

BOKO HARAM INSURGENCY AND VIOLATION OF CHILDREN'S RIGHTS IN NORTH EAST, NIGERIA

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Abstrak

Pemberontakan Boko Haram di Nigeria Timur Laut telah memicu krisis kemanusiaan yang parah, yang dianalisis dalam makalah ini melalui Pendekatan Berbasis Hak Anak (*Child Rights-Based Approach/CRBA*). Makalah ini berargumen bahwa pelanggaran sistemik terhadap anak merupakan gejala dari kegagalan mendalam dan tiga lapis negara Nigeria sebagai pemangku kewajiban utama (*duty-bearer*). Dengan menggunakan metode penelitian kepustakaan yang bersumber dari data sekunder—termasuk literatur akademik, dokumen pemerintah, serta laporan LSM dan PBB tahun 2024–2025—makalah ini menunjukkan tiga kegagalan tersebut: (1) kegagalan mencegah konflik dengan mengatasi akar penyebabnya, yaitu kemiskinan akut dan marjinalisasi; (2) kegagalan melindungi anak-anak dari pelanggaran berat yang dilakukan oleh aktor non-negara, Boko Haram, termasuk penculikan, perekrutan, dan serangan terhadap pendidikan; serta (3) kegagalan sebagai pelaku aktif, di mana pasukan kontra-pemberontakan negara terlibat dalam penahanan sewenang-wenang, penyiksaan, dan penyalahgunaan terhadap anak-anak, sebagaimana didokumentasikan di fasilitas militer seperti Barak Giwa. Analisis ini menyimpulkan bahwa pemenuhan hak-hak anak memerlukan pergeseran paradigma melampaui pendekatan kontra-pemberontakan, dengan menuntun akuntabilitas yang kuat bagi semua aktor, penghentian segera pelanggaran oleh negara, serta komitmen berkelanjutan untuk mengatasi faktor-faktor struktural yang mendorong konflik.

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Keywords: *Boko Haram, hak anak, hak asasi manusia, pemberontakan, pelanggaran.*

Abstract

The Boko Haram insurgency in North East Nigeria has precipitated a severe humanitarian crisis, analyzed in this paper through a Child Rights-Based Approach (CRBA). This paper argues that the systemic violations against children are symptomatic of a profound, threefold failure of the Nigerian state as the primary 'duty-bearer'. Utilizing a desk research method drawing on secondary sources—including academic, governmental, and 2024-2025 NGO and UN reports—this paper demonstrates this threefold failure: (1) a failure to prevent the conflict by addressing its root causes of acute poverty and marginalization; (2) a failure to protect children from the grave violations of the non-state perpetrator, Boko Haram, including abduction, recruitment, and attacks on education; and (3) a failure as an active perpetrator, where state counter-insurgency forces have engaged in unlawful detention, torture, and abuse of children, as documented in military facilities like Giwa barracks. The analysis concludes that realizing children's rights requires a paradigm shift beyond counter-insurgency, demanding robust accountability for all actors, immediate cessation of state-level abuses, and a sustained commitment to addressing the structural drivers of the conflict.

Kata kunci: *Boko Haram, child rights, human rights, insurgency, violations.*

Introduction

The Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria's North East has metastasized into one of the world's most severe humanitarian crises, with profound and devastating impacts on the rights and well-being of children [Ewa, 2022]. Originating in Yobe state in 2002, the conflict's devastation has been compounded by a persistent failure of state protection. As of 2024, this failure is starkly quantified: Nigeria's out-of-school population has surged to 18.3 million, the highest globally, with 2.8 million children in the conflict-affected states of Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa requiring urgent education-in-emergencies support. This educational collapse is a direct result of the insurgency's tactics, which include targeted attacks on schools and communities, abductions, and the use of children as suicide bombers.

Boko Haram has deployed a campaign of terror characterized by bombings, abduction for sexual slavery, and targeted attacks on schools. The 2014 abduction of 276 Chibok schoolgirls, while attracting global condemnation, must be analyzed beyond the horror of the act itself. From the perspective of the Child Rights-Based Approach (CRBA), this event was a watershed moment that exposed the complete collapse of the Nigerian state as the 'duty-bearer.' The violation by the 'non-state perpetrator' was predicated on the state's absolute failure to provide the most basic protection for children in its care—a failure that has been repeated. This dual crisis of insurgency and state failure has driven the poverty rate in the North East to 70% (Nkata, 2023) and created over 2.2 million internally displaced persons (IOM, 2024).

