

## **THE ROLE OF MEDIA IN EXPOSING VIOLATION OF CHILD'S RIGHTS AND GENDER ABUSE BY BOKO HARAM TERRORISTS IN NIGERIA**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This paper employs journalism analytical approaches to highlight issues related to child and gender abuse perpetrated by Boko Haram terrorists in north-east of Nigeria with the aim of setting an agenda for the adoption of systematic (in addition to the traditional) developmental approaches toward enhancing children and women protection and ending the 10-year-old insurgency which has so far claimed more than 30,000 lives, forced more than 1.7 million people out of their homes and destroyed properties worth billions of Dollars that have given rise to one of the largest humanitarian crises in the world. The group's notoriety came to limelight after a surprising abduction of nearly 300 schoolgirls in the Borno State town of Chibok, an incident that gave rise to the global #BringBackOurGirls campaign. Role of the media in the protection of children and women as well as counter-terrorism were critically discussed and policy recommendations offered.

**Keywords:** Boko Haram conflict; child exploitation; child and gender abuse; human rights violation; investigative journalism, kidnapping, religious extremism, suicide bomb attack, terrorism, violent conflicts

### **INTRODUCTION**

In recent years, there have been regular reports that children are aimed and imperilled to attacks and ruthless hostility. As these attacks continue, the world should not overlook it; such brutality should not be allowed to become what Nigeria's UNICEF Director of Emergency Programmes Manuel Fontaine calls "the new normal" (n.p.). The world, especially the United Nations and critical stakeholders should not fold their arms and watch-by while such gruesome acts are being perpetrated against children and women wherever they maybe in the world. All rivals to war and conflict should stand by their onuses under universal law to instantaneously stop all forms of violation against children and women and the destruction of properties and civilian infrastructure, including hospitals, schools and markets. Nations with power over rivals to war and conflict should employ their power to safeguard children and women (Pearson, 2018 May).

Since 2009, when it began insurgency, Boko Haram has wanted to create a caliphate or an 'Islamic state' in northern Nigeria, particularly in the country's north-east as well as parts of Cameroon, Chad and Niger republics. *The Independent* (London) reports that recent statistics have shown that more than two million people have been forced from their homes following the group's gaining and losing territory across the region. Even though Boko Haram has once controlled an area of land which was approximated to the size of Belgium, a formidable counterinsurgency

campaign by Nigerian military in 2015 forced the terrorists to retreat to camps in rural areas and the Sambisa Forest. In the aftermaths of the recapturing of the territory by the Nigerian forces, the group increased its guerrilla war tactics and suicide bombing aimed to terrorise civilians and cause more havoc in the society (Ibrahim, Gujbawu, & Abba-Aji, 2019a; *The Independent*, 2017).

Boko Haram's activities are continuing with no predictable end to them; at least not so soon as signalled by its continual suicide bombing and attacks on military camps and humanitarian aid workers. Some of the most devastating incidents in 2018 include the kidnapping of 110 Dapchi schoolgirls, the attack on Ran and a suicide bomb attack which occurred on Friday, 2 March 2018 in Yobe State town of Buni Yadi are clear signals of the activeness of the extremist group though it has considerably been weakened over the past couple of years. *Channels Tv* reported that two Boko Haram teenage, female suicide bombers evaded the town; one blew herself in very early hours of Friday morning just prior to dawn prayer, when Muslim worshippers were yet to arrive at the mosque, at Fulatari community in the town killing self and injuring one person. The other suicide bomber fled for fear of being apprehended. This incident which was confirmed by the military is the first of its kind in the town since the return of residents on 16 April 2016 after the insurgents took over the control of the town for over three years. The attack came barely two weeks after the Dapchi schoolgirls abduction by the outlawed group (*Channels Tv*, 2018a).

It cannot be an over statement in wars and conflicts across the globe that children are targeted as frontline victims, killed, maimed, used as hostages and recruits, raped, subjected to coerced marriage, kidnapped as well as enslaved. These atrocities continue to be perpetrated as normal manoeuvres in wars and conflicts in many parts of the world, e.g., Nigeria, Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Myanmar and South Sudan. Often, children kidnapped by terrorist undergo gory exploitation; however, when they are released by security forces after being held captive, they experience added abuse. Millions of poor, innocent children around the world falling prey are to these wars and conflicts. They suffer from shock, starvation and diseases because essential public services such as access to health care, foodstuff, water and sanitation are wickedly deprived of or destroyed in the conflict (UNICEF, 2017, 2016a & b). *Vanguard News* (2018) cited UNICEF reported that not less than 1000 children have been abducted by Boko Haram terrorists since 2013; and that with continual suicide attacks continuing well towards the close of 2018, Boko Haram terrorists have coerced more than 151 children (mostly girls) to carry out suicide bomb attacks in the north-east of Nigeria, including Cameroon. This figure is about five times the number in 2016.

