

EFFECTS OF BOKO HARAM INSURGENCE ON THE GROWTH OF  
CHRISTIANITY IN NORTHERN NIGERIA: AN OBSTACLE FOR NATIONAL  
DEVELOPMENT

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**Abstract**

This paper examines the effects of Boko Haram insurgency on the growth of Christianity in Northern Nigeria. The paper submits that the activities of the group have direct consequences on national development with specific examples, the paper shows the religious, social and economic effects of Boko Haram activities as it affects Christians in Northern Nigeria. To further buttress this, a table showing dates, places and nature of attack and effects is presented from 2011 to 2015. With phenomenological methodology the paper maintains that Christians are to persevere in such a way as using religious leaders to re-indoctrinate freed members of the sect and the need for the government to be more committed to the fight against the sect among others.

**Introduction:**

For three years now, 2011 -2014, Christians in the northern part of Nigeria have experienced and are still experiencing one form of attack or the other on their lives and churches by an insurgent group called the Boko haram. Although attacks by the Boko haram sect cannot be said to be exclusively and entirely targeted at Christians alone, however, the numerical frequency and the consistency in bombing and attacks of Christian churches especially in 2011 - 2012, as well as the message of the Boko haram leader Abubakar Shekau that the group want to establish full Islamic shariah law in the region calls for concern especially among Christians about the real motive of the group. Within these years, Christians in northern Nigeria have undergone what some sections of Christians term 'persecution of great proportion' by the Boko haram. The lives of many of their brethren have been destroyed, their homes, churches, business premises and schools have also been destroyed. This paper assesses the religious, social and economic effects of Boko haram as it affect the growth of Christianity in northern Nigeria. It establishes that these attacks have caused serious damage on the growth of Christianity as well as affected national development. There is therefore the need for all hands to be on deck in the fight against the Boko haram before it consumes the entire nation. According to a report by the United State Department, the Boko haram has killed the most number of people in 2013 and 2014 when compared with other terrorist groups in the world. The state Department compiled a list of the world's deadliest terrorist group with the total fatalities that

they caused in 2013 and 2014. The Boko haram group killed the highest number of people in the period. The report says the group caused 8,239 deaths in the period, the Islamic state of Iraq, and the levant in Iraq killed about 8,038 people, the Taliban group in Afganistan caused 5,848 deaths, AI-shabab group in Somalia killed around 1,539 people in the period while the Maoist/communist party of India - Maoist killed 188. Again, a United Nations report says 1.4 million children have been displaced by the Boko haram in Nigeria. More than half of whom are under the age of five. According to a United Nation's Children Fund, (UNICEF), children and women have been increasingly used in bombings. It further says women and girls are involved in approximately three quarters of the attacks. This has greatly affected the religious, social and economic activities of Christians and non Christians in the affected places.

### **Meaning and objectives of Boko haram**

Different people view Boko haram differently. As such, there are many perceptions about the meaning and objectives of Boko haram. Some see it as a purely religious sect and different from the mainline Islamic groups that is out to entrench Islamic shariah law and compel non Muslims to adhere to it. Some view it as a purely terrorist group in the likes of Alqaeda, Alshabab and ISIS. Still to some, the Boko haram is seen as a political tool invented and aimed at fighting and unseating some political elements in the country. However, the general consensus is that Boko haram has caused great havoc on the Nigerian people and it is a big threat to the corporate existence of Nigeria.

Walker (as quoted in Bazza, 2013), said the term Boko haram developed in the city of Maiduguri where the group was formed. The residents dubbed it to Boko haram. The term itself comes from the Hausa word Boko pronounced bo - ko which means western education (literally 'alphabet', from English "Book") and the Arabic word "haram" meaning sin or forbidden. The name loosely translated from Hausa, means "western education is forbidden". The group earned this name due to its strong opposition to anything western which it sees as corrupting Muslims. According to Bazza (2013), Boko haram was founded as an indigenous group turning itself into a Jihadist group in 2009. It proposes that interaction with the western world is forbidden. In the views of walker as earlier quoted, the group adopted its official name to be people committed to the prophet's teaching and Jihad, which is the English translation from Arabic Jamma'at ahlal- sunnah li-dda'a wati wa-Ijihad. Corroborating this, Abubakar Shekau, the leader of Boko haram in one of his message said "I want all Muslims in Nigeria and the world at large to know that this is a religious war between Muslims and Christians. Every Muslim should take note that this is not an ethnic war, civil war or any kind of war but a religious one. We have not started this war to finish in a week, month or year. The end of this war will be either they kill us or we emerge victorious. This war will not end until the very last one of us or Islam becomes the determinant of governance in Nigeria without question that will be the end of the war" (Middle belt dialogue, 2014).

