

Civil Society Dialogue Network: Crisis Response Meeting¹

Conflict Risk Assessment and Possible EU Responses: Northern Nigeria and Boko Haram², 24 February 2012

Meeting Summary

Objectives:

- Joint analysis of causes of conflict, triggers of violence and mitigation measures in Northern Nigeria.
- Development of possible policy options for the European Union, based on analysis of gaps in existing responses and feasibility and risks of possible policy options.

Structure:

- Informal brainstorming under Chatham House rule.
- Interactive but strictly facilitated sessions will address specific questions in order to map the conflict dynamics.

Background document:

- A background paper collating the results of existing conflict assessments and analysis will be circulated in advance of the meeting (much existing analysis of Boko Haram is not open source information thus the background paper will not be comprehensive).

Participants:

- Invited experts from the EU institutions.
- Invited Nigeria experts from civil society.

Introduction

The aim of the meeting was to identify ways in which the EU could strengthen local capacities for managing conflict non-violently and in addressing the root causes of violent conflict, in the short-term (0-6 months), medium-term and long term; through conflict transformation (long-term structural change), conflict resolution (addressing root causes), and conflict management (limiting, mitigating and containing violence). The key principles presented were local ownership and the Do No Harm principle; it was suggested that the EU adopt a comprehensive approach using all available EU tools, focussing on the factors it can influence while being mindful of those it cannot.

This note records analysis presented by participants on:

- (1) Key causes of violence
- (2) Key actors
- (3) Recommendations by theme and by priority
- (4) Possible next steps for the EU.

¹The Civil Society Dialogue Network (CSDN) is a three-year project funded by the European Commission aimed at facilitating dialogue on peacebuilding issues between civil society and EU policymakers. The CSDN contributes to strengthening international and regional capacity for conflict prevention and post-conflict co-operation (for more information please see: www.eplo.org). The CSDN is managed by EPLO, the European Peacebuilding Liaison Office, in cooperation with the EEAS and the EC.

²This note captures key points made by the participants of the meeting and collated by *rapporteur* Laura Davis. The recommendations may not be attributed to any participating individual or institution, nor do they reflect the positions of the CSDN as a whole, or of EPLO or its member organisations, the European External Action Service or the European Commission.

(1) Summary of key root causes of violence and triggers of violence

Political:

- The changing nature of Nigeria's elite consensus, which is now a more regional than national construct; political parties are not ideological and the opposition does not challenge poor governance; the dominance of the People's Democratic Party (PDP).
- Poor and bad governance in Nigeria and particularly in the northern Nigeria: the lack of response to the population's needs by the political elites, limited commitment to social services and lack of development of a welfare state mismanagement of public goods, and instrumentalization of radicals by elites.
- There is a risk that donor activity in south Nigeria creates conflict if it is seen as external and not locally owned. Diplomatic engagement is also very important.

Socio-economic:

- Poverty – especially in northern Nigeria. Development policies and programmes are viewed as focussed on the south of the country.
- Low economic activity caused, for example, by the end of Trans-Saharan trade routes and the decline of agricultural production.
- The youth bulge: High unemployment, poverty, lack of access to education amongst young people who are therefore vulnerable to radicalisation. Northern elites manipulate *Almajirai* (young mendicants) to further their own political ends.
- The demand for social justice and Boko Haram's response to these demands (e.g. one participant argued that Boko Haram does not attack during strikes over petrol prices).

'Religious,' Identity and Cultural Motivations:

- Tradition of radical Islam in northern Nigeria, including on doctrinal issues, excluding those 'not Muslim enough' from jobs. Boko Haram also targets 'insufficiently Islamic' clerics more than Christians.
- Radical, fundamentalist Islamic and Christian groups. Fundamentalism gives a sense of belonging and opportunity.
- Globalisation, including global Islamic fundamentalism and the influence of extremists from outside Nigeria. Also, the Arab Spring with its calls for reform serves as an inspiration for young people.
- The 'National Question:' there are still people who feel like foreigners in their own land, and have problem accessing land and jobs. Non-state groups provide the sense of belonging that the state does not.

