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### **Nigeria: The Business of Violence**

Hunger remains an intricate issue for the country of Nigeria as a similarly intricate state. Built of many smaller kingdoms, British colonial rule, which originally brought many smaller nations into a single state, left a dramatic impact on the country's history. It is a multifaceted country influenced by a large land area spanning from the Sahel to Africa's western coast, a variety of cultural groups, and neighbors from Niger to Chad. Agriculture remains a vital field both for the economy and people within the country, but hunger, too, continues. The historic legacy and influence of colonization left a mark that continues to influence conflict and hunger today.

Nigeria sits in West Africa bordering Niger, Chad, Cameroon, Benin, and the Atlantic Ocean. The country contains over 200 million people and an estimated 250 different ethnic groups each with a historic claim to agricultural rights in pockets of the country. These fragmented claims often prevent other farmers from ethnic groups other than the majority Fulani group from gaining rights to land. Approximately half of the population lives in rural areas and half in urban residences (Falola, 2020). Beyond simply regional ethnic leadership in agricultural rights, large governmental divides between the primarily rural, Muslim north and urban, Christian south persist today. 40 percent of the land in the country is currently used for agriculture primarily in small family farms (United States Geological Survey, n.d.). The average farm consists of 1.8 ha of land, or slightly smaller than four basketball courts, which makes it difficult to grow large amounts (Kafeero, 2021). Nigeria contains a wet, tropical climate where most crops can be farmed throughout the year. While most farmers are engaged in sustenance farming, peanuts and cotton remain primary exports for the north and root crops and trees, such as palm oil and cacao, are vital exports for wetter southern regions.

These differences transcend into families as well. The average Nigerian family consists of two parents, children, and extended family members such as cousins or grandparents. The average family in rural areas, especially in the north, of Nigeria often have 7 to 10 children whereas families in urban areas typically have 3 to 5 children (AFS-USA, 2021). Living conditions also vary across urban and rural areas, but most live in small, multigenerational houses where only 67 percent and 41 percent of the country respectively have access to clean water and sanitation (World Health Organization, 2014). Access to roads, reliable electricity, telephones, and even healthcare have also not kept pace with the rising population. In the case of healthcare, the cost remains prohibitively expensive as it is primarily paid out of pocket. In regions, such as Borno state, conflict, including common kidnappings of schoolchildren, creates high rates of displacement and a lack of permanent housing. Approximately 10.5 million children between the ages of 5 and 14 do not regularly attend school despite it being free and compulsory in nature which is further worsened by fear of kidnapping (UNICEF, 2021).

Family plays an important role in many cultures within Nigeria and respect for older relatives is a key tenant in that. Many foods, including popular dishes such as meat stews and Jollof rice, are passed down through generations. Despite the cultural significance of food, food insecurity is high in the country. The average salary in Nigeria fell to the equivalent of \$1,584 since 2014 (The World Bank, 2018). The majority of people in the country currently work in agriculture however, with rising growth in the national oil industry, careers in the field are also on the rise. In addition to this, 18.8 percent of the population remains unemployed largely due to a lack of available jobs which is likely to worsen due to COVID-19 (Mbah, 2018). While salaries vary based on profession, one continuity is the high cost of living.

Food remains prohibitively expensive costing the average person 73 percent of their income (Owoo, 2020). This further cuts off access to nutritious foods as access specifically to fresh, balanced diets remain out of reach for most in the country. Some families in rural areas raise livestock and grow food crops during the year however most people in urban areas buy from local markets. Meals are typically cooked on kerosene gas stoves or over wood fires.

As a large and incredibly diverse country, Nigeria has long struggled with complex geographic and cultural tensions which have created many varying experiences across the country however the experience of hunger remains pertinent. In the population of over 160 million people, 13 million experienced food insecurity in 2012 (Agostini, 2018). In the rural state of Borno, 64 percent of residents are food insecure (Merchant, 2018). Hunger remains a significant issue, especially in rural areas, due to a myriad of factors the greatest of which remains conflict due to banditry and kidnapping.

