



July 2020 Report

Terrorism, COVID-19, Flooding And The Growing Humanitarian Crises In Northern Nigeria

Lead Story

Spike In Terrorism As COVID-19 Worsens Humanitarian Emergencies In Northern Nigeria

'Kunle Adebajo



This project is supported by the Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA)

 OSIWA |  HumAngle



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An artist's sketch depicting the multiple conflict situations in Northern Nigeria at the time of COVID19 pandemic.

Calamities are raining in torrents for the residents. There is a rise in terrorist attacks, abductions and other violent crimes across Northern Nigeria, amid the spread of COVID-19. The already dreadful humanitarian crises are further worsening.

Victims who manage to escape one calamity steadily find themselves down into the rabbit hole of other criminal onslaughts. Under the overwhelming crises, not much help is in sight. For victims of escalating calamities, particularly in Northeast Nigeria, God seems far away.

For aid workers operating in the region, each day's foray into the communities of the needy and helpless is steadily turning into a reality show on a death sentence. They have recently become targets of abductions and executions by terrorists. They are frequently designing and harnessing opportunities to be fed with ransom on prime captives. Aid workers particularly fit this brand. Expectedly, many humanitarian organisations have been forced to scale down their services, especially in delivering foodstuff and medical supplies to Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in these Northeast communities.

Dr Allen Manasseh, Director of Media and

Publicity for Kibaku (Chibok) Area Development Association (KADA), attested to this.

He told HumAngle that humanitarian services in Borno State recently came to a halt but had been partly revived. "Right now, they are only going to places that are not really on the red line so that they don't risk the lives of humanitarian workers and pilots," he explained.

HumAngle investigations revealed that in areas like Rann, Baga, Malumfatori and Marte, considered as red zones, the populations of vulnerable dwellers in those communities are growing desperate. They are hungry, exposed, medically in need, yet cannot receive much-needed aid.

Within 2020, by July 24 specifically, over 6,800 people, including over 1,500 civilians and 620 security personnel, have been killed as a result of insecurity in Nigeria and over 1,200 have been victims of kidnapping. Data from the Nigeria Security Tracker indicates that the number of deaths recorded in April was the highest since March 2015. A HumAngle examination of the data further reveals that a dominant percentage of the fatalities are in parts of Northern Nigeria. A decade-long battle with insurgency, banditry

and communal clashes has set Nigeria up for the depressing characterisation as one of the world's most severe humanitarian disaster sites.

Contending with these is already an overwhelming burden. To further be struck with additional global health pandemic that exposes potentially millions of the people under life-threatening conditions stretches the disaster beyond full grasp.

According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the number of people who need urgent assistance in the Northeast rose from 7.9 million in January 2020 to 10.6 million following the outbreak of

COVID-19. Also, people affected by food insecurity in the region are seen to increase from 3.7 million to seven million.

The European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO) recently estimated that 1.2 million people affected by insurgency in the country lacked access to aid, having been cut off from possible aid by conflict, threats of attack, and restrictions on movement. Experts fear that if the state of security does not improve soon, significantly increased rates of food shortage, health challenges, displacement and death will worsen in affected communities.

AS OF JULY 24

2020

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The European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO) recently estimated too that 1.2 million people affected by insurgency in the country do not have access to aid due to conflict, threats of attack, and restrictions on movement. Experts fear that if the state of security does not improve soon, significantly increased rates of food shortage, health challenges, displacement, and death are unavoidable.

Unsafe roads, airspace

The presence of insurgents and the frequency of ambushes against travellers have rendered a significant stretch and categories of highways and other roads in the Northeast unsafe for urgent aid to reach vulnerable populations. Many organisations, to reduce the risk of moving employees from one location to another, prefer to engage locals. This approach is, however, not airtight.

HumAngle's investigation found that some of the aid workers got employed using illegally procured documents from Local Government authorities certifying them as indigenes, a major consideration for employment. The practice, our investigation shows, is a reflection of the desperation for jobs among young people. These workers then have to regularly travel long distances to see their family or return home without the knowledge of their employers. Since not all aid workers can work from their original location, there are others whose jobs require that they travel from time to time to areas actively ravaged by insurgency. Because of this, helicopter transportation services are provided by the United Nations Humanitarian Air Service (UNHAS) to convey workers, but even this does not cover much of the areas of critical need in the region.

In Borno State, the helicopters' possible destinations include Pulka, Gwoza, Damboa, Ngala, Bama, Kala Balge-Rann, Banki, Monguno, Dikwa, and Damasak.

To visit areas outside of the locations covered by the helicopter service, humanitarian workers fall back to the use of the roads but generally in compliance with regularly updated travel advisories and careful plans. But attacks from terrorists and bandits cannot easily be predicted. In June, five aid workers were abducted by the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) along Monguno-Maiduguri Road in Borno State and last week, and the group released a video clip of its execution of the aid workers. Apparently, the execution followed failed negotiations.

Meanwhile, air travels are not entirely safe either. A UNHAS helicopter came under fire resulting in "serious damage" in July in Damasak as it was returning to Maiduguri, the Borno State capital.

On July 29, the convoy of the Borno State Governor, Prof. Baba Gana Zulum, was ambushed in Baga during an official state tour to connect with his people. The heavily guarded convoy did not prevent ISWAP, a faction of Boko Haram, from attempting an attack on the entourage.

Zulum thereafter showed his displeasure over the security situation in Baga town, saying that despite the presence of the military in the town, the troops were still unable to secure the area. He was quoted as saying, "You have been here for over one year now, there are 1,181 soldiers here. "If you cannot take over Baga which is less than five kilometres from your base, then should we forget about Baga?

"I will inform the Chief of the Army Staff to redeploy these men to other places that they can be useful.

"You people said there's no Boko Haram here, then who attacked us? I doubt if there is any Boko Haram in this town, I can go in and sleep here," Zulum added.

A military commanding officer in the trending video of the incident could be heard assuring the governor that there were no Boko Haram insurgents in the town.

Baga is located close to the shores of Lake Chad, off the northeast flank of Kukawa town in Kukawa Local Government Area.

The governor was in the town for the reopening of Monguno- Baga highway to commuters after two years of closure.

In June, Borno State Commissioner for Reconstruction, Rehabilitation and Resettlement, Mustapha Gubio, said the ongoing Boko Haram insurgency was preventing the execution of development projects in five of 27 local governments' areas in the state.

