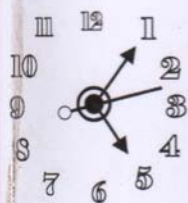




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Literacy: The Missing Link in Boko Haram Insurgency

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Abstract

In spite of the efforts of governments and international organisations in fighting insurgents and insurgencies as exemplified by the Boko Haram war in Nigeria, there are some missing links. Efforts like recruiting armed officers and expending money to buy arms and ammunitions are but mere acts; to fight insurgency there is the need to institute a proper and workable process. This process which has been practiced in many instances with sustainable results is called a literacy process. Without this process, insurgents will continue to be with Nigeria as a country, Africa as a continent and the whole world as an entity. This paper therefore identifies a literacy process for fighting insurgency and suggests ways of achieving a peaceful multi-ethnic society like Nigeria.

Key words: Insurgents, Insurgency, Boko Haram, Literacy and Human development

Introduction

Literacy has gone beyond the ability to read and write as it is popularly believed by laymen in Adult Education. In the contemporary period, literacy remains useful in every organization and community. It aids capacity building as an enabling factor and a core engine of human development; its impact can be seen in terms of its benefits to individuals and communities as a whole (Sarumi, Ojokheta and Adepoju, 2007). Ostensibly, literacy has led to its wider conceptualization and generalization as the acquisition of cognitive skills, as functionality, a tool for critical reflection and action for social change, and as a set of social and cultural practice, as well as a lifelong learning process. Research in some countries over the past several years has contributed weightily to a rethink of the concept of literacy, and Nigeria cannot be an exception. Irrespective of how it is viewed, one thing is certain, literacy remains the core skill and competence for building societies in Africa, especially in Nigeria where the Boko Haram insurgency has unleashed its venom for over six years.

Boko Haram Insurgency

Insurgencies have been as old as civilization but became most prominent after the September 11 2001 bombings of the United States by Al-Qaeda. The bombings were carried out on the World Trade Centre which had adverse effects on America and on the global world (Rogan, 2007).

There are differences in opinion over the precise date and conditions under which the group that became known as Boko Haram was first established. Despite the existence of various conflicting accounts, it is agreed by most observers that in 2002, a Muslim cleric by the name Ustaz Mohammed Yusuf, established a religious complex with a mosque and an Islamic boarding school in Maiduguri in Borno State, along with a prayer group which he called "Jama'atulAlhulSunnahLidda'watiwal Jihad" loosely translated from Arabic as "people committed to the propagation of the Prophet's teachings and jihad (Chothia, 2011). The same group is better known by its Hausa and Arabic language name as Boko Haram, meaning "Western education is sinful" (Adesoji, 2009). This position on

Education is not generally acceptable to the insurgents, even though, they are largely uneducated, many of them have hatred for Western civilization, and not Education. According to Professor Adamu, and quoted in Akanji (2013), the pervasive view in the local press that the sect abhorred western education in totality sounded droll to Yusuf and his followers: He thus used the word “boko” in its original Hausa context to mean “false”. This is the process of demonising the movement that created the projected medieval persona of the group as condemning Western education—a fact they found amusing, since they not only use products of Western technology and knowledge (laptops, arms, explosives), but at one stage they even had a full-blown website to proclaim their ideals. In addition, their attack on Bauchi prison in August 2010 was facilitated by an extensive use of Google Maps which helped them to map out the prison location and its access roads, and subsequently take strategic locations that hampered counter attacks by security agents, as documented in their video release *Gazwatu Abi Ibrahim* (Abi Ibrahim’s War).

Akanji (2013), also reported that Boko Haram was relatively unknown as a violent or terrorist group before the 21st century, however, in the present circumstances, social discourse on Nigeria often centres on issues bordering on insecurity, poverty, ethno-religious clashes, corrupt enrichment, kidnapping, herdsman and farmers crises, and particularly, Boko Haram terrorism. He further affirmed that the over 300 ethnic groups that had enjoyed relative cordiality in the past, even after a few years of civil war, have suddenly become “strange bed fellows” due to the insurgence of Boko Haram in the Northern part of Nigeria.

