

Boko Haram Insurgency and Environmental Degradation in the North-East Region of Nigeria, 2009-2021¹

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Abstract:

The Boko Haram (BH) insurgency has attracted global attention because it has lingered for over ten years now and gory news of serial killings, ambushes of security personnel and convoys, abductions, internal displaced persons/refugee crisis, among others made the headlines. The BH insurgency has a devastating impact on the economy and society particularly in Borno, Yobe and Adamawa States where the security problem had been more pronounced. Bauchi, Gombe and Taraba States in the Northeast region of Nigeria and the neighbouring Republics of Niger, Chad and Cameroon have also been affected, having accommodated people fleeing the insurgency. While many displaced persons have settled in states other than that of their origin and may not go back, others with government support have started returning to their ancestral homes to start a new life. The BH insurgency, as with different aspects of the society, seriously affected the environment of a region that has been experiencing ecological degradation over time. The insurgency-induced environmental degradation in the Northeast region does make the headlines; little or nothing is reported or written about this aspect of the crisis. This paper attempts to examine the environmental impact of the insurgency in relation to the violent military engagements and the lifestyle of the displaced persons in and outside camps. The content of the paper is based on information generated largely from written material and some oral data.

Keywords:

Boko Haram, insurgency, environment, degradation, internal displaced persons.

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Introduction

The issue of environmental degradation has received deserving attention from scholars who offer conceptual clarification of varying value to explain the phenomenon. Barau (2004) defines environmental degradation “as the reduction or deterioration in the quality of natural and socio-economic variables including a decline in or loss of bio-diversity”. Ahmad (1997) views environmental degradation as the tempering with the state and quality of the surrounding objects of land, water and air as an interdependent component of nature. Without belabouring on conceptual clarification, the environment is degraded if natural resources are depleted, ecosystems destroyed, leading to wildlife extinction, and pollution. Environmental degradation is the process in which the ecosystem, the aesthetic landscape and other physical structures that support the lives of humans, animals and plants in different ways through the ecological value chain are disrupted resulting from natural and anthropogenic factors.

Environmental degradation as a process of ecological change has local and international dimensions. A number of factors trigger environmental degradation in different places around the world. War is one of the factors that destroy the environment. Local, regional and international wars have often caused environmental change with negative consequences on humans and animals, plants and the vegetation cover, water and food sources, among others. The environmental degradation induced by wars, for example, in Somalia, Sierra Leone, Liberia, South Sudan, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Afghanistan, Vietnam, Sri Lanka, Burma, Philippines, Chechnya, Bosnia, and Northern Ireland, can only be imagined given the wars’ local and regional implications, moral and ethical dimensions (Ahmad, 1997). Though there have been rules of engagement in a war situation, little or no regard is given to the environment in the course of the wars. War actors knowingly or unknowingly destroy the environment in their effort to win a war or cause maximum damage on the opposing side, mostly considered as the “enemy”. The environmental damage caused by wars has more often than not been limited to the war period but lingers for a while as the affected people continue to grapple with environmental problems in the aftermath of the wars.

Environmental degradation is not only noticed in the theatre of war, but also manifested itself in refugee or displaced persons’ camps. People displaced as a result of the wars or insurgencies mostly ended up in internally displaced persons (IDPs) camps. The unpleasant lifestyle of the IDPs taking refuge in makeshift shelters and camps raises issues of environmental and health concerns. It is within this context that this paper discusses the BH insurgency-induced environmental degradation in the Northeast region of Nigeria, 2009 to 2021. Though the insurgency is not yet over and the degrading of the environment is ongoing, the ecological disruption resulting from violent military engagement is, to say the least, disturbing, as the insurgency not only accelerated the process of the environmental degradation, but actually widened its scope in a region already known for its environmental crisis (Daily Trust, 2021). Several IDPs’ camps had been established across the region and beyond to accommodate the people displaced from their homes as a result of the insurgency.