Reinforcing that concern, Manasseh said "the truth is a few kilometres outside Maiduguri; there is no community, no local government headquarters, and no town that is safe for people to go freely and come back. Majority of these roads are not in use, so all the people moving from Maiduguri, for example, to Damboa have to be airlifted, including the volunteer staff."

Relying on locals and the inability of staff of NGOs

to be at locations where aid is needed has widened the gap between givers and receivers of aid.

"Monitoring and evaluation are central to humanitarian assistance, a situation where staff cannot oversee the distribution and delivery of aid; it's suspended. This is usually the case in Northeast Nigeria," said Zara Al'Amin, an aid worker with an international agency in Maiduguri. Aside Gwoza town, villages such as Gava, Ashigasgiya, Arboko, Ngoshe in Gwoza Local Government Area remain inaccessible to humanitarian assistance.

In Damboa, there are communities under Boko Haram occupation such as Talala, Foro, Azur, and Multe with populations. The list goes on, including Abadam, Gubio, Marte, Ngala, and Dikwa local government areas where communities survive at the mercy of Boko Haram insurgents.

The use of helicopters helps with the safe delivery

of essential services to critical areas, but there are not enough to meet the needs of humanitarian workers. The few available choppers have to be scheduled, sometimes weeks ahead. There is then the added problem of increased scarcity in recent weeks, which has frustrated efforts to deliver food supplies to IDPs as well as other essential items forcing many to risk travelling by road.

"The truth is the state government has abandoned its primary responsibility to attend to the health of IDPs. So, without the helicopters moving those cargoes, they won't have access to good medical care," Mariam Bulus (not real name), who works with an international humanitarian organisation in the Northeast, told HumAngle.

She noted that air travel saved time and prevented civilians from getting abducted or killed by Unexploded Ordnances (UXOs) and Improved Explosive Devices (IEDs).

Diminishing excitement to work in NGO/INGOs in Borno

Despite growing unemployment and poverty levels, many families are putting pressure on their loved ones to either resign or decline job offers by local and international non-governmental organisations because of the high risk of abduction and execution of staff of such organisations by insurgents.

"Because of the increased frequency of attacks these days, some aid workers are resigning their jobs, and that is a dangerous trend at play.

"By the time NGOs start advertising openings for employment and people are not turning up to provide services, then the end has come," Manasseh added.

To avoid loss of lives through travelling, Manasseh urged organisations providing humanitarian support to, where possible, train and actively involve members of beneficiary-communities.

"The Nigerian labour organisations must step in to ensure that young people that are being engaged by aid organisations should be employed directly and must get health and life insurance," said Al'Amin

According to Al'Amin, there is a new awakening whereby many young people are now reading their contract letters beyond the figures, and asking questions about their safety and other rights and privileges.

Vulnerability to COVID-19

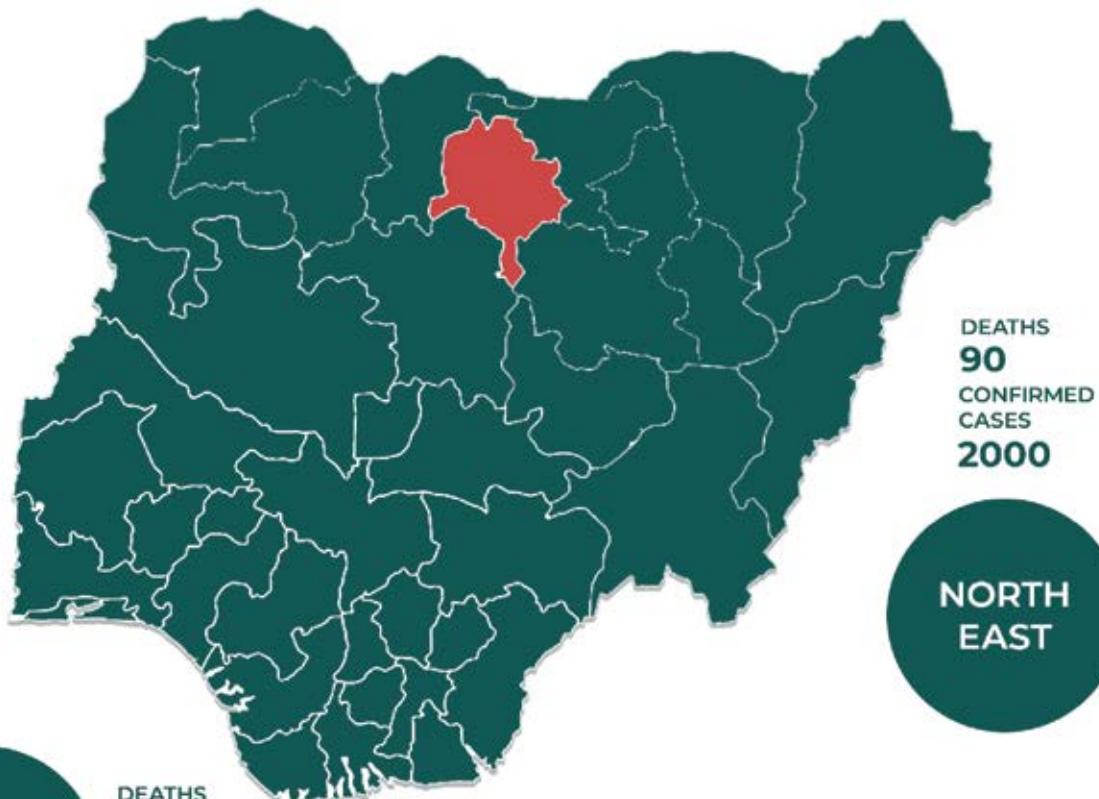
Statistics from the Nigeria Centre for Disease Control (NCDC) show that, as of July 29, the COVID-19 fatality in the country stood at 868 people. In the Northeast, there are over 2,000 confirmed cases, with nearly 90 casualties. In the Northwest, confirmed cases exceed 4,300 with about 130 deaths.

Many believe these figures underestimate the actual spread and impact of the virus, especially in a place like Kano where there were reports of widespread, controversial deaths. Nevertheless, the state currently has the sixth-highest number of confirmed cases and the third-highest death toll.



◀ Kano, Weeks after first case was recorded and massive deaths followed.

