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POVERTY, INSECURITY AND EXTREMISM IN WEST AFRICAN SUB-REGION:
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ABSTRACT

The West African sub-region faces a veritable perfect storm of social, economic and security challenges, all of which are exacerbated by poverty and the fragility of states in the sub-region. The sub-region has become home to terrorist groups in recent times such that numerous protracted atrocities have been committed against innocent civilians, security forces and government agencies by the various terrorist groups. The main aim of the study was to provide an assessment of the poverty, insecurity and the extremism situation in the sub-region with a view to identifying the root causes. The study employed a case study research design that involves focusing on the West African sub-region. The method of data collection was secondary sources, while content analysis was used in analysing the data generated. The Horizontal inequality theory was used as framework of analysis. The work insists that poverty is the major cause of extremism in West African sub-region. Some of the causes of extremism included pervasive material inequalities and unfairness, poverty/unemployment; weak security system etc, assessment of the situation revealed a deterioration of security, safety, and stability in the West African sub-region. Some of the extremist groups in West African sub-region include Boko Haram and its breakaway faction, the Islamic State of West Africa Province (ISWAP), Jama'at Nustratal-Islam wal-Muslimeen (JNIM) or the Group for the Support of Islam and Moslems (GSIM) in Mali and Burkina Faso and Ansarul Islam in Burkina Faso. the MNLA, Ansar al Dins Iyad and AQIM. The Sahel region of West Africa has become home to some of the world's deadliest extremist groups in recent times resulting in numerous protracted atrocities committed against innocent civilians, security forces and government agencies The Countries in West African sub-region should formulate and effectively implement policies and programmes capable of addressing the root causes of insecurity in the sub-region

Introduction

West African sub-region has long been characterized by poverty, insecurity, and sectarian extremism. Annan (2012) indicated that failed development and poverty create inequalities that underpin many of the grievances that drive terrorism. Poverty is the main source and breeding ground for extremism, as President Blaise Compaoré conceded in November 2017

If Burkina Faso does not manage it to better fight poverty, inequality and their roots in poor education, religious fundamentalism may take over, putting the nation in clear and present danger “to lose its North”.

Such conditions are ample in several West African states and have provided ready recruits for the jihadist groups in the sub-region. While some arguments seem to highlight the situation in West Africa with respect to the sociological underpinnings of insecurity, the economic dimension to these arguments are insufficient. The central contention here which is closely associated with the human needs theory of social conflicts states that ‘all humans have basic needs which they seek to fulfill and failure caused by other individuals or groups to meet these needs could lead to conflict’ (Benedikter and Ouedraogo 2019).

It is therefore imperative that security should be given a boost in West Africa to sustain economic development in a sub-region that has a high prevalence of poverty and underdevelopment. There have been a few attempts to link insecurity to underdevelopment in West Africa; one of such attempts asserts that economic underdevelopment is a major cause of insecurity in West Africa. Marshall (2005:19) posits that there are two factors which help to explain the ‘great disparity between expected levels of insecurity in the generally poor and poorly integrated and mobilized countries of West Africa and the observed high levels of extremism and welfare’. He goes on to state that ‘perhaps the most important factor is the economic and political marginalization of the majority of the populations of many West African countries.

This position offers a pointer to what could possibly be the root cause of most conflicts in West Africa.

Cornish (2001) argues that there is a connection to terrorism and underdevelopment, which could be found in deprivation, disease, inequality, ill health, debt, corruption, crime etc. The West African sub-region particularly Niger, Mali, Burkina Faso, and Nigeria continues to witness persistent terrorist attacks since 2010 till date. This is a manifestation of the worsening poverty and security situation in many parts of the sub-region. There has been a spike in the number of attacks particularly by Boko Haram and its breakaway faction, the Islamic State of West Africa Province (ISWAP) in Nigeria, Niger, and Chad, Jama’at Nustratal-Islam wal-Muslimeen (JNIM) or the Group for the Support of Islam and Moslems (GSIM) in Mali and Burkina Faso and Ansarul Islam in Burkina Faso.