Teachers at this school have been known to abuse these children, in some cases taking a portion of whatever people give them, and in other cases using them as foot soldiers in religious clashes. Boko Haram started as a small radical Sunni Islamic organization with preaching and a limited support from among the Sufi Islamic communities in the Northeast of Nigeria; the anti-western ideology of the Boko Haram terrorist group earned it the concern about its potential relationship with other groups such as Sunni extremists and other terrorist groups elsewhere, including Al-Qaeda as well as

Al-Qaeda affiliates such as the Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) in Algeria and Mali and al-Shabaab in Somalia. (Reuters, 2013). Gusau, (2009) made the assertion that the early members of Boko Haram were people such as Aminu Tashen Ilimi, who was involved in the founding of the early evolution of Boko Haram.

The main reason for the emergence of the Boko Haram insurgents in Nigeria could be regarded as religious, yet there are other reasons apart from this religious factor. Boko Haram's main intention is for the country to fully implement Sharia Islamic law which was already adopted in most of the Nigerian Northern states. In other words, the intention was to turn Nigeria into an Islamic country to be ruled with Islamic Sharia law. In the view of Malam Yusuf, the leader of the Boko Haram, the Sharia law was not enforced strictly enough hence the need to get it enforced through Jihad (Nossiter, 2010). It could be said that some of the factors such as political and socio-economic frustrations which are all over Nigeria and more prevalent in the Northeast where Boko Haram thrives alongside poverty, unemployment, and lack of education which are much higher than in other parts of the country also serve as reasons for the emergence of Boko Haram.

The Failure of the Nigerian Government on Security

One of the factors highlighted in this paper is that of the use of the military. It could be recalled that Nigeria's military has been known for its good performance and reputation internationally due to its involvement in several peace keeping missions in Africa which are still fresh in people's minds. Yet the government's inability to contain the Boko Haram insurgency can be adduced to the inefficiency of the military through its use of wrong approaches. For instance, the military has a poor attitude towards human rights which makes the people not to have confidence in them. Another problem that bedeviled the military and contributed to its poor outing against the Boko Haram is its use of sub-standard equipment, insufficient training or the absence of it and most importantly, low motivation from army commandants.

The misuse of political power has also contributed to the failure of the government on security. The problem of insecurity should be

attributed to any political party. Successive administrations have not been able to nip the activities of dissenting groups in the bud. This postulation was supported by an environmental activist, Mtee, when he said that "People around the president, his closest allies, informed him that this Boko Haram is manufactured by the Northerners to play politics," particularly when it was stated by the North after the 2011 election that the country would be made ungovernable for the elected President being a President from the Southern part of the country (BBC, 2014). The above scenario led to the non-seriousness on the part of the government to confront the insurgent group immediately.

Corruption can be pointed out as another area that aided the failure of the government's fight against Boko Haram in Nigeria and this can be viewed from the procurement, administration and poor maintenance of acquired weapons meant to prosecute the war against the insurgents. The most serious aspect of corruption remains the internal frustration that led the soldier's ranks and files to engage in what the military referred to as mutinies and the refusal to take orders to engage in the fight since September 2014. The repercussion was that 66 soldiers have been sentenced to death for that act. It is also recorded that the desertion rate was high in the army.

The main reason for the emergence of Boko Haram could be regarded as religious fanaticism. Although corrupt practices among government officials and a few rich ones in the society also led to protests against government neglect, the masses did not benefit any share, especially those in the north-east which happens to remain traditionally the poorest part of the Nigerian population. More so, apart from corruption as a factor responsible for the ineffectiveness of the Nigerian government in countering the Boko Haram insurgency, it is important to prove that there are corrupt individuals within and outside the government that are benefiting from the fight against the insurgency through contracts and material supplies to government.

Measures Employed in Countering Boko Haram Insurgency

In countering Boko Haram insurgents in Nigeria by the government, several measures have been used which include the adoption of mechanisms that contain and deter the Boko Haram group.