The environmental, social and other problems associated with the IDPs' camps, especially in Borno were such that the government decided to close down the camps and support the IDPs to go back to their homes (Daily Trust, 2021). The insurgency-induced environmental degradation in the region will therefore be examined on the basis of pieces of available information and data generated from people directly and indirectly involved in the events under consideration, and the reading of published materials on the subject matter.

The Northeast Geographical Landscape

Geographically, the Northeast region is one of the six geo-political zones in Nigeria. It comprises of six States of Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Taraba and Yobe. The region is located within the Savanna zone of Nigeria with a large part of its northern section lying within the Sahel region, while the middle and southern parts are within the Sudan and Guinea Savanna regions respectively. Borno and Yobe are classified among the most vulnerable desert prone areas in the region while Bauchi and Gombe also have their fair share, being threatened by desert conditions. With an estimated 21,637 million hectares (216,370 km²) land area, the region accounts for 30 per cent of the country's landmass (Akko, 2013). According to the 2006 National Population Census, the region had a total of 18,984,299 population made up of diverse ethnic, cultural and religious groups. In 2016, the projected population of the region stood at 26,263,869 (based on the data available on the website of the National Bureau of Statistics).

The Northeast region has a long history of environmental crisis induced by natural and human factors as its climate and physical landscape have undergone changes over time. From the early period, the progressive desiccation of the Sahara and drying up of the Lake Chad had influenced the peopling of the region, just as human colonization of space has affected the environment. Mohammed (2017) has shown that human activities contributed to environmental degradation through series of wars of expansion from the fourteenth to the nineteenth centuries and the Borno rulers' application of scorched earth strategy, "in this process all food and tree crops were razed to the ground" which sometimes led to famines. Not only wars "accentuated man's harmful effects on the environment" but also hunting expeditions "undoubtedly affect the animal and bird population" (Mohammed, 2017).

Other environmental issues manifested in trees and crops being destroyed through depredation by birds. Bashir (2014) has observed that the Northeast in the past was one of the well-endowed parts of Nigeria in terms of human and ecological resources, but in recent time the land has become dry and thus its natural resources depleted in the quest for development resulting in the region being gradually pushed onto the fringes of the desert with the attendant consequences of decline in rainfall and periodic occurrence of famines and droughts, soil impoverishment, and sharp decline in the agricultural production (Bashir, 2014). Based on a number of empirical studies, Shehu and Molyneux-Hodgson (2014) have opined that "the region suffers from severe environmental degradation in the form of rapid



desertification, encroaching at a rate of 0.6 kilometre per year; excessive deforestation, estimated at 0.4% reduction per year; severe erosion, seasonal flash floods, garbage accumulation in urban areas and so on". Consequently, the inhabitants of the region became highly vulnerable to the impacts of environmental change in the face of "increasing poverty, population growth and natural resources depletion" which is said to form the basis for the "rise of violent conflicts in various parts of the region" (Shehu and Molyneux-Hodgson, 2014).

Boko Haram Insurgency and the Government Counter-Insurgency Operations

The BH insurgency which started in 2009 is one of the major security challenges in the Northeast region, fuelled by high element of religious fundamentalism as expressed by the pioneer leader of the movement, Muhammed Yusuf and his successors and followers (Mohammed, *The Message and Methods of Boko Haram*, 2014). The BH started as a crisis but soon transformed into a full-flown terrorist insurgency that has last for nearly 12 years now. Numerous lives had been lost and properties worth billions of Naira destroyed over this period. The insurgency has become a nightmare to three different Nigerian Presidents: Umaru Musa Yar'adua, Goodluck Ebele Jonathan and Muhammadu Buhari who individually committed so much resource to end it but to no avail. Without delving into the history of the emergence, philosophy, methods and messages of BH, a subject that has been adequately handled by experts (Harnischfeger, 2014; Mohammed, 2014; Mustapha, 2014; Da'wah Coordination Council of Nigeria, 2009), it will not be out of place to give a brief historical account on the Nigerian Government's efforts towards tackling the BH security challenge in the form of counter-insurgency operations over the years.