However, as the adage goes, every cloud has a silver lining, as many as about 200 teenagers aged seven to 18 years old (eight girls and 175 boys) previously held captive by Boko Haram terrorists have been rescued by the Nigerian Army and handed over to the United Nations Populations Fund (UNFPA) and UNICEF Nigeria in the Boko Haram-embattled city of Maiduguri. This paper aims to provide a review of literature on the role of journalism and media in exposing child and gender abuse by Boko Haram terrorists in Nigeria with a view to setting an agenda for stakeholders to contain the menace for peace and development.

## **CHILD AND GENDER ABUSE IN THE BOKO HARAM CONFLICT**

### *A Statistical and Chronological Analysis*

The continued victimisation of young girls and boys as suicide bomb attackers skyrocketed after the group understood what *CNN* underscores, “the potency that gender and youth offer in raising its global profile” (n.p.) after the 14 April 2014 kidnapping of the Chibok schoolgirls, an incident that prompted the ‘Bring Back Our Girls’ campaign globally. As of December 2017, 60% of the 135 children were abused as suicide bomb attackers, nearly five times as many as the number of children abused as suicide bomb attackers in 2016, which is quite staggering. The worst of it is that, so far, the youngest children abuse as suicide bombers were identified as seven years old (*Financial*, 2017). Boko Haram deployed a seven-year-old girl who detonated the explosives strapped around her killing five and injuring 19 persons in a market in Yobe State town of Potiskum, in northeast Nigeria on 22 February 2015. Also, the group deployed three seven-year-old girls to carry out two separate (one paired and one solo) suicide attacks. On December 9, 2016, a pair of seven-year-old girls carried out suicide bomb attacks at a market in Maiduguri city, in Borno State, Nigeria killing one and injuring 17 (*CNN*, 2017).

According to *CNN* (2017) the terrorists have exploited many teenage girls four times more than they have abused teenage boys: 42 teenage girls and 23 little girls (aged about 12 years old or younger), compared to 11 teenage and five little boys. Some recent statistics have shown a huge rise from 2016. Out of 19 cases where children were abused as suicide bombers in the northeast of Nigeria and neighbouring countries of Niger, Cameroon and Chad, 15 were girls and four were boys according to UNICEF (2017, 2016). One of the most horrible secrets of the terrorists was revealed by *Vanguard* newspaper (Nigeria) which reported that teenagers who were deployed on suicide missions were paid a token of money as little as N200 (or 65 Cents) to buy themselves food before carrying out the attacks, with additional promise that they will go directly to heaven (paradise) thereupon, after they are blown up (*Vanguard News*, 2017).

A 14-yearl old girl (see Figure 1), whose name was Maimuna was one of the girls who Boko Haram tried to exploit and use as a suicide bomber.

Figure 1: Gruesome child and gender abuse as girls, boys and women are deployed as suicide bombers by Boko Haram



She narrated some of her ordeals to the soldiers that saved her life, saying that she didn't want to be like other many girls who used themselves to blow themselves and many innocent people up. She said that the terrorists tried to lie to her by telling her that as soon as she pressed the buttons of the explosive detonator, the 'bombs' strapped around her waist would fly off her body and she would be safe. But she knew they were starkly lying. According to her, she realised that they were lying as soon as they began to plait her hair into the traditional burial style. Maimuna further said that after the terrorist dropped her off on the road, she told some passers-by about her situation and soon soldiers rushed and took off the explosives (*Knights Chronicle*, 2017; *Premium Times Nigeria*, 2018).

Since 2012, more than 2,000 women and girls have been abducted and abused by Boko Haram. Unfortunately, majority of the kidnappings and abductions went unreported. Apart from the infamous kidnapping of the Chibok and lately Dapchi schoolgirls, occasional abduction or missing of Nigerian soldiers at the war front, the abduction of some persons believed to be members of the Nigeria Police and that of the University of Maiduguri lecturers in mid-2017, most other cases of kidnapping have not been made known to the world. Probably because a clear majority of abductions occur in villages and countryside, that may have been one of the main reasons stories of kidnapping and abduction get obscured from the media (Ibrahim et al., 2019; UNICEF, 2017, 2016a).