Methodology

The study employed a case study research design that involved focusing on the West African sub-region. Case research design is most suitable when a study is intended to examine a particular phenomenon within a geographic region or scope. In this study, I examined poverty, insecurity and extremism on West African sub-region. Qualitative method was employed and the data for the study were obtained from secondary sources.

Theoretical Frame work

Horizontal Inequality

The theory of horizontal inequality attempts an explanation into the underlying causes and nature of intergroup conflict in a diverse or heterogeneous polity or communities. The theory was propounded by Frances Stewarts (2008:19). The theory assumes that conflict is not an organic characteristic of a multi-ethnic society but holds its manifestation to certain forms of injustices. That is to say, “cultural differences do not lead to violent conflict unless there are also major economic and/ or political causes”. Succinctly, an ethnically polarised people can live in maximum peace and harmony if tangible and intangible resources and privileges are equitably shared/ distributed at a mutually agreed and sanctioned formula. However, where injustice prevails, (as is the case in West African sub-region) there is a horizontal inequality and that is, according to Stewarts (2008:19) the underlying source of intergroup conflict.

Here, horizontal inequalities (HIs) are defined as injustices or inequalities in economic, social or political dimensions or cultural status between culturally defined groups. They are called horizontal to distinguish them from inequalities among individuals, which is referred to as vertical inequalities (VIs). According to her economic inequality occurs if a certain group is denied access to ownership of assets, opportunities and income; social inequality occurs when a group is denied access to social services as health, education, water, housing, etc; political inequality occurs if a group is prevented from participating maximally in political leadership; and cultural inequality occurs if holidays and cultural practices of a certain group is not recognised within a larger polity.

When the collective interest of a group is trampled upon by another group within a polity, there is mass mobilisation by a vanguard within the marginalised or suppressed group with a view to righting the wrongs with a strategy that is determined by the intensity or severity level of the horizontal inequality (His). Where severe horizontal inequality (His) affect both the elites and masses of a marginalised group, there is high tendency of outbreak of violent resistance (this explains the situations in several conflicts zones in West Africa). Where there is a sharp horizontal inequality (His) (which might be spatially distributed) with the government failing to respond or further repressing the victimised group, the later always resorts to violence and could also pursue secessionist cause for abrupt autonomy. HIs are total with conspicuous indicators and are based on the following conjectures that:-

- A. conflict is more likely where there are significant political or economic horizontal inequalities, or both;
- B. political mobilisation is especially likely where there are consistent horizontal inequalities, that is both political and economic horizontal inequalities run in the same direction;
- C. lack of cultural recognition and equity, or cultural status horizontal inequalities, will be provocative, while cultural inclusion will help sustain peace. A change in either direction may be particularly relevant to group mobilisation;
- D. political mobilisation and possibly conflict will become more likely where His are widening (Stewarts, 2008:19). This theory suits this work when one considers the fact that many countries in West African sub-region not marginalize their citizens but

also exclude many in terms of political, economic and social provision. The theory also aptly explained the current socio-economic conditions of many West African States hence insecurity and extremism.

Conceptual Review

Poverty is a worldwide concern. Although there is a global concern towards poverty reduction, there is a little agreement on a single definition and measurement of poverty (Kotler, Roberto, & Leisner, 2006). According to Kotler et al. (2006), the problem of arriving at one single definition of poverty has been compounded by a number of factors. Poverty affects heterogeneous groups such that the concept of poverty is relative depending on different interest groups and individuals experiencing it (Rank, 2004). Policy makers have often related poverty to the concepts of impoverishment, deprivation, the disadvantaged, inequality, the underprivileged and the needy. According to Laderchi et al. (2003), the monetary approach defines poverty in terms of how much a person's income (or consumption) falls short of some minimum level of resources. The monetary approach to poverty measurement involves methodologies that emphasize monetary indicators and an objective derivation of the poverty line.

