

**Fragility and Insurgency as Outcomes of Underdevelopment of Public Infrastructure
and Socio-Economic Deprivation:
The Case of Boko Haram in the Lake Chad Basin**

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Robert A. Tayimlong
University of Pretoria,
Email: bobafuh@yahoo.com / a.tayimlong@afdb.org

Abstract

2019 marked 10 years since the beginning of the Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria – a violent conflict that later spilled over to Chad, Cameroon and Niger, killing over 37000 people and displacing 2.6 million. For over a decade, researchers and policy makers in peacebuilding and development have been trying to understand the drivers of the conflict in order to find lasting solutions. While violent conflicts rarely have straightforward explanations, the narrative on the Boko Haram insurgency has been somewhat reductionist, largely addressing the role of religion, and to a lesser extent, other drivers. Moreover, a lot of the literature has focused on Nigeria, for the obvious reason that it was the birthplace of Boko Haram and the epicentre of its activities. As a result of the disproportionate focus on Nigeria, data on the conditions in the affected regions and provinces of Chad, Cameroon and Niger that facilitated the regional spill-over are very minimal. To fill the gap, this article examines the role of the underdevelopment of public infrastructure and socio-economic deprivation as underlying drivers of the insurgency in all four affected countries. Complemented by data from secondary sources, the article builds on primary evidence from field observation, key informant interviews and focus group discussions in Borno State of Nigeria, the Lake Province of Chad, the Far North Region of Cameroon and the Diffa Region of Niger, to establish the link between infrastructural development gaps, illiteracy, unemployment and poverty and the Boko Haram insurgency.

Key Words: Underdevelopment, Illiteracy, Unemployment, Poverty, Relative Deprivation, Spill-over, Terrorism, Insurgency, Boko Haram, Lake Chad Basin

Biography:

Robert Afuh Tayimlong is a career diplomat and international development professional. He holds a PhD in Development Studies from the University of Pretoria. His research focused on the nexus between the Boko Haram insurgency and the development conundrum in the Lake Chad Basin, specifically Nigeria, Chad, Cameroon and Niger.

Introduction

Religious, political, economic, social and environmental drivers have been identified from the literature on the Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria. Regarding religion, “Boko” is a Hausa word for “Western education” while “haram” is an Arabic word which means “forbidden” in Islamic law. *Boko Haram* therefore means ‘Western education is forbidden’ (Adigun 2018: 206). The group’s original rationale for embarking on an insurgency was to undermine Western civilisation by opposing Western education in north-eastern Nigeria, and in so doing, create an Islamic State where Islamic education and values would be advanced (Hentz & Hussein 2017: 29). Concerning political drivers, state weakness, corruption and bad governance often feature in most analyses (Obamamoye 2019; Maiangwa 2018). Authors directly link corruption within Nigeria’s ruling class and the inability of institutions to discharge core governance and service delivery functions, to the insurgency. Others (Alozieuwa 2012; Agbiboa 2013) have attempted to link the insurgency to the 2011 election of Goodluck Jonathan, a Christian from southern Nigeria, as President of the country against the wishes of northern Muslims who felt it was their time to govern.

With respect to economic drivers, scholars have analysed the role of poverty, income inequality, unemployment and the lack of sustainable livelihoods in north-eastern Nigeria, as drivers of the insurgency (see Yinka 2015; Masaeli & Sneller 2020). Regarding the social drivers of the conflict, illiteracy often emerges as a common theme among scholars of the insurgency in north-eastern Nigeria (Ezedani 2015; Hentz & Hussein 2017; Anugwom 2018). Finally, scholarly research has identified the impacts of climate change including floods, drought and land degradation as the environmental drivers of the insurgency (Nagarajan *et al* 2018; Böckler 2019; Tallon 2019).

A number of gaps can be identified from the literature. First, little attention has been paid to infrastructural development gaps, which exacerbate poverty and inequality in conflict-affected areas. Second, scholars have generally presented the insurgency as a Nigerian problem, failing to capture the regional spill-over of the conflict to the Lake Province of Chad, the Far North Region of Cameroon and the Diffa Region of Niger. This paper aims to broaden the literature on the drivers of the insurgency by departing from a Nigerian narrative to a regional perspective, by examining the select drivers not just in the former but also in the other three affected countries.

