

Report on visit to Maiduguri, Borno State from May 13th – 18th 2014

Background

On April 14th 2014, 276 adolescent girls were abducted by the boko haram sect in the middle of the night from a government secondary school in Chibok, Borno State. Fortunately, 53 girls escaped from the sect while they were being transported to their hideout and have since being reunited with their families. However over 223 girls are still missing. We learnt also that the numbers of girls might be higher as this was not the first time girls have being abducted from villages or communities in Borno state. As a matter of fact, in February, 25 girls were taken from a village and as many as 50 (at different times) have been abducted from the streets, homes of villages around the area. The matter had gotten disturbingly bad that most of the schools had to shut down and students were either asked to stay at home or relocated to other schools to write their final examinations. Such was the case of the girls in Chibok prior to their abduction. Perhaps what was most distressing was the lack of prompt and adequate response from the Nigerian Government in first, addressing the issue and securing the release of the girls. Their attitude sparked nation and world-wide criticism and galvanized major actions, protests and rallies under the campaign to #BringBackOurGirls.

KIND has worked in Borno State training young women in the University of Maiduguri since 2006. We have trained 500 young women in transformational leadership, advocacy, financial management and entrepreneurship. We have also trained 40 female political aspirants on political education in preparation for the 2011 elections. However, our engagement was severely downsized in 2010 because of the rising insecurity in the state as well as other parts of the region. Despite this, we continued to connect with our members through KIND's long-term partner/liason person, a well-known grassroots activist and lecturer Professor Hauwa A. Biu who has been a primary part of KIND's work in the University of Maiduguri since inception.

With the information provided by Professor Biu, we determined that a visit to Maiduguri, Chibok and other affected areas was necessary to enable us outline a clear strategy to work with the women and girls in Borno State. Unfortunately, we were unable to visit Chibok due to the high level of insecurity and instability of the area. It is reported that despite the abductions, the area is yet to be secured by security operatives. As such, boko haram operates at will any time of the day. The distance from Maiduguri, surrounding areas and vegetation, bad roads and lack of security makes it impossible to travel without adequate security. However, we were able to meet with and garner information and testimonies from several individuals and groups who have similar experiences and have being affected by the insurgency.

Since 2009, the Northeastern part of Nigeria has been thrown into an atmosphere of violence and insecurity brought on by activities of the dreaded 'Boko Haram' sect. Affected states are Adamawa, Borno and Yobe with Bornu and Yobe been the worst hit. Since February, Bornu has experienced a series of attacks that have left several thousands of people dead in its wake. Sadly, Boko Haram's wave of terror is not confined to one area but spread all over its 27 LGA's in the 3 Senatorial districts (North, South and Central).

"Initially, it (Boko Haram) was seen as a very local problem. A problem of Borno State but now, it is an international issue" – Honorable Commissioner of Education Mallam Musa Inuwa Kubo

The activities of Boko Haram include bombings and destruction of churches, schools, airports and other public places. The sect indiscriminately kills people, rapes and abducts innocent women and girls while spreading a spirit of fear across the state. They have succeeded in destroying millions of Naira worth of businesses, inhibited people's livelihoods thus adding to the alarming high rate of poverty in the region.

Objective

Our visit therefore sought:

- To gather stories from women and girls affected by the escalating violence brought on by the insurgency in Borno State
- To understand what are the drivers of the conflict.
- To understand the challenges of civil society and grassroots organisations to effectively deal with the problem, proffer and advocate for change within the state
- To ascertain the systems and processes in place to effectively manage survivors and victims of the insurgency
- To ascertain the most immediate needs of the community
- To understand the challenges the conflict poses to girl education in the region
- To identify civil society groups to partner with
- To begin to engage with government and critical stakeholders like the national security adviser to include women and girls issues in the on-going security plan

Costs of war

"There is no one in Borno that has not been affected by this. Everyone has either lost a family member, business or property. Some have lost everything". Mallam Goni

Sadly, there is no clear consensus on the number of lives lost since this 'war' began. Schools in these states have been closed for months and students have had to make do with relocating to other schools to write their final examinations. Many have been displaced from their villages and communities. Some currently live in bombed or half built-out buildings, make-shift homes for lack of better accommodation or for fear of reprisals. Reports of rape and gross abuse of girls and women by security forces are rampant and yet, no action has been taken to bring perpetrators to book. Many women witnessed their husbands and sons being killed or dragged away. Most with relatives in custody do not have access to them and, consequently, do not know if they are alive or dead.

Citizens continue to suffer a 'double whammy' of sorts from both the military forces and boko haram members. Many are yet to recover from the physical and emotional trauma talk less of the financial and economic burden the conflict has inflicted on them.

Women and girls are probably the worst hit as they often have the added burden of fending for their children and family members. Many men reportedly have abandoned their families and run away because they fear being killed or unjustly captured during military raids and boko haram attacks. Local government chairmen or people of authority of selected villages have relocated from their wards outside Maiduguri and now live within the city centre for fear of attacks.

