigeria to address violent extremism as well as its root causes, the actors involved and measures for countering violent extremism.

The article further discusses the role of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC)—Nigeria's national human rights institution charged with the mandate under the NHRC (Amendment) Act 2010 for the promotion and protection of the human rights of everyone as well NHRC activities in the prevention and countering of violent extremism.

[B] DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

‘Institutions’ may be formally described in the forms of law, policy, or procedure or they may emerge informally as norms, standard operating procedures or habits. In another way, they are mechanisms for adjusting behaviour in a situation that requires coordination among two or more individuals or groups (Hurwicz 1989; Polski & Ostrom 1999). In the context of this article, institutional approaches to preventing and countering violence include but are not limited to the sensitization activities against violent extremism by civil society organizations, traditional institutions, faith-based organizations, ministries, departments and agencies of government whose sphere of influence or mandate have direct bearing or impact on countering violent extremism. However, this article dwells specifically on the activities of the NHRC deployed towards preventing and countering violent extremism (PCVE) in Nigeria.

Definitional perspectives to ‘violent extremism’

There is no globally agreed definition of the term ‘violent extremism’. Different countries have deployed different perspectives in defining the term. For instance, according to the Australian Government ‘violent extremism is the belief and actions of some people who support or use violence to achieve ideological, religious or political goals’ (Baker 2014-2015: 1). In the United States of America, the Federal Bureau of Investigation conceives violent extremism as encouraging, condoning, justifying or supporting the commission of violent acts to achieve political, ideological, religious, social or economic goals. Furthermore, for the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), violent extremism means calling, involving or getting ready or supporting ideologically motivated or justified violence to advance social economic and political objectives (USAID Policy 2011: 1). In the United Kingdom, the Government regards extremism as the vocal or active opposition to fundamental values including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and the mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs as well as the call for death of members of the United Kingdom’s armed forces at home and abroad (HM Government UK 2015).

‘Violent extremism’ under the Nigerian Policy Framework and National Action Plan for Promoting and Countering Violent Extremism 2017 is defined as the beliefs and actions of persons who support, promote or use ideologically motivated violence to achieve social-economic, political, ethnic and religious objectives. For this article, violent extremism connotes the deployment of violent, reckless and indiscriminate activities targeted

towards the destruction of human life and property to achieve ideological political, social and economic objectives or goals by a person or group of persons.

Preventing and countering violent extremism

PCVE is defined as policies and activities that aim to prevent and counter individuals and groups from committing or materially supporting ideologically motivated violence against innocent targets by discrediting the messages and propaganda of the extremists, disrupting their plans and activities, and challenging their actions. It also includes measures to engage and change the behaviour of violent extremist offenders and rehabilitate and reintegrate them back into society (Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN) Policy Framework and Action Plan (FGN Action Plan) 2017: 14). Countering violent extremism further includes proactive actions to counter efforts by violent extremists to radicalize, recruit and mobilize followers to violence and to address specific factors that facilitate violent extremist recruitment and radicalization to violence (Mandaville & Nozell 2017).

[C] LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR PREVENTING AND COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN NIGERIA

Nigeria's policy and the legal framework for PCVE is anchored in the United Nations (UN) Security Council Resolutions. Resolution No 2178 2014 requires countries to address foreign terrorist fighters including the restriction of such persons from entering and transiting their territory; Resolution No 2199 2015 mandates states to ensure that their nationals and persons in their territory do not make economic resources available to ISIL etc; Resolution No 2250 2015 urges member states to increase representation of youths in decision-making at the local, national, regional and international level; and Resolution No 2349 2017 focuses on the threat of terrorism in the Lake Chad basin by Boko Haram and ISIL.