Understanding the Drivers of the Boko Haram Insurgency from Relative Deprivation Theory

Relative deprivation theory offers an analytical framework for understanding the drivers of the Boko Haram insurgency in the Lake Chad Basin. According to Pandey *et al* (2019: 40) “relative deprivation refers to the idea that feelings of deprivation and discontent arise due to comparison of own life situation with some comparative standard.” Similarly, Eager (2013: 11) opines that “relative deprivation is the feeling that individuals get when their environment fails to provide them with something that they believe they are rightfully entitled” which eventually rationalises participation in violent political activity. The feeling of relative deprivation induces people to think that there is need for social change and this motivates them to join movements to bring about the desired change (Kendall 2008). Robert Gurr is among the most cited theorists of relative deprivation. In *Why Men Rebel*, Gurr (1970) offers an explanation of the political protests and rebellions that characterised postcolonial Africa and South-East Asia in the 1960s.

He claims that “men are quick to aspire beyond their social means and quick to anger when those means prove inadequate...” (Gurr 1970: 58). Within this framework, violence occurs when people’s collective expectations in terms of the satisfaction of their wants is disproportionate to their environment’s capabilities to provide that desired level of satisfaction. There is contextual consonance between the Boko Haram insurgency in the Lake Chad Basin and relative deprivation theory, especially in terms of socio-economic drivers. Tar and Bala (2019: 35), argue that relative deprivation theory “ties the poor state of the socio-economic development of the Lake Chad Basin, particularly North-eastern Nigeria where Boko Haram is most active, to psychological feelings of deprivation.” Agbiboa (2013), applied the theory to explain the conflict in north-eastern Nigeria. Using empirical evidence from fieldwork in four countries and secondary data from desk review, this article tests the Lake Chad Basin-wide applicability of the theory by presenting the Boko Haram insurgency as an outcome of the deprivation of the affected populations from critical public infrastructure and socio-economic wellbeing.

Methodological Approach

As part of a broader study on the nexus between conflict and development in the Lake Chad Basin, qualitative techniques and instruments were used to collect data for this paper. Primary data was collected via field observation, key informant interviews (KIIs) and focus group discussions (FGDs) in N’Djamena and the Lake Province of Chad during the months of February and March 2019; in Yaoundé and the Far North Region of Cameroon in April and May 2019; in Niamey and the Diffa Region of Niger in August 2019; and in Abuja and Borno State in August 2019. Purposive sampling was used to recruit participants. The interviews were conducted with officials in governorates of affected localities, administrative authorities, community leaders and elected officials. Representatives of national defence forces leading counter terrorism operations and de-radicalisation programmes, national emergency management agencies, international institutions and non-governmental organisations responding to the conflict were also interviewed. These included officials of the Lake Chad Basin Commission, the Multinational Joint Task Force and United Nations agencies. A total of 42 KIIs were conducted across the four affected countries as part of the broader study – 11 in Chad, 9 in Cameroon, 11 in Niger and 11 in Nigeria.ⁱ The interviews included 33 civilians and 8 military officials. Due to issues around patriarchy in the governance systems of the countries, especially in the conflict-affected communities, there was only one female participant in the interviews.

FGDs were held in communities affected by the insurgency and included indigenous residents of affected communities, internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees. 8 FGDs were held in the four affected countries – two per country, with an average of 12 participants in each. Two thirds of the participants were males while one third were females. In Chad, an FGD was held in the Tchingam IDP community, in the Kaya Division of the Lake Province. Another was held in Ngouboua with host population and IDPs. In Cameroon, FGDs were held with indigenous residents of the Amtchali Fike and Kerawa communities in the Mayo Sava Division of the Far North Region. In Niger, for cultural reasons, two FGDs were held with Nigerian male and female refugees, respectively, in the Awiridi community, Diffa Region. In Nigeria, an FGD was held with IDPs in the Maisandari community of Maiduguri, Borno State and another with IDPs in the Gongulang Lawanti Community, Jere Local Government Area. While supported by evidence from secondary sources, the analysis below is unique in that it is largely premised on

the often-neglected first-hand accounts of indigenous peoples, affected populations and stakeholders responding to the conflict.

The Enabling Environment for the Outbreak and Spill-over of the Boko Haram Insurgency

While it is difficult to establish a direct link between underdevelopment, inequality and conflict (World Bank and United Nations 2018: 110), the general structural conditions in Borno State, Nigeria and other affected provinces and regions in Chad, Cameroon and Niger, created the conditions for the complex interaction between various drivers, leading to the emergence and territorial expansion of Boko Haram in the Lake Chad Basin. The northern belt of Nigeria and the Far North Region of Cameroon were very underdeveloped in terms of public infrastructure, just like the Diffa region of Niger and the Lake Province of Chad (Colonel B. H. Menye, personal communication, April 23, 2019). As stated in Cameroon's national daily – *Cameroon Tribune* (22 September 2014), “Boko Haram takes advantage of ... poor indicators in the areas of ... [Western] education and lack of socio-economic infrastructure” in the country's Far North Region. These are discussed in the following sub-sections. While deficits in the energy, water and education sectors are discussed in this paper, it should be emphasised that these were not the only sectors with development gaps in the Lake Chad Basin but this study identified them to be of particular importance to the participants engaged during primary data collection in the four affected countries.