COVID-19 DATA



KANO

SIXTH HIGHEST NUMBER OF
CONFIRMED CASES AND THE
THIRD HIGHEST DEATH TOLL

AS OF 29TH JULY
29,868

PEOPLE HAVE LOST THEIR LIVES SINCE
THE INDEX CASE WAS DISCOVERED IN
FEBRUARY

Source: Nigerian Center for Disease Control

Despite these numbers, adherence to safety measures, including physical distancing and the use of face masks, appears to be the exception, not the norm, in many parts of the North. Manasseh, who has visited several teaching hospitals in Borno said some doctors attended to patients without the necessary personal protective equipment.

"In fact, you look odd when you are wearing masks in Maiduguri. People look at you in some places as if you are strange," he said, adding that many believed the pandemic was a hoax and an opportunity by government officials to siphon public funds.

"I asked a lot of people when I went to the University of Maiduguri Teaching Hospital, why they were not properly geared up and observing social distancing. The response was, even our isolation centre is empty; nothing is in it. So, they don't believe that COVID is real."

HumAngle visits to a few public places, including public buildings in some Local Government Areas, confirmed Manasseh's worry. There seemed to be nothing to indicate that people were aware that a public health challenge is ravaging society. The well-rehearsed protocols of handwashing with soap under running water, masking up and social distancing appear totally alien.

Though he has seen the Northeast Development Commission distribute protection kits to some hospitals and agencies, the intervention cannot get to everyone as many of the clinics, especially those owned by the government, "are not even functional".

HumAngle reported on Tuesday, July 28, 2020, that internally displaced persons in Borno are rendered vulnerable to the pandemic owing to inadequate health facilities. Arising from the newspaper's interviews with many IDPs, the incidence of widespread ignorance and misconception seems to run deep. The rise in violent crimes makes it challenging for grassroots orientation exercises about the pandemic to be carried out.

The curse of the rainy season

The rainy season which, in Northern Nigeria, lasts between mid-May and September, comes with fresh challenges. Flooding makes various communities even less accessible to aid workers. The Nigeria Hydrological Services Agency (NIHSA) cautioned on Tuesday that "August and September are very critical for flooding in Nigeria." Already the ugly impacts of flooding are showing as many states have recorded fatalities and loss of properties to the disaster. Last year, among the 13 states projected to witness increased flooding by the agency were Adamawa, Benue, Kebbi, Kogi, Nasarawa, Niger, and Taraba. Frequent rainfall, accompanied by a dramatic rise in health challenges, especially malaria and cholera, adds to the growing humanitarian crises in Northern Nigeria.

The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) had warned in May that the risks presented by malaria, pneumonia, diarrhoea in developing countries "far outweigh any threat presented by the coronavirus" if routine healthcare is disrupted.

Manasseh noted that the downscaling of services by humanitarian organisations would have a considerable impact on the health of the people and such issues as child nutrition, infant, and maternal mortality.

"They are going to be affected because most of these local government areas don't have doctors who are domiciled as government workers," he said.

"Some of the hospitals are not functional, so it is Doctors Without Borders or UNICEF or International Organization for Migration or some of these organisations that are providing skeletal health and sanitation services. They refer some people to tertiary healthcare facilities and even airlift patients in some cases. It is going to affect a lot of people," Manasseh said.

Editor-in-Chief's Note

As gripping as reporting the daily violent crimes and terrorism across Africa is, the dreadful and rising fatalities over the COVID-19 pandemic adds new urgency to the unfolding humanitarian emergency on the continent.

This special supplement examines tendencies that suggest the collapse of governance at all levels in the Northeast and Northwest regions of Nigeria and the attendant inability to protect citizens from violent crimes. Already, there exists a dramatic trust deficit between the people and the government.

From Katsina to Sokoto in the Northwest, Nigerian citizens have streamed into the Republic of Niger, where over 70,000 are refugees. In Chibok, Borno State and other communities in the Northeast, the idea of government rings hollow and distant tunes in the minds of people who believe the government is unable to save them from insurgents. They neither expect help while in the throes of COVID-19 pandemic.

HumAngle spoke with citizens whose voices reflect anger, despair and resignation. Some question the government's moral authority over their lives. As such, they view preachments of social distancing, masking, and handwashing to check the spread of coronavirus as part of the articles of infamy from an unjust government.

For HumAngle, this reporting project supported by the Open Society Initiative of West Africa (OSIWA) in the time of the COVID-19 pandemic may ultimately lead both the authorities and potential victims to visualise and take precautions against the next possible doom.

HumAngle is further encouraged by its partnership with OSIWA to maintain steady surveillance on society, thereby offering intelligence information about what is unfolding while also chronicling the concise and transparent account of what occurred.

Happy reading.



Ahmad Salkida

COVID-19 Widening The Education Gap In Northern Nigeria

Aliyu Dahiru Aliyu

With 13.2 million out-of-school youths, Nigeria leads the world in a march to a most insecure future. According to the United Nations Children's Fund, (UNICEF) 2018 data, Nigeria has the most significant number of out-of-school children in the world, contributing 20 per cent to that ugly data. Within Nigeria, though, the distribution of that out-of-school children menace points toward the Northeast as the chief harvester. Perhaps, a pointer to this is the targeted campaigns and attacks on Western education by radical religious groups.

Schooling has been regularly disrupted by terrorist attacks mostly in Borno, Yobe and Adamawa states. In the Northwest, the situation is not different. Indeed, with Zamfara State at the forefront, most out-of-school children in the state have never been enrolled in schools to benefit from compulsory basic education.

HumAngle assessment of the situation in the state identified different orientations from families. Finger-pointing has been evident, with some picking holes with the education system as part of the reasons their children are not enrolled in school. This is especially in rural areas where children of farmers do not go to school at the peak of the farming season due to their involvement in agricultural activities. The children of livestock herders are hardly enrolled in schools as they are seen by their parents to be more

beneficial for their livestock breeding than with anything to do with schooling.

The Almajiri system of education is another major barrier to accessing formal education in the North. Secular school timetables clash with the Almajiri lifestyle that requires children to beg for alms or run errands when not in their fulltime Quranic schools.