The insurgency started in 2009 during the Umar Yar'adua administration, and the government violent military crackdown on the BH members and their local collaborators was thought to have ended the problem and the military returned to their barracks. Not long after, the BH members regrouped in villages and forests far away from the capital cities and after a period of recruitment of more members and gathering of resources, including ammunitions, they launched a major offensive against government security forces and killed any person who seem to associate with government. It was during the Goodluck Jonathan administration the insurgency reached a horrendous level, when the insurgents took control of about 27 Local Government Areas (LGAs) in Borno, Yobe and Adawama States (Mustapha, 2014). They made Gwoza the headquarters of their imaginary caliphate, having decimated lives, destroyed government buildings, disgraced the Nigerian flag and hoisted their flag with jihadist symbols and imposed their laws on the people in the areas they had occupied.

The failure of the Jonathan administration to effectively deal with the insurgency situation, among others caused him his seat in 2015. The Buhari administration came in with full force. With high level of determination, the military ably reclaimed the LGAs earlier taken by the insurgents and then declared that the backbone of the BH insurgents has been broken and thus "degraded" (Daily Trust, 2015). In 2015, BH pledged allegiance to the Islamic State in Iraq

and the Levant (ISIL) and took the name of Islamic State in West African Province (ISWAP). In 2016, there was fallout among the group and consequently Abubakar Shekau led a faction at the sometime Abu Musab El-Barnawi and later from 2019 Abu Abdullah El-Barnawi led another faction. Both Shekau and El-Barnawi were killed in 2021 (Omirin, O. and Isamotu, I., 2021). This made some of their followers to come out of the bush and surrender to the Nigerian army. The BH leadership crisis has to a considerable degree slowed down the insurgents' aggression against the Nigerian state and its citizenry.

In the course of engaging the insurgents and their collaborators, the government used kinetic and non-kinetic approaches. The kinetic approach involved "hard-knock" military engagements through Operation Lafiya Dole with the support of the Multi-National Joint Task Force (MNJTF) in the Lake Chad Region and local vigilante known as Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF). The non-kinetic is the "soft-slap" Operation Safe Corridor which provides BH abductees, terrorist suspects and members that have surrendered to be de-radicalized, rehabilitated and reintegrated back to the community after passing through a "safe corridor" programme. Thus, in 2016, the Federal Government, based on the recommendation of the international organizations, commenced the de-radicalization, rehabilitation and reintegration of BH members, fighters, and abductees in the Operation Safe Corridor Camp at Mallam Sidi, Gombe State. Three batches had been successfully hosted and trained at the camp since 2016 when the programme started. The effectiveness or otherwise of this programme on the ex-BH members is outside the scope of this paper. But there were some complaints about the "repentant" BH members going back to the field, taking arms against the state, and coordinating violent attacks on communities and the peoples either on the highways or in the bush (Daily Trust, 2021).

The effort so far made by the Nigerian army in dealing with the insurgents has yielded some positive result as peace is gradually returning to region, but sadly over the years a lot of lives and resources had been wasted, and areas affected by the insurgency have experienced serious destructions. Populous towns had been destroyed and deserted, people displaced and their means of livelihood destroyed or abandoned to waste. This further widened the scope of poverty and hardship among the people in the region, especially in Borno State, most hard hit by the insurgency. According to official account, "the total cost of destruction in the Northeast is about 9 billion naira and Borno took the lion's share of 6 billion naira". It is further reported that "35,000 people" had been killed and "2 million displaced" from Borno alone (Terzungwe, S., 2021).

