PRAXIS CENTRE
The Pan African Center For Strategic Reflection, Planing And Alternative Action

POLICY BRIEF

GROWING INSECURITY AND EMERGENT HUMANITARIAN CRISIS IN THE NORTH WEST OF NIGERIA: THE NEXT EMERGENCIES FRONTIER?

[A BRIEF ANALYTICAL OVERVIEW AND SUPPLEMENT TO THE POLICY BRIEF ON GOVERNING AND SECURING UNGOVERNED SPACES IN NIGERIA]

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SUMMARY

The Nigeria North West geopolitical zone context is a developing and rapidly evolving humanitarian crisis, requiring urgent and proactive responses as it is impacted by several types of conflicts and forms of insecurity. This has manifested in the form of Farmers-Herders conflicts; Politically Motivated Conflicts; Ethno-Religious Conflicts, which are not necessarily inter-ethnic and inter-religious, but many times also manifest as intra ethnic and intra religious depending on the issues at stake; Kidnapping for ransom, Banditry and Cattle Rustling. Banditry, in particular, which now manifests as large scale, organised and coordinated attacks by armed bandits on communities, is having the most significant and devastating impact, citizens and residents in the North West, and is the single most important factor in displacement of communities, leading to growing numbers of internally displaced persons in the zone, as well as growing numbers of Nigerian refugees in Niger Republic.

The growing severity of the problem of banditry, manifesting in the increasing scale and scope of displacement, is creating an incipient humanitarian emergency of increasingly complex proportions. It is reported that as at August 2019 there has been reported death of 436 persons and 210,354 persons had been internally displaced from 171 towns and villages across the three states of Sokoto, Zamfara, and Katsina. Living conditions of the IDPs were reported to be appalling with serious protection issues compounded by the absence of humanitarian actors in the affected areas. Attacks on rural communities are said to be accompanied by atrocious human rights violations of inhabitants by the bandits, and violent reprisal attacks against them once security forces that had come to the aid of the communities leave.

Unfortunately, the current responses by the government have proven to be inadequate. The response around distribution of relief materials has been grossly inadequate, while the approach of negotiations and offer of amnesty for the bandits glosses over the root and structural causes of the crisis embedded in failure of governance, failure in the delivery of public services, failure in the delivery of security, and the inability of governments at all levels and the communities to provision the needs of citizens and residents.

In this policy brief, we make a number of recommendation on immediate responses that are viable and would progress into a more focused and viable solution.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- There is need for the governments at all levels to invest more in understanding the present scale and scope of the crisis in affected states and communities in order to design appropriate responses rather than the current reactions that appear unstructured and suggest a lack of understanding of the potentially explosive nature of the crisis.
- There is an urgent need to re-evaluate the current approach to addressing the crisis which is not holistic and are composed of standalone initiatives that gloss over the root and structural causes of the crisis embedded in failure of governance, failure in the delivery of public services, failure in the delivery of security, and the inability of governments at all levels and the communities to provision the needs of citizens and residents.

- Government need to tackle growing problem of youth unemployment, illiteracy and lack of education, as well as consequent alienation of the youth and resort to drug and substance abuse by young people.
- The use of the amnesty approach is a temporary response that in reality is an appeasement of the violent, and has the likelihood of becoming an entrenched reward mechanism for violence. It does not address the root causes of the crisis which are ingrained in governance concerns. It is hereby recommended that government pay attention to an overhaul and reform of governance; the development and implementation of integrated human and economic development policies; and the conscious promotion of the participation of all sectors of the society – in particular youth and women in democratic governance and participatory development processes in their communities and in local and state governance systems and structures.
- The distribution of relief materials has been grossly inadequate, largely because it suffers from a severe underestimation of the scale, scope and impact of the crisis. It is hereby urgent for the federal government to invest in a proper understanding of the situation and for humanitarian actors to pay detailed attention to the evolving situation for appropriate responses.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT:

In recent years, and in particular over the two decades since the return to civilian democratic rule and the inauguration of the fourth Republic on May 29th, 1999, Nigeria has been experiencing varying degrees of intensity and fluctuating levels of insecurity across the country.