Borno State government has been providing support – mainly to families of security officials who have been killed during the insurgency. However, with the high number of casualties it seems like ‘a drop in a very big ocean’.

Security

In response to the threat and attack from the sect, the federal government declared ‘a state of emergency’ and deployed security personnel to all three states in 2013. However, despite this, boko haram’s activities have only escalated with daily multiple attacks and abductions – each one more deadly and gruesome. There are also allegations of the military’s part in the problem as proponents of crimes like rape, destruction of property and extra-judicial killings. At the same time, there are reports of a lack of preparedness on the part of the military to adequately handle boko haram’s sophisticated machinery and weapons. Many have alleged to corruption as the reason for the military’s inability to quell the chaos.

Security is predominantly visible within and around Maiduguri, the city centre, while the outskirts are usually less secure. These outlying areas still have a high concentration of the dreaded sect.

In Borno state a vigilante group popularly called the civilian joint task fund (CJTF) was formed in 2012 in response to the escalating violence particularly those meted out by the security agents against innocent citizens. Comprising of local youths, men and women, it was established to identify and handover boko haram militants to the army in order to reduce the military’s engagement with the local population. The impetus for the creation of the group was thus to reduce the opportunity for the military commission of human rights violations and abuses. The idea has so far being supported by the state government who is committed to providing the CJTF with training, kits and materials to enable them better handle the menace of boko haram. The government has also worked to incorporating the JTF with the military and other security personnel. There are plans to provide a legal framework to ensure that recruits are incorporated into other vocations like the military, police, nursing or civil service after their paramilitary stint.

Needs

Even if the whole world is ready to assist us, without our own input – our own voices, nothing can be done – Hafsat Allamin Reg, Programme Manager National Stability and Reconciliation Programme (NSRP)

Over the course of four days, we visited Maiduguri, Borno State and met with civil society groups, victims/survivors of the insurgency, key government officials from ministry of justice and education and other indigenes of Borno. Through face-to-face meetings, interviews and visit to affected areas we were able to determine the following needs:

- Trauma & Counselling Centre to deal with the complaints and issues of continuous violence against women and girls.
- Military is not properly equipped to handle the insurgency. In some cases soldiers are also responsible for certain atrocities committed. CJTF needs technical expertise and training to gather intelligence and better combat insurgents.

- One-stop database point, unit or centre that provides records or data on victims (names, details) of the insurgency. Provides information on type of support (If any) rendered by government
- Parents of girls are equally traumatised and not taken care of
- Victims need immediate assistance like accommodation, food, and clothes. They also need assistance to learn vocations to enable them build their livelihood.
- Victims need legal services and support
- Provide a resettlement place for many who are displaced to stay till they can return to their homes.
- Provide support for people who have become physically disabled as a result of this insurgency
- Build the capacity of civil society to develop proposals, attract funds, dialogue with government and to advocate for the needs of the people.
- Build the capacity of media to document and tell stories particularly stories that show the abuse and violations.
- Women who are a major casualty affected by this 'war' need to be involved. They need to be at the table where decisions are made and taken with regards to curbing the crisis and dealing with the damages.

Resolutions

Our goal is to position Borno state to benefit from the international and national interventions currently pouring in; such interventions must go to where is needed most and for those most vulnerable.

1. Set up a trauma and counselling centre or unit. It could be within already existing structures like the Federal Teaching Hospital and the State hospital.
2. Build the capacity of civil society groups in Borno State
3. Work with Borno women to identify a product that can be created and marketed outside the state. The product will help generate income for displaced families, women and girls in Borno State. This idea ties into the uplifting the spirit of strength and resilience of women in Nigeria in general and women in Borno state in particular.
4. Begin to collate information and data – data of those displaced, data of those affected in one way or another by the insurgency to support needs-based planning.
5. Promote the campaign for girls education – its significance in addressing and ending poverty and the vicious circle of violence

Long term goals

- Advocate for the passing of the Child Rights Act
- Build a permanent trauma & counselling centre that would provide immediate assistance to victims and survivors of violence and abuse

- Build the capacity of women in Borno to engage in political, social and economic development of the state. Encourage women to enter into politics and take up leadership positions in the state.

Potential partners

- Ministry of Women Affairs and Poverty Alleviation: Ministry is directly in charge of the welfare home where many women and girls are relocated to for rehabilitation and support after cases of abductions and rapes.
- Ministry of Justice, which manages the civilian JTF.
- Ministry of Education, which manages the primary and high schools.
- Local government: directly responsible for the local government areas.
- Women leaders and district heads: directly responsible for working with community groups and members.
- Religious leaders (Christian & Muslims)
- 20 Civil society/grassroot groups in the NorthEast region of Nigeria (Adamawa, Borno, Yobe state)

Reach

We will work within the 3 senatorial districts to reach

- 80 – 100 Women Leaders
- 50 – Religious leaders
- 5000 – Women and girls with direct support (rehabilitation, psychological counseling and possibly relocation where necessary)
- 1,000,000 women, girls, boys and men (indirectly support)