The monetary approach is based on the assumption that a uniform monetary metric can be used to control for the heterogeneity of all the individuals and their situations, pointed out that determining poverty based on a monetary metric entails the choice of an indicator, a unit of analysis, and a poverty line. A monetary indicator provides a common denominator of measurement for comparability (Laderchi et al, 2003). In addition, a monetary approach serves as a standard homogenous platform of poverty measurement that eases the tension between theoretical complexity and diversity of poverty definitions and measurements. The monetary approach emphasizes on the choice of income or expenditure indicator as a proxy for consumption as a proxy for permanent income. Traditionally, poverty is viewed as an individual problem, even though many of the causes of poverty can be traced to the household level. A poverty line may be identified either with respect to a list of basic needs (absolute) or some characteristics of the distribution of the welfare indicators chosen (relative) (Ravallion, 1998). The lack of economic theory to determine minimal level of needs caused the estimation of the poverty

line to be influenced by political debates and policy agenda.

Poverty according to Gans in Okolie (2017) survives in part because it provides a baseline of failure which tends to reassure the non-poor of their worth, something akin to “a reliable and relatively permanent measuring rod for status comparison”. Any contrary impression has the potential to turn aside attention from the larger socio-economic structure on which poverty is entrenched. Indeed, poverty as a subject has assumed sub-regional/global dimension that has suddenly become conditional for debtor nations. Therefore, poverty not just an incident but a process of in social relations forms has been extended in reach and impact and so giving hint to of a far more devastating effect on the environment than it downgraded the individual life of the immediate victims- this time around the people of West African-sub-region. In other words, the very bold angles of poverty, as now established have opened new world knowledge of it as sources of far more diffuse impact than the despair of it on the one man who has failed to provide for his family. To appreciate this development in its fuller form, it will be gainful to consider the views of Caenonis in Okolie (2017) on the trends and patterns of poverty as they manifested, differently, in rural and urban areas.

An overview presentation represents the segmentations as the overlap of social classifications, which bursts down the relatively well to do in the rural areas as presenting a true description of the definitely poor in the urban areas. Conversely, the active player in the urban area who may have attained a stable urban economic life but gets suddenly transported to the rural areas, will be reduced to the deprived and poor status, if prosperity is measured in terms of both possession of such definite property as land and access to the social stabilizing institutions as roles in decision making bodies and specialized societies. In other words, he who may have attained some stability in the urban area- marked out by certain possessions but who cannot even transfer such acquisition to the rural areas – that is if such would make any meaning there – may have to be forced to accept severe social downgrading if he finds himself back to native land. In a straight form, it is being said that poverty can be geographically/ sub-regionally determined while wealth has social meanings which

will never be the same everywhere. In the view of Walkins in Okolie (2017:P:178) Poverty is termed:

the income of a community which in subdivision among families and kindred, is less than 40 per cent of the norm which manifests more in poor infrastructure, poor health, poor nutrition poor self esteem low hygienic standards, low intellectual development, and lack of capacity to articulate social, economic and political environment and lower per capita income

This is the situation in most of the countries in West African sub-region. The West African sub-region is one of the poorest sub-region in Africa for out the sixteen (16) countries that make up the sub-region twelve (12) of them belong to the poorest countries of the world.

Insecurity is the extreme opposite of security. Insecurity as an antithesis of security refers to a condition that exists due to lack of effective measures put in place to protect individuals, information and property against hostile persons, influences and actions. Insecurity is simply a situation in which individuals in a given society cannot go about their daily activities as a result of threat to and harmful disruption of their lives and property. According to Beland (2005) insecurity entails lack of protection from crime (being unsafe) and lack of freedom from psychological harm (unprotected from emotional stress resulting from paucity of assurance that an individual is accepted, has opportunity and choices to fulfill his or her own potentials including freedom from fear. The concept of insecurity connotes different meanings such as: absence of safety; danger; hazard; uncertainty; lack of protection, and lack of safety. Beland (2005), insecurity is “the state of fear or anxiety stemming from a concrete or alleged lack of protection.” It refers to lack or inadequate freedom from danger. Achumba et al (2013) defines insecurity from two perspectives.