Deprivation from Energy and Water Supply

Borno State, Nigeria, had over the years faced challenges relating to electricity supply (G. Grema, personal communication, August 15, 2019). Households and businesses did not receive adequate energy supply to meet their needs (Grema, 2019). Before 2018, Maiduguri residents received electricity in their homes for just 12 hours a day and when it improved to 24 hours, the costs went up, leading to protests (*Sahara Reporters* December 18, 2018). With reference to relative deprivation, while Borno was not a typical industrial state when compared to others like Lagos, it had companies manufacturing products like nails and plastics, etc. And while Lagos State was nearing universal access to electricity, access in Borno State only stood below 40 per cent (Okafor 2018). This partly explains why extremist groups like Boko Haram were able to operate in the latter and not the former. Electricity shortages in Borno State meant businesses were unable to operate at full scale and contribute to create jobs and employment opportunities. The high unemployment rate resulting from limited private sector investments had implications on the ease with which Boko Haram was able to radicalise and recruit (Yinka 2015: 10).

The Lake Province of Chad also suffered from huge energy deficits and faced serious challenges relating to water supply. As observed during fieldwork, only a few NGOs, UN agencies and some individuals had private generators and solar panels. The absence of electricity discouraged private sector investments and therefore employment opportunities in the province. It also constrained the irrigation of farms by the predominantly agriculturalist population, most of who could not afford solar panels. Boko Haram insurgents and suicide bombers took advantage of obscurity to easily infiltrate the communities with their explosives and arms (A. Mahamat, personal communication, May 15, 2019). The lack of access to electricity therefore directly facilitated Boko Haram's atrocities in the Lake Province of Chad compared to a province like N'Djamena with relatively higher access. Concerning water supply, participants in an FGD in Tchingam revealed that the community had no human-powered drilling that could provide clean water to households. During consultations with captured and defected Boko Haram militants,

the divisional officer for Kaya gathered that they held grievances against the government for not ensuring water supply and other utilities to their communities (S. A. Adoum, personal communication, March 04, 2019). In the light of relative deprivation, they complained that despite the abundance of lake water resources in the province, they had no access to safe drinking water as was the case in other provinces of Chad (Adoum, 2019).

The situation in the Far North Region of Cameroon similar to the Lake Province of Chad given the fact that until 2019, there was total lack of electricity supply in communities such as Amtchali Fike. As observed during fieldwork, a few people in the communities relied on power generators. The high degree of insecurity resulting from the lack of electricity was also a cause for concern in the community due to recurrent Boko Haram attacks at night. Again, it can be observed here that there was a direct relationship between electricity supply and security in the community. In fact, most Boko Haram attacks in the Mayo Sava Division were carried out at night. Examples include the attack on Tchakamari on the night of 18 to 19 April 2019, and Gakara on the night of 29 to 30 July 2019 (Amnesty International December 11, 2019). The ease and frequency at which Boko Haram attacks such communities without access to electricity, compared to not so far off regions like Garoua with more access, strongly supports the argument that the lack of energy increased the vulnerability of communities to attacks. Water supply was equally a big challenge in the Mayo Sava Division as a whole. In the Amtchali Fike community, inhabitants consumed water from polluted rivers and women had to walk long distances to fetch water (P. Goïgoï, personal communication, April 26, 2019). “Poor access to safe drinking water and sanitation [in the Far North region saw] the spread of cholera and other waterborne diseases” (Rackley 2017: 4). What should be retained here is the fact that in its radicalisation strategy and campaign, Boko Haram capitalised on such development gaps in the Lake Chad Basin to push for a caliphate where the needs of the neglected populations would be met (see Rackley 2017: 3). Thousands of disenfranchised youths bought into messages promising them of a better life, thus pledging their allegiance and joining the insurgency movement (Colonel H. F. Melou, personal communication, April 22, 2019).