Even among those who go to school, the literacy rate in Northern Nigeria is so abhorrent. A national survey conducted in 2010 showed that 71.7 per cent of children between the ages of five and 16 in the Northwest and 83.1 per cent of the same category in the Northeast could not read. The survey further showed that the teachers themselves were grossly lacking the knowledge and skills to impart in the children. They were largely deficient in basic literacy and numeracy skills.

Further back, a 2008 study showed that the majority of basic school teachers in Kwara State, North Central region, were barely literate. However, the state ranked better than many in Northern Nigeria.

Nigeria's budget on education is also very poor, with less than 10 per cent of the total allocations allotted to the educational sector. The condition of infrastructure in schools is poor with classrooms in most public schools in a pathetic state, congested and not conducive to meaningful learning.

COVID-19 and e-learning in the north

The outbreak of COVID -19 early in the year has exposed different socioeconomic, digital and educational divides among communities in Nigeria. The awful choices the pandemic forced Nigerians into has shown what used to be seen as the lamentations of civil society organisations.

The decision of the Federal Government to close schools raised questions about how

children would continue learning. The option of using virtual learning methods was considered viable and different countries around the world embraced the strategy.

However, e-learning is based on digital inclusion and internet penetration that are progressing sluggishly in many parts of Nigeria, and largely non-existent in the rural areas.

Statistics show that less than half of Nigeria's population has access to the internet and the country's education through virtual infrastructure and the internet is described as ill-conceived by experts even before the pandemic took the country by surprise.

Dr Dili Ojukwu, a UK based Nigerian expert on e-learning told HumAngle that "it is indeed sad that it took COVID-19 to shock most of humanity, particularly those living in the so-called developing nations, about the need for a total rethink on the delivery of education.

"But technology has been warning us about it for decades.

"In a lot of African countries today, education, including tertiary education, is at a standstill. Why? They have not integrated remote learning practices in their curricula.

"They are still stuck in the traditional pattern of knowledge sharing where one individual would stand in a classroom, telling students how to confront the challenges of the 21st century with 19th-century equipment."

Even though the government is seen as not well

prepared to ask students to join e-classes due to COVID-19, the less privileged families in Nigeria cannot afford it due to harsh financial realities facing them.

Maimuna Muhammad Labbo, a Kano State-based secondary school final year student, expressed her concern, saying accessing the internet was expensive for many families who struggled to eat daily.

"The Federal Government said it is planning for teachers to engage students through online classes, but nobody thinks about hundreds of thousands of students who cannot access the internet or are digitally not included," she lamented.

"Try to imagine what online classes would possibly mean to the majority of students in rural areas who have never accessed or surfed the internet!

"Try to imagine the cost of data bundles to poor parents who cannot have a day of three square meals, especially in this trying time when businesses are experiencing economic meltdowns," Maimuna said.



◀ Mass graves following COVID-19 breakout and controversy in Kano, North West Nigeria

Students in Nigeria continue to sit at home due to COVID-19 and receive no lessons for over four months since the lockdown against the spread of the virus came into force.

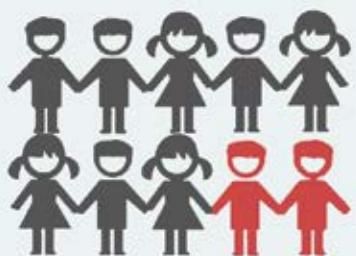
Some states, however, use radio and television broadcasts to offer instructions to primary and secondary school pupils. Still, some privileged children, especially those in the cities who have

access to the modules, are said to be struggling to understand the less interactive modules.

But the majority in rural areas lack access because their parents cannot afford radio and television sets and where they have, may not be able to access the broadcasts because of poor energy supply.

EDUCATION & COVID IN THE NORTH

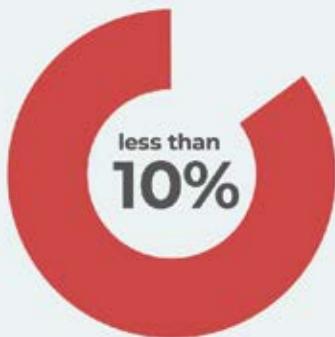
According to a survey conducted by UNICEF



**13.2 MILLION CHILDREN
OUT OF SCHOOL**

LARGEST NUMBER OF OUT-OF-SCHOOL
CHILDREN IN THE WORLD IN 2018

NIGERIA'S BUDGET ON EDUCATION IS
OF THE TOTAL ALLOCATIONS
TO THE EDUCATIONAL SECTOR



HumAngle

Insecurity in Northwest Nigeria Exporting Humanitarian Crisis To Niger Republic

Idris Muhammad

In the last half a decade, the Northwest region has been facing severe insecurity issues. Banditry erupted across some communities affecting a significant population living in Zamfara, Katsina and Sokoto states.

This crisis has forced over 70,000 community dwellers in those states to flee, crossing the border into Niger Republic to seek refuge.



Some casualties of brewing terrorism in North West Nigeria

The violence began in 2014 as cattle rustling activity, and the matter became worse in early 2016 when the bandits started killing local miners in communities of Zamfara State and expatriates working with them.

Hassan Zurmi is a resident of Zurmi Local Government seeking refuge in Garin Kaka Opportunity Village in Maradi, Niger Republic. HumAngle spoke with him about his condition, and he said "before the incident, we were living peacefully with all sorts of people not only in Nigeria but Nigeriens at the border areas.

"Fulani herders were doing their normal rearing of animals. They always passed through our farmlands. Sometimes we cracked jokes with them. We bought their animals. We also engaged in barter. They provided us with fresh milk, rams and other livestock while we provided them food for their animals," he added.

The attacks, which began like child's play in some communities of Zamfara State, have changed everything. They have spread like wildfire affecting the entire Northwest region, especially those at the border area with Niger Republic with

recurring tragedy as thousands are killed. Women are raped, several of them are forced to become widows. Children are turned into orphans. Villages have been burnt down, sacked and destroyed, while cattle are rustled, farm produce destroyed, properties stolen and people kidnapped for ransom.

The former Governor of Zamfara State, Abdulaziz Yari, is reported to have said that nearly 500 villages and 13,000 hectares of land were destroyed and 2,835 people killed between 2011 and 2018. In late 2018, it was estimated that more than 10,000 bandits were controlling several communities, especially in Anka, Zurmi, Birnin Magaji and Shinkafi local government areas of Zamfara State.