The children have also been disproportionately affected by the conflict, facing a range of violations including recruitment as child soldiers, sexual violence, abduction, and denial of access to education and healthcare (Eltayeb, 2019). The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) described the situation in North East Nigeria as one of the most severe crises against humanity with an estimated 3.8 million children in need of protection. The Nigerian government, with international support, took steps to address the crisis, including military operations and efforts to rehabilitate former child soldiers. However, challenges remain, chiefly the failure of the Nigerian state to provide adequate protection.

Utilizing a desk research method drawing on secondary sources from governmental, non-governmental, and academic bodies, this paper argues that these systemic violations are symptomatic of a profound, threefold failure of the state in its role as the ultimate duty-bearer. This analysis moves beyond contextualizing violations to argue that the Nigerian state has not only (1) failed to prevent the conflict by addressing its root causes, but has also (2) failed to protect its child citizens from the insurgency, and in some cases, has (3) become an active perpetrator of rights violations in its own counter-insurgency. This threefold failure is the central crisis impeding the realization of children's rights in North East Nigeria.

Theoretical Frameworks

Child Rights-Based Approach

This study is anchored in the Child Rights-Based Approach (CRBA), a framework rooted in the 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). The CRBA moves beyond viewing children as "minors" in need of care [Centre for Child Protection, 2024] and instead conceptualizes them as rights-bearers entitled to legal protection and meaningful participation [UNICEF, 2014]. Its foundational principles include the universality, interdependence, and indivisibility of all human rights.

The Child Rights Based approach emphasizes the capability that every child has dignity as a human being and should be enjoyed. So, children as human beings have dignity to be protected. As a matter of fact, the approach emphasizes that social justice should be accorded to children and be made to enjoy human capabilities. The right based approach espouses that children are to enjoy rights to life, good health, bodily integrity, emotional development, practical reasoning, social affiliation and relate with natural environment (UNCRC, 2023). The approach advocates the need for the protection of children from every form of harm and that children are entitled to human dignity like the adults. Therefore, governments are to develop policies that will protect children during conflict situations.

Analytically, a CRBA lens demands an examination of the gaps between a child's abstract rights and their lived reality, particularly the gaps in state provision of healthcare, education, and protection. While the CRBA recognizes that children are uniquely vulnerable in conflict [Matambo, 2022], it rejects a framework of passive victimhood. Instead, this paper operationalizes the CRBA to structure its analysis around three key actors:

1. The Rights-Holder: The child in North East Nigeria, whose rights (to life, education, protection) are the object of analysis.
2. The Non-State Perpetrator: Boko Haram, which acts as the primary agent of rights violation.

3. The State Duty-Bearer: The Nigerian government, which, as a signatory to the UNCRC, holds the legal obligation to respect, protect, and fulfill the rights of children.

Therefore, this paper moves beyond a simple description of Boko Haram's violations. It uses the CRBA to argue that these violations are symptomatic of a profound failure of the state in its role as the ultimate duty-bearer, a failure that is central to the persistence of the crisis."CRBA perspective is inseparable from the concept of Child rights itself as the entitlements and protections afforded to individuals under the age of 18, as recognized by international human rights law and conventions such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). The rights are designed and advanced to enable children are able to develop physically, mentally, morally, spiritually, and socially in safe environment. This framework is embedded in the principle that children are not merely passive recipients of adult care, but are autonomous rights-holders [Centre for Child Protection, 2024]. This perspective grants children the capacity to participate in decisions affecting them, with their views given due weight in accordance with their age and maturity. A major principle of child's rights is non-discrimination of children irrespective of their race, sex, religion and status. The principle of non- discrimination is embedded in the Article 2 of the United Nations Convention on the Child's rights which emphasizes the need by state parties to ensure that the rights of children are respected across the globe.

