

**AGENDA SHIFTING AND MOTIVATIONS FOR TERRORISM IN  
NORTH-EAST NIGERIA**

**OBOSHI AGYENO**

Postdoctoral fellow, Institute for Dispute Resolution in Africa (UNISA)  
Senior Research Fellow, Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution (IPCR), Abuja, Nigeria.

**SIMEON OLUDELE-AJIBOYE**

Principal Research Fellow, Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution (IPCR),  
Abuja, Nigeria.

<https://doi.org/10.37602/IJSSMR.2021.4503>

**ABSTRACT:**

The original agenda of Boko Haram was to establish a caliphate carved out of Nigeria, to be governed under strict adherence to religious creed. Counter-terrorism measures by Nigeria security forces has undermined the achievement of creating an Islamic state by the terrorist organisation in northeast Nigeria. In order to remain relevant and achieve its overall goal and sell their ideology to a wider population, Boko Haram shifted its tactics significantly in 2014 by kidnapping girls and using them as incentives for recruitment, mobilization and motivation of members. Kidnapping as a tactics is to fulfil a socio-cultural lacuna prevalent in a community challenged by poverty, illiteracy and lack of opportunities. Girls kidnapped by Boko Haram have suffered forced marriage, rape, death and other forms of gender based violence. They are captured and distributed as 'brides' to commanders and members of the terror organization as trophies for bravery. This has impacted on the nature, trend and complexities of the war on terror in Nigeria. A content analysis described the rising rate of kidnap in the dynamics of terrorism in northeast Nigeria as a strategy to diffuse religion and culture of the people in justifying the agenda and activities of the group. Secondary data and unstructured interviews was conducted to arrive at the need for a holistic approach to counter-terrorism and reforms in northeast Nigeria.

**Keywords:** Agenda shifting; Terrorism; Boko Haram; Nigeria

**1.0 INTRODUCTION**

Boko Haram activities in northeast Nigeria became violent after the killing of its progenitor, a popular Islamic cleric by security forces in Borno State. Following the demise of their charismatic leader, Boko Haram emerged as a terror organization with an agenda to establish a caliphate carved out of Nigeria, to be governed under strict adherence to religious creed. Boko Haram unleashed a terror campaign to grab communities out of the geographical area of northeast Nigeria in order to install a theocracy administered by sharia law. To achieve such objective, the terror organization adopted violent tactics by attacking government institutions, security personnel and every symbol of secular civilization within the country. Among the high profile targets attacked by Boko Haram were the bombing of Force

Headquarters of the Nigerian Police and the United Nations building in Abuja, Nigeria in 2011<sup>1</sup>. The Nigerian government made several efforts at counter terrorism to ensure peace, stability and normalcy. Some counter-terrorism measures by the government include the need to fix the systemic poverty, perennial climate challenges, socio-economic and political alienation of the people. However, security and military operations became the most laudable and fixated measures of counter-terrorism by the Nigerian government. This measure over time could not effectively arrest the motivation driving radicalization, recruitment and violence by Boko Haram.

Boko Haram was founded and significantly motivated by radical Islamism and such ideology has influenced the character and content of its activities in Nigeria. Despite unsuccessful attempts to establish a Sharia state (Caliphate) in the northeast through targeted violence, terrorism in the region continued unabated and metamorphosed into a very disturbing trend. Such trend hint of a shift from previously known targets to a transition into gender specific violence in order to propel its agenda. Apart from attacks on government and security institutions and consequent retaliation by the Nigerian armed forces, Boko Haram have inadvertently scaled down on its ambitious objective of capturing territories and establishing a Sharia state. Instead, the terror organization shifted its modus operandi and tactics to kidnapping young girls as a renewed strategy to boost the morale of its fighters, appeal to its non-combatant supporters, and attract potential recruits. Kidnapping girls as a tactics is to fulfil a socio-cultural lacuna prevalent in a community challenged by poverty, illiteracy and lack of opportunities. Several years into Boko Haram activities in the northeast, the group have abducted girls from schools and farms, sometimes from the streets and markets. These kidnapped girls have become a very strong incentive in the recruitment and motivation of young men into Boko Haram. Shifting its agenda to kidnappings over the years have indicated that terrorism in Nigeria has embraced a far reaching restyling with an unmistakable eye on expansionist ambition.<sup>2</sup>