The Issue of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), Rebuilding and Resettlement Efforts

Among the most disturbing aspects of the insurgency is the displacement of thousands of people and their communities in Yobe, Borno and Adamawa States. People had to run for their lives; hence many internally displaced persons (IDPs) sought refuge in different parts of Nigeria and beyond. IDPs' camps mushroomed in many towns and cities, including the Federal Capital Abuja. The state capitals in the Northeast accommodated thousands of displaced persons, with Maiduguri having the highest concentration of displaced persons camps. In the neighbouring countries, Minawao Camp, Mokolo in the far Northern Region of Cameroun; Des es Salam Camp, Baga Sola Western Chad and Diffa Camp in Southeastern Region of Niger hosted Nigerian refugees displaced by the insurgency. According to the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR):

The Boko Haram/ISWAP terrorism has displaced nearly 3.2 million people in the Lake Chad Basin, forcing the region to grapple with a complex humanitarian emergency. Of the 3.2 million people that are displaced, over 2.9 million are Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Northeast Nigeria. Out of this number, there are about 778,000 IDPs in Cameroon, Chad and Niger.

The situation has exacerbated conflict-induced food insecurity and severe malnutrition in the refugee and IDPs camps. Despite the efforts of governments and humanitarian aid, some 12.5 million people remain in need of assistance in the Lake Chad Basin region, with 5.3 million people remaining food insecure (Daily Trust, 2021).

The socio-economic situation of the people in the region has been very dire, thereby attracting the attention of governments and international organizations. Federal and state governments have been mobilizing the much-needed resources from within and outside Nigeria to restore peace and stability in the region. In the wake of the massive destruction occasioned by the insurgency, the Federal Government established in 2017 the North-East Development Commission (NEDC) saddled with responsibility for mobilizing, coordinating and distributing interventions from governments and development partners in the process of rebuilding devastated parts of the region and resettling displaced persons. This is aimed at bringing succour to their life and creating an enabling environment for meaningful development to take place.

With peace gradually returning to the states most affected particularly Borno, efforts have been made by the governments with the support of the development partners to return displaced persons living in various camps in Nigeria and refugee camps in the neighbouring countries to their ancestral homes in order to start a new life of dignity. This has been made possible through the dynamic leadership of Borno State Governor, Babagana Umara Zulum, who since 2019 had several times visited the neighbouring countries to ensure that displaced persons come back home. Already the government initiated the rebuilding of destroyed communities and resettlement of displaced persons. Houses for government officials and

private individuals, markets, schools, hospitals, road, water and power supply infrastructure had been provided in the communities badly affected by the insurgency and the returnees have started coming back to resettle in their homes they were earlier forced to flee by the insurgents. The Borno State Governor had severally visited different rebuilt and resettled towns on humanitarian mission to support the people with cash and life-supporting items and programmes to improve their conditions. Among the reasons for the governor's humanitarian interventions are stated in few lines below:

The governor's sustained strategy of ensuring food and cash support reaches displaced persons is aimed at denying Boko Haram opportunities to entice affected persons through social and economic incentives which the insurgents had used where their victims were frustrated with lack of livelihood, coupled with losing their homes and loved ones (Daily Trust, 2021).

In the course of humanitarian visits to Marte, Dikwa, Gamborun Ngala, Baga, Banki, Monguno, Kukawa, Bama, Magumeri, Gubio, Damasak, Gwoza, Pulka, Chibok, Konduga, to mention a few, the Borno State Governor had interfaced and supported displaced persons in "government-controlled camps" and returnees generally. Social protection packages, foods, wrappers and cash grants had been given to vulnerable female returnees and soft loans given to small and medium scale traders, while farmers had been given seeds, fertilizers, water pumps, chemicals, among others to commence dry season farming (Daily Trust, 2021). For safety, travellers and returnees had to be escorted by soldiers while several security checkpoints had been mounted on the road. The roads linking the settlements had been constantly patrolled by security forces and local vigilante to ensure safety of life and properties (Daily Trust, 2020).