It is believed that the criminal gangs camped in eight different locations in the wild forests at the boundary areas with neighbouring states of Katsina, Sokoto as well as at the border with Niger Republic.

The Rugu, Kamara, Kunduma and Sububu forests have become major hideout locations for the gangs from which they carry out their criminal raids on communities in

Zamfara State and across the whole of the Northwest region.

From 2019 to date, several operations by the Nigerian Army such as 'Operation Harbin Kunama,' 'Operation Puff Adder,' 'Operation Diran Mikiya' and the recently launched 'Operation Exercise Sahel Sanity,' were each hyped as the single inevitable solution to the endemic insecurity in the Northwest. The community dwellers have seen the fizzling and end of each 'operation', but the problem has remained assertive.

There is no consensus on what originally triggered the insecurity. What is not in contention

though is that the crisis has been long drawn and that it is verging on humanitarian emergencies of very tragic dimension.

Usman, a resident of Magama village, a border community between Nigeria and Niger Republic, remembers that "there were pockets of hit and run, armed smuggling and drug business gangs at the border areas but the issue became aggravated as the areas began to witness less rainfall as farming and grazing started running into desperate situations.

"We can trace the origin of the conflict back to when Jibia Dam started drying up. Most Fulani herders use the dam to get water for their cattle and rear animals in the communities of Zamzam, Mazanya Yar Gamji, Mallamawa," he said.

Usman added: "They started having issues with the communities because they occupied their farmlands, denying the villagers access to their farmlands."

Foreseeing the aggravating situation, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

(UNHCR), opened a sub-office in Maradi, Niger Republic in September 2019. The office coordinates registration, protection, education, health, housing and access to WASH (Water Sanitation and Hygiene) and getting refugees settled.

The Maradi office of UNHCR told HumAngle in April that over 23,000 people from Northwest Nigeria fled into Niger Republic in search of safety. These were people whose ancestral homes had been razed by armed men across the most volatile states in the region.

The office also keeps a record of over 70,000 Nigerians who have fled and are living as refugees in Niger Republic and records that the first influx

"we managed to carry our children and started running to safety with no idea where we were going. Our men couldn't help us and didn't know what to do. It was very tragic and traumatic. It was in the night.

was in April 2019.

HumAngle spoke with Hamisu and who is from Buzu town in Isa Local Government Area of Sokoto State but now in a refugee camp in Niger Republic. He remembers that first wave of fleeing Nigerians pouring into the neighbouring country. "At the time we were doomed with this calamity. It was on the first day of Ramadan (April 2019). It was around 7 p.m. Suddenly, we saw a heavily armed group riding motorcycles. The gang stormed our community and started shooting. "We ran off together with our families whereas some didn't even know the whereabouts of their family members," Hamisu recalled.

Women and children still bear some scars of the attacks, such as Bilikisu, a widow who fled with her 11 children from Garin Bawa of Isa Local Government Area of Sokoto State.

She said, "we managed to carry our children and started running to safety with no idea where we were going. Our men couldn't help us and didn't know what to do. It was very tragic and traumatic. It was in the night.

"It was a long journey of uncertainty. We went through bushes. We trekked more than four hours in the bush until we arrived at Dankano town in Niger Republic."

Hamisu explained the difficulty the men faced in the escape journey, saying: "Men, in particular, couldn't wait to support anyone because we were warned that whoever stopped would certainly lose his life."

HumAngle learnt that more than 3,000 villagers

fled Isa Local Government Area that night.

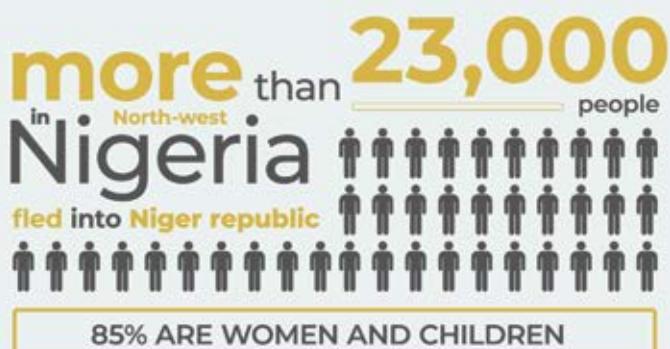
"We were warmly received at Dan Kano town and given where to sleep and what to eat. Our number could not be estimated, but I can roughly say we were about 3,000," Bilikisu recalled.

Musa Sale, a resident of Burugusuma community and the only surviving person in his clan, recounted that "all of us trekked to the border town. On the way, many little children were discovered. Some more children were found later when a group of young people volunteered to search for them."

This conflict has generated a severe humanitarian crisis in Niger Republic. Maradi, like several major communities in the Lake Chad Basin, is creating a location of intervention for the aggravating humanitarian emergencies of the Sahel as the region contends with a refugee crisis amid the global coronavirus pandemic.

Not surprisingly, Babar Baloch, an official of the UNHCR revealed in a recent statement that "the conflict generated a lot of suffering and straining humanitarian actor's financial resources and capacity to respond."

Refugees in Niger republic



Source: the UNHCR Maradi office

 HumAngle

Will there ever be re-integration?

As the canvass of the violence and insecurity widens in the Northwest, more communities are likely to be affected with a resulting upsurge in the refugee crisis. It is estimated that hundreds of Nigerians from states in Northwest Nigeria flee daily.

Of the over 70,000 Nigerians living in refugee camps in Niger Republic, 85 percent of whom are women and children, are there any hopes of restoring peace in their homes and getting them back to their communities?

"The people that brought us here really tried but we are worried because whoever leaves his country doesn't think of anything except how to go back home," philosophised Hamisu while contemplating reintegration in a conversation with HumAngle.

Mallam Amadu, also from Sokoto State, told HumAngle: "We can't go back to our communities because we are always conversant with the situation in Nigeria. The gangs are still occupying our houses and farmlands, and there is no security and no plans to dislodge them.

"We feel more at home here despite some challenges. Niger Republic is safer and more comfortable for us than in our country home," he said.

"Our hosts, the Nigeriens, integrated with us very well. They are very hospitable, they agree to marry our daughters and even allow us to marry them. So, we are leaving happily with them here," Amadu said.

Sa'adatu Tanko from Sabon-Birni lost her husband and three sons during attacks by armed gangs. She spoke with HumAngle, pitching a very sorrowful tone.