As concerns Niger, there was evidence of relative deprivation of Diffa from access to electricity compared to other regions of the country. In 2016, out of a total population of 669,307 in the Diffa Region, only 680 persons, i.e. 0.1 per cent, were subscribed to the electricity distribution company – NIGELEC (*Direction Régionale de l’Institut National de la Statistique* 2018: 91). Whereas in 2014, out of a population of 1,026,848 in Niamey, 50% had access to electricity while the rate varied between 20 to 40 per cent in small towns (World Bank 2018: 145). As a result of inadequate supply of electricity, while private sector investments in Diffa were very minimal, Boko Haram insurgents also found it relatively easy to infiltrate the region at night to carry out attacks. For example, the group’s attack on an army base in Diffa on 29 October 2019 was carried out at night (Boulima & Aksar 2019).

Poor Educational Infrastructure

According to Fraser and Moor (2019: 450), northern Nigeria has been struggling with “the general failure of the educational infrastructure.” In Borno State, prior to the insurgency, public schools were in their worst level of deterioration (G. Okonifua, personal communication, August 20, 2019). Elementary and secondary education standards had also drastically dropped (Grema, 2019). This was compounded by lack of capacity. For example, in 2012, there were only 10,536 qualified teachers in the primary school system in Borno State, compared to 21,915 in Oyo State (National Bureau of Statistics 2016). This speaks to relative deprivation. In northern Borno, people did not care much about Western education because there were no

educational facilities (Grema, 2019). In fact, according to Nigerian refugee participants in an FGD, there were many local government areas without schools. The communities remained traditional and relied on qur'anic schools, some of which were run by religious fundamentalists and violent extremists (see Ezedani 2015: 216). The ruling elite rather enrolled their children in expensive private schools, usually abroad. In fact, secular school was considered 'schooling for the rich' (Hoechner 2018: 69). Some disenfranchised sections of the population, including Boko Haram founder Mohamed Yusuf, took advantage of this social divide to preach against the leadership of Borno State and of the country, with particular attention to Western educated elite (Grema, 2019).

Likewise, before the insurgency spilled-over to the Lake Province of Chad, educational establishments, notably schools, only existed in the administrative centres of sub divisions such as Bol, Baga Sola, Liwa, Ngouboua, Kaiga Kindjiria and Fourkulum, and not in villages, meanwhile most of Boko Haram's radicalisation and recruitment activities took place in villages (Mahamat, 2019). Moreover, secondary school cycles were incomplete in the few communities where schools existed (Mahamat, 2019). In the entire province, final grade classes were only in Bol, Baga Sola and Liwa and examinations were only taken in Bol (Mahamat, 2019). This discouraged school enrolment. In the light of relative deprivation, according to the *Education Systems Performance in Francophone Sub-Saharan Africa*, the education infrastructure index for the Lake Province in 2014 was 48 points compared to 60.9 points for N'Djamena (PASEC 2014: 80). The weak education sector in the province was largely due to limited government investment. This was evidenced by the fact that by 2019, most schools in the province were run by teachers recruited and paid by UNICEF (anonymous source, personal communication, March 02, 2019).

Similarly, before the spill-over of the insurgency into Cameroon, the Far North region struggled with structural educational challenges including inadequate infrastructure, school equipment and staffing (Norwegian Refugee Council 2018). Results from a World Bank study blame the central government for poor resource allocation and insufficient funding of schools in the region which did "not always consider number of classrooms and teachers ... or adapt quickly enough to enrolment surges" (World Bank 2012: 2). To put these into perspective, according to participants in an FGD, there was no school in the Amtchali Fike community in 2019. Due to the absence of schools in their community, children had to walk considerable distances to far off communities to attend school, thereby risking Boko Haram kidnap and force conscription. Such structural constraints also reduced the likelihood of children from such communities of completing basic education. Regarding relative deprivation, this explains why only 36% of girls in the Far North region were likely to complete school, compared to 88% in the Littoral Region (World Bank 2012: 1). During an FGD, residents of the Amtchali Fike community acknowledged that Boko Haram took advantage of the low rate of school enrolment in their community and other neighbouring communities, due to lack of educational infrastructure, to influence and radicalise young people.

Regarding Diffa, Niger, the region had long been deprived of educational infrastructure as "the first schools did not arrive until the late 1990s" (Anyadike 2017) and faced staffing challenges. In 2015, Diffa division had a total of 121 primary schools compared to 181 in the Niamey I municipality and 9 secondary schools (*Direction Régionale de l'Institut National de la Statistique* 2018: 50 & 57). A World Bank report revealed that certain schools in the region lacked specialised teachers in some disciplines for the entire school year or for very long periods (World Bank 2010: 34). This was because of disparity in the concentration of teachers between urban and rural areas. For example, out of 161 physics and chemistry teachers in Niger in 2010, 95 were in Niamey, while Diffa had nothing (World Bank 2010: 34). This speaks to relative

deprivation and further explains why Boko Haram was able to establish a foothold in an underserved region like Diffa, compared to others like Niamey. In addition, although higher education was not a priority in regions facing challenges in their basic and secondary education sectors, the fact that the Diffa region did not have a university before 2014 tells of the development lapse in the sector.