Firstly, insecurity is the state of being open or subject to danger or threat of danger, where danger is the condition of being susceptible to harm or injury. Secondly insecurity is the state of being exposed to risk or anxiety, where anxiety is a vague unpleasant emotion that is experienced in anticipation of some misfortune. These definitions of insecurity underscore a major point that those affected by

insecurity are not only uncertain or unaware of what would happen but they are also vulnerable to the threats and dangers when they occur. The insecurity in West African sub-region is poverty induced. This explanation is closely related to relative deprivation, rather than absolute poverty. As a result of the above, the inability of the states in West African sub-region to provide basic services for the populace, generate insecurity manifested through politicized agents who have used the conditions of the poor to address, the responses or non-responses of the state to the legitimate yearnings of the people. Ibrahim and Igbuzor (2002), Hazen and Horner, (2007), Salawu (2010) and Igbuzor, (2011) identified ethno-religious conflict as a major causes of insecurity in West Africa sub-region. Ethno-religious conflicts were defined as a situation in which the relationship between members of one ethnic or religious group and another of such group in a multi-ethnic and multi-religious society is characterized by lack of cordiality, mutual suspicion and fear, and a tendency towards violent confrontation (Achumba et al. 2013; Salawu, 2010).

Causes of Poverty, insecurity and extremism in West African sub-region

Poverty and Unemployment

There is high level of unemployment and poverty in West African sub-region. Nwagbosa (2012) argued that the failure of successive administrations in West African sub-region to address challenges of poverty, unemployment and inequitable distribution of wealth among ethnic nationalities is one of the major causes of insecurity in the sub-region. What this means theoretically is that poverty and unemployment increase the number of people who are prepared to kill or be killed for a given course at token benefit. (Salawu 2010). It could predispose one to engaging in illicit activities that would undermine security of the environment. Nigeria has the highest population in West African sub-region. The National Bureau of Statistics (2019) puts Nigeria's unemployment rate at 23.1%, of which youth unemployment is 55.4%.

No wonder, Suleiman (2018) opined that anxiety from Nigerian graduates that later turn to frustration, and then to aggression on the government is what has fuelled the emergence of most of these security threats in the country. Also according to National

Bureau of Statistics (2022) national poverty average was over 40.1 per cent. The country has a youth population of 80 million, representing about 60 per cent of the total population in West African sub-region with a growth rate of 2.6 per cent per year, and the national demography suggests that the youth population remains vibrant with an average annual entrant to the labour force at 1.8 million between 20018 and 2020. While there is no statistical correlation between levels of poverty and the incidences of extremist attacks in particular countries, failed development and poverty create inequalities that underpin many of the grievances that drive extremism' (Annan 2012, 234). In other words, as unemployment rate increases, poverty level also rises. Poverty, occasioned by decades of military rule and sit-tight leadership coupled with a lack of formal education has driven the sub-region's exploding youth population toward extremism.

Religious fundamentalism

Statistics showed that in the countries besieged by Islamic insurgents in the sub-region, about 75 percent of the people live in abject poverty. In addition to this, another factor that partly explains why radical extremist groups take root in certain areas in West Africa is the broad brush history of West Africa as having been dominated historically by Fulani/Muslim kingdoms stretching East–West across the sub-region. With the advent of colonialism, the colonialists essentially empowered the more fragmented coastal ethnic groups and established the seats of power almost exclusively along the coast. So conceived, the problem of West African militant Islam is partly one of re-establishing regional political dominance in the post-colonial age.