The UNCRC (1989) also advocates for the comprehensive protection of all rights, viewing children as human beings with a full suite of civil, political, social, and economic rights. For the purpose of this analysis, the most salient of these include the rights to life, family, health, education, and, critically, protection from all forms of violence and armed conflict. As a body of law, the child rights recognize the capacity of children to develop and exercise their freedom in making decisions that affect their lives (Centre for Child Protection, 2024). Therefore, parents, guardians and government to provide opportunities and support for the children to enjoy their rights. The

Convention recognizes the child as a holder of rights, not just as a passive recipient of care and protection. The child rights recognize and emphasizes the need to respect evolving capacities of the children for protection and assistance.

The Centre for Child Protection (2024) argued that children rights are subsets of human rights concerned with the protection and care of the minors and such rights include freedom of association with their parents. Another important aspect of child right is the recognition of the evolving capacities of children. This means that as children grow and develop, their ability to exercise their rights and make decisions increases. Accordingly, adults and governments have a responsibility to provide children with support and guidance to exercise their rights in a meaningful way.

Boko Haram Insurgency in the North-East Nigeria

Boko Haram is an Islamist militant group seeking to form an Islamic state, launched its violent insurgency in northeast Nigeria in 2009 (Botha & Abdile, 2019). As a sect, it was led by late Muhammad Yusuf, who believed in the Ibn Taymiyyah teachings. Boko Haram started in Maiduguri but speedily spread to other states Borno, Yobe, Adamawa, Bauchi, Taraba and Gombe and later to neighbouring countries like Chad, Cameroon and Niger Republics (Dahiru, 2023). Boko Haram insurgents became more violent under Abubakar Shekau who maintained a strong connection with Al-Qaeda, Al-Shabaab, Taliban and Islamic State of Iraq and the Levitant (Dahiru, 2023). Launching attacks on security forces, government sites, churches, schools, and civilian centres provoked repressive state responses, ensuing in a protracted crisis centred in Borno, Adamawa and Yobe states (Mercy Corps, 2016). Brutal suicide bombings, village massacres, looting, kidnapping and fear tactics target and terrorize civilian populations (Zenn & Pearson, 2020).

As a concept, insurgency that has been done by Boko Haram has attracted different conceptions from various scholars, hence, it is a highly contested term in Peace and Conflict Studies. The United States Department of Defence (2007) conceptualized insurgency as a movement targeted at removing a constitutionally recognised government by making use of subversion and armed conflict. Abolurin (2015) views insurgency as a protracted political-military activity directed towards completely or partially controlling the resources of a

country by using irregular military forces and illegal political organisations. It is noteworthy to state that insurgency is characterised by asymmetrical nature involving non-state actors operating in small, decentralized groups challenge the authority of the state.

Insurgencies are typically protracted conflicts, marked by a combination of guerrilla warfare, terrorism, and pan organized movement aimed at overthrowing a constituted government by using subversion and armed conflict. The causes of insurgency are multifaceted, typically rooted in grievances related to governance, identity, or socio-economic conditions. The Boko Haram insurgency, specifically, is driven by a complex interplay of factors, including acute poverty, political marginalization, systemic corruption, and religious extremism [Akubo, 2019]. These underlying conditions create a fertile environment for the mobilization of disaffected groups against the state. Insurgent groups employ a range of tactics and strategies to achieve their objectives, including ambushes, bombings, assassinations, and propaganda campaigns. In the context of the Boko Haram insurgency, the group has utilized suicide bombings, kidnappings, and attacks on civilian populations to instil fear and undermine the legitimacy of the Nigerian government. One of the defining features of insurgency is its impact on civilian populations. Insurgent groups often target civilians, either as a means of coercion or to advance their political goals.

Boko Haram's tactics feature extensive abductions, forced recruitment and abuse of women and children (Ewa, 2022). An estimated 8,000 children remain captive within Boko Haram forces, subjected to indoctrination, combat roles, and pervasive violence (Botha & Abdile, 2019). Tactics like the notorious 2014 Chibok schoolgirl abduction that seized 276 students aim to attract media attention, undermine government control, spread fear, and replenish militant ranks with young obedient followers moulded under duress (Zenn & Pearson, 2014).

