

Boko Haram Insurgency in Nigeria: The Imperative of Institutionalising Human Rights-based Approach to Post-conflict Peacebuilding Processes in the North-East

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Abstract

The Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria has greatly devastated the north-eastern region of the country. Human beings have been killed in the thousands, millions displaced, and the very weak infrastructure hitherto in place completely mangled. The question that looms large in light of the horrendous situation in the north-east is: How can this problem be addressed towards promoting sustainable peace in the region? This is the concern of this paper. Against this background, Parlevliet's four dimensions of human rights was employed as a framework of analysis for the interrogation of the conflict's context and the framing of the discussion on the strategies that can be employed to promote sustainable peace in the region. It finds that the root cause of the violent conflict is prolonged human rights violations and abuse at both the vertical and horizontal levels of the society, respectively. The paper concludes that the key to the enthronement of sustainable peace in north-east Nigeria is a post-conflict peacebuilding process that is anchored on the institutionalisation of respect for human rights, especially at the levels of governance and social relations.

Keywords: *Boko Haram Insurgency, Human Rights-Based Approach, Institutionalisation, Post-Conflict Peacebuilding, North-East Nigeria*

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Introduction

Over time, human rights have come to be considered as important in the generation, manifestation, resolution and prevention of violent conflict...It is now largely accepted that human rights protection and promotion are important for the long-term stability and development of societies that have experienced or are experiencing violent conflict. Parlevliet, (2010: 17-18)

Since independence, the Nigerian State has experienced different kinds of violent conflict--religious, political, ethnic and communal. Lately, two phenomena have come to define the trajectory of violent conflict in the nation: the Boko Haram insurgency in the north-east and the herdsmen attacks in virtually all parts of the country. Be that as it may, Boko Haram insurgency is more challenging. The devastating effects of the insurgency on the nation in general and the north-east in particular cannot be over-emphasised. Indeed, it is said to be the most devastating armed conflict that has taken place in the country since the civil war that was fought between 1967 and 1970 (Gamawa, 2017:451).

Expectedly, the government of Nigeria, in conjunction with other stakeholders, has embarked on peacebuilding activities to restore the troubled spot in the north of the country to the path of peace and development. Some of the Initiatives guiding the process include but are not limited to the North-East Recovery and Peacebuilding Assessment (RPBA); Presidential Initiative for the North-East (PINE); North-East States Transformation Strategy (NEST); and the North-East Development Commission (NEDC). It must be observed that the Nigerian government-led recovery and peacebuilding activities in the north-east are being carried out simultaneously with serious military engagement targeted at wiping out the Boko Haram insurgents.

However, the crux of the matter is this: how strong and resilient are these programmes and initiatives in preventing a relapse to violent conflict in the region? This is the fundamental question that should concern all the stakeholders involved in the north-east peacebuilding process. Undoubtedly, the chances of the ongoing peacebuilding efforts

bearing the desired outcomes are largely tied to the extent to which they address the root cause(s) of the conflagration in that part of the country. The point is that if the whole recovery and peacebuilding exercise is a recalibration of the old order in a dry-cleaned garment, a return of violent conflict is only a matter of time. Our diagnosis is that prolonged and excruciating human rights violations, especially on the part of the duty bearer (the State), is one of the major factors responsible for the outbreak of insurgency in the region. Thus, to achieve sustainable peace, the ongoing peacebuilding process must be anchored on a strong commitment to both the principles and the practice of human rights in the management of public affairs and at all levels of social interaction. Though respect for human rights is mentioned as one of the basic principles and values underlying the peacebuilding efforts, there is a need to conscientiously institutionalise respect for and the promotion of human rights as the driving force of governance processes, institutional functionality and social relations.

Following the Boko Haram onslaught against the Nigerian State and the consequent peacebuilding efforts of the stakeholders, many academic works have been spawned on the subject, especially by scholars of Nigerian extraction (Iyekekpolo, 2016; 2018; Gamawa, 2017; Umar et al, 2019; Bertoni et al, 2018). While these studies underscore the causes, effects and management of the crisis, relatively little attention has been paid to a penetrating analysis of the salience of human rights violations as a force for the emergence of the insurgency and the need to make respect for human rights the fulcrum of governance processes and social relations. In other words, this study emphasises the imperativeness of institutionalising respect for and promotion of human rights as the underlying principle of governance process and social relations, if sustainable peace is to be achieved in north-east Nigeria. The 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights amplifies this. It states that “it is essential, if man is not to be compelled to have recourse, as a last resort, to rebellion against tyranny and oppression, that human rights should be protected by the rule of law” (UN, 2015: 1).