The Problem of Illiteracy

It has been established that deprivation from education increases the risk of rebellion and explains why countries with low literacy rates are more prone to armed conflict (Luke 2020). Due to inadequate access to education, illiteracy was a root cause of radicalisation and violent extremism in the Lake Chad Basin. This was because it was relatively easy to radicalise illiterates due to their inability to “critically analyse and question ideological narratives and doctrines” propagated by extremists (see Nwafor *et al* 2015: 204). High rates of illiteracy in both Islamic and Western education were a major driver of the insurgency in Borno State, Nigeria (Anugwom 2018: 102, Ezedani 2015: 224-225). Before the insurgency, it was commonplace to find kids in Maiduguri, who could neither read nor write after six years of primary school (S. Waziri, personal communication, August 19, 2019). With reference to relative deprivation, adult literacy stood at 14.5% only, compared to the national rate of 56.9% in 2010 (UNESCO 2012: 1), reason why it was relatively easier for Boko Haram to indoctrinate and radicalise people in Borno than in other states. In 2013, 83% of youths in Borno State were illiterates and 48.5% of children were out of school (Agbibo 2013: 76). Generally, most of the followers of Yusuf were either illiterates or semi literates (Grema, 2019). According to Nigerian refugee participants in an FGD in Awiridi – Diffa, most uneducated youths from their communities in north-east Nigeria joined Boko Haram because they were convinced that the ideology propagated by the group was good. According to participants in an FGD in the Maisandari community, the high rate of illiteracy is also explained by the fact that Government stopped supporting the education of children from poor households by abolishing the award of scholarships to them. Those who managed to enrol ended at primary school. In Borno State and Maiduguri in particular, it was common to find so many children of school-going age roaming the streets, begging, rather than learning in class (Z. U. Ali, personal communication, August 16, 2019). By staying idle and out of class, illiterate youth became potential recruits of Boko Haram. Because most people were not educated, it was relatively easy for Boko Haram to convince them that Western education contravened Islamic teaching and that it was their religious obligation to violently oppose it (K. Maidugu, personal communication, August 16, 2019). There were however a few cases where educated youths joined Boko Haram in Borno State (S. Alkali, personal communication, August 18, 2019).

The high rate of illiteracy in the Lake Province of Chad facilitated the spill-over of the insurgency into the Chadian side of the basin. With regard to relative deprivation, while the rate of literacy for persons of 15 years and above in the province stood at 8.6% in 2011, up from 4.2% in 2009, it was 38.9% and 53.5% in Moyen Chari and N’Djamena, respectively (INSEED 2013: 71). This discrepancy explains why the group was able to establish and sustain a foothold in the Lake Province and not in others in Chad. The non-deployment of well trained and qualified teachers to the Lake Province by the Government of Chad meant that youths were not getting quality education (Mahamat, 2019). Due to illiteracy, ignorance and lack of a sound judgment, young people were easily radicalised and joined the ranks of Boko Haram (M. Nadji, personal communication, March 04, 2019). The illiteracy situation was worse among girls – often used as suicide bombers. This is because in accordance with the prevailing customs and traditions, young girls were supposed to help their mothers at home or in the farms until they

were married. This explains why between 2014 and 2018, Boko Haram was responsible for about 80% of all female suicide attacks and 87% of deaths from female suicide attacks in the world (Institute for Economics and Peace 2019: 3 & 5). Participants in an FGD in Tchingam testified that the process of radicalisation in their community entailed convincing young uneducated youths including girls to kill infidels of Islam in order to be accepted in paradise by Allah. The high rate of illiteracy in the Lake Province was compounded by the fact that several households believed Boko Haram's ideology that western education is "*haram*" (forbidden) and in contravention to qur'anic teaching and the idea that parents who agreed to enrol their children in school will end up in hell (Mahamat, 2019). This enabled Boko Haram's agenda in the province at the expense of peace and stability.