Boko Haram kidnapped about 276 school girls at Chibok town of Borno state in 2014.<sup>3</sup> The kidnap of Chibok girls were not the first time girls were abducted from their communities. However, the Chibok abduction attracted the attention of the international community to an interface of gender based violence (GBV) as a justifiable strategy of terrorism in Nigeria. These kidnappings also exposed a condition in the motivation and recruitment of Boko Haram members amid already established factors, but which is appealing to religious and intra-cultural sensibilities of the region. Kidnapping of girls and distributing them as 'brides' to Boko Haram members has empowered a new wave of incentive that is sustaining attraction to the terror group. The argument will ensue that the Boko Haram inability to create a Sharia state in Nigeria over several attempts, due to sustained military actions against them, has made changing tactics to target vulnerable population its agenda. Agenda shifting by Boko Haram has impact in flourishing terrorism in the northeast for over a decade despite sustained counter-terrorism measures? Why is it an attractive strategy by Boko Haram members to kidnap girls? What is the relationship between the rising kidnap of girls and cultural practices of people in the northeast? Some scholars gave opinions that kidnap as a strategy by Boko

<sup>1</sup>BBC News Africa: Abuja Attacks-Car bomb hits UN building 27 August 2011 <https://www.bbc.com>

<sup>2</sup> Ahmed Salkida. Nigeria's Terror King, Shekau, Connects East, West and Centre in a puzzling Agenda. HumAngle, July 2020. [Humangle.ng](http://Humangle.ng)

<sup>3</sup> PM News: Rescue Remaining Chibok Girls-Group Remind Buhari. (2020/07/05) [Pmnewsnigeria.com](http://Pmnewsnigeria.com)

Haram is purely economic.<sup>4</sup> Also, other literatures have indicated political, environmental and religious reasons as drivers for the decade long terrorist campaign in the region. However, there is hardly any linkage to cultural practices as motivating terrorism in northeast Nigeria.

An interrogation on the intra-cultural angle in the role of puberty, especially among young men as motivating terrorism is given attention. This paper intend to fill the gap created by the Islamic civilization of the north and its influence on cultural practices, where boys and girls are expected to be married early upon reaching puberty. Puberty for marriage in the region is defined by religious exposure. Significantly, systemic poverty has prevented many young men from fulfilling such cultural cum religious obligation of marriage. The urge for procreation is a strong motivational asset that Boko Haram is using to lure and recruit members, by promising them 'brides' or 'wives'. This strategy is increasing the rate of abducting women in the northeast. Marrying kidnapped girls and converting them to Islam has become a tactics with Boko Haram members to evade dowry and fulfill a religious and cultural obligations. Hence, many have found in this tactics the incentive to join Boko Haram as a qualification to access 'brides' or 'wives' of which is justified under "Rushd", an injunction of the Qur'an that qualifies an individual to be of sound judgment and maturity to conduct one's own affairs<sup>5</sup>. The provision of early and 'forced marriages' has embolden Boko Haram members to increase the abduction of girls considered marriageable under Sharia law during attacks on communities. This could explain why abducting girls have become a growing strategy of Boko Haram since 2014. As will be revealed, some men joined Boko Haram as fighters or spies based on stories they heard about exploits their friends and neighbours had with women that they had kidnapped.

The article adopts a content analysis to reveal a shift in the original objective of Boko Haram, which has provided additional incentives to its member and potential recruits. Data is derived from reports, journals, policy briefs and reviews of terrorism in Nigeria. There is also the use of unstructured interviews granted by security operatives involved in counter-terrorism in the northeast, friends and relations of Boko Haram members and rescued victims of abduction. The number of girls rescued from captivity of Boko Haram indicate that kidnapping girls from schools was not just to undermine the girls quest for education, but to also generate a reward system where girls are handed over as wives to their 'soldiers' as a reward for bravery. This strategy has incentivised membership of Boko Haram and is being seen to motivate others who are looking forward to being married, but unable due to prevailing socioeconomic circumstances in the region. Boko Haram is therefore shifting agenda to exploit the import of marriage under Islamic culture as a tactics to sustain such bloody villainy in the now decade-old insurgency which has consumed about 30, 000 lives and scattered more than two million citizens into a cruel internal flight from their homes<sup>6</sup>.