Flowing from the need to institutionalise respect for human rights as the cornerstone of the peacebuilding exercise in the region, this paper employs Parlevliet’s multi-dimensional perspective of human rights as a framework for the interrogation of the context of the conflict and the framing of the discussion on how human rights can be integrated into the governance processes and all levels of social relations in north-east Nigeria.

Against this background, this study proceeds as follows: the first segment discusses the key terms that underpin the study. The second section reviews recent literature on peacebuilding and human rights along with that on the Boko Haram insurgency. The third section interrogates the context of the north-east Nigeria in the light of Parlevliet's four dimensions of human rights. The fourth section examines how human rights can be institutionalised into governance processes and social relations for sustainable peace in north-east Nigeria. The final section presents the conclusion.

Operational Definition of Terms

It is germane to clarify the use of the key terms that define this study, especially in light of the fact that two of them, human rights-based approach and post-conflict peacebuilding, are bedevilled by the tendency for scholars and practitioners to define them from their ideological perspectives.

Human Rights-Based Approach

Broadly speaking, human rights are rights that have been codified in international and national legal instruments as belonging to individuals solely by virtue of being human. Baehr (1999:1) expresses this when he defines human rights as "internationally agreed values, standards or rules regulating the conducts of states towards their citizens and towards non-citizens". They constitute a set of universally acceptable standards "against which duty-bearers at all levels of society can be held accountable" (UN 2006: 1). In other words, they are inalienable rights that an individual is entitled to by reason of his or her membership of the human race. Our conception of human rights is one that is robust and empowers individuals to realise their potential. Parlevliet (2017:341) asserts that "human rights involve more than law and relates also to challenging the status quo, emancipating the oppressed and promoting social justice and social change towards a fairer, participatory and equal society where people can live in freedom and dignity."

Having clearly established the perspective that informs the engagement of human rights in this study, let us briefly articulate our understanding of a human rights-based approach. A human rights-based approach is a normative framework that prioritises the establishment of international human rights standards as the foundation of governance

processes and social relations. Under a human rights-based approach, public policy formulation and implementation and processes of peacebuilding and development are anchored on a system of rights and corresponding obligations established by international covenants. According to the UN (2006: 15), a human rights-based approach “identifies rights-holders and their entitlements and corresponding duty-bearers and their obligations, and works towards strengthening the capacities of rights-holders to make their claims and of duty-bearers to meet their obligations”.

Post-conflict Peacebuilding

There appears to be a consensus among scholars and peacebuilding practitioners that the idea of peacebuilding was conceived by the Norwegian peace researcher Galtung in 1976 and popularized by then UN Secretary-General Boutros-Ghali in his widely published work *Agenda for Peace* (1992). Broadly speaking, peacebuilding refers to a variety of measures and activities targeted at addressing the root causes of a violent conflict with a view to preventing a reoccurrence in a polity. Ghali (1992) defines it as “action to identify and support structures which will tend to strengthen and solidify peace in order to avoid a relapse into conflict”. It is a complex engagement that involves a cluster of activities directed at transforming the social, political, economic and cultural bases of a society that is emerging from a violent conflict with a view to establishing that polity on the path of sustainable peace and development.

Literature Review

This segment of the paper explores the debate on the relationship between human rights and peacebuilding, on the one hand, and interrogates the extant literature generated as a result of the ongoing Boko Haram insurgency in the north-east Nigeria, on the other hand.

Here, it must be stated that, globally, there is a growing body of literature on the importance of human rights to peacebuilding. Apparently, this interest was triggered by the monumental violations of human rights and international humanitarian law in the course of the war in the former Yugoslavia (1992-1995) and the 1994 genocide in Rwanda (Parlevliet, 2018: 17). The discussions on the relationship between human rights and peacebuilding revolve largely around the challenge

inherent in marrying the normative nature of human rights with the pragmatic demands of peacebuilding processes. Schmelzle and Dudouet (2010: 1) opine that “the relationship between human rights protection and conflict transformation seems straightforward, but it is not an easy one. Over and over again, the question has been asked whether the two share a common agenda or actually pursue competing goals”.⁹ Other scholarly works that took their bearing from this perspective include Simpson (2017), Nordquist (2008), Parlevliet (2010; 2017), and Sriram (2017).