With such kinds of words coming from the leader of the group, one may not be entirely wrong to say that subjecting Christians to accept shariah law which may include coercion and even killing is one of the objectives of the Boko haram. Though this view is contestable, but the Boko haram coordinated attacks on Christians and their churches, is of course, a proof to this line of argument.

### **Northern Nigeria**

Northern Nigeria is a large geographical landscape. It has vast land and high population. There are presently 19 states in the region which covers from the Benue River to the Sokoto caliphate in the north west and the Borno empire in the north east. Christians are not the majority in northern Nigeria but their population cannot be ignored either. Corroborating this view, Amaza (2014) said, "out of the 19 states at least five have a majority Christian population; Plateau, Adamawa, Nasarawa, Taraba and Benue. At least 6 more have at least 40% Christian population. These states are Gombe, Kaduna, Kogi, Kwara and either Borno or Bauchi. That then leaves only Kano, Kebbi, Katsina, Jigawa, Sokoto, Yobe and Zamfara as having Muslim population above 60%". According to the president of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) pastor Ayo Aritse Jafor as cited in Bazza (2013), the population of Christians in Nigeria is equivalent to the population of the entire country of Egypt. Also, the population of Christians in northern Nigeria is more than the entire population of Syria. The population of Syria is estimated to be 23 million.

Apart from the indigenous Christians from the north, there are also a good number of southerners who have settled in the north for one reason or the other. Some of them are also Christians. Therefore the north is both multi ethnic and multi religious in nature.

### **Effects of Boko haram attacks on Christians in Northern Nigeria**

As earlier pointed out in this paper, the Boko haram attacks on Christians in northern Nigeria has been viewed as persecution by some Christians. Persecution has always been a crucial factor in the spread or elimination of Christianity from a place. Thus, there are painful and fruitful gains. In the words of Boer (2003), the blood of the martyrs, is the seed of the church. In other instances, persecution could lead to the suppression or outright elimination of Christianity. Often cited is the example of North African countries. Nigerians are very sensitive and attaches high premium on any matter of religion. Much of this is due to the presence and manifestation of Islamic fanatics who under the disguise of whatever agitation they have had from time to time have used Christianity as their main target. According to Walker (2013), ever since the Muslim invaders first came to Nigeria in the 11th Century, the Christian population has not been spared the Islamic sword. In the 19th century Othman Danfodio launched a Jihad on this country especially around the northern part after which Muslims have been victimizing Christians. The following are therefore the effects of Boko haram insurgence on Christians in northern Nigeria.

### **Religious effects**

Many religious activities of the Christian faith have been adversely affected as a result of Boko haram insurgence. Bazza (2013) explains:

Christians are always at the receiving end of the Boko haram terrorism and this is indeed a great challenge to our faith. Through their activities, a lot of fear has entered the minds of Christians to the point that some no longer are able to go to church for worship or participate at public Christian religious programmes any longer. As it stands today, Christian faith is no longer practiced in Bama, Gamboru Ngala and the desert areas of Borno. In many churches in the north, times for religious services and liturgical activities have been changed to even the most inconvenient times. For a couple of years now, such central Christian solemnities, festivals and ceremonies like Christ the king procession, Corpus Christi, Christmas and Easter Triduum were scarcely celebrated in most parts of Northern Nigeria. Cases abound where many of our Christian faithfuls have had to abandon their jobs and businesses and relocated back to their villages or some other areas to start life all over again. This has left many confused and disillusioned. There are many cases of victimization in places of work, land acquisition, property ownership and so on all because one professes the Christian faith.