Furthermore, Nigeria's PCVE has recourse to the Report of the UN Secretary General on the Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism (2015) that adumbrates not only on essential security-based counter-security measures, but also on systematic preventive steps to checkmate the conditions that make a person become radicalized and enlist into violent extremist organizations. Also, Nigeria leverages the United Nations Global Counter Terrorism Strategy 2006, which provides for a

common strategic and operational approach by all UN members to fight terrorism, as well as the African Union Plan of Action on the Prevention and Combating of Terrorism to bring up Nigeria's prevention and Policy Framework and National Action Plan for Promoting and Countering Violent Extremism 2017 (at 12).

Besides these international normative frameworks for PCVE adopted by Nigeria, there is other domestic legislation for the same purpose, as discussed in the immediately following sections of this article.

Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 (As Amended)

Under the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999, section 14(2)(b) obligates the Government to protect the lives of persons and guarantee their security and welfare. To achieve this purpose, government-established security and law enforcement agencies must discharge this onerous task. Although the Nigeria Police Force is the law enforcement institution provided under section 214 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 for the maintenance of law and order, other specific law enforcement agencies have been created by law to carry out particular obligations, namely: Department of State Service; Nigerian Armed Forces; Nigerian Immigration Service; Nigerian Customs Service; Nigeria Correctional Service; National Drug Law Enforcement Agency; and Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps. These agencies, either individually or jointly, are involved in guaranteeing the security of the citizenry.

Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (Establishment) Act 2004

This Act was established to checkmate economic and financial crimes. However, under section 15, the Act lays out 'offences in relation to terrorism'. But this is not exhaustive because this is the only section in the whole Act that deals with terrorism. The reason for this may be because, at the time of the enactment of the Act, the ugly incidence of terrorism 2004 was not as intense as it is at present in the country. Thus, the Act devotes only three subsections to offences against terrorism by providing that any person who wilfully collects money directly or indirectly with the intent that the money shall be used for terrorist activities commits an offence (section 15(1)). It also makes it an offence for any person to commit or attempt to commit a terrorist act or participate in the commission of a terrorist act (section 15(2)). Under section 15(3), the Act finally makes

it an offence for a person to make available funds, financial assets, economic resources or other related services to any person to commit or attempt to commit or participate in the commission of a terrorist act. Any person that commits any of these offences is liable on conviction to life imprisonment.

Terrorism (Prevention) (Amendment) Act 2013

The Terrorism (Prevention) (Amendment) Act 2013 (TPA Act) was enacted, essentially, to prevent and deal with incidents of terrorism in Nigeria. The Act has been established pursuant to section 4(2) of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 that empowers the National Assembly to make laws for the peace, order and good government of Nigeria. Also, section 11 thereof provides that the National Assembly may make laws for the Federation or any part with respect to the maintenance and securing of public safety and public order and providing, maintaining and securing of supplies and services as may be designated by the National Assembly as essential supplies and services. As the name implies, the Act amends the 'Principal Act'—the Terrorism Prevention Act 2011. It prohibits all acts of terrorism (section 2(1)). The Terrorism Prevention Act 2011 provides for the seizure of terrorist cash (section 12) and dealing with financial assets of terrorist groups (section 15). Also, under the TPA Act 2013, any person or body corporate knowingly in or outside Nigeria that omits to do anything that is reasonably necessary to prevent terrorism commits an offence and is liable on conviction to a maximum of the death sentence (section 2(2)(a)-(h)) among other provisions.

Furthermore, under the Act in section 1A, the Office of the National Security Adviser (ONSA) is designated the coordinating office for the country's counter-terrorism efforts. The ONSA is also to provide support to all relevant security, intelligence and law enforcement agencies and military services to prevent and combat terrorism in Nigeria. The ONSA must also ensure the effective formulation and implementation of a comprehensive counter-terrorism strategy for the country as well as building capacity for the effective discharge of the functions of all relevant security, intelligence, law enforcement and military services under the Act or any other law on terrorism in Nigeria. The question that yearns for an answer is to what extent the ONSA has been able to successfully deliver on this mandate given the continuing spate of attacks by Boko Haram insurgents especially in the north-east part of the country that brings in its wake the deaths of many people and destruction of properties.