Illiteracy was also an enabler of the spill-over of the insurgency from north-eastern Nigeria to the Far North Region of Cameroon. In 2014, between 55% and 76% of the population of the region were illiterate (World Bank Group 2014: 13). This was extremely high when compared to the Littoral and Centre regions with only 10% and 13% of illiterate populations, respectively (World Bank Group 2014: 13). In 2017, the region had the highest share of the population of Cameroon with no education at all (World Bank Group 2017: 9). In terms of relative deprivation, only 54% of the population was receiving any form of formal education, compared to the national average of 81% (Norwegian Refugee Council 2018). Just 22.5% of the women in the region were literate, given the phenomena of early and forced marriage (World Bank Group 2017: 9). As David Manan – Country Director of the Norwegian Refugee Council in Cameroon put it, because youths had "little knowledge and awareness to discern bad from good" it became difficult to provide them protection and relatively easy to recruit them into armed groups (Norwegian Refugee Council 2018).

According to UNICEF (January 31, 2018) Niger is home to the highest illiteracy rate among young people in the world, with 76 per cent of 15 to 24-year olds unable to read or write. Three in 10 young people in Niger are illiterate (UNICEF 2018). This situation had a bearing on the ease of religious indoctrination, especially in the country's south-eastern border with Nigeria. Authorities at the Governorate of Diffa alluded to illiteracy as a driver of radicalisation, violent extremism and terrorism in the region. According to them, due to illiteracy, young people accepted the false ideology of Boko Haram that if they died in the cause of killing others for Allah's sake, they will achieve martyrdom and be compensated with 72 virgins in paradise (Y. Goni, personal communication, August 05, 2019). In terms of relative deprivation, this owes to the fact that prior to the insurgency, the region had one of the highest rates of illiteracy for persons of 15 years and above, which stood at 13.6% in 2006 compared to 9.6 percent in Zinder (Koura 2006: 50).

Lack of Sustainable Livelihoods and Gainful Employment

Prior to the outbreak of the conflict in 2009, the rate of unemployment in Borno State, Nigeria was quite high at 26.5% of the population compared to 7.6% and 9.9% in Lagos and Ogun States, respectively (National Bureau of Statistics 2010: 13). Boko Haram capitalised on the high rate of unemployment in the state to radicalise thousands of youths (see Maiangwa 2018: 94, Anugwom 2018: 103). With the limited presence of the private sector, government found it difficult to provide jobs for the growing working population, most of whom were youth. This was further compounded by the inadequacy of skill acquisition centres (Ali, 2019). Youths without sources of livelihood saw the terrorist group as a means to make money and earn a living (K. Modu, personal communication, August 16, 2019). According to Nigerian refugee

participants in an FGD in Diffa, this was the case in Abadan, Malam Faturi, Talata N’Gam, etc., where youths without sustainable livelihood opportunities chose to join the Boko Haram because the opportunity cost of doing so was low (Yinka (2015: 10).

High rates of unemployment also facilitated the spill-over of the insurgency into Chad. While the last national economic survey conducted by the country’s National Institute of Statistics, Economic and Demographic Studies (INSEED) in 2011 did not measure provincial unemployment rates, the national rate was very high among young graduates prior to the spill-over of the insurgency. It jumped from 42% in 2015 to 60% in 2017 (African Development Bank 2020). In fact, participants in a focus group discussion revealed that in Ngouboua – one of the most affected communities in the Lake Province, the few educated persons in the community were unemployed. They recounted that many of the unemployed eventually joined Boko Haram to have access to scarce resources controlled by the group, especially fishing and forests.

Unemployment was also a driver of the insurgency in the Far North Region of Cameroon. Apart from fishing, agriculture and livestock farming, there were limited livelihood opportunities for the population. While the ILO-projected activity rate for persons aged 10 years and above was 69.7% for both males and females in urban and rural areas combined (*Institut National de la Statistique* 2015: 145), most of the people were underemployed, especially women. Regarding relative deprivation, 85.3% of persons of 15 years and above in the Far North region were underemployed in 2015, compared to 47.2% only, in Douala (*Institut National de la Statistique* 2015: 147). The underemployment rate in the region was very high, partly because the industrial sector was very underdeveloped (Amnesty International 2015: 10). The situation made some of the inhabitants of the region vulnerable to Boko Haram radicalisation and recruitment (A. Ousmane, personal communication, April 26, 2019). For instance, when Boko Haram infiltrated the region, it was estimated that about 2000 youths were recruited from Maroua – the administrative centre because the terrorist group proposed motorbikes to them and 200,000 CFA francs (approximately US \$350) each (Colonel S. S. Ndutumu, personal communication, April 23, 2019). Participants in an FGD in Amtchili Fike opined that the lack of sustainable livelihoods forced some youths in the Mora subdivision to join Boko Haram.