## **FACTORS DRIVING CHILD AND GENDER ABUSE BY TERRORIST GROUPS**

### ***Risk Factors of Children's Vulnerability During Violent Conflicts***

When the issue of child bombers is discussed, it is naturally awe-inspiring and chill-feelings giving. As mysterious as the logic that lies behind the terrorists' choice of children as suicide bombers may seem, at the heart of it is the appearance of children and teenage suicide bombers that has proven to inspire profound shock and fear (GTI, 2016, 2015; UNICEF, 2016b). Terrorist forces exploit children to gain virtually the same suicide attack tactical advantages as women. In fact, in some cultures, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa children are more liable to be manipulated than women are. Researchers and scholars like Sawicki (2016) and Warner and Matfess (2017) have outlined some of the key reasons child suicide bombers are preferable to terrorists:

1. Children often are not suspected to be carrying explosives and can approach a target more easily than a man can (at least it succeeded when the tactic was first deployed, if no longer does).
2. Because of their small physical size and puerile mental development, children are characteristically easier to be coerced into suicide terrorism than their adult counterparts, who comparatively possess limited support over their actions.
3. Children's status is naturally inferior, and there is considerable temptation for them to try to raise it.
4. Children's perception of death is minimal, and younger children can be more vulnerable to brainwashing and radicalisation if there is no counter-narrative from parents and other adults.
5. Under the Geneva Accords children are normatively and legally presumed to be innocent and should not be involved in any act of war or fighting and war. Children exploitation by Boko Haram terrorists is hypothetically perceivable as a gesture to civil society organisations to show both the significance of determination and impending cruelty of the terrorists.
6. Most bluntly, kids possess minimal control over their actions.
7. Children are easy to kidnap.
8. Boko Haram exploits children and women suicide bombers having realised the influence which gender and youthfulness proffer in highlighting its world-wide notoriety after the mass schoolgirls kidnapping in Chibok town.
9. By deploying children to carry out suicide attacks, Boko Haram also saves its men gun-fighters for facing troops in physical combat or guerrilla-style attacks.
10. Kids are at best suitable for deployment in suicide bombing missions because they provide a source of labour that is usually free of charge.
11. Some children, especially teenagers may be willing jihadists, especially if brainwashed.

The findings of some inquiries noted that Boko Haram views children as ideal decoys for such gruesome acts due to their physical characteristics, relative insignificance in human ambience, acknowledged blamelessness and harmlessness. Moreover, Boko Haram also cherishes children's difficulty to be detected, creep through concealed arms, e.g., via security check points

unsuspiciously, and their effectiveness at penetrating other secure places to reach targets. These tactics have worked perfectly for the group at least the first times they were used. In fact, sometimes such children suicide bombers are described as ‘little carts,’ because they are least likely suspects. Additionally, kids are best for exploitation as suicide bomb attackers because they provide support as a substitute for men fighters, who are often not easy to recruit as it is much easier to kidnap children (Dodwell, Milton, & Rassler, 2016). Though verifiable data remain sketchy yet, available records indicate that most of the children and teenagers that were unfortunately abused and exploited as suicide bombers by Boko Haram are kidnapped (Horgan, Bloom, Daymon, Kaczkowski, & Tiflati, 2017 May).

### ***Feminisation of Conflicts***

Exploiting women as suicide bombers offers extremists significant advantages, namely (i) media attention is about four times greater for attacks by women than by men (at least, this is quite evident in the Boko Haram insurgency); (ii) because of their billowy garments (locally known as hijab), women can avoid detection more easily and often are searched less stringently; and (iii) women are better at gaining access to targets. In fact, some extremist organisations consider women more expendable than men, and the use of social pressures, especially the disgrace of rape, may make women more easily manipulated (Sawicki 2016 July-August; Speckhard & Ahkmedova, 2006). This discourse leads us into the lane of analysis on the factors driving the exploitation, abuse and use of women and girls as suicide bomb machines by terrorist groups.