It is commendable that apart from isolated returns by the victims themselves, the government organized the return of displaced persons from neighbouring countries, who had been repatriated back to Nigeria and given houses and relief package comprising of food and non-food items: mattresses, blankets, and even cash to start a new life (Daily Trust, 2021). Many buildings have been completed and being allocated to returnees, while others are at various stages of completion. Besides houses, healthcare, education and worship centres, security outposts, markets and adjoining farmlands had been provided in the rebuilt settlements for the returnees (Daily Trust, 2021). Not only that the government ensure that displaced persons are resettled, there has been aggressive but pleasing drive to enrol many out-of-school children into school whose curriculum broadly covers western and Islamic education syllabus. It has been reported that "the schools had been reopened and children enrolled. Combined curriculum of Islamic and western education is used for teaching pupils who the government will support to actual their dreams in life" (Daily Trust, 2021). The government has also demonstrated sincere determination to reform the traditional *almajiri* school system as some had been converted into higher Islamic colleges designed to serve as Islamic research centres in addition to teaching and learning. This is to "provide opportunities

for eligible adults with adequate Islamic knowledge to acquire diplomas in western education (Daily Trust, 2021).

Boko Haram Insurgency-Induced Environmental Degradation

The scale of the insurgency-induced environmental degradation in the Northeast region can only be imagined considering the mass destruction of human and material resources perpetrated by the BH insurgents. It is difficult to assess the level of environmental degradation related to the insurgency in statistical terms as the data on that aspect of the insurgency is scanty if not completely lacking; only oral evidence from participants, observers and victims shades some light on the nature and dimension of the insurgency-induced environmental degradation. The destruction of the environment has been the result of direct and unintended consequences of military measures taken by the key players in the war. Environmental degradation manifested at different levels from the forests to the rural and urban centres and displaced persons camps. For obvious reasons the BH targeted specific facilities and persons just to cause maximum damage. According to Mustapha:

Since 2009 Boko Haram has used targeted assassinations, drive-by shootings, suicide bombings, improved explosive devices (IEDs) and vehicle-borne IEDs to spread death and destruction across northern Nigeria. The targets have been individuals with whom they disagree on their doctrinal or political grounds, schools, churches, mosques belonging to their perceived opponents, the police, the military, traditional authorities, political leaders, symbolic targets like the Police Headquarters in Abuja, and the United Nations (UN) Building in Abuja, bombed in 2011. (Mustapha, 2014).

Markets, motor parks, hospitals, barracks, prisons and banks had also been targeted by the insurgents. Every person familiar with orthodox Islamic teachings, the Holy Prophet Muhammad (SAW) and the Rightly Guided Caliphs abhorred Muslim fighters to destroy certain category of structures and persons even in a war situation. This has been articulated again and again by Muslim leaders following the teachings of the Prophet. Caliph Abu Bakr is reported to have directed Yazid bin Abi-Sufyan, the leader of the Muslim army on expedition to Byzantium in Syria that: "Do not cut fruit bearing trees nor injure palm tree or burn them with fire. Do not kill children, women and old people neither harm a priest, nor desecrate buildings. Never butcher a goat or camel except for you to feed on" (Al-Suhaimi, 2015). This golden rule is binding on all right-thinking Muslims during war and peace. In brazen violations of Islamic teachings and values, the BH insurgents attacked all kinds of persons and destroyed structures and everything on sight in order to achieve maximum damage.

Being ruthless and destructive, BH attacks had been characterized by arson, wholesome sacking of towns and villages, torching of public buildings and private companies' facilities, slaughtering and beheading of their victims in the most gruesome way (Mustapha, 2014). The insurgents had also been found wanting for blowing off electric towers and putting affected communities in difficult situation of being cut off from having power supply and thus living in

total darkness for several months (Daily Trust, 2021). Dori (2021) has succinctly captured difficulty faced by the people of particularly Maiduguri, Borno State Capital when he said: Maiduguri had been without electricity for several months when the insurgents deliberately incapacitated the transmission line from Damaturu. The Transmission Company of Nigeria (TCN) made efforts to repair and restore electricity to the city but the terrorists that destroyed the transmission lines gloated that Maiduguri would never see electricity again (Dori, 2021). In December 2021, however, power was restored in Maiduguri after several months of living without electricity supply (Dori, 2021). Telecommunications installations had also been blown off as “the insurgents cut off two major communication networks in the area, belonging to Airtel and MTN”, thereby making the people suffer resulting from lack of mobile network coverage (Daily Trust, 2021).