Pervasive Material Inequalities and Unfairness

A major factor that contributes to insecurity in West African sub-region is the growing awareness of inequalities, and disparities in life chances which lead to violent reactions by a large number of people. There is a general perception of marginalization by a section of the people in areas of government development policies, political patronage, and these are triggers of disaffection, resentment, and revolt (Achumba, et al. 2013). The incessant strikes, civil disobedience and demonstrations by civil society groups are mainly due to pervasive material inequalities and unfairness. Barak (2016) expresses the view that underdevelopment of Mali's North-

region relative to the South has been identified as a major reason why the Tuaregs decided to bear arms against Malian state. This situation will be clearly understood when one considers the fact that twelve out of fifteen member-states of ECOWAS belong to the poorest countries of the world. The widespread poverty and limited economic opportunity radicalize poor uneducated and vulnerable young people. For instance, one of the Boko-Haram's recruitment strategies involved the provision of cash loan to potential recruits.

According to World Bank (2016), African Poverty Report confirms that poverty levels among Africans are higher than in the 1990s. When provided employment opportunities and infrastructure are mainly concentrated in urban centres or constituencies that are royal to ruling political party. According to Tella (2015) as such many deprived or excluded groups express grievances through the use of illicit arms against the state. Iheme (2010) argues that the disparity in the level of development of the different member-states of ECOWAS, ten of which are among the twenty poorest nations of the world, has constituted stumbling block to the achievement of common economic policies. Just as poverty and proliferation of small arms have been attributed to some of the factors that fuel insecurity in the in the dub-region.. The situation has thus degenerated further thereby intensifying the already deepened feeling of poverty, inequality and deprivation that is commonly associated with the sub-region. According to Johnson (2011) despite a per capita income of more than USD 2,700 and an annual GDP growth of 7 per cent the sub-region has one of the world's poorest populations. An estimated 70 per cent of the population lives on less than a USD 1.25 a day. As at 2010, the total number of people living in relative poverty in sub-region was 60 per cent.

Organized extremist groups

Organized extremist groups such as Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO), the Signatories in Blood, Ansar al-Dine, and Al- Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) BOKO-Haram Islamic State of West African Provence (ISWAP), al Qaeda-affiliated Jama'at Nustratal-Islam wal-Muslimeen (JNIM) or the Group for the Support of Islam and Moslems (GSIM) comprising of AQIM, Macina Liberation Front (MLF), Ansarul Dine and al-Mourabitoun group, operating from Mali, Mouvement des Forces Democratiques de la

Casamance (MFDC) and the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), ethnic militia, vigilantes, secret cults in tertiary institutions and political thugs contribute significantly to security challenges in West African sub-region in different dimension and forms. These groups gain access to a global network of support through their affiliation or identification with other global terrorist organisations such as Al-Qaeda, and the Islamic State of Iraq. Their emergence have been linked to a number of factors which include the culture of militarism that has its antecedents in military rule, the failure of the state and its institutions, economic disempowerment, the structure of the post-colonial state in West African sub-region and non-separation of state and religion, politics of exclusion, culture of patriarchy, ignorance and poor political consciousness (Ibrahim and Igbuzor, 2002 as cited in Eme and Onyishi, 2011).

Weak Security System

This is a major contributory factor to the level of insecurity in West African sub-region and this can be attributed to a number of factors which include inadequate funding of the police and other security agencies, lack of modern equipment both in weaponry and training, poor welfare of security personnel, and inadequate personnel (Achumba et al. 2013). According to Olonisakin (2008) the police-population ratio in West African sub-region falls below the standard set by the United Nations. The implication of this is that West African sub-region is grossly under policed and this partly explains the inability of the Security Agencies to effectively combat crimes and criminality in the sub-region.