One of the measures employed is the military counter-measures. Boko Haram started as a domestic based insurgent group in the early days of its emergence with little or no attacks until it clashed with the security agents in July 2009 when the Federal Government adopted the strategy which centred on armed repression. At this stage, the group was contained through the deployment of military units alongside the police to suppress the group. The result of this repression was the extra-judicial elimination of Mohammed Yusuf, the leader of the group as well as the arrest of hundreds of his followers. It was also argued that the security forces, mainly the military, police force and state security services officers arrested and detained those suspected to be members of Boko Haram along with their wives, children and other relatives. The leader of the group, Muhammad Yusuf and others were extra-judicially killed by the police. The brutal massacre of the members was condemned all over the world especially with Aljazeera news releasing its news clips on the killing in late 2011. To the Nigerian government, it seems as if the strategy of repression adopted against the then domestic based Boko Haram insurgency was effective, because members of the group who escaped the security crackdown fled to the north-east between the periods of July 2009 to July 2010, which witnessed almost zero activity by Boko Haram. This gap of non-activities by the group created the impression that the military counter-measure strategy as adopted in July 2009 was effective. Concerning the resurgence in the group's violent attacks from August 2010, it was argued that the one year interlude from the activities of Boko Haram was put to good use by the group towards the total transformation of itself by establishing links with international terrorist organisations which resulted in its re-emergence and further attacks by the group.

The group's attacks since then changed from that of guerrilla tactics and hit and run strategy to that of encirclements which

increased to that of medium scale urban guerilla warfare against the Nigerian State. This strategy adopted by the group became more devastating as it creates panic, fear and terror in the hearts of citizens and in the country.

The above view was supported when it was confirmed that military counter-measures adopted by the government were not helping the situation due to some variables when it was stated that: "Not only that Boko Haram has always been a test for the country's Armed Forces on their preparedness to defend and protect the nation, but the group's earlier successes in killings and destruction of properties methodically exposed the vulnerability of the military strength and capability of Nigeria" (Sun Online, 2015).

Boko Haram's attacks became more devastating beginning from the year 2010; the Federal Government had to accept the fact that the group had once again turned into a national security threat. Moreover, the insurgent group claimed responsibilities for all the attacks they carried out. With this realization came the need for a security strategy to deal with the group more frontally as witnessed through the formation of the Joint Task Force (JTF) as a booster to the initial military force being used.

The formation of the Joint Task Force (JTF) as a counter-measure is worth considering. The Federal Government of Nigeria in Phase II of its counter-measures, on 12 June 2011, the then President, Goodluck Jonathan inaugurated the combined security forces, named Operation Restore. The JTF is saddled with the responsibilities of restoring peace and the security of lives and property in the north-east zone where the insurgent is more prevalent (Amnesty International, 2012, 9).

The Nigeria Police Force (NPF) is primarily responsible for the protection of lives and property, as well as that of the maintenance of domestic law and order. The Armed Forces constitutionally is mandated to aid in civil authority by assisting the police in the maintenance of law and order, but they are only to be called upon if the situation was beyond police capability, as the case is at the moment with the Boko Haram insurgents. While the Nigerian Immigration Service is responsible for immigration issues, with the

DSS and DIA, they are charged with the responsibility of intelligence gathering.

The JTF is primarily concerned with the duties of subduing the group through offensive military crackdowns. The aims of the JTF actions were mostly to put a limit to the attacking space of the group and eliminating its activities as well as arresting members of the group and their supporters. The JTF designed strategies in its quest to achieving its aim of military oriented operations which include road blocks, checkpoints, arrests, cordons and searches.

Literacy: The Missing Link

There have been arguments on the relationship between literacy and development. Okeem (1981) established the fact that there is no simple direct causal relationship between literacy and development. Nonetheless, Sarumi (2010) advocated that there should be less emphasis on individual literacy, and that societal literacy in the context of creating a learning society should be encouraged. It has been said that; if a purpose of a thing is not known, abuse is inevitable. Thus, literacy as an instrument is needed in the development of both the young and the adult's mind in Nigeria. However, people have encouraged the government to handle the insurgents as freedom fighters rather than terrorists, so that the group will stop its attacks to enable them, the contractors to remain in business. Despite the continued attacks by the Boko Haram along with its threats to national security, the JTF has continued its counter-measure strategy against the insurgents and was able to pursue the insurgents into the border towns of Cameroun. At the moment, states under threat of Boko Haram include Kaduna, Kano, Adamawa, Taraba, Benue, Plateau States and of course, Abuja, the seat of the Government. Dispersed but provoked, members of Boko Haram group fleeing the intensive fire power of the military in the north-east now freely operate as herdsmen and carry out heavy assaults on citizens across north-west and central, buttressing the non-effectiveness of the military to combat the insurgents. It was reported that not less than 1,000 people have been killed via the group members camouflaging as herdsmen in what is called 'herdsmen versus farmers' violence' in Katsina, Benue and Kaduna