In their violent attacks of communities, the BH insurgents used IEDs, suicide bombers, or physically attack in broad day time or at night. The report of their recent attack on Maiduguri captures the devastating environmental effects of their insurrections on communities as narrated by an eyewitness of the sad event. They used trunk-mounted guns and motorbikes from outskirts of Maiduguri and fired several rockets into the city which not only damaged properties but also killed and wounded many residents of Maiduguri. Part of the eyewitness account reads:

The exploded shells also released smoke and power that caused itchy eyes and skins, it also caused swellings and rashes on the skin of some children who also needed medical attention... Pieces of the metal that injured the children after the weapon had exploded were actually poisonous (Daily Trust, 2021).

In communities they occupied through the use of instrument of violence, they either set on fire educational, health, institutional and residential facilities or destroyed/vandalized bridges and other valuable infrastructure. They left most of the communities taken in ruins. The bodies of those people they killed mostly in a horrific way were either buried in an undignified manner, or dumped in rivers, streams and wells or left in open space to decompose, thereby causing environmental pollution. Those that escape being killed ended up in the displaced persons’ camps. The environmental conditions in most if not all the camps are unattractive if not appalling. Among the reports carried on print media the one by the Aljazeera is quite vivid in terms of proper coverage of the pitiable lifestyle of the displaced persons, mostly women and children in IDPs’ camps in the Northeast region. The degrading living conditions in the camps as narrated by interviewed victims and the reporter’s on the spot assessment of the situation is paraphrased below:

In the flat, colourless landscape of the displacement camp – the miles of sand interrupted only by rows of identical tarpaulin tents and huts – a common arrangement in camps across North-East, Nigeria, where women and children make up 80 per cent of the population. During the course of the decade-long armed conflict between armed groups and Nigeria’s military, nearly two million people have been forced from their homes.



In Dalori camp in Maiduguri, beyond sandy alleyways and rows of identical makeshift structures are hey fences, children playing with empty cans and plastic bottles ... The scenery is dominated by subdued lives.... To survive, women mostly depend on meagre earnings from daily labour, and on humanitarian aid... because this is not enough, every single day one goes to the bush to collect and sell firewood. It is a hard labour and it can be dangerous, but they still go... in order to get money and buy the necessities of life.

In Bakassi and other camps in Maiduguri, sunlight pierces through the holes in the tarpaulin ceiling above their heads, and women sit barefoot on the plastic mat,... during the Harmattan season, clouds of white dust hover above the scorched, naked earth.

With her voice barely audible, one of the displaced women (Aishatu) whose husband was killed by the insurgents, recounts how she then fled the village on foot with her children, running past dead bodies decomposing by side of the road, and the explosions. There are long silences between her words as she recalls the horrors of the journey (Daily Trust, 2021).

The above Aljazeera report highlights the displaced persons' experience and lifestyle in Maiduguri camps. The situation may even be worst in camps outside Maiduguri considering that those in Maiduguri had been closely monitored as so much resource had been committed by the government and NGOs to improve the life of the displaced persons in the "government-controlled camps". Apart from those housed in the Maiduguri camps run by the government, many displaced persons had been accommodated in uncompleted and abandoned buildings or makeshift shelters elsewhere. The resilience of the displaced persons in the camps is amazing, but the social and environmental abuses have been widespread. The problems of anti-social behaviour, sexual exploitation, and sharp practices have been reported among the displaced persons in camps (Daily Trust, 2021). Lack of observance of safety measures and negligence in camps sometimes led to fire outbreak with high cost on human life and properties (Daily Trust, 2021). Unhygienic practices, open defecation and littering of the environment have featured in many camps, thereby posing a challenge for urban sanitation and waste management (Ukomadu, et al., 2019).