Porous Borders

Achumba et al. (2013) observe that the porous frontiers of the countries in West African sub-region and the introduction of Free Movement of Persons and goods, where individual movements are largely untracked have contributed to the level of insecurity in the sub-region. As a result of these there is an unchecked inflow of Small Arms and Light Weapons into the sub-region which has aided militancy and criminality in West Africa (Hazen and Horner, 2007). The three most notorious arms smuggling frontiers in Nigeria are in the south-west (Idi-Iroko in Ogun state and Seme in Lagos state), in the south (the port city of Warri in Delta state), and in the north-east at the border with Niger and Cameroon (Adamawa, Borno, and Yobe states) (Ebo 2011, p.21). Warri has been

referred to as the 'hub of the gun trade' in the Niger Delta (Ojudu, 2007) and its location in the Delta, as well as the demand for small arms in that area of the country, makes this a logical place for the reception of shipments. Also, the porosity of the West African borders and Free Movement of Persons and goods has aided the uncontrollable influx of migrants, mainly young men, from countries such as Republic of Burkina Faso, Republic of Benin, Ghana, Mali, Niger and Nigeria, responsible for some of the criminal acts (Adeola and Oluyemi, 2012).

Terrorism

The most fundamental source of insecurity in West African sub-region today is terrorism which is traceable to religious fanaticism and intolerance particularly in Islam dominated states of Burkina Faso, Mali, Nigeria and Sahal zone of the sub-region. Terrorism is a global phenomenon and it is ravaging the sub-region mainly Burkina Faso, Mali and Nigeria. Terrorism in West Africa is not a recent phenomenon it started with the notorious Islamic sect in the Northern part of Nigeria called Mataisine in 1980s and has since grown in intensity and scope of operation. In recent times terrorism has assumed a political undertone and is being spear headed by a faceless Islamic insurgents based in the Northern region of Nigeria called Boko Haram, that has claimed hundreds of thousands of lives in the North since 2009. Terrorism in West African sub-region has been linked to religious, socio-political, economic and cultural factors. Terrorism which originated from Islamic fanaticism is now driven by factors such as inequalities within the sub-region and lack of employment among youths in the sub-region, in terms of livelihood (economic) resources, education or access to education and good values. The current challenge of terrorism to physical security is threatening the sub-region on all fronts. Terrorism in the sub-region has been traced to a number of factors which include, political conflicts, unbalanced development that involves horizontal inequalities, religious/ethnic distrust, poor governance linked to leadership failure, and high level of corruption (Kufour, 2012; Oluwarotimi, 2012).

Ethno-religious conflicts

These have arisen from distrust among various ethnic groups and among the major religions in the sub-region. Ibrahim and Igbuzor (2002), Hazen and Horner, (2007), Salawu (2010) and Igbuzor, (2011)

identified ethno-religious conflict as a major causes of insecurity. Frequent and persistent ethnic conflicts and religious clashes between the two dominant religions (Islam and Christianity), present the sub-region with a major security challenge. In all parts of the sub-region, there exist ethno-religious conflicts and these according to Ibrahim and Igbuzor (2002) have emerged as a result of new and particularistic forms of political consciousness and identity often structured around ethno-religious identities. The claim over scarce resources, power, land, chieftaincy, local government, councils, control of markets and sharia among other trivial issues have resulted in large scale killings and violence amongst, groups in West African sub-region.

Extremist groups in West African sub-region

Some of the extremist groups in West African sub-region include Boko Haram and its breakaway faction, the Islamic State of West Africa Province (ISWAP), Jama'at Nustratal-Islam wal-Muslimeen (JNIM) or the Group for the Support of Islam and Moslems (GSIM) in Mali and Burkina Faso and Ansarul Islam in Burkina Faso. the MNLA, Ansar al Dins Iyad and AQIM. The AQIM's involvement escalated the conflicts in the sub-region. AQIM also attempted to embed itself in northern Malian communities through commerce, marriage, and outreach to dissidents, including former Tuareg rebels. The "Arab Spring" in Tunisia in January 2011 and Protest movements in Mauritania and survival, refugees, fighters, and weapons that travelled out and this circulation of men and arms in explained why Mali's 2012 rebellion occurred when it did, but at the very least the "Arab Spring" decreased West African's prospects for stability. The MNLA, created officially in October 2011 in northern Mali, benefited from The "Arab Spring" returning fighters and weapons, as well as the high-level defections of Malian soldiers, officers, and gendarmes who had previously joined or been integrated into the security forces following past peace accords.