[D] POLICIES

Nigerian National Security Strategy 2014

The security challenges that have engulfed the country in the past few years have affected the economy and the security architecture etc. Although these trends might not be peculiar to Nigeria, the country has been exposed to incessant unrest in different aspects of national life. The National Counter Terrorism Centre (of the ONSA to the President in 2004) worked on the National Security Strategy which recognizes that, while the country must continue to focus on the persistent and evolving terrorist threats, it must at the same time address the full range of potentially catastrophic events, including man-made and natural disasters, due to their implications for national security. The purpose of Nigeria's National Security Strategy is to guide, organize and harmonize the nation's security policies and efforts (National Counter Terrorism Centre 2020).

The strategy provides a common framework on which the entire nation should focus its efforts to counter and prevent violent extremism. In order to properly articulate a government strategy for combating these security challenges, there is a need for a strategic plan in the form of a document to guide security agencies in the conception of ideas, formulation of policies and conduct of operations so that every single agency will be properly guided and seen to be working towards the same goal. In this way, they should be aware that individual agencies are part of a larger whole, which when properly coordinated would present a neat, coherent, orderly and complete system (National Counter Terrorism Centre 2020).

The Policy Framework and National Action Plan for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism in Nigeria 2017

As the intensity of the security threats increased, so has government resolve and its attempts to prevent and counter violent extremism. This has brought the need to clearly articulate a broad policy framework to provide direction and coordination for the various initiatives that have been launched to tackle the menace of violent extremism in the country (FGN Action Plan 2017). This policy, under the strategic coordination of the ONSA, seeks to ensure that PCVE is institutionalized and mainstreamed into the mandates of ministries, departments and agencies of governments, including at state and local levels. It has four components, namely: strengthening institutions and coordination of

PCVE programming; strengthening the rule of law, access to justice and human rights approaches; engaging communities; and building resilience and integrating strategic communications in PCVE programming.

[E] ROOT CAUSES

The current situation faced by Nigerians is a direct result of violent disenchantment among citizens because of mass impoverishment brought about by bad governance. The insurgency and extremist behaviours in the country cannot only be attributed to Boko Haram alone. There is also the dichotomy based on the country's Christian-South and Muslim-North partisan politics that brings to the fore deep-rooted ethnic, linguistic and class conflicts that constitute some of the underlying drivers of violence (Muyiwa & Ayodamola 2021: 202). Undeniably, the most recent and widespread extremist group in Nigeria, Boko Haram, continues to grow and commit various terror acts, posing one of the main threats to national security. A self-declared ally of the Islamic State, this terrorist organization has been responsible for immense damage and suffering in Nigeria and surrounding countries, including Chad, Niger and Cameroon. Through mass abductions, assassinations and bombing campaigns, the group has created chaos and hindered political stability and development efforts in the region. Using an 'us versus them' narrative, it has spread the fundamentalist ideology of *jihād* in its effort to override the Nigerian state and turn it into a Taliban-like Sharia state. A combination of unfortunate national circumstances, weak state actors, fragile or weak civil society organizations and power vacuums have enabled the Boko Haram campaign to run rampant in certain parts of the country (Muyiwa & Ayodamola 2021: 202). The causes of radicalization and extremism are typically explained through a variety of perspectives that emphasize psychological, ideological, social, political, economic and other factors (Christmann 2012; Mohammed & Mullins 2015; Senzai 2015: 202).

Corruption is the culture of dishonesty and duplicity seen among national, political and economic elites, in which government positions are seen as a vehicle for obtaining economic benefits and increasing private wealth. This unjust situation, combined with a general lack of accountability, aggravates ordinary citizens, generates dissatisfaction and facilitates the recruitment efforts of extremists (Muyiwa & Ayodamola 2021: 203).