Even with humanitarian interventions, lack of good jobs and poor living conditions caused great frustration, psychological nightmares and insurgency related traumatic mental health problems (Asaju, 2021). Thus, in and outside the camps there had been ever growing interest to find something to do for a living. Many wanted to return to their ancestral homes because, as one of the displaced persons pointed out "our living condition as displaced people is pitiable even though we get humanitarian support" (Daily Trust, 2021). Many IDPs in the camps and even those returnees with not enough resources engaged in works that require little or no skill or capital to do. Selling firewood/charcoal being among the small-scale businesses done by the IDPs. The felling of trees for fuel wood and charcoal has serious environmental consequences but who cares since one is struggling to survive (Daily Trust, 2021). The collection of firewood and the making of charcoal for cooking by households and selling to others had been a common money-fetching business for many of the displaced persons in

camps and returnees in resettled communities (Daily Trust, 2020). There are report and photos of women cooking with firewood at the IDPs' camps (Daily Trust, 2021). In the face of continuous desert encroachment, more and more trees needs to be planted than felling the existing ones at a great ecological cost. Other menial jobs done by the displaced persons include manicure, cap making, tailoring, embroidery, carpentry, masonry and painting, riding motorcycle or tricycle among others to sustain their life.

The insurgency-induced environmental degradation is not only visible in the urban centres but also in the rural areas and forests of the region. Having been flushed out of the major towns and cities, the BH fighters took refuge in rural areas and forests particularly in Sambisa. It has been observed that "For a decade now, Borno's Sambisa Forest has been the redoubt for Boko Haram because of its dense, mined and booby-trapped forest, which is nearly impregnable to ground forces" (Jega, 2020). The BH operated from Sambisa and hilly areas of Gwoza and Mandara from where they launched offensive attacks on government forces and several communities (Mustapha, 2014). The military encounter in the theatre of war, especially the forests being the hideout of the insurgents has had a negative effect on the environment. In the Nigerian army's unshaken zeal to eliminate the insurgents, they had taken the fight to them deep in the forests. The insurgents dug ditches and planted landmines. Through the use of IEDs and landmines the insurgents had killed, maimed and fatally wounded several soldiers, local vigilantes and other unsuspecting civilian farmers and herders doing something in the bush. A number of times, moving vehicles and people trekking or using beasts of burden stumbled on landmines which exploded to cause maximum assault and damage. Several incidences of landmine attacks have been reported in the region (Daily Trust, 2021).

In addition to the destruction of lives and properties, the explosion of massive bombs, IEDs and landmines also caused incalculable damage on the flora and fauna species in the region. The military activities endangered wildlife as some had been killed, their habitats destroyed. As the vegetation cover is denuded through the war situation, very useful fruit-bearing trees, medicinal and value-adding plants had been indiscriminately destroyed, thereby affecting the ecosystem in an adverse way. Land degradation has been a major issue here. The insurgency has a deleterious impact on the environment considering that not only the natural vegetation is destroyed, the aesthetic landscape is being tempered with, grazing areas and farmlands are also adversely affected. From the bush, the insurgents periodically visited farming communities to attack, obtain food items and, or destroy their farm produce out of sheer cruelty. Since the insurgents were dislodged and chased out of Maiduguri in 2015 and other towns in the ensuing flush out follow-ups, "they faded into the anonymity of the countryside. They then regrouped and returned to take vengeance and stock up on foods and women, whenever it pleased them". Dori (2021) went further to say that:

Many at times it would seem like a return of peace. The village would be prepared for the return of the displaced persons. As soon as the displaced persons returned and settled



with all fanfare, the insurgents would return to inflict more mayhem. Resources and efforts spent, hopes dashed (Dori, 2021).