The build-up to the rebellion began with the formation of the National Movement of the Azawad (French: Mouvement National de l'Azawad, MNA). The MNLA, an alliance of the MNA and Ag Bahanga's National Alliance of Tuareg of Mali (French: Alliance Nationale des Touareg du Mali, ANTM) issued its first communique on October 16, 2011. The MNLA's first attacks in northern Mali

were in 2011. The MNLA, along with fighters belonging to the Tuareg led Islamist group Ansar al Din drove the Malian national army out of northern Malian cities. The MNLA declared a state of independence for northern Mali as the “Azawad” on April 6, 2012. In northern Mali, the Islamist coalition, comprising the Ansar al Din, AQIM, and MUJAO politically and militarily outmaneuvered the MNLA, taking control of northern Malian cities resulting in Islamist fighters’ advancing into the Mopti Region and their seizure of the town of Konna. The Islamist resorted to guerrilla tactics, including the first suicide bombings in Malian history on February 8, 2013, in Gao.

In 2015, Amadou Kouffa a Marabout who had acted as commander for the Islamist militants in the 2013 Battle of Konna formed the Macina Liberation Force (MLF). Al Qaeda-affiliated Jama’at Nustratal-Islam wal-Muslimeen (JNIM) or the Group for the Support of Islam and Moslems (GSIM) comprising of AQIM, Macina Liberation Front (MLF), Ansarul Dine and al-Mourabitoun group, operating from Mali has spread its attacks into Burkina Faso and Ivory Coast with the possibility of moving into other coastal countries within the region.

Incidences of Poverty, Insecurity and Extremism in West African sub-region

The Sahel region of West Africa has become home to some of the world’s deadliest extremist groups in recent times resulting in numerous protracted atrocities committed against innocent civilians, security forces and government agencies (Lacher2012). The Sahel zone remains widely excluded from structural progress and its people remain among the poorest of the poor. Poverty is the main source and breeding ground for extremism. The North of Burkina Faso, and subsequently the nation and larger parts of the West African sub- region which holds some of the poorest countries on earth, may be entrapped in continuing upheaval and insecurity, threatening to destabilize the sub-region and to further worsen the African refugee and migration crisis. According to Cooke, Sanderson, Johnson, and Hubner, (2016) terrorist organizations have expanded their ambition, capabilities, capacities and geographical reach in the Sahel, with devastating impact on human security and economic development.

There appears to be a competition of Islamic State (IS) and Al-Qaeda affiliation among terrorist groups in

the Sahel. Al-Qaeda affiliated groups such as Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), Macina Liberation Front (MLF), Ansarul Dine and Al-Mourabitoun operating under the name JNIM as well as Boko Haram and Ansarul Islam are very active in the region. Similarly, IS, affiliated groups such as ISWAP and Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) have dominated the terrorism landscape in the Sahel particularly in Nigeria, Niger, Chad, Mali and Burkina Faso. Attacks by these extremist groups have killed tens of thousands of people and displaced millions more within and across national borders. For instance in 2015, Boko Haram killed more people than IS killed in Syria and Iraq combined. From June 2011 through June 2018, the Nigeria Security Tracker (NST) documented 2,021 incidents involving Boko Haram, in which 37,530 people were killed, nearly double the conventionally estimate of 20,000.