There have been regular reports that children are targeted and exposed to attacks and ruthless violence. A recent report indicates that from June 2014 to the end of February 2018 Boko Haram terrorists violated the rights of not less than 469 girls as suicide bombers in 240 incidents killing about 1,259 people (excluding the bombers) and injuring not less than 2,967 others. Most (179, 75%) of those incidents were perpetrated in Nigeria. However, 48 incidents (20%) occurred in the neighboring Cameroon’s region of Far-North while six (2%) and seven (3%) incidents occurred in Chad and Niger republics respectively. Moreover, a great number (133, 55%) of the attacks in Nigeria occurred in Borno State (Pearson, 2018 May).

Five months after Pearson’s (2018 May) report, not less than 17 suicide bomb attacks were carried out by the terrorists with about 12 of the incidents carried out by girls. Hence, over all, not less than 488 girls and young women were abused by the group as suicide bombers, with not less than five attacks perpetrated by young boys. Scores of people were killed, with the highest figure of death toll in some of the most recent incidents coming from the twin suicide attacks carried out by two adolescent boys in a market in the Adamawa town of Mubi on May 1, 2018 killing at least 86 and injuring 58 others. In November of the previous year, another attack had killed 50 persons in the same market (*Aljazeera*, 2018 May).

In what seems to be one of the most emotional circumstances in recent months, the media reported live the audio (voice) of the only Dapchi schoolgirl still in captivity of Boko Haram, Leah Sharibu, pleading the Nigerian Government to rescue her from her abductors. Miss Sharibu is one of the 111 schoolgirls abducted by Boko Haram from the dormitories of Government Girls Science Technical College (GGSTC) in the northern Yobe State town of Dapchi on February 19, 2018. Till the time of this writing she is being detained by the terrorists for refusing to denounce her Christian faith after releasing 110 others following a marathon negotiation deal with the Nigerian Federal

Government in collaboration with Swiss Government and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) (*TheCable*, 2018).

Leah spoke in Hausa language in a 35-second audio released by Boko Haram and exclusively published online by *TheCable*. This is the English translation of the poor girl's emotional plea:

*I am Leah Sharibu, the girl that was abducted in GGSS Dapchi. I am calling on the Government and people of goodwill to intervene to get me out of my current situation. I also plead to the members of the public to help my mother, my father, my younger brother and relatives. Kindly help me out of my predicament. I am begging you to treat me with compassion. I am calling on the Government, particularly, the President to pity me and get me out of this serious situation. Thank you. (Online)*

The global champion of female suicide terrorism, Boko Haram (*ThisDay*, 2017) (see Figure 2) only began the employment of women and girls as suicide bomb attackers in 2014, three years after its first suicide bombing (Warner & Matfess, 2017 August). However, two reasons stand out: (i) the group adopted the use of female suicide terrorism deliberately as a clear divergence from the traditional gender roles stipulated by old-school Islamic theology; and (ii) because the use of women and girl suicide bombers has turned out capable of offering perceived strategic motivations over other available alternatives (Bloom & Matfess, 2016; Warner & Matfess, 2017 August).

### ***Child Abuse during Conflicts versus Child's Rights***

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989, Article 1) defined a child as every human being below the age of 18 years, unless under the law applicable to the child, adulthood is attained earlier. Similarly, the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), now African Union (AU) Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child 1999 defined a child as every human being below the age of 18 years (*BBC News*, 2015).

Figure 2: Boko Haram terrorists deployed three girls on suicide bomb missions but luckily, they survived and told their stories of horror experience in the hands of Boko Haram



The Nigerian Child Rights Act of 2003 also explicitly defines a child as any human being under the age of 18 years (see Figure 3). This definition is the same with those of the UN Convention and OAU/AU Charter because Nigeria is signatory to the above-mentioned international instruments. However, six decades earlier, the Children and Young Persons Law of 1943, Article 2 (enacted originally in 1943, and extended to the Northern region in of the country 1958) defines a child any human being under the age of 14 years. Given that Nigeria is a federated nation, it should be noted that in states that have not yet adopted the Federal Childs' Rights Act of 2003, the child legislation applies (Agbu & Agu, 2016).

Because of the rampant abuse of the rights of children and gender violation in conflict zones, children are targeted and exposed to attacks and brutal violence in their homes, schools and playgrounds. For example, in north-east Nigeria and Cameroon, Boko Haram fighters have coerced at least 151 children to carry out suicide bombings in 2017 and about 30 in the previous year, while in the Middle East especially in Syria and Iraq, children are reported to have been used as hostages and lived in agonising violence (Matfess, 2017; *ThisDay*, 2017).