This protracted crisis has induced immense suffering. By 2020, over 36,000 people were killed, entire communities razed, 2 million displaced and 7 million rely on humanitarian assistance (Mercy Corps, 2021). State counterinsurgency operations have also perpetrated abuses against civilians suspected of rebel affiliation (Amnesty International, 2018). Infrastructure damage exceeds \$9 billion, decimating health clinics, markets, water systems, and homes (Global Education Monitoring Report, 2022). Beyond direct impacts from the conflict itself, the Boko Haram insurgency has created a large-scale

humanitarian crisis leaving basic social services decimated or unavailable (Botha & Abdile, 2019). Years of violence have displaced over 2 million people with many dwelling in overcrowded refugee camps or unregistered informal camps (Human Rights Watch, 2019). Displaced children often lack access to healthcare, are afflicted by cholera and malaria outbreaks, experience high rates of malnutrition, as well as psychological trauma from exposure to extreme violence (UNICEF, 2019).

However, these actions by the 'non-state perpetrator' are predicated on the 'state duty-bearer's' comprehensive Failure to Protect. The state's inability to secure schools, communities, or even IDP camps has created a vacuum of impunity. This failure is horrifically detailed in recent 2024 reports. A June 2024 Amnesty International report found that girls and young women who escaped Boko Haram captivity subsequently faced "further suffering," including being "reunited" with their surrendered Boko Haram 'husbands' in government-run transit camps. This practice, exposing them to the risk of continued abuse, demonstrates that the state's failure to protect has, in some cases, evolved into active endangerment.

The insurgency's assault on the education system can provide a stark illustration of the CRBA framework. Boko Haram's tactics—which include the targeted killing of over 600 teachers and the destruction of at least 1,500 schools [Global Coalition to Protect Education under Attack, 2020]—are a direct violation of the child's right to education. However, this violation by the non-state perpetrator is also compounded by the failure of the state duty-bearer. The resulting closure of over 1,280 schools and the fact that 3 million children in Borno State lack access to education is not merely a consequence of conflict; it is a failure of the state to provide 'education in emergencies' or secure 'safe schools,' representing a collapse of its obligation to fulfill this fundamental right. Children in IDP camps also often have no access to learning opportunities. Girls face additional barriers to education including child marriage, cultural norms favouring boys' education, and fears over safety traveling long distances to school (Humanitarian Response Plan, 2020).

The recruitment and use of children by Boko Haram also constitutes a grave violation of international law and a war crime. The group's tactics, which include mass abduction and forced recruitment, have resulted in an estimated 8,000 children held captive. The UN Secretary-General's 2024 report on Children and Armed Conflict (S/2024/384) confirms Nigeria remains one of the situations with the

highest number of children affected by grave violations, including recruitment and use.

While the illegality of these actions by the 'non-state perpetrator' is clear, the CRBA framework compels an analysis of why accountability remains elusive. This elusiveness is a function of state failure: the inability to secure territory, the failure to rescue these children, and a lack of political will to prosecute perpetrators, all of which reflect a dereliction of the state's duty to protect its child citizens from recruitment. This lack of accountability extends to the state's own forces, which, as the next section details, have also engaged in the detention of children.

Meanwhile, Nigerian security forces tasked with counterinsurgency efforts have also perpetrated grave children's rights violations, through unlawful child detention, torture, and extrajudicial killings of children suspected of ties with Boko Haram As documented by Amnesty International (2018) and Human Rights Watch (2018), Nigerian security forces have engaged in grave violations, including the unlawful detention of at least 3,600 children, torture, and extrajudicial killings of children merely suspected of affiliation with Boko Haram. Within the CRBA framework, this is the most severe form of state failure. The 'duty-bearer' has not only failed to protect children from a third party but has become a primary perpetrator, actively violating the very rights (to life, to due process, to freedom from torture) it is legally bound to protect. This transforms the crisis from one of insurgency to one of state-sponsored impunity."

Ample research has analysed the horrific abuses against children amidst armed conflict (HRW, 2016; UNICEF, 2017). Scholars call for child-centred rights-based approaches in addressing children affected by war (Wessels, 2016). Responding to the impacts of armed conflict on children requires multilayered psychosocial support, community reintegration programs for former child soldiers, and rebuilding decimated education systems. Protecting children and mitigating harm amidst warfare remains an immense but urgent challenge worldwide.