Weak Justice and Security Provision:

- The security services (police, army, intelligence, joint task forces) lack the capacity to gather actionable intelligence, to enforce the law, or to ensure public safety; reform of these agencies has not been a priority for the government; there is often conflict and/or lack of coordination between agencies.
- Security agents use force and have committed abuses; people are afraid of them and do not trust them.
- State institutions – including in the security sector – appear to have been infiltrated by Boko Haram.
- The justice system (including non-state actors e.g. *hisbah*) is incapable of addressing Boko Haram, providing public safety, or fighting corruption.

- The expertise of the militants indicates the possible involvement of frustrated former peacekeepers and retired military personnel.
- The proliferation of weapons, including from Libyan arsenals.
- Impact of local peace deals reached in other parts of the country that create incentives to use violence to achieve similar gains.
- History/past grievances.
- Role of regional state governance.
- Extensive crime and organised crime networks are operating in Nigeria (and across the Sahel region and beyond).

Communication:

- The media heighten tension through inflammatory and/or inaccurate reporting, including (inaccurately or prematurely) attributing criminal acts to Boko Haram.
- The government does not clearly communicate about its response to conflicts and to grievances in the northern Nigeria.
- YouTube and other new media facilitate rapid and wide distribution of propaganda.

Specific to Boko Haram:

- It is motivated in part by the desire for revenge for the extrajudicial killing of Yusuf Mohammed and other members.
- The Internet and social media enable recruitment and publicity.

(2) Key actors inflaming or resolving conflict

International
The 'West'
US (oil, AFRICOM)
UK ('colonial master'), DFID
France
EU
Libya – people and weapons
Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM)
Al-Shabaab + AQMI
UN
AU
Media: Al-Jazeera, BBC
Intelligence agencies e.g. FBI

Regional
ECOWAS
Organized crime across Sahel to Sudan, South America (trafficking drugs, arms, people)
Nigerian Diaspora
Niger, Chad, Mali (porous borders)
(Inspiration from) Hizbollah/Hamas

National
Boko Haram
National government

Security agencies
Religious bodies: e.g. Jama'atu Nasril Islam, Christian Association of Nigeria, Muslim Brotherhood
Political parties
Private sector
State governors and administrations
Media

Local
Young people, <i>Almajirai</i>
Civil society, potential to work with community policing initiatives
Victims and their families
Civil society inter-communal initiatives
Clerics
Emirs and <i>hisbah</i>
Leaders of ethnic groups
Small business e.g. market traders
Muslim scholars in universities in Jos, Lagos, Kaduna
Those who leave Boko Haram

Concerning actors, participants noted that:

- Very little is known about Boko Haram, for example hard information about its structure, hierarchy, leadership and the organisations that provide it with training, funding and/or ideological inspiration is not available.
- Differentiating between and 'driving a wedge' between the leadership and rank and file will be important.
- The membership and size of Boko Haram are unclear, as are the question of who belongs to it and why. Some members appear to be only loosely connected to the group and others seek only to acquire personal benefits.
- The West has some blame for the current violence thus if interventions appear to be Western-led and not nationally owned, this will resonate with Boko Haram's rhetoric.

(3) Recommendations for action by theme

The meeting found that while the root causes of the conflict are complex the possible actions are manifold. Due to the limited time available only preliminary ideas about entry points for support were discussed. Recommendations need to be further explored to ensure that they take into account other possible, ongoing or planned actions and to ensure that they respect the do no harm principle.

Theme 1: The justice and security sectors should deliver security and safety for all citizens

- **Comprehensive reform and accountability to build public confidence in security system** – it is important not only to develop specific counter-terrorist capacities but also to strengthen the justice system's overall capacities including protecting the rights of people, increasing access to justice, and working with traditional systems and religious channels to make people aware of their rights and the dangers of extremism.

