

Dilemma Of Aid Workers Amidst Attacks, Military And Jihadists Cross-Fire In Nigeria

Lead Story

Aid Workers Caught Up In Military, Jihadists Cross-Fire In Nigeria

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... Stringent rules hinder activities in North-East

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Artist's sketch showing the plight of humanitarian workers in conflict-plagued areas.

Aid workers in the Northeast are caught between the crosshairs of the Nigerian military and terror groups. Apart from endangering the lives of aid workers, the military's stringent guidelines and unfounded accusations that aid workers have sympathy for terrorist elements also create distrust between humanitarian workers and the civilian population.

In September 2019, the military forced the offices of Action Against Hunger and Mercy Corps in Borno and Yobe to be closed for two months. The army had alleged corruption and support of the insurgents, two accusations not yet proven despite their supposed investigation.

The direct impact of the two-month closure saw 400,000 people without access to aid, prompting the Minister of Humanitarian Affairs, Disaster Management and Social Development, Hajiya Sadiya Umar Farouk, to lift the sanctions.

Aid workers in northeast Nigeria told HumAngle that the military's interference in their activities has prevented them from accessing millions of vulnerable groups in the region.

In the past year, insecurity has worsened. The military has subjected aid organisations to lengthy protocols before authorisation for transporting their employees, cash and cargo-carrying food and medicine to the vulnerable population.

Clearance from the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) was also required for moving cash for staff salaries, vendors and essential services to remote communities.

Such authorisations could take days or even three weeks to obtain, defeating the urgency required in delivering life-saving assistance to millions of people.

HumAngle gathered that the military also made it mandatory for aid workers to use armed escorts when travelling from Maiduguri to towns such as Rann, Banki, Pulka, Gwoza, Damboa and Monguno.

They have banned the transportation of certain goods and reduced the quantity of fuel for some humanitarian agencies to shuttle aid. As a result, aid agencies face a shortage of fuel for the vehicles and generators at medical facilities.

Any violation of these stringent rules attracts de-registration, hefty fines and even prison terms. According to the aid workers, this has only aggravated the threat of being kidnapped or executed by terror groups.

For instance, Boko Haram attacked a United Nations facility in Ngala, Borno state in January. The building had at least 20 internally displaced persons waiting for assistance. They died in the attack. In 2019, 12 workers lost their lives; double that figure lost their lives in 2018, while two others, Alice Loksha and Grace Taku, remain in captivity.

Concerned about increasing attacks against aid workers in the Northeast, the UN and European Union released a joint statement in January to call for an

enabling environment for humanitarian support.

"What matters most is that humanitarian organisations can reach all the people in need, without restrictions, including in areas under the influence of non-state armed groups.



Humanitarian worker and IDPs at a camp in Nigeria.

armed conflicts respect their obligation to allow and facilitate the rapid and unimpeded passage of humanitarian relief," observed Janez Lenarčič, European Commissioner for Crisis Management.

UN's Humanitarian Coordinator in Nigeria, Edward Kallon, said the international

community was extremely worried that attacks against aid workers was hindering efforts to “save lives and help people rebuild livelihoods and communities”.

Again in August, the UN, in its statement marking the World Humanitarian Day, noted that aid workers all over the world often have to risk their own lives in saving others and struggle with “unprecedented movement restrictions and insufficient resources as needs are outpacing funds”.

“Major attacks against humanitarians last year surpassed all previous years on record. A total of 483 relief workers were attacked, 125 killed, 234 wounded and 124 kidnapped in 277 separate incidents. This is an 18 per cent increase in the number of victims compared to 2018,” the international organisation said, citing the Humanitarian Outcomes’ Aid Worker Security Database.

While various terror groups continue to pose a considerable threat to aid workers, however, restrictions by state actors have also done no favour, violating the humanitarian principle of independence allowed for officials.

According to customary International Humanitarian Law, all “parties to an armed conflict must allow and facilitate rapid and unimpeded passage of humanitarian relief for civilians in need, which is impartial in character and conducted without any adverse distinction.”

Aid workers also said that the military’s unsubstantiated accusations that some humanitarian organisations were providing support to Boko Haram created negative rhetoric that could alienate workers from the communities they serve and put them at risk in these communities.

“The army does not want to hear of

neutrality,” an aid worker said. “Saying to the military that you are neutral is saying that you are supporting Boko Haram.”

Humanitarian Response Plan For 2020 To Factor In Evolving Crisis In North East

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IDPs in a camp in Northern Nigeria.

The humanitarian response plan for Nigeria this year includes the priorities identified by the vulnerable individuals, women, children and those with disabilities affected by insurgency in Borno, Adamawa and Yobe, including empowerment, physical, mental wellbeing and living standard needs, according to a report published by the United Nations Office of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA).

The response will adapt to the dynamic, complex, and rapidly evolving operational environment in the northeast region, which has been plagued by insurgency for the past ten years.

This is because of increased collaboration

between the agencies of the UN, other international NGOs, as well as government and state authorities involved in the development, peacebuilding and stabilisation. Such efforts included the establishment of the North-East Development Commission and the Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs, Disaster Management and Social Development in 2019.

"The new approach pays particular attention to reflecting the priorities identified by affected people themselves and considers the specific needs of diverse groups of people, including women and girls and people living with disabilities," Edward Kallon, the UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator in Nigeria said.

Humanitarian organisations were able to provide aid to 5.2 million people in 2019, most of whom were women and children, saving 365 children each day and food assistance to 2.4 million people each month.