Much of the world held its breath as #BringBackOurGirls swept across social media in 2014. Garnering support from celebrities from Oprah Winfrey to Michelle Obama, the online campaign brought about a broader global consciousness surrounding the pervasive issue of kidnapping in Nigeria. It emerged after 276 schoolgirls were kidnapped from the Chibok region in northern Nigeria by the militant group Boko Haram (Holpuch, 2018). Even though the story has faded from western media outlets, this problem hasn't disappeared today. Many individuals kidnapped in less high-profile kidnappings are forgotten, not by their communities, but by higher levels of governance. Many victims are never found.

Instead, kidnapping and banditry have become a business. In Nigeria, approximately 40 percent of the population currently lives in poverty, one of the highest proportions in the world (The World Bank, 2018). This is predicted to only worsen as both COVID-19 and its necessary safety protocols ravage the global economy. Especially in northern Nigeria, many militia groups have quickly exploited kidnapping as a way to drive profit because economic opportunity remains low. As unemployment increases, many people, primarily young men, in the region are radicalized into groups known for kidnapping and violence as a way to financially support their families. Frequently charging thousands of dollars in ransom for their release, militant groups and kidnapping have risen significantly in recent memory.

Altogether, an estimated \$18 million dollars was paid in ransom between June 2011 and March 2020 (Maclean, 2021). Initially beginning with targeted kidnappings of young schoolgirls of wealthy families, it has quickly expanded into mass kidnappings in poorer areas as well creating a cyclical effect. As families who are already struggling under a depressed economy are forced to pay large sums to see their children again, this only continues to fuel the economic turmoil that created this system in the first place.

Kidnapping has not had an isolated effect, but rather has disrupted the underlying factors that create stable food systems. This has uniquely impacted those in rural areas focused on agriculture, especially young girls. These kidnappings are typically events in which groups of men kidnap a few to entire classes of young girls in school. Many victims are forced into human trafficking or even killed. Those who are fortunate enough to escape often lack a complete education, as their education was disrupted, which follows them for the rest of their lives. Additionally, many of these groups also raze local crops and silos, kidnap or kill farmers, and block local trade routes. In a study following 50 farmers, representative of the larger 80,000 farming families in Katsina, Nigeria, 100 percent of participants noted at least one direct setback from banditry (Ladan, 2020). Kidnapping and banditry impacts regional stability and food systems undermining food security in the country.

In order to tackle the role of conflict in undermining food security, the economic component must first be addressed. Militant groups often exploit ransoms and banditry in order to gain funding since legal

economic opportunity remains low. This only further reduces the economy from instability. Providing economic incentives to farmers, especially in livestock, is essential to increasing food production and stabilizing a struggling economy. The National Livestock Transformation Plan, *NLTP*, is a ten-year program initially submitted to the agricultural minister in 2018 to provide more accessible animal feed, aid farmers in forming larger land collectives, and further aid farmers in raising livestock (Adeshokan, 2019). Economic initiatives not only address ongoing food insecurity but also stabilize the economy to create a financially sustainable solution.

Many past initiatives failed precisely because the fragmentation of land makes investing in and maintaining livestock prohibitively expensive. Due to a plurality of different ethnic groups in the region, each with historic claims to land, many farmers simply lack enough land to afford the expensive start-up costs associated with livestock such as cattle or even chickens. The program began revitalizing this field by unifying many smaller farms into greater collectives who could share the costs for tools, feed, and the initial animals. As Nigeria's population rises, demand for livestock is only increasing. Investing in future programs to connect farmers to larger collective lands is essential to raising animals, such as cattle, that require large grazing areas however more action must be taken in order to specifically target less wealthy farmers who still lack access to such programs.

In order to specifically target these groups, the government should focus on skills-based training and direct agricultural loans. Education on how to increase efficiency as well as funds to invest in irrigation and other tools is essential to investing in food stability. Currently, only 1 percent of farmers in Nigeria use irrigation for their crops (You et al., 2018). This means that crops, and therefore food production, are highly vulnerable to changes in rainfall and climate volatility. Allocating small loans to farmers to purchase small-scale irrigation systems alone would increase farmers' income by an estimated \$600 million in a single dry season (You et al., 2018). The government has primarily focused on fuel subsidies to create growth with mixed results however loans from the government to be paid back after investments create economic benefits for farmers and creating new taxable income creates a self-sustaining model for growth. Farmers who work in their fields each day are the most knowledgeable surrounding what will benefit their own crops therefore small, direct loans give them the flexibility to do so.