## 2.0 AGENDA SHIFTING AND TERRORISM: A CONCEPTUALISATION

### 2.1 Agenda Shifting:

<sup>4</sup> John Campbell (2014). Boko Haram: Origins, Challenges and Responses. Norwegian Peacebuilding Resource Centre. (Policy Brief)

<sup>5</sup> Islamic Relief Worldwide (2018). An Islamic Human Rights Perspective on Early and Forced Marriages. Protecting the sanctity of marriage. P4 <http://www.islamic-relief.org>

<sup>6</sup> Ahmed Salkida 2020. Op cit

Agenda shifting is a concept receiving growing interest on contemporary discourse in social science. This concept has inspired understanding in evaluating individual, group or community interactions against a plethora of choices available in such interaction. Agenda shifting is thus a phenomenon that occurs in any social environment where individual, group or institution have set goals but are not bound by any particular method to achieving the goals. The process necessary in agenda shifting is dependent on prospects or uncertainty. David Gold (2005) encapsulates agenda shifting as 'starting out with one set of objectives that defines an organisation but then shifting over time to take on another set of roles. Agenda shifting presupposes organisations that may originally have a political objective shift their activities towards wealth accumulation in the illegal economy'.<sup>7</sup> Understanding the concept of agenda shifting is greatly influenced by the presence of incentives (prospects) or constraints (uncertainty). These two factors strongly determine the extent of interaction towards achieving an agenda, because it provides the opportunity to rethink options based on either of the two. In some cases however, agenda shifting may be spontaneous but it is eventually influenced by a relation between prospect and uncertainty, either deliberately or by default. Regardless of how it appears, agenda shifting to any group or organisation is subject to the kind of incentive or constraints the agenda offers.

Goals and objectives of a group or organisation may change or shift to accommodate new ideas or prevailing interests which the original agenda may not have envisioned. This concept is particularly relevant to organization like Boko Haram because according to Andrew Jordan and John Greenway (2002), they asserted that social issues with a solid ideological underpinning are occasionally subject to marked and whole sale shifts<sup>8</sup>. Nevertheless, the initiation of agenda shifting in many cases is to further accentuate the original position of a given political or social idea. This is especially potent when the benefits of the original goal could only be achieved if new factors are inculcated or new players allowed to participate. In the case of Boko Haram, agenda shifting is valid if the group intends to stay relevant, attract necessary attention and be able to provide concrete benefits to its members and anyone who plans to join the organization.

Agenda shifting is therefore a social construct that ensures adaptability under uncertainty in order to change the direction previously taken towards increase in prospects. It reasserts new thinking or ambition in the actions of individual or group to meet targets, increase the advantage of such target or reduce the risks involved. Agenda shifting occurs when new prospects or incentives emerge between the time dedicated to an agenda, and the means to achieving it. It usually exposes the need for transition or alteration in an already established strategy. It often initiates a need that will require adoption of new strategies to achieve an outcome. New opportunities and challenges have emerged in the dynamics of terrorism in northeast Nigeria that call for a rethink in the strategy already being used to counter the menace. The evolution and disintegration of BH into splinter groups in Nigeria and the emergence of girl abductions following attacks has exposed a shift in agenda. Such shift adopts the use of religious and socio-cultural beliefs as incentives for support, recruitment

---

<sup>7</sup> David Gold (2005). Economics of Terrorism and the Cost of Countering Terrorism. International Affairs Working Paper. New School University. NY

<sup>8</sup> Andrew Jordan and John Greenway, (2002). Shifting Agendas: Changing Regulatory Structures and the 'New' Politics of Environmental Pollution. British Coastal Water Policy 1955-1995 <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9299.00131>

and sustainability strategy of Boko Haram. This particular incentive by Boko Haram has however open a new vista to GBV in the risk analysis of terrorism in Nigeria.