According to a report in Vanguard Newspaper by the Director of social communication Catholic Diocese of Maiduguri Rev. Fr. Gideon Obasogie in 2014 said "as a church we are really going through severe moment of persecution". He said 185 churches were destroyed in Borno and Adamawa while 190,545 people were displaced by the Boko haram. He said many priests and the displaced are now taking refuge in Yola or Maiduguri metropolis. Specifically the statement said churches in Gulak, shuwa, Michika and Bazza were razed while Gwoza and Madagali were under the control of the Boko haram. "We have been sacked for months, sleeping in uncompleted buildings, camps, school premises. We have been absorbed into houses of relations and friends in sixties and seventies" (Vanguard 6th October, 2014).

In another report by Vanguard, four Christians were killed, two churches and over 50 houses razed down by suspected insurgents in pelachiroma community of Hawul on Tuesday 21st October, 2014. According to the report, Hawul is a predominantly Christian community south and about 210km from Maiduguri. The report further stated that "about two weeks ago, some insurgents stormed shaffa community which is about 10km away from Azare the council headquarters and killed over 20 people including a pastor of living faith church, pastor Eluid Gwamna Mshelizza who was slaughtered on his way to his house after performing public sermon programme at about 10.00pm in the community. In the attacks, no fewer than 6 churches were razed down with several houses and shops all belonging to Christians looted and destroyed. (Vanguard 23rd October, 2014). According to an online news media (information Nigeria), suspected Bako haram members opened fire in a church on Thursday 26th September, 2013 in Dorawa town Yobe state killing the pastor and his two children

before setting the building ablaze. The joint Taskforce spoke person Col. Eli Lazarus confirmed the story (information Nigeria online Friday 27th September, 2013).

While addressing Christian Association of Nigeria in America in July 2013, the president of Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) pastor Ayo Oritse Jafor as cited in Bazza (2013), revealed that 70% of all killings targeted at Christians globally are from northern Nigeria with 3000 killed and over 500 churches burnt between 2010 - 2012. In his words "In my first term, about 3000 Christians were killed. Last year alone (2012), it averaged over 100 death every month. In March, 2010, about 500 Christians were slaughtered in one night in an attack in their villages. In April 2011, we lost over 500 churches, thousands of homes and businesses in a 48 hour period and in 2012 about 70 percent of all Christians killed worldwide were in northern Nigeria".

### **Social Effects**

According to a report by a Christian group (open doors 2014), says the level of violence against Christians in 2013 remained extremely high with hundreds of cases of physical aggression and the destruction of nearly 300 churches and the death of 612 Nigerian Christians. The report added that Pentecostal leader Rev. Faye Pama Musa was shot dead by two suspected Boko haram members. Local government areas and social groups leave hardly any space for Christians to live their own lives. The report further said that many Christian villages are denied basic facilities such as wells and schools. Below are some other social effects of Boko haram on Christians:

- a) Boko haram insurgency has created mutual distrust and suspicion
- b) Many public social activities such as marriages, open air crusades, sports etc have been hampered by the activities of Boko haram.
- c) The activities of Boko haram has caused high scale migration of Christians from the north to the south.
- d) Boko haram has created fear and apprehension among Christians as they consider themselves and their worship Centres as prime targets.
- e) Many of the churches, homes, schools and business premises have been reduced to ashes. Many more people are rendered refuge

### **Economic effects**

The economic life of the people in the areas that have been ravaged by Boko haram have been destroyed. Most business premises, shops and markets have either been destroyed or looted. Farming activities by locals has been abandoned. Even livestock's and poultry farming have been destroyed or carted away by the insurgent. Most banks have closed down or relocated. As such many staff within the affected areas have lost their jobs. Investors are chased away and their properties looted or destroyed. Consequently, hunger, poverty, malnutrition, diseases and epidemics abounds.