Poverty and unequal resource distribution affecting the majority of the population cause intense resentment towards the political *status quo*. Inefficiencies in the formal justice system and the usual delays in

court decisions exacerbate the sense of marginalization and exclusion of citizens, whose calls for equality remain unheard. Lack of formal education prevents citizens from gaining practical critical-thinking skills that would greatly aid in dissecting the issues of radicalization and violent extremism (World Leadership Alliance Club 2017; Muiyiwa & Ayodamola 2021: 202).

For example, decades of mass impoverishment caused by bad governance in the northern region of the country have created frustrated and vulnerable population groups for Boko Haram's radicalization operations. The Nigerian military's indiscriminate use of force has only made things worse. This sense of social and economic injustice and a lack of political legitimacy is not a vague assumption. It seems that many Nigerians no longer believe in Nigeria's political, economic, or legal institutions. Their most common grievances included corruption among political and economic elites, economic disparity, barriers to social and educational opportunity, energy poverty, environmental destruction, human insecurity and social and economic injustice (Rosenberger 2021).

[F] ALLEGED GROUPS INVOLVED IN VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN NIGERIA

Indigenous People of Biafra

Biafra had existed as an independent multi-ethnic republic consisting of the Igbo, Ijaw, Efik and Ibibio peoples and was declared as a country by Lieutenant Colonel Odumegwu Ojukwu for three years, 1967 through 1970 (Britannica 2022). The FGN fought hard to preserve the Federal Republic of Nigeria. It did not like the idea of an independent state of Biafra. The result of tensions between Biafra and the FGN resulted in the Nigerian civil war for three years. There were an estimated 3.5 million deaths of civilians caused by starvation on the side of Biafra (Campbell 2017). In 1970, the Biafran forces surrendered through the armistice brokered by the defunct Organization for African Unity (Akuchu 1977). The Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) has since brought both local and international attention to the plight of the people of south-eastern parts of Nigeria whom they refer to as Biafrans that are still in Nigeria.

Nnamdi Kanu established IPOB after he initially gained fame from his broadcasts on Radio Biafra, which was established in 2009. This was a radio station from London that broadcast messages that called for 'freedom of Biafrans' and criticized corruption in the Government of Nigeria. Radio Biafra catalysed Kanu's rise to the public scene, as he

was previously an unknown figure. Kanu was arrested by the Nigerian security forces on 19 October 2015, on charges of ‘sedition, ethnic incitement and treasonable felony’ (Ibeanu & Ors 2016). There have been many other pro-Biafran groups that have come into existence. For instance, the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra began gaining attention in the early 2000s, along with the Biafra Zionist Movement which rose to the spotlight in 2012. The FGN alleges that IPOB uses extreme violence as a tool to force the Government to do its bidding.

Niger Delta Militia/Avengers

Nigeria is home to Africa’s largest economy and one of the world’s biggest populations. Notwithstanding frequent oil supply disruptions, Nigeria as a member of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries was also the continent’s top crude producer. The oil industry accounts for about 70 per cent of government revenue. After seven years of relative peace, one of the world’s most oil-rich regions is under siege by militants. Although Nigeria is well-acquainted with violence on its southern shores, the group behind a new wave of attacks, the Niger Delta Avengers, is shrouded in mystery and sabotaging one of the world’s biggest oil producers. The Niger Delta Avengers are in the business of destroying oil infrastructure—working in teams, carrying small arms and explosives, blowing up pipelines and sabotaging facilities, taking advantage of the Delta’s complex, creek-filled terrain to stay one step ahead of the Nigerian soldiers chasing them. They are driven by economic and environmental grievances, and, until those issues are addressed, the Delta will remain in a cycle of sabotage, and Nigeria’s oil output will remain under pressure (DiChristopher 2016).