## 2.2 Terrorism:

Terrorism has been open to different interpretations for many decades. Attempts to define the concept has not been successful in getting a universal acceptance. It is however considered as 'a method of coercion that utilizes or threatens to utilize violence in order to spread fear and thereby attain political and ideological goals'<sup>9</sup>. Terrorism can originate from state and non-state actors to pursue a predetermined goal through activities that may be unconventional, but seen as necessary by those involved. In contemporary perspectives and assumptions it is agreed that terrorism are unjustifiable, whatever the considerations of a political, philosophical, ideological, racial, ethnic, religious or other nature that may be invoked to justify them<sup>10</sup>. It is also often seen as a style of war, used to implement a strategy, but is not a strategy in and of itself<sup>11</sup>. It involves violence or the threat to use violence with the aim to create fear and instability in any society. Due to its construct, terrorism is therefore a strategy or tactics that can be used by insurgents, rebels, bandits, revolutionaries and even criminals to achieve their mission especially when viewed from the *raison d'être* of their actions. Acts of violence categorized as terrorism may include but not limited to arson, suicide bombings, mass shooting, kidnapping, beheading of victims, bio/cyber-attacks, to mention but a few.

Terrorism utilizes a variety of non-conventional schemes by mostly non-state actors in this instance, to mount pressure on third parties like government to change their policy or position<sup>12</sup>. A terrorist is therefore anyone or group of people who engage in the strategy or tactics mentioned above, to cause fear and attract the attention of the public to a certain issue. Terrorist activities are perpetrated by people who often justify their actions as necessary for change or to achieve a goal. Some even see themselves as vanguard of social justice which had been denied by a government or society, of which violence is the only way to correct the anomaly. Ominously, Boko Haram as a terrorist group have unleashed terror on communities in Nigeria for more than a decade. The sustained assault on innocent citizens and security agencies by the group has been justified as a divine injunction. In recent years thus, the terror group have adopted tactics of kidnapping as part of its strategy to abduct girls, convert them to Islam or have them married. It is therefore instructive to evaluate Boko Haram tactics as motivated by its call for radical Islamism.

## 3.0 THE 'RELIGIOUS' WAVE THEORY OF TERRORISM

The religious wave theory is a component of what is known as the wave theory. Adoption of the wave theory is to broaden understanding of the development, stimulus and motivation of terrorism. The wave theory provided a compelling argument in perception of dynamics and

---

<sup>9</sup> United Nations office of Drugs and Crime (2018). Introduction to international Terrorism. Education for Justice. University Module Series. Vienna. P1 <https://www.unodc.org>

<sup>10</sup> United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (2018). Human Rights, Terrorism and Counter Terrorism. Fact Sheets 32. Geneva. P6 <https://refworld.org>

<sup>11</sup> Jeffery Kaplan (2016). Terrorism and Political Violence: A Strained Criticism of Wave Theory. P229 <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/319287873>

<sup>12</sup> United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime (2018) Op cit. p2



transformation of terrorist acts from historical to modern times. David Rapoport (2015)<sup>13</sup> publication on the 'four waves of terrorism' has been influential in the emergence and development of the framework of wave theory. It is the assertion of this theory, that terrorism developed in stages and flourished in a form of a cyclical movement where as one cycle flow decline, it is taken over by another cycle which makes the movement appear like the rise and fall of a tidal wave. David Rapoport described and categorized the four waves of terrorism as the 'anarchist wave', the 'anti-colonial wave', 'nationalist wave' and the 'religious wave'. Each of these waves emerged from a distinct historical environment that would later influence the growth and activities of terrorism, and motivate the evolution and development of terror groups in history.