"There is nothing left for me in Nigeria. I have no relatives again. My maternal brothers are nowhere to be found, and I am not hearing from them at all.

"No one will force me to go back to that community because the place is very dangerous; I honestly gave up on Nigeria because of the security situation," Sa'adatu said.

Ali Barau from Shinkafi said, "It's no longer a story for the Nigerian government to promise us peace and fail us woefully. We have heard enough from them. We lived in fear and anxiety for over five years. The situation has already gotten out of hand. If our hosts, Nigerien authorities, will offer us land to build, farm, and run businesses, we may not go back to Nigeria at all."

Scepticism, Lack Of Awareness Exposes IDPs In Borno To COVID-19

Aisha Talba

The environment where they dwell immediately raises the red flag on several health fronts. Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in most parts of Borno state are particularly more vulnerable to the COVID-19 pandemic than other segments of the population considering how they live in crowded unhygienic environments.

The World Health Organization (WHO) advises that social distancing should be practised to minimise contact that may lead to COVID-19 infections.

However, for a large number of IDPs who find themselves sharing one tent with at least five persons, transmitting the virus to a nearby sleeper, especially who, like many others in the Northeast, do not believe the virus exists, is very easy. Aisha Saminu in Stadium IDPs Camp in Borno State told HumAngle that although she lived with eight co-IDPs in one tent, none had contracted the virus.

Aisha believes COVID-19 does not exist because she has not seen anyone around her who has tested positive for the virus.

“COVID-19 is not real,” she said, adding: “No one has died of it here; even with all the measures not practised, we are still surviving.”

Aisha narrated what she saw in the camp. The only way for her to believe the virus exists is when she has seen someone die of the virus.

This lack of awareness about how the virus affects people by many IDPs is worrisome. If anyone of

them contracts the disease, it will be spread rapidly in large numbers, especially with the conditions in the camps.

There are many IDPs like Aisha who share similar views. Their camp lacks not only testing facilities but water to wash hands as recommended by WHO.

Twenty-five years old Zainabu told HumAngle that although she believed the virus existed, protecting herself was a herculean task.

“We are aware of the virus, but we can’t afford to wash our hands with water or hand sanitisers.

“However, during sensitisation in our community, we were told to use ashes and salt to wash our hands,” Zainabu said.

Some NGOs provided handwashing facilities for the camp as Kellemu Modu said, but stressed that the supplies were not enough to go round inmates.

He said this was among the reasons even among those who believed the virus existed not all washed their hands.

Modu said that social distancing was not practised in the camp, pointing out that the two metres distance between persons recommended by WHO was not possible “where many IDPs sleep with one head touching the toes of another under one tent”.

Lockdown: adding salt to injury

Some IDPs told HumAngle that the lockdown measures imposed by the government to curb the spread of COVID-19 were deadlier than the virus infection.

Sakina Yusuf said she believed the virus existed and did what she could to avoid contracting it but that she was more concerned about how to get

food to eat.

For Ummi, a 27-year-old mother of five, she worries that humanitarian agencies stopped working due to the virus and that the government forced inmates to stay in the camp without going out to get what to eat.

"We lack food and water. The borehole is our only source of water, and due to the lockdown, there is a scarcity of water and food. Donors have stopped all interventions," she cried.

For 30-year-old Zubaida whose son fell ill during the lockdown, the lack of access to healthcare

services and medical doctors to attend to the sick is a primary concern.

"My baby was sick during the lockdown, but there was no medicine in our clinics and medical personnel were scarce," she said.

'No Virus, No Face Mask'

HumAngle noticed that a large number of IDPs do not believe COVID-19 exists and do not practice the safety measures against the virus infection. Children in Islamiyya schools do not observe social distancing, and their teachers do not wear

face masks, and so do their pupils. But a security man working at an IDPs camp said NGOs were doing their best to sensitise camp inmates to the dangers of COVID-19 infection.



Some IDPs In Katsina Interviewed by HumAngle

Katsina: Fear Of Terrorism, COVID-19 Discourage School Reopening

Idris Muhammad

The Federal Government's directive on July 27 that schools should reopen in Nigeria for exit classes was met with admiration among families, but several others remain fearful of the step.

There are general concerns as to how the various schools across the country will keep the students within the safety of the ravages of the coronavirus pandemic. In parts of the country, the worry seems to revolve around plugging each school within the necessary COVID-19 precautions. In the northern parts of the country, however, the concerns appear to be strikingly different. For them, the fears are more acute because of the endemic insecurity and often targeted attacks on secular schools.

The Federal Ministry of Education issued a set of guidelines for schools to reopen, most of which are COVID-19 safety precautions. Teachers and students are to prepare for the examinations within two weeks with the tests commencing on August 17.

But several of the exit class students from some of these states may have become refugees in far-flung places, some of which are across the border in Niger Republic. For instance, just like other states in the Northwest, Katsina State has been a hotbed of escalating terrorist attacks.

Terrorist attacks in communities of Faskari, Dandume, Batsari, Safana, Kankara, Sabuwa, Dan-Musa, Matazu and Jibia local government areas of the state have forced over 20,000 out of their homes to safer places within the state and nearby territories, HumAngle learnt.

In recent months, there have been several more Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) camps at Batsari, Faskari and Dandume, where the people, mostly women and children, are living in squalor, a HumAngle investigation revealed.

Thousands more are taking refuge with relations or in rented apartments outside their communities.

Majority of the people are afraid to send their children back to school because of the fear of attacks, especially in the frontline local government areas where kidnapping, killing and raping of women are fast becoming a norm.

Alhaji Hamisu Labaran, a father of three girls attending Daudawa Government Girls' Science Secondary School, expressed fear about the frequent attacks in the area to HumAngle.

The school is a boarding facility that is located in one of the remote hotspot terrorist areas in the Faskari Local Government Area.

"To me, it is suicidal to allow my three female children to resume now in that community where bandits find it very easy to unleash attacks.

"We heard how they raped women and kidnapped people in the community; I will rather leave them with me here than risking their lives," he added. A mother, Amina Halliru, said, "To be sincere with you, my female children are not going anywhere except I am fully convinced about the upgrade of the security situation in the state.

"It seems the government is not ready to contain the conflict so why would I send my children back to school when I don't have money to pay for ransom if anything happens?" she asked.