- **Demilitarize the response:** the police force is weak, while the State Security Service (SSS) can investigate and bring a case to court. It is important to consider which of the two to reinforce.
- **Actionable intelligence:** agencies need skills in collecting and digesting information, including forensic skills, whilst respecting human rights. Regional intelligence cooperation is also necessary.
- **Visible anti-corruption** measures would increase public confidence.
- The government could **tap underused expertise** e.g. retired military personnel and to find ways to discourage engagement in criminal activities (for example increase pensions; increase pension age).
- **Better coordination**, trust and division of labour between security agencies.
- **Better strategic communication by the government** including challenging misreporting in the media. Communication is a key element in building confidence between state and citizens and strengthening the social contract.
- **Increase convictions** by training judges and prosecutors; **penal reform** to equip prisons with specific capacities for housing terrorists; **specialised courts** could bring counter-terrorist activities under judicial control.
- Accompany retributive justice with **restorative justice** for rank and file members of extremist organisations.
- **Prevention:** the government is developing a strategy with the support of an EU member state. This should include developing a counter-narrative; media strategy; education; working with victims; creating jobs. Expertise is needed more than funding.
- **Building relations with the population:** examples of how civil-military relations and relations between communities and police have improved in other countries e.g. Ghana could be relevant.
- **Community policing including** engaging with civil society could increase public safety. There may be positive examples of *hisbah* and police working together for greater public safety.
- **Alternative Dispute Resolution** for certain types of cases could address the justice backlog, increase delivery and public confidence.
- Tighter **regulation of the trade in raw materials** for Improvised Explosive Devices, and **bomb disposal** training for security agencies.
- **Mapping existing EU actions** across different issues which are relevant to counter-terrorism and see which partners could work on counter-radicalisation.

Participants noted:

- The EU's justice support project, which predates the latest Boko Haram attacks, maps a lack of capacity in the formal justice system and the potential for strengthening it, including through working with civil society organisations. There should be an emphasis on improving governance: public finance management, anti-corruption, and tackling money-laundering.
- The EU may lack influence regarding security sector reform: the government will not want to lose formal and informal control over security forces; devolving some agencies to state-level (e.g. police) is a controversial proposal.
- Some bilateral donors are already engaging significantly in this sector. Hence there is a need to ensure coordination and complementarity of efforts.

Theme 2: The lack of education and employment possibilities fuel radicalism

- **Investment** in irrigation, agriculture, and basic infra-structure (power, roads) are key considering the significant development divide between the north and the south of Nigeria.
- **Engage communities** in identifying their development priorities and strategies
- Identify and **address the grievances** driving a core group within Boko Haram
- The **government has to reach beyond the formal education sector** to inform citizens of their rights, government actions and the dangers of extremism.
- **Peace education** should be introduced to the formal sector to encourage a culture of dialogue.
- Government should **challenge the myths surrounding secular education** (see also: Next Generation Nigeria Task Force)
- Government and donors should **support interfaith organisations** that are working toward building bridges between communities e.g. Interfaith Mediation Centre (Kaduna); **religious leaders who use inflammatory language should be encouraged to tone down** inflammatory statements.
- Strengthen the voice of women who can play an important role in preventing radicalization.

Participants noted:

- In addition to EU member states, UNICEF and other UN agencies, and other organisations like Save the Children and AED are active in development.
- Nigeria is a vast country in which it is difficult to work as a donor agency: there are security issues and challenges in working with Nigerian institutions.