This article however espouse the 'religious wave' aspect of the wave theory to trigger understanding of the place and influence of religion in understanding contemporary terrorism. Religious influence on terrorism dates back to ancient times. However, understanding of religious waves theory on terrorism as postulated by David Rapoport (2015), Bruce Hoffman (2006)<sup>14</sup> and Chaingi Aondona (2019)<sup>15</sup>, gives insight on development of contemporary terrorism. Chaingi Aondona (2019) in reviewing the wave theory, described religious terrorism to have began in 1979 after the Iranian Revolution in which Islamic fundamentalism successfully overthrew the government of Mohammed Reza Shah. The revolution was led by a religious leader, Ayatola Rubolla Khomeini, which resulted in the replacement of Sha's secular monarchy with the Islamic Republic of Iran<sup>16</sup>. The success of the Iranian revolution which instituted a sovereign state run by Islamic theology, provided a strong example of what is achievable through advancing religious ideology. The 'religious wave' therefore influenced the emergence of terror groups like Boko Haram, Al Qaida, Islamic State in Syria and Levant (ISIL) and justified actions, approach and tactics of these terrorist organisations. The religious wave gave birth to the ideological resistance to secular governance in place of theocracy by several state and non-state actors. The ideology on contemporary terrorism in Nigeria, USA, the Sahel or the Philippines among others, have maintained a religious outlook and undertone. Even though the religious wave is also influenced by other factors that are mutually reinforcing, its methods and operations keep changing<sup>17</sup>, with religious narrative and significance.

Religious wave theory argued the place of religion in promoting resistance to political, social, economic and cultural exclusion or perceived injustice. This is particularly potent where secular governments and systems are seen by the people to oppose divine injunction, producing consequences of blatant immorality and corruption, poverty, inequality and vanities of the secular state. Religious wave noted that a state or group of non-state actors can use religion as justification to resist, repair or serve as a better alternative for a pious governance based on religious ideology. Three of the four wave theory were greatly influenced by ideology and most of its proponent were known to be the educated mass of the

<sup>13</sup> David Rapoport (2015). It is Waves, not Strains. University of California.

<https://www.researchgate.net/publication/291016035>

<sup>14</sup> Bruce Hoffman (2006). Inside Terrorism. Revised and Expanded Edition. Colombia University Press. P16

<sup>15</sup> Chiangi Aondona (2029). A theoretical Conception of Modern Terrorism: David Rapoport's Four Waves Theory. P1 <https://papers.ssrn.com>

<sup>16</sup> Ibid

<sup>17</sup> ibid

society. However, the religious wave theory have been known to be influenced by theological thinking that exist in books of religious teachings that is accessible to all levels and class of society. Terrorism in this guise has become a weapon of opposition, currently synonymous with religious fundamentalism because such has been used previously, with some degree of success to resist, influence or direct attention towards a particular social issue or change.

The religious wave theory of terrorism has been criticised by many scholars. Jeffrey Kaplan (2016) argued that the wave theory is a blanket generalization of terrorism from a cultural historian eye<sup>18</sup>. In particular, situating the Iranian revolution as the beginning of the religious wave could undermine certain influences that foster the understanding of religious wave of terrorism like the 1929 formation of the Iqwan or 'Muslim Brotherhood', the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the 1967 Six Day War<sup>19</sup>, to mention but a few. However, the religious wave in particular and the four wave theory in general, provide scholars, students and observers of contemporary terrorism with a good insight into knowledge, understanding and classification of the origin, strategy, and fundamental drivers of terrorism.

#### 4.0 AGENDA SHIFTING AND MOTIVATION FOR TERRORISM IN NIGERIA

The emergence of Boko Haram and its recent activities and tactics have revealed transition from the group already established modus operandi. The agenda to establish a sharia state out of the northeast states of Borno and Yobe in particular, has motivated a drastic approach from the terror group. Previously, Boko Haram had resolved to conquer northeast Nigeria through series of bombings, mass shooting, armed confrontation with security agencies and attacks on places of worship especially churches. The audacious terror campaign by Boko Haram captured some communities and territories came under their control for a short period. The Nigerian government through its armed forces launched a counter-insurgency operation against the terror group which they eventually pushed back and reclaim previously captured communities. The counter-terrorism effort became obvious to Boko Haram that the task of capturing communities and holding such communities perpetually under its control will be hindered. Boko Haram consequently shifted its goal of capturing communities and making them Sharia enclaves, to kidnapping girls and converting them to Islam through force marriage and other gender specific violence.