### **Table showing Boko-Haram attacks on Christians Timeline of Boko-Haram attacks on Churches in Northern Nigeria 2011 – SEPTEMBER, 2014**

S/ N	DATE	Place of attack/ location	STATE	Nature of attack	Casualty/ Effects	Source
1.	26/11/2011 Saturday	Damaturu	Yobe	Bomb explosions on churches	8 churches destroyed, 4 people died, 28 injured, police Hqts. Destroyed	National Mirror 27/11/2011
2.	24/12/2011 Saturday	Gadaka area on the way to Potiskum	Yobe	Many Christians in the area were attacked with bomb explosions & gunshots	Many Christians were killed, churches, houses & shops burnt down	Vanguard news online 24/12/2011
3.	Xmas day 25/12/2011	St. Theresa's Catholic church Madallah	Niger	Suicide bomb on Christians worshippers on Christmas day	45 people killed, many injured. The church and adjoining building destroyed	AIT News 25/12/2011, Daily Sun 26/12/2011
4.	“	Mountain of fire and Miracles ministry Jos	Plateau	Suicide bomb on the church	One died many injured	AIT News 25/12/2011
5.	“	Churches in Kandahar area of Damaturu	Yobe	Bomb explosions	25 people killed 12 injured	AIT News 25/12/2011
6.	Thursday 5/1/2012	Deeper life Bible Church Gombe	Gombe	Gunmen attacked worshippers of the church	6 people killed	Naij.com Vanguard online 5/1/2012
7.	Friday 6/1/2012	Mubi	Adamawa	Gunshots on Christian mourners in a town hall	18 killed	BBC Hausa 6/1/2012
8.	Sunday 22/1/2012	Catholic and ECWA churches in Bauchi and Tafawa Balewa Town	Bauchi	Bomb explosions on Christian worshippers	11 people killed in the two attacks and the churches were damaged 10 unexploded IED recovered	AIT News, BBC Hausa
9.	Sunday 19/2/2012	Christ Embassy morocco street Suleja	Niger	Bomb blast	2 killed, 5 injured 5 vehicles destroyed	Vanguard online
10.	Sunday 26/2/2012	Worshippers at COCCIN Hqts Jos	Plateau	Suicide bomber attacked worshippers	4 killed, over 30 injured. This led to reprisal attack and conflict between Christians & Muslims	AIT, Raypower news 26/2/2012
11.	Sunday 11/3/2012	St. Finbar Catholic Church Ray field Jos	Plateau	Suicide bomber attacked Christian worshippers	10 people killed, many people injured & vehicles destroyed. Tension became high between Christians and	AIT, Raypower news 11/3/2012

					Muslims in Jos	
12.	Easter Sunday 8/4/2012	Junction Road by Sardauna crescent near ECWA Gwari Road, Kaduna	Kaduna	Suicide bomb explosion on traders near ECWA church Gwari road	40 people died 20 motorcycles destroyed	Liberty Radio Kaduna 8/4/2012
13.	Sunday 29/4/2012	Bayero University Kano	Kano	Bomb attack & shootings on Christian worshippers in a lecture theatre	25 people killed including a professor	Vanguard, FRCN news, BBC Hausa 29/4/2012
14.	Sunday 3/6/2012	Living faith church Bauchi and COCCIN church	Bauchi	Bomb attack on Christian worshippers in living faith and COCCIN church	Over 20 people killed & over 35 people injured	BBC Hausa, Vanguard online 3/6/2012
15.	"	A church in Yelwa	Bauchi	Suicide car bomb explosion on Christian worshippers	12 people killed	BBC Hausa 3/6/2012
16.	Sunday 10/6/2012	The Lords chosen church at Rukuba Road Jos	Plateau	Suicide bomb attack	Unspecified number of people killed and many injured.	FRCN News 4pm
17.	Sunday 10/6/2012	A Church in Biu	Borno	Gunmen attacked Christian worshippers in a church	Many Christians killed	Vanguard online 10/6/2012
18.	Sunday 17/6/2012	ECWA Good news Wusasa, Zaria	Kaduna	Suicide car bomb attack on Christian worshippers	8 people killed, many injured, over 40 cars destroyed	Liberty Radio
19.	"	Christ the king catholic church Sabon gari, Zaria	Kaduna	Suicide car bomb attack on Christian worshippers	4 people killed many injured	BBC Hausa
20.	Sunday 17/6/2012	Shalom church Trikania, Kaduna	Kaduna	Suicide car bomb attack on Christian worshippers	4 people killed many injured. This led to reprisal attack by Christians in some parts of Kaduna. 51 people died in all the attack including reprisal according to Red cross.	Vanguard V.O.A Hausa
21.	Monday 18/6/2012	Damataru	Yobe	Bomb attack and setting churches ablaze	4 churches (names not mentioned) were burnt down	Naij.com online BBC Hausa 18/6/2012