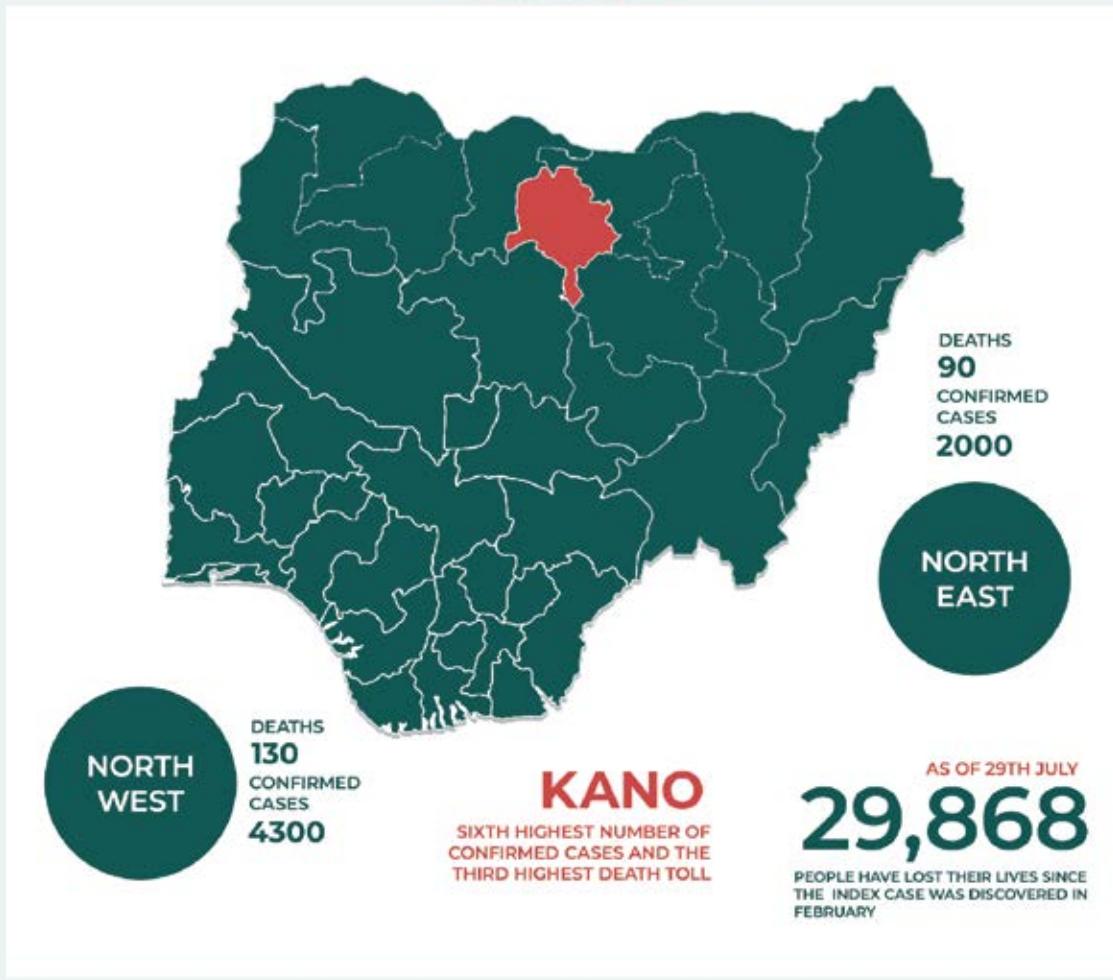
According to Halliru, great concern should be raised over the sudden resumption notice, especially as most of the boarding schools in the state are located around attack hotspots.

A student of Government Girls School, Kaboom, Halima Garba Malumfashi said, "I am afraid to go back to school now. Our school is located in a remote area where people are always fleeing because of the frequent attacks in the community.

"We have been living in fear even before the escalation of the conflict because some unknown people were making attempts to enter our hostels at night."

Mixed feelings over COVID 19

COVID-19 DATA



Source: Nigerian Center for Disease Control



"Some parents might not be willing to let their children come to school because of fear of the virus," an employee of the Zonal Education Authority, who pleaded anonymity, said. "Can the school be fumigated and disinfected before the resumption? In fact, how many schools can afford that or can the schools comply with global standards and federal government guidelines against COVID 19?" he asked. "Honestly speaking, the schools are not ready to carry out these tasks within this short notice. "As for me, I cannot send my children back to school now. "For the schools that have agreed to open within the short notice, the teachers and students must ensure they use nose masks, practice handwashing and limit outdoor activities and if possible limit learning hours as well as ensure

social distancing," he added.

A parent, Chidinma Ibere, said, "The major challenge is maintaining social distancing in this pandemic and other protocols for suspected COVID-19 cases.

"Most of the classrooms are too small to observe social distancing during the examination," she said.

Also, Captain Usman Balarabe, a retired military officer, shared his fears on the sudden directive to reopen schools in Katsina State.

"Why will they open schools now? The cases are getting higher daily, and the menace is now in community transmission.

"I am not in support of the school reopening now. In fact, I will not send my children to school until the government provides all the necessary precautionary measures to avoid the

transmission," he said.

Another stakeholder, Solomon Haruna, noted that funds were limited to fumigate and produce masks for teachers and students.

Meanwhile, some parents in the state cheered for the reopening of the schools.

They also advocated that all the classes be open for students to return.

A father of seven, Hassan Yaro Dandume, said, "The disease is just a mere saying. Government is playing politics with it as always in Nigeria. They are using it to get money from their paymasters. "As for me, there is no reason our children will not continue with their studies. Let them open all the schools and not just for exit classes," he said.

Tales Of Women Widowed By Boko Haram In IDPs Camps

Aisha Talba

Many single mothers in Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) camps or those taking refuge in host communities are widowed as a result of the Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria's Northeast region. Others are divorcees or single mothers whose husbands are missing following their spouses' involvement in Boko Haram activities or attacks, a HumAngle investigation reveals.

However, whatever the circumstance for the women, it has been a life of pain and struggle to raise children alone, especially as the majority are poor without sustainable means of livelihood.

COVID-19 Affecting Businesses Negatively In Kano – Operators

Muhammad Sani Uba

The Coronavirus crisis has affected most businesses and industries in Kano State with operators struggling for survival, a HumAngle investigation has revealed.