Scholarly works on the interface between human rights and peacebuilding processes published in a special edition of the *Journal of Human Rights* (2017), which can be aptly dubbed a compendium of articles on the subject, readily comes to mind in this respect. The articles in that edition of the journal examine the relationship between human rights and peacebuilding from a variety of perspectives covering legal justice, transitional justice, governance and rule of law, development and gender, to mention but a few. The introduction to the edition, written by Michelle Parlevliet, *Human Rights and Peacebuilding: Complementary and Contradictory, Complex and Contingent*, provides insight into papers in the edition and brings to the fore the central idea that runs through the articles therein. Indeed, Parlevliet amplifies the overarching objective of the various papers in the special edition as that of correcting a deep-seated impression that human rights and peacebuilding are parallel and contradictory concepts (Parlevliet, 2017: 334).

The above shows that prior to recent attempts by scholars to reconstruct the relationship between the two concepts, human rights and peacebuilding was largely seen as contradictory. Nordquist’s (2008) work, *The Crossroads of Human Rights and Peacebuilding: An Ongoing Debate* exemplifies the then dominant position that the overriding objective of human rights and peacebuilding are at cross-purposes. Over time, there has been a paradigm shift. Dudouet and Schmelzle (2010: 8) express this when they opine that the debate in literature on human right and peacebuilding has, over the past decades, moved from “postulating a direct, inherent tension between the two to recognizing a more complementary relationship”.

Having done a review of literature on the relationship between human rights and peacebuilding, let us now engage the literature on Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria. Expectedly, the insurgency has generated scholarly works from within and outside the borders of the Nigerian state. Judging by their focus, the body of literature on the

insurgency in Nigeria can broadly be classified into two categories. The first category focuses on the human rights violations occasioned by the activities of the insurgents and the counter-insurgency operations of the Nigerian military. It must be observed that, within this category, there are two streams. The first represents reports and documents commissioned by international organizations such as the Amnesty International (AI), the UN Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights (OCHR), and the US Department of State, to mention but a few. Essentially, it is a condemnation of the counter-insurgency measures of the authorities of the Nigerian State as one that is characterised by impunity and gross human rights violations. The other leg within the first category depicts the writings of scholars interrogating the human rights issues involved in the Boko Haram Insurgency and counter-insurgency. Some of these works are Kingsley (2019), Adishi and Oluka (2018), Mosabala (2016), and Odomovo (2014).

The second category represents the body of literature that largely focuses on the structural conditions that gave birth to the insurgency and the efforts by stakeholders to address the problem. Like the first category, the second category can be bifurcated into two perspectives. The first perspective encompasses commissioned reports and documents targeted at providing a comprehensive framework for the management of the humanitarian crisis generated by the insurgency and the on-going peacebuilding activities in the region. These include the United States Department of State (2018), International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) (2015), Danish Institute for International Studies (DIIS) (2015). The other perspective within the second category represents the works of scholars that interrogate the context of the conflict and articulate measures that can be taken to fix the problem in north-east Nigeria. Some of these works are Ebonyi (2019), Iyekekpolo (2018; 2016), and Aghedo (2014).

It is important to point out that the importance of respecting human rights to the entronement of social order and peacebuilding in a polity is clearly acknowledged in the extant literature reviewed in this study. Parlevliet (2017: 23) reiterates this when she argues that institutionalising respects for rights and enhancing the rule of law in the aftermath of violent conflicts serves as a form of structural prevention through addressing deep-seated causes that underlie the outbreak of violent conflict. Iyekekpolo (2018: 1) refers to the issue of rights as a major factor responsible for the violence in the north-east. He argues that at the

root of the insurgency in that part of the country is “structural vulnerabilities”.

Having done a review of literature on the relationship between peacebuilding and human rights, let us at this juncture interrogate the context in the north-east using Parlevliet’s four dimensions of human rights as a framework of analysis.

