

PAPER PRESENTATION ON SECURITY AND FAMINE AROUND THE LAKE CHAD REGION

BEING PRESENTED BY:

NETWORK OF CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS IN BORNO STATE (NECSOB)



LEAD PRESENTER

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Mr. President, Your Excellencies,

I would like to begin by thanking the Ethiopian Ambassador and President of the Security Council this month for inviting me to provide a civil society perspective as part of your considerations on the Lake Chad Basin.

I am Fatima Shehu Imam. I am the current Chairperson of the International Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA) in Borno State, and today I am also representing the Network of Civil Society Organizations in Borno State (NECSOB). The network is a Coalition of over 100 Civil Society, Community and Faith Based Organizations engaged in a wide range of activities geared towards providing humanitarian aid and assistance to victims of the over 4 year insurgency.

In Borno State where I live and work, families, livelihoods and communities been repeatedly torn apart by insurgent activities of Jamaatul ahlul sunnah lil daawa otherwise known as the Boko Haram. Borno State remains the epicenter of the Boko Haram insurgency.

In March this year, you met with me with me and other women led Civil Society Organizations during the Security Council mission to Maiduguri. Sadly there has been no significant improvement in providing protection needs and humanitarian assistance to the growing number of victims of the insurgency who have been displaced.

The non-participation of women in decision making, peace-building processes and in aid and relief delivery in camps remains a serious concern.

Borno State currently hosts the highest number of displaced persons who remain in need of urgent humanitarian protection and assistance due to the level of insecurity in the state. The dire humanitarian conditions of North-East Nigeria are arguably birthed by the security challenges and almost near total collapse of societal and institutional apparatus of government which has been unable to cater for the increasing numbers of Internally Displaced Persons

I wish to highlight the following under-captured **key concerns** as observed within the context of the work we do as humanitarians, enumerate the **key areas for urgent intervention**, touch on the **challenges we face** as a coalition and close with **an appeal to the good conscience** of the Security Council.

1. Security

The general security situation in and around Maiduguri remains tense and fragile. While there have been several reports suggesting improvements and gains made by the Nigerian Armed forces in the region, this has been grossly overestimated, leaving room for a false sense of security which has also led to a resurgence of armed attacks of civilians and soft targets in and around the state.

People still live in fear within their communities and many who have been displaced as a result of the insurgency are reluctant to return. This has resulted in poverty, lack of food, malnutrition, total collapse of economic activities within the region and threat of famine.

Threat to lives and properties of marginalized populations especially **women** and **girls** seem to be on the increase in light of the resurgence of violent attacks.

Local Civil Society Organizations, such as mine, working on the ground are largely incapacitated in reaching out to large sections of these communities, including to women and girls who are in urgent need of humanitarian aid, because unlike the International Non Governmental Organizations and the UN Agencies that are accompanied by security detail during field operations, local groups still go on carrying their interventions unaccompanied by any form of security apparatus making access a major challenges and also compromising lives of individuals that engage in such operations.

2. Situation in Camps

There is continued and apparent abuse of rights of individuals living in the Camps in Maiduguri and surrounding areas. As has been captured in numerous reports there are severe shortages of food and other supplies. This has led to a situation that translates to a trade of **sexual favors for food**.

From the various visits I have personally made to the IDP Camps as part of my mandate to improve and promote the welfare and rights of women and children, it is pertinent to note that most of the women and girls in the IDP Camps are ignorant of their basic human rights and as such; do not even know when their rights have been violated. This is partly as a result of culturally induced factors, where the women do not have a “voice” and in a few cases, do not know where to go when violated.

The insurgency has taken its toll on these women who are now heads of households and are compelled to give away their bodies for food which ultimately result in unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases in the name of “survival sex” just to be able to provide for their children.

3. Women abducted by Boko Haram

Women and girls have been used as targets in the recent trend of violent attacks perpetrated by insurgents in utilizing them as suicide bombers. The issue of stigmatization faced by these women and girls cannot be overemphasized. A case at hand is that of a married woman who was abducted by Boko Haram and returned after a few years with another child. Her husband is forcing her to choose between him and the child. The psychological trauma faced by this woman as well as many others who have lost their self esteem as a result of stigmatization needs to be urgently addressed.

Greater focus must be placed on women’s reintegration, tackling stigmatization and also ensuring women are part of strategies aimed at addressing Boko Haram

4. Threat of Famine

The fragile state of insecurity in the region has led to a situation where normal life styles and traditional settings of the people have been truncated. Due to the inherent security challenges, members of some communities are afraid to go to farm because it is risky to travel beyond three (3) kilometer radius from the communities. About a week ago, 12 people were abducted from their farms and are yet to be found. Reports of these abductions still abound and this is a cause of great concern to my Network.

5. Challenges faced by the Network and local Civil Society Organizations (CSOs)

Our network and many other local civil society groups face a myriad of challenges that affect our ability to deliver the live saving work we are trying to carry out. These challenges include but are not limited to i) Operational challenges such as of funding ii) Institutional challenges iii) Policy and Law and IV) Security

Currently, there appears to be more rigidity than flexibility in the level of donor **funding** available for humanitarian assistance. A situation whereby highly professionalized and

experienced institutions such as the UN Agencies and INGOs are expected to access funding based on the same evaluation criteria despite clear and noticeable differences in terms of institutional capacity undoubtedly impede on the availability of funding opportunities available to smaller local groups on the field carrying out life saving interventions.

There is an urgent need to ensure that local CSOs and affected populations are a critical component in the design and implementation of interventions.

The fragile and tense situation still makes it extremely challenging and risky for local groups to engage in operations on the field. As observed, local groups lack the accompanying security apparatus that colleagues in the UN Agencies and INGOs have.

Despite the extreme humanitarian situation in the country and apparent global focus on Nigeria arising from the insurgency and rising number of people who have been displaced and in need of protection and assistance, it may interest this distinguished Council to note that the country still lacks any comprehensive legislation and/or policy that holistically targets humanitarian response. This is resulting in the majority of the work currently being done in an ad hoc and non-transparent manner and with no accountability mechanisms.

Conclusion

As I close in again giving this distinguished Council immense appreciation for the opportunity afforded me for this address, I must reiterate the important role that perceptions play in the context of humanitarian intervention and bringing **hope**. The perceptions on the ground as of today speaks to a diminishing hope for huge populations affected by this conflict as they believe responses have been slow and insufficient despite the huge funding allocations reported by the government and development partners.

I urge this council to see this as an urgent and dire call, to on the strength of the highlighted challenges and situational analysis, galvanize strategic and adequate response mechanism in bringing assistance and aid to the millions of people in need of protection and humanitarian assistance.

Thank you.