The terrorist' employment of kids in suicide terrorism is enmeshed in many ethical issues. The international community has expressed concern about the use of children in conflict of whatever type. Children involved in conflict may lose possibility of normal childhood, children involved in conflict often lose both the physical and existential agency. "Every child has the right to freedom from all forms of violence." This principle is provided for in the in the convention on the Rights of the Child of 2003. In fact, this principle is far important than a mere common sense and basic morality, it is an international legal obligation and the world's most widely ratified human rights treaty (Amnesty International, 2015 April; UN, 2015).



Figure 3: Nigerian children as victims of conflict. Since 2009, the Boko Haram conflict has bereaved about 15,000 children of their parents



Furthermore, the United Nation 2007 Paris Principles on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict clearly stipulates that the employment of kids below 15 years of age in war and conflict is considered as a war crime by the International Criminal Court (ICC) (UN, 2015). Due to the notoriety of Boko Haram terrorists (see Figure 4) in the employment of children suicide attackers, a call was made by Amnesty International (AI) for the group to be charged for war crimes. It should be noted that children are naturally innocent and adorable. In the absence of threats of violence and terrorism, children can develop their talents and skills to full potentials. Hence, any act that tries to strip them of the golden rights bestowed on them by God and society by any individual or group is classified as violation of child's rights and child abuse, which are convictable crimes internationally (Amnesty International, 2015 April; UN, 2015).

UNICEF (2017, 2016a & b) statistics indicated that one-fifths of Boko Haram suicide bombers are children, most (three-quarters) of whom were identified as female bombers. Surely, Boko Haram fighters' unusual use of female children in its campaign indicates what Warner and Matfess (2017 August) describe as a dual marriage of innovations, which involves the use of both women and children to form a colossally new tactic for lethality. Therefore, based on available data, girls are much more likely to be employed as suicide attackers than boys at an approximate ratio of 4:1. In addition, 42 out of the 81 child suicide bomb attackers whose gender was identified were teenage girls and 23 of them were little girls in comparison to five little boys and 11 teenage boys (GTI, 2016; UNICEF, 2016a).

Figure 4: The arch leader of the Boko Haram terrorist group, Abubakar Shekau flanked by his commanders. Boko Haram has earned a global notoriety for normalizing the use of girls and boys as suicide bombers.



## **THE MEDIA AS EXPOSERS OF CHILD’S RIGHTS AND GENDER ABUSE IN SOCIETY**

Nigerian children living in the Boko Haram conflict zone face many challenges during their journey through life. The unfortunate situation is that the country ranks among the worst nations in many gender and children-related world ranking indices ranging from child health, out-of-school children, gender-based violence, child labour to kidnapping, etc. Many gender and children-related issues are requiring urgent attention of stakeholders within and outside the country if the country must redeem its image as one that caters for the need and protects the innocence of its children. The media is envisaged to possess the power to provide a unique channel through which such gender and children rights violation issues could be tabled for public discourse. In recognition of this fact, the Norwegian Government and the United Nations Children Education Fund (UNICEF) launched the Oslo Challenge as a call to action to ensure that “the overwhelming power of the media for good in the lives of children is identified, encouraged, and supported, while the potential harmful effects are recognised and reduced” (Adeniran, Hassan, Mikaila, & Kayode, 2015, p. 161; Oyero, 2010).

To gain an insight into what role the media can play in the exposition of child’s right and gender abuse, certain questions would need to be addressed and answered from the Agenda-Setting theory perspective. The questions are (i) do the media impact or influence?; (ii) should the media influence?; (iii) if yes, in what ways are they supposed to influence? It is also necessary to ascertain

if the media should take responsibility for exposing child's right and gender abuse, or if they have the potential to combat child's rights and gender abuse (Nwankwo, 2011). The Agenda-Setting theory emphasises media coverage of topics deemed salient by media keepers (McQuail, 2010).