Boko Haram

Boko Haram, officially known as *Jamā’at Ahl as-Sunnah lid-Da’wah wa’l-Jihād*, is a terrorist organization based in north-eastern Nigeria. It is also active in Chad, Niger and Northern Cameroon (United States Department of State 2014). In 2016, the group split, resulting in the emergence of a hostile faction known as the Islamic State’s West Africa Province. Founded by Mohammed Yusuf in 2002, the group was led by Abubakar Shekau from 2009 until his death in 2021, although it splintered in 2015 into other groups after Yusuf’s death. When the group was first formed, its main goal was to ‘purify’ Islam in northern Nigeria, believing *jihad* should be delayed until the group was strong enough to overthrow the Nigerian Government. The group formerly aligned itself with the Islamic

State of Iraq and the Levant. The group has been known for its brutality, and, since the insurgency started in 2009, Boko Haram has killed tens of thousands of people, in frequent attacks against the police, armed forces and civilians. It has displaced 2.3 million from their homes and during part of the mid-2010s was adjudged the world's deadliest terror group according to the Global Terrorism Index 2022. Boko Haram has contributed to regional food crises and famines (Matfess: 2017). Of the 2.3 million people displaced by the conflict since May 2013, at least 250,000 left Nigeria and fled to Cameroon, Chad or Niger (Nichols 2015). Boko Haram killed over 6,600 people in 2014 (Troup Buchanan 2015) The group has carried out mass abductions including the kidnapping of 276 schoolgirls in Chibok, Borno State, Nigeria, in April 2014. Corruption in the security services and human rights abuses committed by the group have hampered efforts to counter the extreme violent activities of Boko Haram (Glenn 2014).

Herders clashes/cattle rustling

According to a 2021 report by the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project, about 8,343 persons have died in the violence involving herders and farmers (Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project 2021). What were once spontaneous attacks have become premeditated scorched-earth campaigns in which marauders often take villages by surprise at night. The FGN has taken welcome but insufficient steps to halt the killings. Its immediate priorities should be to deploy more security units to vulnerable areas; prosecute perpetrators of violence; disarm ethnic militias and local vigilantes; and begin executing long-term plans for comprehensive livestock sector reform.

The conflict is fundamentally a land-use contest between farmers and herders across the country's Middle Belt. It has taken on dangerous religious and ethnic dimensions because most of the herders are from the traditionally nomadic and Muslim Fulani who make up about 90 per cent of Nigeria's pastoralists, while most of the farmers are Christians of various ethnicities. Also, tens of thousands have been forcibly displaced, with properties, crops and livestock worth billions of naira destroyed (International Crisis Group 2017). The violence exacts a heavy burden on the military, police and other security services, distracting them from other important missions, such as countering the Boko Haram insurgency.

Banditry and kidnapping

In 2011 north-west Nigeria experienced a surge in bandit attacks between the nomadic Fulani herders and sedentary Hausa farming communities. Environmental and ecological changes caused land and water to become valuable commodities, sparking fierce, and often violent, competition over resources. Over the past decade banditry has evolved from a communal rivalry into lethal militia groups (Brenner 2021).

Banditry has become an appealing method of income in north-west Nigeria, where weak governance, youth unemployment, poverty and inequality have left people with depleted options for livelihood. Security services are often understaffed and lack the proper resources to effectively combat banditry. Vast areas of ungoverned and under-policed forests allow for easy concealment, and police and military forces have difficulty penetrating the rough terrain. In addition, under-policed borders have aided the proliferation of small arms and light weapons amongst bandit groups (Brenner 2021).

The rise of banditry and armed attacks has severely disrupted means of livelihood and the distribution of essential services for people across the north-west region. Since 2011, nearly 200,000 people have fled the violence of bandits and remain internally displaced within the north-west region. Approximately 77,000 Nigerians have fled to neighbouring countries, and humanitarian efforts to respond to emergencies in Nigeria as well as crises in neighbouring Sahel and Lake Chad are overstretched. The majority of those displaced do not receive organized assistance and are in desperate need of basic necessities (Brenner 2021).