22.	Sunday 24/6/2012	In a church at Tudun Wadan Iya Bayangari Bauchi	Bauchi	Bomb explosion in a church	Nine people injured	BBC Hausa 24/6/2012
23.	Saturday 7/7/2012	Nine villages in Riom LGA and Barkin Ladi	Plateau	Unknown gunmen believed to be terrorist attacked the Christian dominated natives	53 people killed	BBC Hausa 7/7/2012
24.	Sunday 8/7/2012	In a church in villages in Riom and Barkin Ladi area.	Plateau	Gunshots by unknown gunmen believed to be terrorist	Church worshipers numbering 50 attending burial of those attacked previous day were shot and killed including senator Gyang Dantong, 2 federal law makers	BBC Hausa, AIT news, Raypower news 8/7/12
25.	Monday 6/8/2012	Deeper life church Otite near Okene	Kogi	Gunshot attack on Christians	19 people killed & 9 others injured	FRCN Network news 8/8/12
26.	Sunday 12/8/2012	All saints catholic church Kanoyel Gombe	Gombe	Gunshot attack	The police man on duty for the church killed	BBC Hausa 12/8/2012
27.	Sunday 2/9/2012	COCCIN church at New market area Maiduguri	Borno	Setting the church ablaze	COCCIN church and the Divisional Hqts burnt down	Vanguard online 2/9/2012
28.	Tuesday 4/9/2012	Unguwan Yoruba area Maiduguri	Borno	Slaughter	Four Igbo men were butchered by unknown persons around 12:00am	V.O.A Hausa 5/9/2012
29.	Sunday 23/9/2012	St. John's catholic church near Tafawa Balewa stadium Bauchi	Bauchi	Suicide car bomb attack	6 people were immediately confirmed dead while 50 others sustained various degrees of injuries	BBC Hausa, V.O.A Hausa, Vanguard & Daily Trust online of 23/9/2012
30.	Sunday 14/10/12	Gwange area of Maiduguri	Borno	Gunshot attack	A Christian and his wife shot dead by unknown gun men	BBC Hausa 14/10/2012
31.	Sunday 28/10/12	St. Ritas catholic church unguwan yero, Kaduna	Kaduna	Suicide car bomb attack	4 people killed while about 145 were injured. There was reprisal attacks in the area on Muslims	Liberty Radio, BBC Hausa 28/10/2012
32.	Friday 9/11/2012	Buni Goni, Yadi Gujba LGA	Yobe	Setting churches ablaze	Two churches at Goni Shuaibu	Daily Trust online 9/11/2012



					and Hayin Dogo burnt down. Also, primary school and a police station set ablaze	
33.	Sunday 25/11/12	St. Andrews protestant church military cantonmdent Jaji	Kaduna	Two separate suicide car bomb attacks	13 people were killed, over 30 sustained injuries	Vanguard, FRCN Network news
34.	"	Kano	Kano	Gunshot attack	A man, his wife and a child were shot dead on their way home from the church by unknown persons	Vanguard online 25/11/2012
35.	Sunday 2/12/12	Gambaru Ngala border town	Borno	Gunshots & setting churches ablaze	3 churches & a police divisional office burnt down	Vanguard online 2/12/2012
36.	Monday 24/12/2012	Musari village in outshirt of Maiduguri	Borno	Killing by slaughter	15 christians were butchered by book haram including a police traffic officer	Naij.com 30/12/2012
37.	Monday 24/12/2012	Peri Village Potiskum	Yobe	Gunshots and setting churches ablaze	6 people killed including a pastor, ECWA church & 20 houses burnt down	Vanguard online 24/12/2012
38.	Sunday 28/7/2013	St. Charles catholic church, Kano	Kano	Bomb thrown at worshippers	5 people killed 8 injured	Punch news online 28/7/2013
39.	Monday 14/7/2013	Church of the brethren and two others dille	Borno	Gunshot attack & setting 3 churches ablaze one of which is the church of the brethren	27 people killed including the bomber	AIT news punch news online