The Boko Haram insurgency continues to severely violate children's fundamental welfare and rights. This protracted crisis has brought immense suffering upon children through extreme violence, forcible recruitment, personal trauma, lack of healthcare, malnutrition, disrupted education, and more. Protecting and supporting conflict-affected children requires sustained political commitment and resources tailored to identify and address key child protection gaps in Nigeria's northeast. The Boko Haram insurgency, for example, has

resulted in widespread displacement, human rights violations, and humanitarian crises, particularly affecting women and children (Akpabio, 2021). In Nigeria, the government deployed various counterinsurgency strategies including military operations, deradicalization programs, and community engagement initiatives (Imobighe, 2019). In tackling the insurgency, the international community played a crucial role in addressing insurgencies, providing support to affected states through diplomatic, humanitarian, and military means. The international actors like the USA and Britain supported Nigeria through military assistance, capacity-building, and humanitarian aid (Okeke, 2020). Despite efforts, children still face critical humanitarian challenges affecting their rights as human beings.

Boko Haram Insurgency and the Plights of Children in the North East Nigeria.

As a result, the Boko Haram insurgency, brought devastating consequences on children's wellbeing, health, education, and development in northeast Nigeria (Ewa, 2022). According to Botha and Abdile (2019), over 3,600 children have been brutally killed, used in bomb attacks, or as human bombs, while over 1,000 were abducted between 2014-2017 alone. Critical analysis is still needed regarding the ways this protracted crisis continues to deprive children of fundamental human rights and detrimentally impact their daily lived experiences (Eltayeb, 2019). Children in communities affected by the Boko Haram insurgency have suffered "horrific abuses" including forced recruitment, suicide bombing, killings, maiming and rape (UNICEF, 2016). A UNICEF (2017) report reveals stunningly high levels of grave violations against children's rights, with over 1,650 children abducted by armed groups between 2013-2017. Child victims who managed to escape or are rescued from Boko Haram captivity often face stigma and rejection. Girls previously associated with militants often face discrimination as they are seen as tainted sexual objects, feared, distrusted, or declared unmarriageable (UN Women, 2021).

Children suffer immensely yet remain overlooked in contemporary armed conflicts (Machel, 1996). Beyond immediate mortality, armed conflict exponentially magnifies threats to children's health, psychosocial wellbeing and development globally. Warfare creates breeding grounds for human rights violations, through crossfire deaths, gender-based violence, recruitment by armed groups and lack of humanitarian access to displaced groups (United Nations, 2021). Traumatic exposures cause toxic stress disrupting brain

development, cognition and emotional processing (Joint Learning Initiative on Children and Armed Conflict (JLICA), 2021). Protecting children hinges on insulating them from conflict impacts and addressing root causes perpetuating cycles of violence (Wessells, 2016).

Counterinsurgency abuses by state security actors exacerbate children's plight in the region. As highlighted by Okoli and Azom (2019), the girls were used in transactional sex while women were forced to become wives of the security agents, which violates their sexual sanctity. Government detention centers feature chronic inhumane conditions including severe overcrowding, lack of sanitation, food deprivation and spreading disease. Torture and extrajudicial killings of children are extensively documented (Amnesty International, 2020). Failure to implement vital protections for conflict-affected children constitutes negligence by duty-bearers. This protracted crisis sabotages social systems protecting children's welfare. Critical child protection gaps across healthcare, nutrition, responsive caregiving, and learning urgently demand redress. Children additionally face stigma and exclusions heightening vulnerabilities. Restoring children's access to fundamental rights and wellbeing necessitates sustained political commitment, community participation, accountability for violations, and strategic investment prioritizing northeast children deprived of a nurturing childhood.

The Boko Haram insurgency escalated both extremist ideological violence and state militarized responses (Ani & Ahmed, 2020). Children suffer disproportionately, deliberately targeted to sow fear and bitterly disputed by opposing armed groups (Watchlist, 2022). Estimates indicate over 3000 children abducted just within 2014 and 2017 (Watchlist, 2022). The infamous Chibok schoolgirl kidnapping sparked global outrage yet over 112 still remain missing since 2014 (BBC News, 2022). Beyond direct abductions, between 2013-2017, over 4400 children were killed or maimed (Watchlist, 2022). Counterinsurgency state forces also commit grave violations through arbitrary detentions and extrajudicial killings of children allegedly affiliated with militants (Amnesty International, 2020). Also, as noted by Human rights Watch (2018), 3,600 children were in detention for alleged connection with the insurgents in Nigeria. Both sides perpetrate war crimes violating children's fundamental welfare and rights (Human Rights Watch, 2016). Despite the UN Security Council establishing a monitoring mechanism on children, meaningful

accountability remains lacking and vital child protection commitments remain largely unimplemented by the state (Watchlist, 2022).