Informal security actors such as vigilantes have played an increasing role in protecting their communities from bandit groups. Vigilante groups are often preferred over the police because official security agencies are often unavailable when rural communities most need them. Although, these informal security providers play essential roles in providing safety and security to their communities, many lack proper security training and often compete against each other. In addition, many vigilante groups have committed human rights abuses, armed robbery, corruption and extortion against bandits and members of the communities they vow to protect. Nigerian security forces have utilized a variety of tactics over the years to combat banditry. Initially, the FGN embraced an aggressive approach by deploying police and military operations to the states of Zamfara, Katsina, Kaduna, Niger and Sokoto. While the security response has pushed back attacks, destroyed hideouts, and killed and arrested hundreds of bandits, attacks have continued. In 2019, a peace deal was

secured between the armed bandits and the governors of Katsina, Sokoto and Zamfara (Brenner 2021).

The deal encompassed disarmament, the release of kidnapped civilians, and pardoning for the bandits. Although the number of fatalities decreased from August to November due to reconciliation initiatives, attacks picked up again in 2020. Though routinely denied, the Nigerian federal and state authorities have often paid ransoms to keep victims alive and secure their release. Mass kidnappings have become a major source of income for criminal and extremist groups because of the Nigerian authorities' willingness to pay ransoms and secure the release of victims, but it also provides an incentive for bandits to continue their malign activities (Brenner 2021).

Effective mechanisms must be implemented to mitigate the threat of banditry in Nigeria's north-west. A peacebuilding process that includes dialogue between security agencies and communities will be crucial to establishing effective policing, early warning and intelligence gathering. The FGN must increase funding for police and security forces to effectively oversee rural areas, control cross-border arms proliferation and strengthen intelligence capabilities. In addition, addressing the root problems that often drive people to violence is needed to stem the recruitment of youth into banditry activities (Brenner 2021).

[G] THE ROLE OF THE NATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION IN PREVENTING AND COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN NIGERIA

The NHRC of Nigeria was established by the NHRC (Amendment) Act 2010 in line with Resolution 48/134 of the United Nations' General Assembly which enjoins all member states to establish independent national institutions for the promotion, protection and enforcement of human rights in line with the Paris Principles. The Commission serves as an extrajudicial mechanism for the enhancement of the respect for and enjoyment of human rights.

The Commission's approach to the promotion and protection of the human rights of everyone in Nigeria against violent extremism is in line with its mandate under the NHRC (Amendment) Act 2010 and in tandem with component 2 of the Strategic Implementation Matrix for the Prevention and Countering of Violent Extremism. The objective is to strengthen an accessible justice system and respect for human rights and

the rule of law with the expectation of improving the justice system and thereby reducing violations of human rights. The Commission's approach is twofold.

Civil/military dialogue

The NHRC, faced with numerous complaints against personnel of the Nigerian Military particularly over their conduct during internal security operations across the country, decided to engage the Nigerian military. This has led to instituting a regular Dialogue with the military since 2015.

The Dialogue is open for participation by the following ministries, departments and agencies, including Office of the Chief of Staff to the President; Office of the Chief of Staff to the Vice President; Chambers of the Hon Attorney-General of the Federation and Minister of Justice; Ministry of Defence; ONSA; Office of the Chief of Defence Staff; Chief of Army Staff; Chief of Air Staff; Chief of Naval Staff; the Nigeria Bar Association; and an umbrella body for non-governmental organizations, the Human Rights Agenda Network.

The NHRC/military/civil Dialogue revolves around four overarching goals. These goals are: improving awareness of respect for human rights by the military; prevention of human rights violations by the military, particularly during internal security operations; speedy investigation and resolution of allegations of human rights violations by the military and mainstreaming human rights in military operations, in particular military justice administration; and providing a sustainable platform for national and international human rights organizations to constructively interact with the Nigerian military.