An Interrogation of the Context of the North-East Nigeria in light of Parlevliet’s Four Dimensions of Human Rights

In this section, the context in the north-east geo-political zone is interrogated in light of Parlevliet’s four dimensions of human rights: human rights as rules; human rights as structures and institutions; human rights as relationships; and human rights as a process. Looking at these four dimensions will enable us have a robust understanding of the centrality of human rights violations as the root cause of the protracted Boko Haram insurgency in the region.

Human Rights as Rules:

According to Parlevliet (2010; 22), rights as rules refers to the legal aspects of rights as contained in international instruments and national legislation that are enforceable through the court system. It emphasises “the need to legally recognize human rights and institutionalise respect for them through the adoption, implementation and enforcement of relevant legislation, both nationally and internationally”. The 1999 Nigerian Constitution contains a Bill of Rights in Chapter IV. However, the modus operandi in the adoption, implementation and enforcement of rules (public policies) informing governance processes, especially in the north of the country, has never seriously reflected a scintilla of respect for the human rights of the generality of the inhabitants of the region. One major factor, among many others, that can be adduced for the paucity of the ingredients of human rights in policy circle in the nation in general and in the north-east in particular is the prolonged military rule experienced and which is still affecting the nascent democratic processes in the country. The politicians that took over from the military, rather than rewriting the rules in line with democratic values and fundamental freedoms, maintained the status quo. We are not stating that nothing was done in terms of re-examining or reframing public policies in the light of democratic principles and values, however, the adoption, implementation

and enforcement of rules in Nigeria in general and in the north-east in particular still largely exemplify disregard for the rights of the individual.

Even when the framing of rules exhibits some tinge of respect for human rights, their enforcement is largely characterised by blatant disrespect for the rights of those who are not members of the ruling class. A very good example is the extra-judicial killing of Muhammed Yussuf, the acclaimed founder of the Boko Haram sect and other members of his group by the police in 2009. In fact, it was the 2009 extra-judicial killing of the members of this sect that partly infused violence into the Boko Haram insurgency in north-east Nigeria. The truth of the matter is that respect for the rule of law and human rights has not sufficiently taken root in the nation's nascent democratic process.

Human Rights as Structures and Institutions

The second dimension of human rights relates to “the structural division of power and resources in society and the mechanisms that exist to handle conflicts that may arise in this regard” (Parlevliet, 2010: 22). It must be clearly stated that in Nigeria, power and resources are concentrated in the hands of a few. The socio-economic and political structure in the north-east, which is a microcosm of what obtains in other parts of the country, is such that you either belong to the oppressive ruling class, which is less than 10% of the population, or you are in the camp of the oppressed, which constitute about 90% of the population. Ironically, the less than 10% of the population that constitutes the ruling elites is the ones in absolute control of about 98% of the resources acquirable in the state.

This oppressive social condition contributed immensely to the outbreak of the insurgency in north-east Nigeria. Ayegba(2015) cited in Iyekepolo (2016: 2215) argues that the unbridled and sustained exploitation of the commonwealth by a few at the expense of the generality of the people resulted in the Boko Haram insurgency. Indeed, the humiliating socio-economic conditions aided the recruitment of the mass of the disgruntled elements into the Boko Harm sect. The poverty Index shows that the north-east, which consists of six states—Adamawa, Bauchi, Bornu, Gombe, Taraba and Yobe—have the highest level of poverty in Nigeria at 72.2% (Mbah et al, 2017: 175). The persistence of this economic condition engenders a feeling of relative deprivation among the populace, which, in turn, engenders frustration and ultimately the engagement in violence as a form of expression.

The critical institutions of the state such as the police, the judiciary and the civil service, which are largely responsible for the implementation and enforcement of state policies, have little or no respect for human rights in their *modus operandi*. The Nigeria Police Force (NPF) which, more than any other state institutions, symbolizes state power perpetually exhibits anti-democratic tendencies as it has no iota of respect for human rights and the rule of law. The court which is expected to serve as the last hope of the common man is not only compromised but also lacks the independence required for a judicial system to deliver justice. To that extent, the mechanisms that exist to handle conflicts in the Nigerian society are largely ineffective. Having discovered that the courts are there to protect the rich, the masses routinely resort to violence as a means of social expression.