Education serves as a fundamental human right for children as well as the foundation for future economic prospects and societal participation. However, in northeast Nigeria, the Boko Haram insurgency threatens to fundamentally undermine an entire generation's access to schooling through systematic attacks on educational infrastructure, brutal violence targeting students and teachers, and cultivated climates of fear. This crisis demands urgent redress considering the stark violations of girls' rights in particular. Effective response requires examining both the immediate and direct harms facing conflict-affected Nigerian children as well as the reverberating impacts on regional education systems.

Since 2009, Boko Haram insurgents deliberately launched attacks targeting schools, executing teachers, abducting hundreds of students, and deploying children as suicide bombers (Amnesty International, 2020). Tactics feature surprise raids on school dormitories, classrooms and examination halls, abducting girls as "wives," while slaughtering boys deemed "infidels" (Bolaji, Iwuamadi, & Chindah, 2022). Such brazen attacks like the April 2014 mass kidnapping of 276 Chibok schoolgirls sparked global outrage through the #BringBackOurGirls campaign (Eltayeb, 2019). Of those seized from Chibok, over 100 remain missing without the hope of setting them free (Adaobi, 2024). Beyond those abducted, children endure profound trauma witnessing brutal violence against classmates and teachers (Ewa, 2022). One 15-year-old described wounded friends screaming amidst gunshots and dorm rooms set ablaze during a late-night Boko Haram raid on her boarding school (BBC News, 2020).

Sexual violence marks a hallmark of Boko Haram's aggression (Zenn & Pearson, 2020). Abducted girls suffer repeated rape, forced marriage and forced pregnancies violating their fundamental rights and dignity. Boko Haram exploits suffocating gender inequities by promising husbands and livelihoods to lure impoverished girls. One victim shared her recurring nightmares: "I keep seeing the men coming to our house and dragging us out and rounding us up" (Amnesty International, 2022). Children born from sexual violence face immense stigma and social exclusion. Such experiences inflict deep psychological wounds challenging recovery and reintegration.

Beyond direct assaults, Boko Haram cultivates climates of terror through threatening and extorting communities to deter school attendance (Mercy Corps, 2016). Tactics forcing school closures

include leaving sinister messages warning parents, throwing explosives over school walls, abducting family members, torching school structures overnight and public assassinations of teachers (Human Rights Watch, 2016). One student explained, "Boko Haram have done what they wanted - they have stopped children from going to school" (Human Rights Watch, 2016, p.45). Fears of violence haunt children's daily journeys to class or boarding school dormitories. Such targeted aggression severely violates children's fundamental rights to education free from violence.

This protracted crisis carries devastating impacts on regional education. National education statistics indicated 10.5 million Nigerian children were already out of school before the crisis onset (Humanitarian Response Plan, 2019). But in northeast Nigeria specifically, 57% percent of school-aged children now lack access to education - the highest rate globally (Humanitarian Response Plan, 2020). School participation plummeted up to 70%-80% in conflict-hit areas of Borno State (Global Education Monitoring Report, 2022). Years enduring violence and disrupted access risks permanently depriving an entire generation in the northeast of formal learning.

Infrastructure damage also severely impedes learning. Over 1400 schools suffered attacks, use for military purposes or remain damaged (Global Education Monitoring Report, 2022). Aerial bombardment decimated higher education with extensive destruction to facilities, libraries and equipment at the University of Maiduguri (Human Rights Watch, 2016). Unique cultural heritage sites were also deliberately demolished including the tomb of a Sufi Muslim cleric in Maiduguri venerating centuries of Islamic scholarship. Reconstructing such historic losses remains impossible. Teachers additionally endure immense risk serving on the frontlines of communities. Over 600 teachers were assassinated by Boko Haram or forcibly conscripted into their ranks (Human Rights Watch, 2016).