According to the 2016 Strategic Conflict Assessment of Nigeria [SCA][1] conducted by the Institute of Peace and Conflict Resolution [IPCR], with the support of the UNDP, the following types and major categories of manifestations of conflict in Nigeria were identified:

1. Security-related Manifestations of Conflict; which include such phenomena as (a) Armed Non-State Actors [ANSAs]; (b) Neighbourhood Gangs which operate in urban and semi-urban areas; and (c) Bandits and Cattle Rustlers, which impact severely and directly on the dynamics of Farmers-Herders Conflicts;
2. Political Manifestations of Conflict: including phenomena such as (a) Election-Related Conflicts, where electoral contestations leads to outbreaks of violence; (b) Inter- and Intra – Party Conflicts, usually associated with contestation for control of party structures, contestations around party primaries processes, and contestations for elective political position between political parties; (c) Politico-Religious Conflicts, which are religious conflicts with overt political agenda including Boko Haram Insurgency in the North East and the conflict between the Shite Islamic Movement in Nigeria [IMN] and state and federal governments for instance; and (d) Self-determination and separatist agitations, in the South East – IPOB, in the South West – OPC, in the South-south – Niger Delta Militants etc;
3. Economic Manifestations of Conflict: including phenomena such as (a) Industrial and Organisational Conflicts, around wages and conditions of work etc; (b) Conflicts Over Natural Resources; (c) Conflicts in Market places; and (d) Conflicts between various informal sector groups and the government, for instance between Okada riders and state governments; And
4. Social Manifestations of Conflict: Including (a) inter and intra ethnic and religious, as well as ethno-religious conflicts; (b) Frontiers and Boundary related Conflicts, between communities from different states which share common borders and frontiers; (c) Religious conflicts, which is both inter and intra religious in nature; (d) Conflicts between youths and Constituted Authorities, particularly in cities, but also increasingly in rural communities; (e) Suicide Bombings, which has become a recurring feature associate with the Boko Haram Insurgency; and (f) Ungoverned Spaces, occasioned by the presence of vast difficult terrains, as well as specific areas even in urban centres where the presence of the state is weak, or absent and where there is little or no governance taking place.

THE NORTH WEST GEOPOLITICAL ZONE:

The North West geopolitical zone is impacted by several types of conflicts and forms of insecurity, with the following being the most common, and pervasive to the area: (a) Farmers-Herders conflicts, which though basically a resource based conflict, oftentimes manifest as ethno-religious, because of the cultural, ethnic and religious diversity of the area; (b)

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[1] 2016 Strategic Conflict Assessment of Nigeria: Consolidated and Zonal Reports; Conducted by IPCR, with the support of UNDP and NSRP; 2017.

Politically Motivated Conflicts, which is basically around political contestations, but also sometimes manifest in ethnic and or religious forms depending on the ethnic and religious identities and affiliations of the political protagonists; (c) Ethno-Religious Conflicts, which are not necessarily inter-ethnic and inter-religious, but many times also manifest as intra ethnic and intra religious depending on the issues at stake; (d) Kidnapping for ransom, which has become more rampant, pervasive and endemic in recent times. It is also becoming more and more integrated with banditry; and (e) Banditry and Cattle Rustling, which has also become more rampant, more intense, and more endemic and pervasive of recent, and with ever more severe impact on populations.

Banditry, in particular, which now manifests as large scale, organised and coordinated attacks by armed bandits on communities, is having the most significant and devastating impact, citizens and residents in the North West, and is the single most important factor in displacement of communities, leading to growing numbers of internally displaced persons in the zone, as well as growing numbers of Nigerian refugees in Niger Republic.

The situation is compounded by the porosity of the border, which creates an enabling environment for cross border movements and operations of the bandits.

EMERGENT HUMANITARIAN CRISIS:

The growing severity of the problem of banditry, manifesting in the increasing scale and scope of displacement, is creating an incipient humanitarian emergency of increasingly complex proportions; so much so that between July 25th and 4th of August 2019, the UNHCR and the Federal Government of Nigeria [FGN] had to organise a Joint Protection Assessment Mission to North West Nigeria[2].