Over the same period, Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project (ACLED) identified 3,346 incidents, in which 34,261 people were killed (Campbell & Harwood, 2018). As at March 31, 2019, the group has carried out 50 attacks and killed 204 persons. Johnmary (2013) is of the view that in Mali, the situation worsened in the aftermath of the 2011 uprising necessitating international intervention against armed groups from progressing to the capital city of Bamako. The rise of extremist groups is exacerbating old inter-communal tensions between ethnic groups particularly those of Peul (Fulani) and Dogons. On 23 March 2019 in Ogossagou, armed men dressed like traditional Dozo hunters attacked a Fulani community killing 160 people, including women and children. Similarly, about 100 members of the Dogon ethnic group were killed on 10 June 2019, in Sobame Da located in Mopti region of Mali. Due to its geographical location, Niger is exposed to criminal activities, including terrorism, on multiple fronts. While groups such as JNIM and its affiliates generate insecurity at the border with Mali and Burkina Faso, the most notable threat is posed by Boko Haram. The South Eastern part of Niger particularly, the Diffa region is the most affected. The group continues to carry out attacks in northern Nigeria, Cameroon, Niger and the Lake Chad Basin area of Chad (Gibbs 2018). Burkina Faso is another country greatly affected by the scourge of terrorism in the Sahel in recent times. Between January 2016 and June 2019, an estimated number of 521 terrorist-

related attacks were recorded, resulting in the deaths of over 750 people.

The fear however, is that, if the terrorists win in Burkina Faso, the country could become a launch pad for terrorists to expand their influence to the coast of West Africa and even beyond. On Friday, 17 November 2017, six people were killed in an armed attack by unidentified individuals in Taouremba, 70 km from Djibo, the capital of the province of Soum in Burkina Faso's northeastern Sahel region. The region is inhabited by just 900,000 people out of the almost 20 million of the nation, making it particularly vulnerable due to its large empty spaces where terrorists can disappear easily. The terrorists attacked the market of the town, not by chance exactly in the week when minister of homeland security Simon Compaore and minister of education Jean Martin Coulibaly visited Djibo, Baraboulé and Diguel, centres of northern Burkina Faso which over the past years have been victims of repeated terrorist attacks. The visit was supposed to boost the morale of teachers who in October and November had to evacuate schools in these towns because of growing insecurity. Islamistic extremism in West Africa is a problem not on the retreat, but on the rise. Burkina Faso has been living under the threat of proliferating Islamistic terrorist attacks since April 2015. This threat has since become a major concern for the stability, peace and economic development not only for the northern part of the country, but also for the greater surrounding Sahel region - comprising in particular Mali and Niger - which is in the process of transforming into one main stronghold of Islamistic terrorism in Africa. It is in this context that after the attacks on the capital Ouagadougou in January 2016 and on the Sahel region in March 2017 just months later repeated almost identically in August 2017 with another deadly attack on the capital the Burkinabe government decided to set up a program called the "Emergency Programme for the Sahel" for the period 2017-2020. In addition to measurements in the security and public defense sectors, the programme aims at responding to the concerns raised by local populations on the political, economic and social levels following the turmoil stirred up by Islamistic agitation which is increasingly penetrating non-urban contexts and the civil society sector, threatening particularly schools and town councils. The "Emergency Programme for the Sahel" is based on the National Plan for Economic and Social

Development (PNDES) 2016-2020, which is an official presidential programme.

Conclusion

Poverty is the major cause of insecurity and extremism in West African sub-region, this poses danger to lives and properties, hampered business activities, and discourage local and foreign investors, all of which stifle and retards development of West African sub-region. Ostensibly, the areas of violent extremism are also part of the region with worse environmental degradation and fierce competition for natural resources. This interconnectedness resulting in recognition of the fact that the nature of the environment and natural resources dynamics (poverty) could explain the increasing incidence of extreme violence in the West African sub-region. The Countries in West African sub-region should formulate and effectively implement policies and programmes capable of addressing the root causes of insecurity in the sub-region as abject poverty, unemployment, ethno-religious conflict, systemic and political corruption, weak security system and organized extremist groups among others. The governments of West African sub-region must be proactive in dealing with security issues and threats, through training, modern methods of intelligence gathering, and intelligence sharing, logistics and deploying advanced technology in managing security challenges.

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