The insurgents' destruction of farmlands and farm produce of communities within their range is another disturbing environmental issue associated with the insurgency. After so much labour and deployment of scarce resources in agricultural production, the insurgents visited the farms at the brink of harvest and destroyed everything and snuffed the hopes of the local farmers, thereby posing serious challenge of food insecurity and environmental ruination in the region.

Conclusion

This paper examined the devastating impact of the BH insurgency on different aspects of the environment in the Northeast region of Nigeria. It has been pointed out that the region has a long history of environmental crisis, but the insurgency accelerated the process of environmental degradation as manifested in the military activities which led to displacement of thousands of people and destruction of hundreds of settlements, the torching of private properties and public infrastructure, particularly schools, given the BH ideological opposition to western education, and the modern state policies and programmes. The losses suffered in terms of human and material resources in the course of the insurgency are great and the environment had been degraded beyond repair. Besides the farmlands and grazing areas, the flora and fauna resources destroyed, the problem of the displaced persons in and outside the camps come with high environmental cost. With no or paltry resources at their disposal and in their quest to earn a living through personal struggle, many displaced persons felled down trees get to firewood and/or made charcoal for sell and domestic use. The lifestyle of those in displaced persons' camps had been characterized by environmental mess as they live in relatively crowded shelters with little or no running water and good healthcare service. Lack of proper sanitation and observing personal hygiene are also among the issues of health and environmental concerns in the areas.

It is pleasing, as Dori (2021) has narrated, that:

The Boko Haram terrorists have largely been degraded and in the last many weeks, droves of them have given themselves up to our troops. Many towns and villages that had been no-go areas are now safe for their citizens to return. This was a big relief for Maiduguri as IDP camps are now closing up and their occupants are being directed back to their towns. (Dori, 2021).

The cut-throat rivalry between the BH factions and the killing of their two infamous leaders (Shekau and Al-Barnawi) in 2021 had seriously weakened the BH terrorists' capacity. However, some members of the groups have continued to attack rural communities and abduct persons; ambush security personnel and private individuals on highways and in the bush, using both military confrontation and hit and run tactics. The BH members' continuous terrorist's

insurrections in the region and beyond is still a source of concern. The government policy of de-radicalization and rehabilitation of BH members that surrendered is a good initiative, but concern has been raised about the reintegration of the ex-BH members back to the communities they earlier terrorized and killed their residents. Community leaders, civil society groups and security experts have complained that some of the “repentant” BH members might be tempted to provide intelligence report to their friends hiding in the bush or even go back to the bush themselves and continue to attack communities, civilians and security personnel in the region. The government should be careful how it goes about reintegrating the de-radicalized, rehabilitated and repentant BH members. On the whole, “security experts had called for a sustained offensive towards decimating [the group] to have a lasting peace after twelve years of uncertainty and carnage” (Daily Trust, 2021).

Conflict of Interest

The author hereby declares that no competing financial interest exists for this manuscript.

Notes on Informants

My informants include men working for NGOs (USAID, Red Cross, and other groups) involved in humanitarian activities in the Northeast region; displaced persons and victims of the insurgency; and people having something to do with de-radicalization and rehabilitation of repentant BH members in the Operation Safe Corridor Camp at Mallam Sidi, Gombe State.

I am indebted to my informants but those in uniforms do not want their names mentioned here for security reasons. The following are civilian informants working for NGOs: Ishiaku Ibrahim Babayo (USAID); Muhammed Bello (Red Cross); Usman Isa Gwoza, Isa Haruna and Mal. Ado Abubakar (the Mahadi Foundation); Aliyu Rabi’u (Community and Youth Development); Murtala Siraj (Gombe State University Muslim Ummah); Mal. Auwal Ibrahim, Mal. Usman Ibrahim, Malama Kaltum Sadiq (displaced persons and victims of the insurgency); and Sati K. Sheik (a PhD student working on the Operation Safe Corridor Camp, Mallam Sidi, Kwami Local Government Area of Gombe State).

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