Unemployment and the lack of sustainable livelihoods contributed to the spill-over of the Boko Haram insurgency to the Diffa Region of Niger. By offering them financial incentives, Boko Haram recruited from among unemployed youths in Diffa (R. M. Mahiaou, personal communication, August 02, 2019). Diffa had long been relatively deprived of employment opportunities compared to other regions of Niger. In 2006, the rate of unemployment in the region stood at 25.2% compared to 9.9% in Tillabéri (Magalma & Djimrao 2006: 23). In 2016, out of a total population of 669,307 in the region, only 2,492 persons were employed, down from 2,830 in 2012 (*Direction Régionale de l’Institut National de la Statistique* 2018: 82). According to a former Mayor of Diffa, the high rate of unemployment made youths vulnerable to recruitment into Boko Haram to benefit from financial incentives (B. K. Hankourao, personal communication, August 04, 2019).

The Poverty Dilemma

Poverty was a significant driver of the Boko Haram insurgency in the Lake Chad Basin (Tar & Bala 2019, Agbiboa 2013). The rate of poverty in Borno State was very high prior to and during the insurgency. In 2010, it stood at 64.8% in North-East Nigeria– the highest rate in the country (Hentz & Hussein 2017: 119). The United Nations Global Multidimensional Poverty Index for

2017 projected the poverty index for Borno State at 70.1%, significantly higher than the national average of 46% (Relief Web 2017). Again, this tells of the extent of relative deprivation of the region from poverty alleviation efforts, in comparison to others. The high rate of poverty in the state is attributed to government neglect, insufficient investments in development projects and the failure to promote private sector investments to stimulate the local economy (Grema, 2019). Poverty created the conditions for easy manipulation and indoctrination (Modu, 2019). In response to the poverty situation, apart from preaching, Boko Haram founder, Mohamed Yusuf also had a local economic empowerment scheme through which he disbursed small amounts of cash to impoverished followers to enable them engage in income-generating activities (Grema, 2019). By helping the poor establish petit trades, Yusuf was playing the role that was supposed to be played by government (Grema, 2019). This helped to capture the allegiance of thousands of people, most of whom were poor. It was then relatively easy for Boko Haram to recruit from among them. In addition to using cash to attract them, Boko Haram provided soft loans of about ₦100,000 to poor individuals to set up businesses, in exchange for intelligence information on the military (*The Guardian* May 09, 2016).

Poverty also accounts for the spill-over of the insurgency to the Lake Province of Chad. In 2011, 46.3% of the population of the province was living in poverty compared to 11% only, in N'Djamena (INSEED 2013: 56). Boko Haram offered as much as 500,000 CFA francs (approximately US \$850) to young people in the province who agreed to act according to their radical ideology (O. Mackage, personal communication, March 04, 2019). Participants in an FGD in Ngouboua disclosed that most residents in the community lived in misery and were therefore vulnerable to recruitment into Boko Haram. By joining Boko Haram and engaging in hostage taking and kidnapping in exchange for ransom, they in turn saw it as a means to make money and live better lives in the lake's resource-rich islands (anonymous source, personal communication, March 02, 2019). As part of its geo-survival and recruitment strategy, Boko Haram occupied Lake Chad islands with fishing resources and fertile soils for agriculture, thereby attracting poor and vulnerable persons. For example, in the Lake's island, west of Ngouboua, there were plenty of resources under Boko Haram control which attracted new followers. In the Lake Province, the Buduma ethnic group was the most vulnerable to radicalisation. In 2018, the role of poverty as a risk factor of radicalisation and violent extremism in the Lake Province was evidenced when the Government of Chad called on Boko Haram militants to drop their arms and regain their communities in exchange for social protection and other support. Many militants responded to the call and the government and other international organisations including UNICEF provided food and homes for them in Baga Sola where they temporarily resettled (anonymous source, personal communication, March 02, 2019). When the militants became discontented with the inconsistent efforts to meet their needs and reintegrate them into their communities, most of them re-joined the ranks of Boko Haram (anonymous source, personal communication, March 02, 2019).

The insurgency in the Far North Region of Cameroon was also highly linked to poverty compared to other areas of the country. Participants in FGDs in Amtchali Fike and Kerawa attested to the fact that the extremists took advantage of high rates of poverty in the region to infiltrate and recruit. According to the World Bank Group (2017: 3), the northern regions of Cameroon, including the Far North, exhibited "by far the highest poverty rates in Cameroon, and poverty and inequality levels ... steadily increased over time relative to the rest of the country where poverty and inequality ... declined." In 2011, more than half of the population of the region was poor (IMF 2014, 23). In 2014, 74.3% of the population of the region was living in poverty – the highest rate in the country, compared to just 5.4% in the Centre Region (African Development Bank Group 2017: 16). In fact, the rate jumped from 56% in 2001 to 74.3% in 2014 (World Bank Group 2017: 8). Interestingly, it was in 2013 that Cameroon began