Rights as Relationships:

Parlevliet (2010: 22) conceives this as “the relevance of rights for organizing and governing the interaction between state and citizens and amongst individuals and groups in society”. This dimension of rights emphasizes the need for both vertical and horizontal relationships to be informed by the consciousness to promote human dignity and values that are germane to the full realization of the potential of the individuals. A vertical relationship, according to him, refers to the responsibility of the state towards its citizens, on one hand, and the existence of a platform for citizens to demand accountability from the government of the state, on the other hand. A horizontal relationship highlights the responsibilities of the ordinary people in their day-to-day interaction with one another. Douzinas (2008), cited in Parlevliet (2010: 23), captures this when he avers that human rights exist in a social context and are reciprocal, and that recognition of the others is a core value of human rights. A juxtaposition of this conception in light of the nature of the relationship that permeates social interaction at the vertical and horizontal levels in north-east Nigeria is necessary in this study.

With respect to the vertical relationship, interaction between the state and the citizens was, for decades, structured in a state-subject kind of relationship. The nature of the relationship between the duty-bearer and the right-holders in north-east Nigeria mirrors Mamdani’s citizen and subject analysis of the legacy of colonialism in Africa (Mamdani, 2018). Even 20 years after the enthronement of democratic governance systems in the nation, the situation painted in Mamdani’s book resonates largely

with the social reality in north-east Nigeria. Those at the helm of affairs still see themselves as “civilized men” that should enjoy rights that are not available to others who, largely, are seen as subjects rather than as citizens. Social welfare programmes, when mounted by the state, are often packaged in the form of a privilege rather than as social and economic rights that the citizens are entitled to.

It must be observed here that, with the enthronement of democracy in the country, the narrative has not changed substantially. This is because power still largely resides with the rulers rather than with the people, who, in a democracy, are supposed to be the custodians of power. The process of determining the representatives of the people is characterised by electoral fraud, godfatherism and money politics. So, in this context, it becomes extremely difficult to throw up leaders that are true representatives of the people. Also, by extension, when the process of electing representatives is not fair and credible, the issue of leadership accountability becomes a mirage. The point here is that the nature of the relationship between the state (duty bearer) and the citizen (rights holder) is not one that is human rights-based. The leadership of the state does not feel morally obliged to respect and promote the rights of the citizens, nor do the citizens see the state as an institution that is set up to guarantee the protection of their human rights. Rather, they see the state as an instrument employed by the ruling class to exploit and oppress them. To the generality of the people, the state remains essentially the state of the elite rather than a representative of the collective interests of the people (Mbah et al, 2017:179).

At the horizontal level, the relationship between the ordinary people, whether at the level of one individual to another or at the level of one group to another, is driven by mistrust, predatory tendencies and disdain for the respect of the rights of others. The ordinary people are constantly mobilized against one another by the elite, using religion and ethnicity, for political gains. Indeed, it is believed that the emergence and escalation of Boko Haram insurgency is rooted in elite politics (Mbah et al, 2017; Iyekepolo, 2016, 2018). It has been widely acknowledged that Senator Ali Modu Sheriff, in his bid to win the 2003 governorship election in Borno state, against the incumbent Mala Kachalla, sought the support and reached an agreement with the Muhammed Yusuff-led Boko Haram sect.

The understanding between the duos saw Sheriff latching onto Yusuff's huge youth followership to win the 2003 governorship election in Borno state, the epicentre of the Boko Haram insurgency. In time, the

understanding between Yusuff and Sheriff broke down. This development later led to recurrent confrontations between the Yusuff-led Boko Haram and the security agencies of the state. It must be observed that apart from those who followed Yusuff on account of his perception and practice of Islam, the economically vulnerable, especially the youth and the *almajiri*, saw Yusuff as their messiah. The coercive approach employed by the state to rein in the sect exacerbated the level of violence as the members of the sect became more daring.

Process Dimension of Human Rights

This dimension of human rights focuses on the recognition that the chances of a peace process leading to the enthronement of sustainable peace in a polity depends both on its substance and the process undergirding the peacebuilding activities (Parlevliet, 2010: 23). Here, it must be stated that the key documents guiding post-conflict peacebuilding—the Recovery and Peacebuilding Strategy (RPBS) and Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP)—are comprehensive and ambitious, especially in terms of meeting the liberal peace specification. However, they lack the input of the locals who are the actual victims of the Boko Haram insurgents' activities. In other words, the much-needed participation of the local people in the peacebuilding process is peripheral as the whole programme exemplifies the top-down approach that characterizes the liberal peacebuilding approach. The crisis of state-society interface is exacerbated by the fact that the bulk of civil society organisations involved in the ongoing peacebuilding process in north-east Nigeria are not membership-based organisations that are imbued with the knowledge of the dynamics of inter-group relations and cultural and historical evolution of the generality of the people in the affected communities.