States (*The Sun Newspaper*, 2014). Lately, there have been the spread of this insurgence to other parts of the country with high level literacy. Apparently, as reported by the National Population Commission, literacy rates are much lower among states in the Northeastern part of Nigeria with about 72 per cent of children around the ages of 6-16 who have never attended schools in Borno State, where Boko Haram was originally founded, this explains the availability of readymade recruits into Boko Haram. Perhaps, if the citizens of Nigeria are educated enough, there would be no need for them to be told the “dos and donts”, and what is absolutely detrimental to them as persons. Similarly, government would not sit back and expect terrorists to bow down for its unrealistic measures. Nigeria would not be the first country in the continent or in the globe to be faced with such situations. In other words, when countries are faced with such contingencies, a number of possible solutions are to be employed (not the ‘a tooth for a tooth’ approach); possible measures with sustainable results should be employed. Corollary to that, the practice of literacy can be instrumental in diverse and sundry ways, be it in an individual’s achievement and development of a range of capabilities, or that of the society as a whole. The introduction of literacy as a missing link can serve as the fulcrum for result, which in turn brings about the preservation of cultural diversity, promotes the transmission of certain values, helps to challenge attitudes and behavioural patterns, promotes ethnic equality in the country, contributes to the expansion of democracy, and increases people’s political participation-rather than being a vice to the government and the people therein. On the part of an individual, literacy is a quintessential instrument and as such, should never be ignored, as it can help boost one’s self-esteem, bring about empowerment, creativity and critical reflection in the individual or persons involved. In the light of this, the rationale for recognising literacy as a missing link (as highlighted above) is the set of prevention and benefits it confers on individuals, families, communities and nations. Thus, there is a need for literacy education, which is fundamental to informed decision-making, personal empowerment, active and passive participation in both the local and global social community, especially in the Northern part of the country due to its significant

population and its attendant effects on the overall population of the country. Literacy here refers to all the abilities that would improve people's capacities to live with others, compromise, tolerate and build a safer world.

Conclusion

The emergence of Boko Haram as observed and accounted for by various scholars, showed the lack of literacy process in forestalling its activities. Amidst some views that Boko Haram is aimed at Islamising a multi-ethnic and religious country like Nigeria, literacy can serve as a bridge in instructing the minds of these individuals. Literacy has become an effective factor in enabling desirable societal changes.

On the part of the government, literacy is essential in bringing about peace in the Nation. The country has suffered various killings from the existence or birth of Boko Haram, and still witnesses such especially in the Northern part of the country. Several lives are endangered without seeing a possible and effective means of curbing such attacks. Likewise, on the part of the people, influencers and those being influenced, literacy remains the core skill and competence for building such individuals; one needs adequate literacy skills to participate and function happily within-and contribute to-one's communities. Literacy education in all spheres can bring changes in the individuals who make up such society.

One of the crucial variables for achieving a knowledge economy in Nigeria is literacy, which is usually perceived as the starting point for sustainable development, which is a cardinal principle driving knowledge economy. In the submission of UNESCO, literacy lies at the heart of Education for All and can be viewed as an outcome (reading, writing and numeracy), as a process (teaching and learning), and as an input that paves way for future development. In other words, for a country to move forward in fighting insurgencies and insurgents as exemplified by the Boko Haram crises in Nigeria, literacy (especially in the Northern part of Nigeria) is an important factor that must be considered and pursued.

Nigerian economy would be enhanced when learners have higher literacy levels. Effective literacy skills open the doors to more

educational and employment opportunities so that people are able to pull themselves out of poverty and chronic underemployment. In our increasingly complex and rapidly changing technological world, it is essential that individuals continuously expand their knowledge and learn new skills to keep up with the pace of change.

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