The key activities undertaken as a result of the NHRC/Nigerian military Dialogue since 2015 include:

- a. training of armed forces personnel deployed to the north-eastern states for internal security operations;
- b. training of military personnel from the rank of captain and its equivalent on legal aspects in counter-terrorism and counter insurgency operations facilitated by the Armed Forces Command and Staff College, Kaduna;
- c. a joint fact-finding visit between NHRC and the Nigerian Army to Giwa Barracks and human rights training for Regimental Sergeant Majors, Maiduguri Borno;
- d. participation in a Nigerian Air Force Refresher Seminar on Law of Armed Conflict/Humanitarian Law;

- e. media chats with African Independent Television and Channels TV to win the support of the civil population in the war against terrorism;
- f. interactive sessions with NGOs in Adamawa and Borno States in north-east Nigeria on the need to protect the internally displaced persons (IDPs) and put in place safety measures in the camps; and
- g. consultation with the Hon Attorney-General of the Federation and Minister of Justice to ascertain the legal status of insurgents awaiting prosecution and work out modalities for speedy prosecution or referring such suspects to the de-radicalization programme of the ONSA as may be appropriate.

Other important outcomes of the NHRC/military Dialogue include:

- ◇ input to the National Counter Terrorism Strategy 2016;
- ◇ review of training curricula for the military and law enforcement agencies as well as operational doctrine to include modules and information on international human rights, humanitarian law and constitutional provisions on civilian protection during internal security operations;
- ◇ part of the Inter-Ministerial Review Committee (inaugurated 2 February 2017) to review the Armed Forces Act CAP A20 Laws of the Federation of Nigeria 2004—submitted to the then Hon Minister of Defence in 2018;
- ◇ part of the Inter-Ministerial Committee to review the Code of Conduct and Rules of Engagement for Military during internal security operations by the Chief of Defence Staff (April 2019);
- ◇ establishment of a Directorate of Civil–Military Affairs headed by two-star generals in the offices of the Chief of Defence Staff, Chief of Army Staff, Chief of Air Staff, Chief of Naval Staff and the establishment of a Civil–Military Relation (at the Ministry of Defence);
- ◇ appointment of a Human Rights Adviser in the Office of Chief of Defence Staff; establishment of a Human Rights Desk in the Army Headquarters, as well as at the various Divisions and Brigades of the Nigerian Army;
- ◇ setting-up of a Presidential Investigation Panel to Review Compliance of the Armed Forces with human rights obligations and rules of engagement;
- ◇ the Commission has, pursuant to the NHRC Act 2010 and the Standing Orders and Rules of Procedures of the Commission, authorized and held a number of inquiries to investigate grave allegations of violations of human rights against the FGN and the security agencies in parts of Nigeria. This exercise had the full

support of the FGN and the security agencies. Some of the inquiries include investigations into all alleged cases of violation of the rights of civilians by the military in the counter-insurgency activities of the military;

- ◇ impromptu and joint investigation visits to military detention facilities and barracks for on-the-spot investigation of allegations of violations within the facilities; and
- ◇ issuance of advisories to the military for prompt profiling of suspects and timely trial of all those with *prima facie* cases of violent extremism against them as well as recommendations for immediate release of those without any case against them. This has led to the release of many suspects by the military.

Human rights protection monitoring

As part of Nigeria's intervention strategy aimed at addressing challenges of human rights abuses by the armed forces especially as it concerns civilians in the insurgency area and IDPs, the NHRC with support from UN Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees in Nigeria intervened through human rights protection-monitoring activities in the north-east.

The protection-monitoring activities are aimed at identifying and strengthening community-based protection mechanisms in order to get a complete picture of protection issues with a view to urgently and effectively addressing human rights concerns of all the affected population. To do this, over 310 human rights monitors were engaged, trained and deployed to the north-east to monitor and report cases of human rights violations and violent extremist activities committed by law enforcement personnel, as well as others, against civilians particularly and the IDPs in the affected areas.

[H] CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Integrating Human rights in the Peacebuilding Response to the Farmers–Herders Crisis in Middle Belt Region

The violent clashes between farmers and herders in Nigeria particularly in the Middle Belt have led to a grave human rights and humanitarian crisis. The clashes have resulted in fatalities, injuries and displacements, as well as the destruction of livelihoods and properties. It has heightened religious and ethnic hostilities within the region. With a record of over 1800 fatalities within the first half of 2018 alone, the fatality rate relating

to farmer–herder clashes is higher than that attributed to the Boko Haram insurgency.