In the twilight of a coordinated counter terrorism measures by the Nigerian government, Boko Haram shifted its strategy to mass abduction of girls in the region. Kidnappings started becoming common on a small scale in farms and rural communities during Boko Haram attacks, until in April 2014 about 276 girls were abducted from their school in Chibok town of Borno State<sup>20</sup>. In June 2020, it was also reported that 10 girls between 13 and 20 years were abducted in Zada Shettimari Dawari community in Borno State<sup>21</sup>. It became disturbing tactics by the terror group as they weaponized kidnapping to discourage young people and girls in particular from seeking education. The kidnap strategy also intends to provide an incentive to members of Boko Haram by using girls abducted during their campaign as

<sup>18</sup> Jeffrey Kaplan (2016). Terrorism and Political Violence: Op cit p228-230

<sup>19</sup> ibid

<sup>20</sup> Fidelis Mbah (2019). Nigeria's Chibok Schoolgirls: Five years on, 122 still missing. Aljazeera (14 April 2019) Aljazeera.com

<sup>21</sup> Murtala Abdullahi (2020). Another Terrifying Kidnapping of Women and Girls by Boko Haram. (30 June 2020) HumAngle humangle.ng

'trophy brides' to its combatants. The shift in agenda became necessary not only to discourage western education, but to satisfy a growing need for marriage to young men who support their course. It is assumed by Boko Haram that western education has affected normal ethno-religious and cultural practices of early marriage in the region. This strategy according to several people interviewed has given Boko Haram influence in recruitment and support base from communities.

It is in this guise that Boko Haram again kidnapped 110 school girls between the ages of 11 to 19 years from their school in Dapchi town of Yobe state in 2018<sup>22</sup>. The large scale abduction of these girls created a lot of panic, uncertainty and reflects a gender dimension to terrorist violence in northeast Nigeria. According to a 2018 UNICEF West and Central Africa report, more than 1000 children in north-eastern Nigeria are abducted by Boko Haram since 2013<sup>23</sup>. Majority of those kidnapped are young teenage girls. Some scholars have argued that kidnapping has become a major source of revenue and is widespread<sup>24</sup> in Nigeria. As kidnapping of girls becomes a popular tactics of Boko Haram, it is apparent that the trend is not for ransom alone as John Campbell (2014) and others may allude. Even though the abduction of girls, humanitarian workers and security personnel gave the terror group leverage in ransom, negotiations and prisoner swap, there is a strong indication of other incentive to such action. The frequency in the zest to abduct girls and the narrative by the leadership of Boko Haram on the fate of girls kidnapped, shows a shift in objective that has played into a cultural cum religious dynamics of the people of Borno and Yobe in particular. In some communities of Borno, Northeast Nigeria, early marriage is a tradition and not seen as a human rights violation<sup>25</sup>. In the Kanuri custom for instance, young men are expected to be married from the age of 17 years, but many have seen such need of a spousal obligation thwarted by education and other external influences. Therefore, modernization, expensive dowry practices, poverty, unemployment and destitution has made meeting such ethno-religious and cultural obligation cumbersome.

Boko Haram through kidnapping and abduction of girls have built an incentive and have provided young men with access to young girls as 'bride' for marriage and satisfying cultural obligations. This incentive has become influential in the increase of girls abduction in the region. It has also serve as a recruiting motivation for young men in northeast communities to join Boko Haram. Some people interviewed confirm this motivation as potent towards radicalization and recruitment. Thus, kidnapping provided an incentive to the escalation of terrorist activities in Nigeria. The exact number of young females married to Boko Haram members will be difficult to ascertain. There are hundredth of girls married and living with Boko Haram commanders, members and birthing children. Almost all of these females were abducted at different times and locations but end up in forced marriages, instituted by their captors. Even some that have been rescued have indicated willingness to go back to their

---

<sup>22</sup> Chika Oduah (2018). Nigeria Family: Voice recording is of last kidnapped Dapchi girl. VOA (28 August 2018) voanews.com

<sup>23</sup> United Nations Children Education Fund (2018). West and Central Africa Regional Office. Regional Office Annual Report 2018 <https://www.unicef.org>

<sup>24</sup> John Campbell (2014). Boko Haram: Origins, Challenges and Responses. Op cit

<sup>25</sup> Aisha Talba (2020). Terrorism: Female IDPs in Borno Recount Tales of rape, Child Loss and Abuse. HumAngle (3 July 2020) humangle.ng



'husbands'<sup>26</sup>. Several women rescued from captivity have granted interviews about how they were captured, used as sex slaves and eventually married off to members of the terrorist organization, whose numbers continue to increase.

