Strengthening Community Resilience

Policy Recommendations

1. Stabilisation programmes are key to achieving community resilience. Stabilisation gives local political and traditional structures, the capacity to provide security, justice and other services.
2. There is the need to mitigate physical and psychological distresses of people living in communities that have been ravaged by Boko Haram.
3. There is need to improve the mental outlook of people living in communities that have been impacted by Boko Haram.
4. Platforms for effective communications are critical for building resilience in post-conflict communities.
5. It is imperative to shed more light on the context-specific drivers of the violent activities of Boko Haram.

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SPD Nextier
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www.nextierspd.com
info@nextierspd.com
+234 701 002 7301

The North East zone is the poorest zone in Nigeria. Its average absolute poverty rate of 69.0% is above the national average of 60.9%. Access to education in the zone is particularly severe with over 44% of school age children out of school. This is higher than the national average of about 26%. The situation has become worse since 2009, when the activities of Boko Haram assumed a violent dimension, that has claimed between 20,000 and 30,000 lives and displaced about 2.6 million people (Onuoha and Oyewole, 2018). As at April 2017, Boko Haram had destroyed properties worth over N1.9 billion (US$5.2 billion). This destruction includes over 1 million homes and 5,000 classrooms (Onuoha and Oyewole, op.cit).

This destruction of major economic and social infrastructures in the zone, has resulted in significant disruption of daily lives in affected communities, and has prompted various interventions such as the North East Development Commission (NEDC) and Victim Support Fund aimed at dealing with the impact. As admirable and well-intentioned as these interventions, they are insufficient to ensure stability and prosperity in the affected communities. There is the need to strengthen resilience capacities of communities in the region. This edition of Nextier SPD Weekly examines the

imperative of strengthening community resilience capacities in ensuring peace, security and development in the North East region of Nigeria.

The United Kingdom Cabinet Office defined community resilience "as communities and individuals harnessing local resources and expertise to help themselves in an emergency in a way that compliments the response of the emergency services". The core components of community resilience include social connectedness for resource exchange, cohesion, response, and recovery; effective risk communication for all populations (including at-risk individuals); integration and involvement of government and non-governmental entities in planning, response, and recovery; physical and psychological health of the population, and socio-economic well-being of the community (Haworth, Bruce, Whittaker, and Read, 2018).

Building resilience is not the sole duty of emergency management agencies. It is a shared responsibility across the whole society. It involves all stakeholders in a community such as traditional

rulers, religious leaders, development partners, governmental agencies, mass media, youth and women. Indeed, resilience builds upon existing arrangements.

Resilience is considered as vital to all members of a community in response, recovery and adaptation to uncertainty after disruptive challenges such as tsunamis, cyclones, tornadoes, droughts, floods, earthquake, or crisis events such as terrorist attacks. In the United Kingdom, it was used to deal with the impact of floods in affected communities (Ntontis, Drury, Amlot, Rubins, and Williams, 2018). Currently, some Western nations are working to strengthen the resilience of communities to extremist violent narratives in the Middle-East and North Africa.

Strengthening the capacities of affected communities to build resilience has become imperative in the face of mounting terrorist attacks and insurgencies in the North East Nigeria. This imperative is important to compliment the efforts of various government agencies and non-governmental organisations. Based on the foregoing, a number of well-tailored interventions are needed to ensure community resilience in the Boko Haram-ravaged North East region of Nigeria.

1. Stabilisation programmes are key to achieving community resilience. As defined by UK Stabilisation Unit in 2018, "Stabilisation is an activity undertaken as an initial response to violence or the immediate threat of violence. All stabilisation interventions will be different and shaped by context specific factors". For the North East, it is important that both political and recognised traditional authorities in the conflicts affected communities are restored. Stabilisation gives local political and traditional structures, the capacity to provide security, justice and other services. This therefore strengthens and makes community resilience achievable, with community members engaging in risk assessment and proactive actions, aimed at preserving structures and infrastructures vulnerable to malicious attacks. Furthermore, less vulnerability of the socio-economic structures and infrastructures can minimize losses, damage, displacements and produce long-term development gains in the region.

2. There is the need to mitigate physical and psychological distresses in people living in communities that have been ravaged by Boko Haram. Such communities should work closely with development agencies and parties treating post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety and depression. This is not an area that Nigerians pay attention to and such traumas, if not untreated, can trigger new conflicts.

3. There is need to improve the mental outlook of people living in communities that have been impacted by Boko Haram. Mental outlook denotes the attitudes, feelings and views of uncertainty after a crisis event or when contemplating one in the future (Haworth, Bruce, Whittaker, and Read, 2018). Mental outlook of a community is important in shaping the minds of its members who have been victims of attacks to carry on in the face of uncertainty. Continued reassurances from trusted leaders that tomorrow will be better than the current realities will enable those members of communities impacted by terror to continue to manage the disruptive challenges. Leaders of traditional and religious institutions and trusted civil society organisations can play a key role in this regard.

4. Platforms for effective communications are critical for building resilience in post-conflict communities. Traditional communications channels should be strengthened. More frequent interactions and flow of information is essential to build an intelligence network to forestall or minmise attacks. Technologies (such as Whatsapp and text messages) can be leveraged even in some of the desolate locations.

5. It is imperative to shed more light on the context-specific drivers of the violent activities of Boko Haram. While in the literature, there are common claims that unemployment and governance failure influence the radicalisation of violence, stakeholders in the Boko Haram-hotbed communities need to share information from their experiences for better understanding of the social and personal factors that make people act on their frustration to participate in violent extremism. A better understanding of the specific drivers can be helpful for designing and implementing the kind of interventions that are most likely to discourage people from being enlisted to carry out violent activities.

Following this discourse, it is pertinent to know that community resilience is a vital skill for individuals and communities, as well as local governance institutions within such conflict affected domain to absorb and recover from such crisis. Where it positively emerges, it means "adapting and transforming their structures and means for living in the face of long-term changes and uncertainty". With supports from partners, violence is reduced, basic security, political and traditional structures are re-established, leading to a foundation for building long-term stability.

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