According to the joint assessment mission report, "The assessment took place against the backdrop that the situation in these states has led to the deaths of 436 persons; and both internal displacement and influx of refugees into Niger Republic. Furthermore, the living conditions of the IDPs were reported to be appalling with serious protection issues compounded by the absence of humanitarian actors in the affected LGAs.[3]"

Also "Attacks on rural communities also persists with atrocious human rights violations on civilians by the bandits, and violent reprisal attacks against civilian population within the vicinity of the attack once security forces leave.[4]"

And the findings are grave; for instance, according to the estimates provided by local government authorities, 210,354 persons had been internally displaced from 171 towns and villages across the three [epicentre] states of Sokoto, Zamfara, and Katsina, at the time of the joint assessment mission[5]. Furthermore, more than 35,000 displaced persons from these states had already gone through the initial registration process undertaken jointly by the UNHCR and the Nigerien Government[6].

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[2] Report of the Joint Protection Assessment Mission To North West Nigeria; 25th July to 4th August 2019; UNHCR And FGN.
[3] ibid
[4] ibid
[5] ibid
[6] ibid

The Joint Assessment Mission highlighted the following key protection findings with respect to the affected communities and displaced persons - IDPs[7]; (1) Gross Human Rights Violations by the bandits; (2) Rampant nature of Sexual and Gender Based Violence – SGBV; (3) Lack of care for persons with specific needs, including the vulnerable elderly and persons with disability; (4) Pervasive Physical and psychological security and safety issues; and (5) Rising Tensions between IDPs and Host communities.

Other general issues highlighted by the findings include: (6) Community structure in the IDP camps – camp management issues; (7) Limited access to livelihoods sources and mechanisms; (8) Lack of adequate shelter; (9) Insufficient access to food; (10) Inadequate WASH facilities; (11) Limited access to primary healthcare; (12) Lack of referral mechanism; and (13) Limited access to education.

CRITIQUE OF CURRENT RESPONSES:

The current responses by the government has included, the distribution of relief materials to displaced persons, as well as efforts to negotiate peace with the bandits through the offer of amnesty.

The first response around distribution of relief materials has been grossly inadequate, largely because it suffers from a severe underestimation of the present scale and scope of the crisis, as well as a lack of understanding of the potentially explosive nature of the crisis if left unattended to, or if inadequate measures are utilised in the attempt to tackle the crisis.

The second response around negotiations and offer of amnesty for the bandits, while a necessary immediate step in the response, is however on its own not self-sufficient in tackling the crisis.

The approach as a stand alone initiative glosses over the root and structural causes of the crisis embedded in failure of governance, failure in the delivery of public services, failure in the delivery of security, and the inability of governments at all levels and the communities to provision the needs of citizens and residents, and tackle growing problem of youth unemployment, illiteracy and lack of education, as well as consequent alienation of the youth and resort to drug and substance abuse by the young populace.

CONCLUSION:

The use of the amnesty approach, without a resort to overhaul and reform of governance; the development and implementation of integrated human and economic development policies; and the conscious promotion of the participation of all sectors of the society – in particular youth and women in democratic governance and participatory development processes in their communities and in local and state governance systems and structures; will only amount in reality, and essentially to the appeasement of the violent, and become an entrenched reward mechanism for violence.

The distribution of relief materials, without overhauling and reforming the architecture for Disaster Management, to include mechanisms – institutional, policy, legal, procedural, and investment – for coordinated disaster preparedness programming, disaster risk reduction

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[7] ibid

programming, and humanitarian response programming components; will not be able to adequately address the crisis in a sustainable manner.

Furthermore, distribution of relief, without adequate understanding of the causes of displacement, the context of displacement, and the issues faced by the displaced, will be grossly inadequate in tackling the crisis; and may in fact eventually compound rather than alleviate the situation.

KEY MESSAGE:

The North West context is a developing and rapidly evolving humanitarian crisis, and it is important to be proactive in tackling the crisis, and begin to put in place the measures and mechanisms to comprehensively address in a transformative manner the unfolding crisis, before it becomes another instance of the new normal.

The North West is threatening to become the New Humanitarian Crisis Frontier, but only if we do not take the necessary steps to nip the crisis in the bud.

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