Whenever terrorism is discussed, media and media-related issues must inevitably be considered especially in this era of globalisation (Baran & Davis, 2012). Understanding these characteristics of the media, terrorist groups have always openly or secretly sought to manipulate the impetuses media could offer to their evil acts. For instance, Pate and Idris (2017) have shown that in its earlier days, Boko Haram used to invite journalists to cover their terror activities (Ibrahim et al., 2019). In fact, Mu'azu (2015) argues that, "indeed, the Boko Haram did trace how they were covered by the media because they [Boko Haram] were dictating how the group should be reported (n.p.)" Hence, this paper poses these questions for future research to explore: (i) Does media publicity fuels the embers of terrorism? (ii) Could media be said to be complicit with the terrorist organisations in the conflict? Absolutely, no; they are only active agents in the process of gathering and dissemination of information.

Of course, terrorism, terrorists and the nefariousness of their activities are known to the world via publicity — one of the major functions of the media — which arguably serves as the oxygen that breathes life to acts of terrorism. Whether publicity fuels terrorism or not, whether it pulls audiences and attracts commercials to the media or not, as the watchdog and third eye and ear of the society the media must cover and report on terrorism as well as child and gender abuse and violation of human rights which might be obscured from the public by the fire and fury of the conflict if not for the prying eyes of the media. In fact, given that terrorists are regarded as terrorists because they weaken the loose ends of the chain that holds the society using the power of fear, so media are seen as watchdog of the society because through thick and thin they bear the risks and costs of keeping the society informed of occurrences within it (Pate & Idris, 2017).

In the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, the media are the society and the society is the media. Generally, the media, whether of mass communication or new (digital) media play a pivotal role in the matrix of terrorism, insurgency and political violence and are put into positions where they can magnify or minimise these kinds of acts and their perpetrators, or, of course, they can provide coverage that avoids either one of those extremes the media are expected to actively and proactively play certain roles to minimise both the actual impacts of terrorism and violation of human rights (Ibrahim et al., 2019; Nacos, 2002).

The media are always employed to wage psychological warfare on the targets through propaganda, heart-and-mind conquest campaigns, deradicalization and reconciliatory efforts of providing incentives for extremists and insurgents to abandon violence and seek non-violence ways of seeking redress for their grievances. For instance, counter-narratives have been shown to be effective in this regard (Crelinsten, 2017). Particularly, counter-narrative messages that foster inter-Islamic sects understanding regarding human rights and the rights of the child and woman can tremendously undermine the propaganda and extremist ideology of Boko Haram which promote hatred among different Islamic sects and label as infidel Muslim individuals and groups that do not follow their ideology (Nacos, 2002; Ngige, Badekale & HammanJoda, 2016).

It is believed that the recruitment and radicalisation processes for all boy and girl suicide bombers are excruciatingly emotional (Bouzar, 2016 May). For any ant-Boko Haram terrorism campaign to be effective and for peace to reign in the society, counter-narratives also must be emotional. The Government should focus on the creation and strategic dissemination of counter-

narrative messages aimed at dehumanising the Boko Haram ideology of religious extremism blatant violation of the rights of children and women in strategically selected media outlets. media framing, community policing such as that provided by local young men popularly known as Civilian JTF and vigilante groups, community outreach and public enlightenment and education, which involves the dissemination of purposefully designed messages to audiences have been shown to be effective tools for counterinsurgency (Crelinsten, 2017; Ibrahim et al., 2019a; Nacos, 2002).

Looking at the alarming rate of illiteracy and high levels of ignorance and poverty in the north-east of the country, an effective, sustainable and development-oriented counterinsurgency activity will certainly involve addressing the economic, educational, material and psychological concerns that render individuals vulnerable to recruitment by the group by creating alternative motivation and incentive structures to dissuade people from adopting violence and extremism as ways of seeking redress to their grievances. The role of the media here is to design messages aimed at peace-making by encouraging dialogue with the insurgents, which can serve as a salient function in challenging and even refuting undesired perceptions (Crelinsten, 2017; Ibrahim & Hassan, 2017).

Drastic attitude-change counter-terrorism campaign should be mounted in the north-east sub-region. All media outlets, including the print should lend a helping hand to the Government's counter-terrorism, respect for the rights of children and women, peace deal negotiations as well as deradicalization programmes. In fact, in extreme cases, the media can be compelled to participate in the anti-terrorism campaign should the need arise because journalists, media practitioners and media owners are also members of the society; they are equally, if not disproportionately, targets of the dreaded terrorists just like many helpless women, girls and boys are (*Financial*, 2017; Nacos, 2002).