On several occasions Abubakar Shekau, a factional leader of Boko Haram has always public pronouncements in his videos that girls abducted by his men will be converted to Islam and married off. These video messaging is not only directed to the government authorities and the public to understand the gravity of the resolve of Boko Haram. It is also a shrouded message and advertisement directed to potential recruits who want to join the terror organization that they have everything to gain within the confines of religious and cultural considerations. The overall objective of a Sharia state has been diffused with cultural norms to give the terror group the edge to explore new incentives in the gaps created in communities. These incentives has generated interest in some young men to join Boko Haram, whom may not have enlisted if the terror group only insisted on its religious agenda of a caliphate. It is therefore pertinent to understand that terrorist agenda is in a continued state of transition. Part of the shift in the tactics of Boko Haram is resonating with its members and potential recruits, as well as sustaining the insecurity in the region.

## 5.0 CONCLUSION

There is an intra-cultural undertone to the approach of terrorism by Boko Haram in Nigeria. The terror organization is exploiting socio-cultural gaps in communities to reassert its version of radical Islamism. The tactics of kidnapping girls have become valuable to the overall agenda of imposing Sharia enclaves in northeast Nigeria. Abduction of girls and converting to Islam, and eventually marrying them off to members of the terror organization, exposes weaknesses created by cultural needs and inequality crisis in the region. Young men who are unable to get married due to inability to meet expensive dowry demand, restriction on courtship and lack of opportunities in general, avail themselves to the incentive provided by Boko Haram. This incentive is partly to generate interest in potential recruitment of members, who may not be interested in establishing a Sharia state, but looking to marry within the strenuous and expensive dowry process. Ultimately, the tactics is also to discourage girls from pursuing western education by making them vulnerable to GBV.

Boko Haram understood that its continued existence will depend on shifting the approach, interest and style of its strategy to remain relevant. Shifting agenda by Boko Haram is interwoven with socio-economic factors, cultural and development circumstances of the region. Thus, in the face of reduction of its influence over territorial control in Nigeria, it introduced the abduction of girls as incentive to boost the morale of its members, to indirectly achieve a Sharia by other means, and appeal to a large number of young men who are distressed by cultural alienation and sense of lack. The cultural fusion by Boko Haram to meet the need of marriage in communities has great influence on the young men population. Many who granted interviews indicated that they were non-combatant members of the terror group, and were recruited with prospects for marriage. Others disclosed that their membership was motivated by the decentralized nature of violent attacks by Boko Haram which accorded opportunity to explore rape and abduct girls for habitation. This strategy has

---

<sup>26</sup> Adaobi Tricia Nwaubani (2020). The Women rescued from Boko Haram who are Returning to their Captors (20 December, 2020) New Yorker.com

made violent attacks increasingly exciting for Boko Haram members while providing more incentives for recruitment, radicalization, abduction and violence currently experienced in Nigeria.

Reforming cultural practices to promote human rights and quality of life is important in counter-terrorism measures. Cultural practices of early marriage of girls who are barely teenagers should be discouraged, as well as expensive dowry practices. Boko Haram is exploiting and shall continue to use kidnapping as justification for promoting forced marriages and human rights abuses in the excuse of religious and cultural norms. Some people interviewed in the northeast acknowledged that their friends or family members who joined Boko Haram were not attracted to radical Islamism. Cultural pressure and the desire to acquire a 'bride' through bravery seem more achievable to a young man, than the possibility to be married through the payment of dowry. Boko Haram therefore provides the option for young men in the region to get married by providing a constant supply of girls, so long as the men join the terror organization.