The fact that the peacebuilding process is fraught by lack of transparency and proper coordination is seriously affecting the credibility of the process, which undermines its legitimacy and sustainability. It is a process that is riddled with the corruption that typifies governance processes in Nigeria. Brechenmacher (2019: 2) captures this when he opines that lack of political commitment, transparency and coordination on the part of the Nigerian government are constituting obstacles to the peacebuilding process in north-east Nigeria. The Babachir Lawal case is a very good example of the corruption that has bedevilled the exercise. Babachir Lawal, a former secretary to the federal government of Nigeria

(SGF), whose office was in charge of the Presidential Initiative on the North-East (PINE), was found to have mismanaged N544m out of the monies meant for the rebuilding process in the conflict-affected region of the nation (The Guardian 30 January, 2019). Closely related to this is the fact that a large number of the civil society organisations involved in the peacebuilding process in the region use it for resource mobilisation. Moreover, the whole peacebuilding exercise has not been devoid of the divisive nature of the nation's politics, thereby making it seriously flawed in terms of substance and process.

It is worth noting here that the interrogation of the context and the modus operandi being employed to address the root causes of the problem towards preventing a recurrence of conflict in the region has not sufficiently recognised the salience of human rights violations in the outbreak of the Boko Haram insurgency. In view of the concern of this study, the next segment examines how respect for human rights can be placed at the centre of governance processes and at all levels of social relations for sustainable peace in north-east Nigeria.

Integrating Human Rights into Governance Processes and Social Relations for Sustainable Peace in North-East Nigeria

As clearly stated earlier, this study adopted Parlevliet's multi-dimensional perspective of human rights, both as an instrument for understanding the conflict's context and as a framework for discussing how respect for human rights can be institutionalised as the bedrock of the peacebuilding process ongoing in north-east Nigeria. Considering the interconnectedness and interdependence of the four dimensions of human rights, the discussion is calibrated into two broad issues: governance and social relations.

- **Integrating Human rights into Governance Processes in North-East Nigeria**

The essence of governance within the context of the modern state is to promote people's security and development. Lately, respect for human rights has become the fulcrum for the realisation of security and development in human society. The UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan captures the inter-linkages between development, security and human rights in his conception of 'in larger freedom'. According to him,

“development, security and human rights are imperative and reinforce each other. We will not enjoy development without security, we will not enjoy security without respect for human rights” (UN, 2005a: para 17).

Towards the project of integrating respect for human rights into governance processes for the enthronement of sustainable peace in the north-east Nigeria, the starting point is to deepen the level of people’s participation and inclusion in the decision-making process. Indeed, the principle contained ‘in larger freedom’ underscores the importance of the people’s consent in the management of their affairs. The point we are making here is that the on-going peacebuilding process in the north-east be organised to put the local people at the centre of the whole exercise. Although democracy, which exemplifies peoples’ participation in the running of the affairs of the state, is the governance model in Nigeria, the reality is that, substantially, the people in north-east Nigeria have no say in the decision-making process that determines the direction of the region. The reason is that the process of selecting the ‘representative’ of the people to political positions is neither free nor credible. People’s preferences on leadership selection and governance issues are routinely sacrificed on the altar of godfatherism and prebendal politics.

A reinvention of the leadership recruitment and representatives’ selection process is needed to enable the people effectively participate in the governance process in the region. The current abysmal level of people participation in state affairs has negative implications for leadership accountability and public policy. When political office holders are not accountable to the people, resources that should have go into development for the socio-economic emancipation of the masses are either mismanaged or stolen outright by the few in power. Sadly, this is the case in Nigeria as exemplified by the grinding level of poverty and the very high rate of unemployment, especially among the youth in the north-east. As a result of the endemic corruption on the part of the leadership, the populace is deprived of the acceptable minimum standard of living and this is fuelling aggression (Ayegba, 2015). With quality representation, public policymakers would become accountable to people, right-based and reflect demonstrated commitment by public institutions to promote the fundamental rights of the people (Muchena, 2012: 1).