Hence, counter-terrorism campaign messages for the rescue of abducted persons and peace should have the right combination of not only seeking for the condemnation and dehumanisation of the terrorists and their activities but also seeking protection for the vulnerable women, girls and boys, rather than portraying them as people to be approached with suspicion as is currently practised. Particularly, the girls and boys who have been rescued or escaped captivity must not be scorned at, stigmatised, mistrusted and persecuted. Instead, adequate social protection and support for education should be provided for them to help them reintegrate into society and achieve their dreams (Crelinsten, 2017; *Financial*, 2017).

## **CONCLUSION**

Due to the weakness and porosity of Nigeria's national security system as well as tyranny, public fund embezzlement (especially in pre-Buhari regimes), youth illiteracy and unemployment criminals can operate freely in most parts of the country in addition to Boko Haram insurgency. It is chillingly sad to note that most parts of the country have become breeding ground for felonious criminal activities such as armed political thuggery, kidnapping and armed robbery. Unfortunately, media coverage and investigative reportage have not succeeded in curbing most of the conflicts, neither those involving Boko Haram, e.g., nor the ravaging farmer-herder inter-communal clashes. For meaningful socio-development, pragmatic steps must be taken to reduce the menace of

militancy and insurgency in the country. Therefore, the recommendations outlined in the following paragraphs can be implemented to maximise the effectiveness of communication for peace and nation building and minimise the media-related effects of terrorism while covering and reporting it legitimately.

Ideally, the main objective of the media is to provide accurate, clear and objective information to the audience. Alternatively, investigative journalism technique can be utilized to exposed cases of children and gender abuse by the terrorists. The Government can provide the media with the necessary assistance in the form of, e.g., information on the political context and background of any terrorism-related act or story. Hence, a state-media collaboration that is focused on effectively informing the public, depriving the terrorists of the publicity they need, exposing their apparently concealed child and gender abuse and refuting the arguments of Boko Haram terrorists through counternarratives can be established.

Covering and reporting terrorism by media is inevitable. However, media gatekeepers must be conscious of the way the occurrences and incidents are framed as well as the degree to which they are covered and reported. For the symbolic relationship between the media and terrorism to diminish, media gatekeepers should reassess and alter the rhetoric when writing news stories involving the terrorists' violation of children and women's rights as well as other terrorism-related issues. Similarly, for the media to achieve the goal of preventing Boko Haram terrorists from using media coverage as an important publicity, recruitment tool and preventing the emergence of an atmosphere of fear among members of the public, they should adopt what Bilgen (2012, n.p.) describes as "de-securitisation," or "de-sensationalisation" approach, which involves covering and treating any terrorism-related incident as ordinarily as any other story in an undramatised and less sensational manner. This approach can encourage the Government and security top-notches to make more rational decisions about intensifying child and women protection as well as counterterrorism and addressing public outrage. Therefore, it is recommended that news coverage that de-emphasises the repetition of horrific scenes, sensationalisation, traumatising and focuses on information dissemination and caution should be adopted.

The Government should use the media as a public affairs and public diplomacy tool to debase Boko Haram terrorists and their extremist ideology as well as influence foreign publics and potential recruits rather than employing the media as a propaganda tool even in the narrative warfare in Boko Haram's radical extremism. In fact, the Government's use of the media as a propaganda tool is seen as counterproductive and often a fruitless effort given that media propaganda maximizes the perceived power of a terrorist organisation and that importantly, media have certain limits and legal and moral obligations, while terrorist organisations do not. Thus, even without the use of propaganda, the extremist narrative can be countered using both media of mass communication and new media with correspondingly clear and effective narrative to prevent the terrorists from accessing the public they draw their support from. With a view to provide some theoretical/hypothetical perspectives that can drive future research, the following propositions are formulated.

1. As long as the Boko Haram conflict lingers, media coverage of it will be more likely to report that children, teenagers and women in the conflict zone are more susceptible to be kidnapped by Boko Haram terrorists than adults.

2. As long as the Boko Haram conflict lingers, media coverage of it will be more likely to report that girls in the conflict zone are more prone to be kidnapped by Boko Haram than boys.
3. As long as the Boko Haram conflict lingers, media coverage of it will be more likely to report that girl hostages are twice as much more likely to be deployed as suicide bomb attackers than boy hostage.
4. As long as the Boko Haram conflict lingers, media coverage of it will be more likely to report that boys and male teenagers are twice as much more likely to be deployed as gun-carrying foot soldiers than older men.

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