Other themes:

- Lack of sense of belonging and national identity
- Globalized dynamics of conflict

(3) Continued, Recommendations for interventions by priority (i.e. the most urgent are listed first)

The Government should immediately:

- Stop extra-judicial killing and brutality by the security agencies and end checkpoints within cities and between states, which alienate people, create targets and lead to development of grievances and possible recruitment by extremist groups.
- Balance security and human rights and strengthen the capacities of the police, customs, State Security Service.
- Launch an inquiry into support for Boko Haram within the security agencies.
- Regain legitimacy and trust by admitting its mistakes in tackling Boko Haram; reassure the population that the government is in control.
- Consider an amnesty package for followers of Boko Haram – assessing its possible negative consequences - and support efforts at dialogue with them.
- Seek consultative dialogue with the leadership in the North, including groups such as the Islamic Council of Nigeria, Jama'atu Nasril Islam, the emir of Kano, and ethnic leaders;

support interfaith dialogue between the Christian Association of Nigeria and Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs.

- Improve its understanding of Boko Haram's target community by supporting research and decode its recruitment methodology.
- Launch an information campaign to inform the population of the socio-economic development work it does, and reduce the recruitment appeal of Boko Haram.
- Bring in an enforceable Bill of Rights and a social security system, and change its overall priorities on public spending (e.g. the defence budget was increased threefold in three years).
- Strengthen efforts to control weapons flow with support from EU and other donors.

Starting now, for the medium term, the government should:

- Work with civil society and with moderates to reach out to those still engaged in extremist activists and drive a wedge between them and the radical leadership
- Work with traditional and religious leaders as key interlocutors, including engaging with them more systematically.
- Look beyond national elites to convene a national conference on the 'national question' and how Boko Haram activities relate to it.

The private sector should:

- Increase its levels of corporate social responsibility and its engagement with and response to the interests of local communities.

Local communities should:

- Strengthen their existing conflict resolution mechanisms (with support from external bodies but locally owned) in order to manage conflict, provide an early warning system and support justice sector reform.

The EU should immediately:

- Develop (or support the government to develop) a "Marshall Plan" (long term, with quick start up) for employment and development in Northern Nigeria, to be overseen by civil society, the government and other donors.
- Map existing research and EU actions which could contribute to de-radicalization, support field research to meet the gap in empirical data, and research into better understanding Boko Haram's messaging.
- Support and strengthen conflict management and resolution mechanisms.
- Support joint-border initiatives between Nigeria, Niger and Chad.
- Support the national government and regional bodies to develop regional and Nigerian road networks and other infrastructure to stimulate trade.
- Support education, micro credit projects for youth and the government's programme on agricultural development.
- Support and encourage the government to develop community policing projects which engage civil society in order to increase public safety and early warning capacities.
- Work very discreetly with ECOWAS and the UN on increasing cooperation against terrorism in region. (Visible EU assistance would feed Boko Haram's rhetoric and is thus likely to be counter-productive).

Starting now and for the medium term, the EU should:

- Assess the risks of a possible military coup and support democratic, civilian forces.

- Support electoral reform and the emergence of greater democratic pluralism, rather than PDP hegemony.
- Support security sector reform, including improving the conditions for retired personnel.
- Support civil society initiatives bringing young people of different religious backgrounds together to highlight their common concerns, peace education, and sensitisation projects about what it means to be Nigerian and live together.
- Continue to support the EU-Nigeria partnership which will be mutually beneficial over time.

(4) Possible Next Steps for the European Union

- Map in detail what is already being done by Member States and other donors and identify gaps in response, i.e. which of the identified causes of conflict are not being addressed by responses.
- Continue to ensure that relevant data and evidence (e.g. on school attendance) informs policy-making.
- Improve understanding of the grievances that drive radicalization.
- Consider possible consequences of some interventions: e.g. amnesty may encourage other groups to arm, a sovereign conference may be perceived as a 'soft coup'.
- Identify and support endogenous early warning mechanisms and existing conflict resolution structures.
- Consider ways to support and encourage the government to isolate Boko Haram's leadership by engaging the base and drawing support away from the hardcore leadership.
- Acknowledge the link between causes of Boko Haram-related violence and other conflicts in Nigeria; adopt a comprehensive approach in its engagement with the government of Nigeria.