By allowing farmers to invest in healthy initial herds, tools, and education on how to best utilize their land, will not only revitalize the economy but also decrease violence. Skills-based agricultural programs, in the study specifically aimed at Fulani youth, significantly reduced the number of youth engaged in banditry (International Crisis Group, 2018). Young men who are unable to find work are often targeted and paid to kidnap and engage in the destruction of crops. By granting them opportunities outside of this cycle, violence can be prevented. One of the greatest barriers to such programs is interest and engagement. In order to attend, individuals must often travel or miss work which disincentivizes attendance. In a local study of vaccination participation in rural India which faced similar obstacles, simply providing small economic incentives roughly equivalent to a day's wage significantly increased participation because individuals felt they could financially participate (Banerjee and Duflo, 2019). Economic incentives invest in food stability, but can only indirectly tackle conflict.

Secondly, strengthening the government's role in maintaining regional security is essential to directly address conflict. Nigeria's government has long maintained an opaque response to kidnapping and banditry which undermines their role in opposing the groups. Most kidnappings are perpetrated with the express intent to extort groups for large ransoms. These are often paid directly to the groups by the government without the approval or even knowledge of the general public (Wodu, 2021). The lack of transparency with the public about these payments has undermined trust in the government and directly aided terror networks, such as Boko Haram, to launder money for their operations. Paying opaque ransoms to terror groups bankrolls terror in the region. In contrast, greater transparency with the public is

essential to maintaining public trust in the government's response to the crisis at large. As the government continues to fund militant groups in the form of ransom, this is likely only aiding these groups and detracting funds from solving underlying economic issues.

In addition to greater transparency, the government should also look to strengthening its security presence and regional security alliances. Boko Haram, one of the primary perpetrators of banditry, emerged in 2009 by selling cheaper Nigerian oil to other countries in the Lake Chad region such as Niger (MacEachern, 2018). The porous border between Nigeria and Niger remains a source of funding for militant groups through smuggling weapons and human trafficking, therefore, a regional security alliance is essential to reducing violence in both countries. Nigeria, Niger, Cameroon, and Chad initiated a multinational effort against Boko Haram named the Multinational Joint Force Task Force, *MJFT*. While the force was initially successful, Boko Haram has instead gained more ground between 2018 and 2020 largely due to a lack of coordination between the countries (Campbell, 2020). Disagreements over ceding control of their respective troops and a lack of funding have proven calamitous for increasing stability in the Lake Chad region. The group should seek funding from the African Union; the European Union, a long-time security partner; and the United Nations. Increased funding allows the countries to invest in security forces well-trained and equipped to respond to groups such as Boko Haram. In addition to funding, the discussion between the countries must focus on building trust in order to combat terror together. Strengthening cooperation is essential to addressing the multinational scale of many terror groups.

Beyond negotiations with partner countries, the government of Nigeria must look to break the cycle of recruitment into militant groups. As the internet's global role has risen over the past decades, so too has its role in promoting terrorism. On a global scale, social media and the internet are exploited by such groups for financing and radicalizing individuals into violence and this plays a significant role in the growing terror groups of West Africa. To confront the rise of terrorism, intervention before individuals are radicalized into these groups is essential. In an initiative aimed at reducing enrollment into ISIS, it targeted searches for the terror groups to show news on the violent realities of the group instead of posts idealizing it which dramatically reduced new recruitment (Sanger, 2019). A similar strategy joining together web engines and the government should be utilized to prevent the idealization of terror. While security forces and government policies responding to terrorism are important in stopping ongoing violence, early intervention is the only solution to stop violence before it can start.

The ongoing conflict in Nigeria due to banditry and kidnapping undermines food security at every level. As the country built upon many diverse ethnic groups and an even more complicated history of disputes looks to address food security, it must do so by strengthening the economy and the government's role in countering terror. Violence disrupts food systems from farm to the table. While the future of conflict in Nigeria remains less than certain, hunger remains a uniting experience today.

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