Moreover, the critical role of the institutions of the state as vehicles for the promotion of the rule of law and democratic ethos and principles cannot be over-emphasised. As a matter of fact, the extent to which respect for human rights become entrenched as a normative framework

for the running of the affairs of a polity is largely a function of the nature and character of the institutions of the state. There is so many instances of human rights violations and abuse in Nigeria in general and the north-east in particular due largely to the fact that the various institutions of the state that are statutorily mandated to carry out state responsibilities and functions have become repressive as they are routinely employed by the ruling class to promote their agenda. The police, which more than any state institution represents the state in terms of promoting of law and order, are often employed by state authorities to violate the fundamental human rights of the people.

Consequently, efforts at institutionalising respect for human rights as the fulcrum of peacebuilding activities in north-east Nigeria must recognise the need for a concerted state-building process. Indeed, activities targeted at making state institutions capable, accountable and responsible are critical to the enthronement of sustainable peace in north-east Nigeria. State institutions that are committed to promoting a society for all on the basis of the principles of equity and social justice are foundational to the institutionalisation of respect for human rights in the management of public affairs.

- **Integrating Human Rights into Social Relations in the North-East Nigeria**

The defining principles of social interaction in a polity determines, to a large extent, the nature of social relationship in a society. The violent genre of conflict has become prevalent as a form of social expression and interaction in north-east Nigeria due to the large scale and persistent violation and abuse of human rights by the duty-bearer and the rights-holders. The reality is that when people persistently experience denial of their fundamental human rights from the duty-bearer (state), they become averse to respecting the rights of others. Social relations in the region, both at the vertical and horizontal levels, are characterised by impunity, discrimination, injustice, inequity and inequality, and lack of respect for others. If respect for human rights is going to be institutionalised as the basis of social relations, there is a need to renegotiate and redefine the violence-induced nature of the existent social relations to one that facilitates the promotion of equity, equality, fairness, respect for individual freedom and dignity (Piron, 2005).

One of the ways this can be achieved is to reinvent and reinforce Nigeria's National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) such that the body can independently and effectively carry out its statutory mandate as an institution for the promotion of respect for human rights. A sufficiently empowered NHRC will be able to check human rights violations and abuse at all levels of social interaction by bringing culprits to justice. A sustained effort at sanctioning culprits of rights violation and abuse and getting justice for victims of such rights violation and abuse would help a great deal in the institutionalisation of respect for human rights as the acceptable form of social relations in the north-east in particular and Nigeria in general.

Conclusion

Considering the salience of human rights violation and abuse to the outbreak of the Boko Haram insurgency, this paper argues that the on-going peacebuilding activities in north-east Nigeria can only achieve the desired goal of promoting sustainable peace through institutionalised respect for the rights of individuals. The antidote to a relapse to violence is to conscientiously make respect for human rights as the basis governance processes and social relations at all levels. The stakeholders in the on-going peacebuilding process in the region cannot afford to put human rights on the margin of the integrated efforts to address the conflict and prevent a relapse. Parlevliet (2018: 34) reiterates this when she opines that human rights matter in the causation, manifestation, and evolution of violent conflict. They should be considered as central to efforts to address violent conflict in the short and long term.

This is feasible when the capacities of the duty-bearers and the rights-holders to carry out their responsibilities within the social network are sufficiently improved. The structures and institutions of the duty-bearers must be reconstructed to promote and protect human rights. The rights-holders must be empowered to demand the respect of their fundamental human rights from the state and respect the rights of others too. Consequently, rights-holders must be equipped with human rights education for a proper understanding of their rights under the law. In addition, the grinding poverty currently being experienced by the generality of the people of the region must be frontally addressed to restore their self-esteem and dignity. This undoubtedly will transform the existent nature of power relations that nurtures the penchant for human rights violations and abuse to one that promotes respect for fundamental

human rights and freedoms. An institutionalisation of a human rights-based approach to the governance processes and social relations is critical to the entrenchment of sustainable peace in north-east Nigeria. Be that as it may, there is a need for further research on the Boko Haram insurgency, especially with respect to the management of the transitional justice aspect of the post-conflict peacebuilding exercise.

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