experiencing an increase in the incidence of Boko Haram attacks (Zenn 2018). In 2015, about 3,000-4,000 Cameroonians were estimated to have joined Boko Haram (Amnesty International 2015: 9). The group used financial incentives as a tool for recruitment. It was known for offering 50,000 francs CFA and a motorbike each, to lure vulnerable persons (Colonel S. S. Ndumutu, personal communication, April 23, 2019). Their strategy was to get into poor villages and propose financial support, motorbikes and the promise of a better life to potential recruits (Melou, 2019). Cameroon intelligence officials established that few Cameroonians joined Boko Haram on basis of religious indoctrination and that a majority of them joined for economic gains (Melou, 2019).

Regarding Niger, Diffa had been relatively deprived and poorer than other regions of Niger long before the insurgency. In 2006, 63.1% of the population was poor compared to 27.1% in Niamey (*Institut National de la Statistique* 2006: 15). As part of Boko Haram's recruitment strategy, youths from Diffa who joined the group were occasionally allowed to return to their communities with money, motorbikes and gifts (Goni, 2019). It follows that at the beginning of the insurgency, Nigerien militants of the group who were studying in qur'anic schools in north-eastern Nigeria began re-establishing contacts with their peers in Niger. Due to poverty, they had the tendency of breaking into shops in Nigeria and returning to Niger with stolen money, motorbikes and other items. This influenced poorer youths who were eager to enjoy similar benefits, to join (Goni, 2019). After many had integrated into the group, they were then barred from returning to their communities unless they were going to fight (Anyadike 2017). Also, given that weddings, which are expensive to organise, are very significant in the Kanuri culture, those who did not have money to finance theirs and therefore could not marry, saw Boko Haram's incentives as a means to do so (Goni, 2019). "The motivation, therefore, behind Nigerien youth joining Boko Haram is seen almost exclusively as economic" (Anyadike 2017).

Conclusion and Recommendations

This article expands the thematic and geographic narratives of the Boko Haram insurgency. The examination of the contribution of deficits in public infrastructure and socio-economic deprivation introduces new thematic angles for understanding the drivers of the insurgency. Also, by including Chad, Cameroon and Niger in the analysis, the article expands the narrative of the insurgency from a largely Nigeria-centric to a regional understanding of the drivers. Specifically, the article demonstrates that significant deficits in much needed infrastructure and service delivery in the areas of water, energy and education, coupled with illiteracy, unemployment and poverty, were among the principal drivers of fragility in the Lake Chad Basin which Boko Haram exploited to radicalise, indoctrinate and recruit youths for the insurgency that began in 2009 in Borno State, Nigeria. It also demonstrates that due to their largely similar fragile contexts, the group was able to territorially expand to the Lake Province of Chad, the Far North Region of Cameroon and the Diffa Region of Niger. Consistent with relative deprivation theory, Boko Haram was therefore able to exploit the development lapses in these worse-off areas of the Basin, which are significantly behind other areas of the affected countries.

In the light of the foregoing and in order to address the drivers of the insurgency and build resilience to violent conflict in the basin, there is need for the governments of Nigeria, Chad, Cameroon and Niger and their development partners to (re)construct relevant infrastructure and improve public service delivery with particular attention on the areas of water, electricity and education. Developing water infrastructure in the conflict-affected communities will improve living standards while the supply of electricity will contribute to private sector development,

job creation and security, given that most Boko Haram attacks are carried out at night. There is urgent need to advance human capital development, with focus on education in conflict-affected communities. This should include the (re)construction and rehabilitation of primary, secondary and higher institutions of learning. It should also be accompanied by the recruitment of qualified teaching staff, and the provision of appropriate incentives to attract and retain them in the communities. In addition, primary and secondary education in fragile communities should be offered free of charge, to encourage school enrolment and retention. The activities of instructors in qur'anic schools also need to be closely monitored to guard against religious indoctrination. Empowering girls and women through education and livelihood opportunities is very critical to conflict response in the Lake Chad Basin. There is need for educational reforms driven by vocational training and skills acquisition, with focus on sustainable livelihoods. This will prevent youths from joining Boko Haram on the basis of financial and material incentives. Above all, there is need for poverty alleviation schemes. Such conflict response policies must be multipronged, accounting for the broader humanitarian, development and peacebuilding needs of the Basin. They must also address other drivers of fragility in the basin, including bad governance and climate change.

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ⁱ Not all the KIIs and FGDs were relevant to this paper.