Operators in some markets within Kano municipality said businesses were suffering from poor patronage by individuals and the government.

Tired of Intimidation And Destruction, Youths Take On Terrorists In Katsina

Idris Muhammad

Frustrated by constant attacks and destruction in their communities despite peace accords with armed gangs, the youth in Katsina State has taken up the challenge to confront criminals terrorising their communities by enlisting in vigilance groups and other non-formal security organisations.

Chibok Grapples With Infrastructural Deficit, Terrorist Attacks Amid Pandemic

Kunle Adebajo

In April 2014, members of the terror group, Boko Haram, invaded the Government Secondary School, Chibok, and abducted 276 children, 57 of which escaped that night by jumping off trucks into nearby bushes. The girls, many of whom were from surrounding communities, had camped in the school to take external examinations.

Houses in Chibok were burnt down during the attack, and the school itself has since deteriorated and is in need of repairs.

The Kibaku (Chibok) Area Development Association (KADA) in a statement released earlier in July said the structures in the school had been abandoned even though there were commitments from various groups to rebuild them.

"The Corps of Nigerian Army Engineers began work on it but abandoned it and it remains uncompleted to this day," the association said.

Because of the school's poor condition, students are forced to receive only afternoon lessons at a nearby primary school after it closes every day.

Northeast Terrorists Running To Northwest As Sahel Terrorists Explore Region – DSS

Yusuf Anka

The Department of State Services (DSS) is aware of the presence of Jihadi elements from Far Burkina, Mali, Niger and Libya in Nigeria's Northwest region seeking alliances with armed groups, the Director-General, Yusuf Magaji Bichi, has said.

He said the agency had information and was following developments in the region and called for more synergy between states and the Federal Government in the fight against insecurity, especially around the border and forest areas.

Herdsmen/Farmers Crisis: How A Fight Between 2 Animals Sparked Communal Feud In Katsina Community

Idris Muhammad

The conflict in the Northwest region of Nigeria, particularly in Sabon Layin Galadima community in Faskari Local Government Area of Katsina State, started because of a fight between an ox and a sheep, HumAngle has learnt.

Northeast: Humanitarian Stakeholders Brace For Impact Of Floods On Displaced Communities

Murtala Abdullahi



◀ Flooding In An IDP Camp In Borno State, North West Nigeria

The rainy season in northeastern Nigeria is associated with social and health problems for thousands of individuals displaced by the decades-old conflict in the region.

In Borno State, the epicentre of the Boko Haram insurgency, recent flash floods and windstorms wreaked havoc in Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) camps, partially submerging shelters and increasing health risks for inmates.

The impact of flooding is exacerbated by overcrowding and poor drainage.

President Buhari Jets To Mali On Peace Mission, Ignores Crisis At Home

Aliyu Dahiru Aliyu

President Muhammad Buhari of Nigeria left Abuja for Bamako, the capital city of the Republic of Mali, on Thursday, July 23, on a one-day peace mission to the country struggling with an internal crisis in which at least 11 persons have died in street protests. The visit is a follow-up to earlier mission by former president of Nigeria, Dr Goodluck Jonathan, who led an ECOWAS peace mission but reported on Sunday that the delegation failed in its assignment of brokering peace between the government and the opposition coalition. The President's Special Adviser on Media and Publicity, Mr Femi Adesina, confirmed on Wednesday that the president agreed to further consultations to secure lasting peace in the politically troubled country.

“We're Farmers, We Give Food To People For Free, Now In Refugee Camp, We Are Helpless” - IDPs

Idris Muhammad

Residents from communities in Katsina and Sokoto states in Northwest Nigeria have been fleeing the aggravated killings by armed men. In the past months, these people have been moving like locusts across the Nigerian border into Niger Republic.

HumAngle undertook a reporting trip to the refugee camps in the neighbouring country to track the daily experiences of these Nigerians. Our reporter spoke with several of these refugees. Hamisu is a husband to three wives, father to 15 children. He is one of the refugees in Bawa, Garin Kaka and narrated his condition with HumAngle.

He has some mixed feelings about his condition. “Sincerely speaking, the arrangement was alright. The food assistance is given on a monthly basis. The food ration is not enough for us. They are giving us three mudu (local retail measures) of grain, and they will not give us till after one month,” he said.

Nigeria's Terror King, Shekau, Connects East, West And Centre In A Puzzling Agenda

Ahmad Salkida

Scorned and underrated, Abubakar Shekau, the leader of Jama'atu Ahlul Sunnah Lidda'awatu Wal-Jihad (JAS), otherwise known as Boko Haram is currently pulling a massive stealth strategy in an organisational makeover destined to connect the northeast, the north-west and the north-central in a bewildering expansionist agenda.

Defined by welcoming former apostates; engaging in factional reconciliations; admitting of modest ideological shifts; and proposing a balanced role for clerics and combatants in his group, Shekau is on the move to consolidate his ranks and establish himself as the 'African Jihadi Caliph' after his 2011-12 falling out with Al Qaeda, the embattled Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant.

Often portrayed as a silly sick bag, on account of his frequent melodramatic video appearances, where he is either dancing, singing, mimicking others or indiscriminately shooting machine guns into the air, insurgency experts and knowledgeable sources on the identity of social movements in the Nigerian northeast, believe Shekau is emerging more of a strategic and calculated schemer than past, or current assessment of him is admitting.

Analysis: Nigeria's COVID-19 Testing Increases By 94% From April, Still Among Lowest In Africa

Anita Eboigbe

COVID-19 tests in Nigeria have increased by 94 per cent since April 27, and this means that as at July 9, the country has conducted 169, 629 tests.

The figure is 159, 629 higher than the 10, 000 tests Nigeria carried out in April. However, the country is still among those with the lowest number of tests in Africa.

COVID-19: 192 Almajirai Test Positive As Schools Continue Operating In Kano Despite Ban

Aliyu Dahiru

Almajiri schools have continued to operate in Kano State in spite of a ban by the government, a HumAngle investigation has revealed.

The investigation also revealed that some of the pupils that the government repatriated to other states have returned, and some were resorting to working as domestic help.

Meanwhile, the state government said 192 almajirai in a COVID-19 isolation camp tested positive for coronavirus.



Footnote: This report is a partnership between HumAngle Media Foundation and Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA) for the COVID-19 Media Intervention Project.



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