## ANALYSIS

### FREQUENCY

1. Total number of attacks 40
2. Number of bomb blast attacks on churches 21
3. Number of attacks by gunshots, setting building ablaze, slaughter or all of the above 19
4. Attacks in North east states of Borno, Yobe, Gombe and Bauchi 22
5. Attacks in other states such as Kano, Kaduna, Plateau, Niger 21
6. Number of attacks on Sundays 29

- |  |    |
|--|----|
| 7. Number of attacks by states: Yobe - 7, Kaduna - 6, Borno - 7, Plateau - 6, Bauchi -5, Kano - 3, Gombe - 2 Niger - 2, Adamawa - 1 and Kogi – 1 |    |
| 8. Direct attacks on churches  | 31 |
| 9. Number of attacks by year: 2011 - 5; 2012 - 32, 2013 - 1, 2014 – 1  |    |

NB: The list in the above table did not cover general attacks on a whole community by the Boko haram even if they are Christian dominated, such as Chibok, Madagali, Gwoza, Michika, Shuwa, Gulak, Bama, Baga, Buni yadi, Bazz and Hawul. But some were cited in the work. Only selected and purely attacks on Christians and churches in particular communities are captured in the table.

### **Boko haram and National Development**

As earlier highlighted in this paper, the Boko haram insurgency has greatly affected the social, religious and economic lives of the people in Northern Nigeria and by extension Nigeria as a whole. In specific terms therefore, Boko haram insurgency has affected Nigeria's National development in the following ways:

1. The activities of Boko haram has crippled economic activities in the north especially states such as Borno, Adamawa and Yobe. This is attested by the fact that many markets, business premises and Banks have either been burnt down and destroyed or looted by the insurgent group.
2. Many investors, private companies and Banks have either been close down or relocated to other places. As a result, many of the local residents working in those places have lost their jobs. This has negative consequences on the income, and economic growth of the nation.
3. A lot of schools in the affected states have been burnt down. Many of the school children have either been killed or conscripted into the group. As I speak, the over 200 abducted Chibok girls have not been found. This has great impact on the educational growth and manpower development of the nation.
4. Due to the activities of the Boko haram, there is exodus of people from the north east. This is because of the general insecurity in the area. This affect national development. There are many internally displaced camps of the victims of Boko haram. These camps as well as the affected areas are exposed to the risk of hunger, malnutrition, diseases and epidemics.
5. Agricultural activities such as farming, fishing and poultry have also been hampered. This reduces food production which can cause famine, hunger and malnutrition.
6. The activities of Bokoharam is posing a great threat to the corporate existence, national unity and integration of Nigeria.

### **Summary**

Boko haram has become a global terrorist group. Its activities have adversely affected Christians and non Christians at large. Their operation is rooted on a religious ideology which motivates them to engage in their murderous and dastardly acts. Governments war on the group is yet to yield much positive results as such new tactics should be devised to root them out.

### **Recommendations**

1. Government should be more committed in tackling the problem of Boko haram insurgence in order to save Nigeria from further destruction of lives and property.
2. Christians in northern Nigeria should be encouraged by their religious leaders to remain firm and steadfast in spite of what they are going through knowing that Christ had spoken of persecution of the church. (John 16:2).
3. Government should engage more the services of Islamic clerics in enlightening the Muslim ummah about the true position of Islam on the ideologies and activities of Boko haram as well as re-indoctrinating freed members of the group.
4. Government, faith groups, Nongovernmental organizations should render prompt succour to victims of Boko haram by rehabilitating and providing relief materials to them.
5. The media should give adequate coverage of the activities of Boko haram and the plight of its victims in order to draw international support in the fight against the Boko haram group.

### **Conclusion**

Christianity is a religion of peace. Its adherents are enjoined to love their neighbours and their enemies and to even pray for them. (Mathew 5:43 - 44). This indeed is a difficult task to the believers at a trying moment like this. However this injunction is divine and carry with it hopes and future rewards. From the exposition in this paper, Christians have suffered much havoc on account of the activities of Boko haram in northern Nigeria.

Until government subdue the group, so that peace and national development thrives, Christians will have to persevere, endure and remain firm and steadfast.

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