Thus, stakeholders, in order to respond to the humanitarian crisis and displacements caused by the clashes, commenced humanitarian actions to ameliorate the sufferings of displaced persons and to generally facilitate peacebuilding within the region. The NHRC in collaboration with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, considering gaps in the humanitarian response, conceived a project titled ‘Integrating Human Rights in UN Peace-building Response to the Farmer–Herder Crisis in the Middle Belt’ to run for a period of 18 months. The objectives of the project include:

- a. to understand security trends and allow for a deeper understanding of the farmers–herders crisis, including root causes, and facilitating the design of targeted responses to address the crisis and attendant human rights violations;
- b. to improve the capacity of key stakeholders, security and government actors on the application or integration of human rights norms in response to the crisis;
- c. to enhance preventive capacities by promoting dialogue and proactive engagement between farmers and herders with the aim of building mutually beneficial economic relationships between farmers and herders;
- d. to improve the effectiveness of the security response through strengthened human rights monitoring and accountability and providing an impartial and evidence-based narrative to defuse the politicized debate and help mobilize a broader response to the crisis; and
- e. to provide opportunities for lessons learned and developing best practices for demonstrated conflict prevention programming that delivers peace dividends to affected populations in different contexts.

The project, which lasted for 18 months, focused on the 15 Local Government Areas (LGAs) of Benue State (Guma, Logo, Ukum, Katsina Ala, Gwer East, Gwer West, Makurdi, Buruku, Tarka, Otukpo, Agatu, Kwande, Ogbadibo, Oju and Gboko) with potential for scaling the project to other states.

Accordingly, field officers were assigned in each of the above LGAs and tasked with the responsibility of sending weekly reports on identified thematic areas and protection issues including the protection of children, women and persons with specific needs and access to justice.

A key component of the project is the Community Outreach Programme which involves awareness sessions and interfaith dialogue. The report shows that the monitors conducted a total of 6,942 Community Outreach Programmes, awareness sessions and interfaith dialogues for the promotion and protection of human rights in the affected areas. The project achieved the following:

- a. community gatekeepers were empowered, trained and engaged in peacebuilding efforts and transformation in various communities;
- b. the concept of early warning and response was institutionalized in the sense that timely information on conflicts is reported to law enforcement and security agencies; and
- c. regular townhall meetings between stakeholders and the Commission/UNHCR were established.

[I] CONCLUSION

Countering violent extremism requires interventions to protect the security of people and assets. However, an integrated approach to PCVE needs to be taken forward beyond outright security concerns and needs to consider the conditions conducive to violent extremism. Bringing on board inclusive development and the promotion of tolerance and respect for diversity will go a long way towards mitigating the impacts of violent extremism on the enjoyment of human rights by the citizenry. The impacts include but are not limited to the violation and abuse of the citizen's human rights to life and integrity of the person, liberty, health, education, water, sanitation and hygiene and so forth and so on. All this should make us search committedly for fast and long-lasting solutions to bring it to an end.

There is no doubt that there is a relationship between poverty, corruption and bad governance and insurgency, violent extremism and other forms of criminal activities in Nigeria. This needs to be addressed urgently and decisively. There is mistrust and resentment in the activities and expertise of the actors who are saddled with the responsibilities of entrenching the tenets of democracy including provision of basic security. We need to address this too. The Government and all stakeholders should as a matter of necessity bring everyone to the table and assign roles in tackling and addressing extremism and security issues. This will assist in developing and reinforcing the confidence of the citizenry in the Government.

The ordinary Nigerian irrespective of age and affiliation must be given a reorientation that will instil values for human life, patriotism and dignity of labour. Also, through this process, Government should insist

on proper and quality education free from the bias of religion, community mobilization, participation and engagement as well as providing good governance to better the human condition in the country as a means of preventing and countering violent extremism.

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