Children represent over 57% of Nigerian displacement at over 1.4 million amidst this crisis (Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), 2020). They endure acute threats to health and survival through disease outbreaks, malnutrition, lack of immunizations, maternal care disruptions, untreated mental trauma and sexual violence (Eltayeb, 2019). Over 600 children died in 2016 alone from measles outbreaks, malaria, diarrhea and respiratory infections in overcrowded makeshift camps (Watchlist, 2016). Records indicate 75,000 children in Borno and Yobe states suffered from severe acute malnutrition (UNICEF, 2019). Children also lack vital

immunizations with under 40% coverage for routine vaccines in Borno state compared to the national average (HRW, 2016). Those abducted by Boko Haram experience profound psychological trauma, stigma and further violence as girls face endemic rape, forced marriage and coerced pregnancies (Mercy Corps, 2016). However, glimmers of resilience exist as children form play groups, support orphaned peers and pursue informal learning and religious community activities (IDP Youth Committee, 2017).

Beyond healthcare deprivations, children across the northeast endure profound threats to their welfare and security. Reports documented over 10,000 children directly killed or maimed, over 3,500 abducted just from 2013-2017 (Watchlist, 2022). Abducted girls suffer endemic sexual violence with thousands raped, forcibly “married” and impregnated by militants (Mercy Corps, 2016). Children also endure forcible recruitment as combatants, messengers, spies and suicide bombers, coerced through drugs, indoctrination and violent intimidation (Zenn & Pearson, 2020). Though children demonstrate remarkable resilience through informal learning groups, play activities and religious peer support, immense protection risks permeate daily life requiring urgent redress.

Family separation marks a widespread and devastating impact across conflict-hit northeastern communities forcibly displaced by violence. Over 90 percent of displaced children were separated from parents or customary caregivers, cutting off primary social safety nets (International Displacement Monitoring Centre, 2019). Orphans and unaccompanied children experience heightened risks of trafficking for labor or sexual exploitation to survive (Human Rights Watch, 2016). Stigma towards women and girls formerly associated with Boko Haram also triggers social exclusion, despite lack of choice over experiences of captivity and gender-based violence. Reintegrating this marginalized population requires sensitization and social services support accounting for traumatic experiences.

Conclusion

This paper has argued that the catastrophic impact of the Boko Haram insurgency on children's rights is not merely a product of the non-state group's brutal tactics; it is a profound and persistent threefold failure of the Nigerian state. By applying a Child Rights-Based Approach (CRBA), this analysis demonstrated: a failure to prevent the conflict's root causes, a failure to protect children from the

insurgency's violations, and a failure manifest in the state's own counter-insurgency, which has made it a perpetrator.

Family separation coupled with decimated community infrastructure leaves children at grave risks of abuse, transactional survival sex, unlawful detention and unlawful killings by state security forces. While children demonstrate resilience organizing play activities, informal education and peer support, extra-legal threats require urgent mitigation. Overall Boko Haram unleashed immense direct violence targeting communities and deliberately destroying regional health and protection systems required for safeguarding children's welfare. Child-centred non-discriminatory approaches tackling acute trauma, survival needs, rehabilitation and societal reconciliation remain vital for redistributing basic services to populations that bore the devastating brunt of this crisis.

The recommendations stemming from this CRBA analysis must, therefore, be twofold. First, responding to the symptoms requires sustained international and state-level commitment to: (1) Rebuilding decimated healthcare and educational infrastructure in remote communities; (2) Funding and scaling psychosocial support (MHPSS) for reintegrating children affected by abduction and sexual violence; and (3) Ensuring humanitarian aid is not blocked or subverted by security forces.

Second, and more fundamentally, addressing the root of the CRBA failure requires: (1) Immediate cessation of the state's unlawful detention and abuse of children in military facilities, such as Giwa barracks [Amnesty International, 2020]; (2) Implementing accountability mechanisms for both state and non-state actors who have committed grave violations; and (3) Re-committing to addressing the structural drivers of the conflict—poverty, marginalization, and corruption—that allow the insurgency to fester. Ultimately, the rights of children in North East Nigeria will only be realized when the Nigerian state re-assumes its role as their protector, not their persecutor.

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