Out of \$848 million that was appealed for, funding of 68.3 per cent, nearly \$580 million was raised. This year, a sum of \$839 million will be needed to reach all those who require aid in the region, with funding going towards empowering

HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE PLAN FOR 2020, BEFORE AND AFTER THE IMPACT OF COVID-19



BEFORE IMPACT OF COVID-19



7.9
MILLION

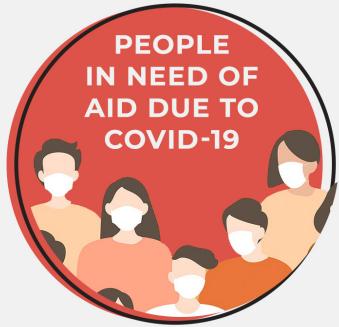


5.9
MILLION



\$839
MILLION

AFTER THE IMPACT OF COVID-19



10.6
MILLION



7.8
MILLION



\$1.08
BILLION

FUNDING ADJUSTED DUE TO
INCREASE IN VULNERABLE PEOPLE

local organisations, and coping with the crisis, "while identifying more sustainable solutions."

"Humanitarian assistance is not a long-term solution to the protracted crisis in north-east Nigeria. Together we must focus on four critical elements: prevention, stabilisation, transformation, and sustainability.

"We have to seize all opportunities to save and protect lives as a matter of urgency, prevent further violence, and foster recovery, peace-building, reconstruction and development efforts wherever and whenever possible. Together we can restore hope to the most vulnerable and a chance at a brighter future for the millions of people affected," Mr Kallon urged.

The number of people in need of humanitarian aid this year has also risen to 7.9 million, due to the increased attacks of terrorists, climate change, natural hazards, and diseases, according to the UN.

Compared to between 2017 and 2019, when the figure reduced from 8.5 million to 7.1 million, an increase of 800,000.

In 2019, more than 180,000 people were forced to flee their homes for safety, which has been a recurring trend since the crisis in the region began, and an increase of human rights violations has become the norm.

Access to land and livelihood has also become a lot more difficult for the vulnerable people and, with insurgents setting up checkpoints on the main supply routes, has had catastrophic implications for both the civilians and aid workers, interfering with freedom of movement and access to food and medical supplies.

Asides this, Borno, Adamawa and Yobe the growing crisis of insecurity and targeting

of aid workers has made providing the necessary aid even harder. In 2019, twelve aid workers were killed while carrying out crucial work in the region, and two others, Alice Loksha and Grace Taku, remain in captivity.

UN Pays Moving Tribute To Attacked Humanitarian Workers

Anita Eboigbe



Humanitarian worker preparing meal for IDPs in a Nigerian camp.

A total of 483 relief workers were attacked, 125 killed, 234 wounded and 124 kidnapped in 277 separate incidents.

HumAngle reports that this is an 18 per cent increase in the number of victims compared to 2018.

The United Nations, to celebrate World Humanitarian Day 2020, paid tribute to humanitarians that have been attacked, killed, wounded or kidnapped in the past year.

According to Humanitarian Outcomes' Aid Worker Security Database, major attacks against humanitarians in 2018 surpassed all previous years on record.

On Wednesday, people all over the world honoured humanitarians – many working in their own communities – who are going to extraordinary lengths in extraordinary times to help women, men and children whose lives are upended by crises and the global COVID-19 pandemic.

In 2008, the United Nations General

Assembly designated August 19 as World Humanitarian Day to raise awareness about humanitarian assistance worldwide and to pay tribute to the people who risk their lives to provide it.

World Humanitarian Day was commemorated for the first time on 19 August 2009. This is the eleventh World Humanitarian Day, designated by the UN General Assembly.

It falls on the day of the attack on the UN compound in Baghdad on August 19, 2003, which claimed the lives of 22 people including the Secretary-General's Special Representative for Iraq, Sergio Vieira de Mello.

Since then, nearly 5,000 humanitarians have been killed, wounded or abducted, and the 2010-2019 decade experienced a 117 per cent increase in attacks compared to 2000-2009.

A surge in attacks against health workers was recorded in 2019, including strikes against medics in Syria and shootings of Ebola workers in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC).

Most of the attacks occurred in Syria, followed by South Sudan, DRC, Afghanistan and the Central African Republic.

Mali and Yemen both saw a doubling of major attacks from the previous year.

The UN has condemned these attacks, and it calls for accountability for perpetrators and justice for survivors. "Relief workers cannot be a target," it reiterated.

Mark Lowcock, the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, said: "To humanitarian workers everywhere doing important, courageous work on the front lines we say Thank You."

"You are saving lives every day, and as new challenges and crises are piling on to existing ones, your perseverance is an inspiration.

"Your protection is also paramount to making sure we can deliver to people most in need.

"The best way to pay tribute to humanitarian workers is by funding their work and ensuring their safety," he added.

The 2020 World Humanitarian Day comes as the world fights the COVID-19 pandemic.

To pay tribute to the efforts of humanitarians, OCHA and its partners shared the personal stories of some of the #RealLifeHeroes who are stepping up to meet the challenges, particularly local humanitarian workers.

They include refugees who as health workers are playing essential roles in the pandemic response; Ebola health workers who are stepping in to fight COVID-19; and doctors and nurses who continue to provide critical health care to women and children.

"The dedication, perseverance and self-sacrifice of these real-life heroes represent the best of humanity as they respond to the COVID-19 crisis and the massive increase in humanitarian needs it has triggered.

"First responders are often people in need themselves — refugees, members of civil-society organizations and local health workers. They bring food, shelter, health care, protection and hope to others amid conflict, displacement, disaster and disease.

"But humanitarian workers are being tested like never before, struggling with

unprecedented movement restrictions and insufficient resources as needs are outpacing funds.

“And all too often, they risk their own lives to save the lives of others,” the UN noted.

In recent weeks alone, despicable attacks have killed aid workers in Niger and Cameroon, and since the onset of the pandemic, scores of health workers have come under attack across the world.

Aid Workers Remain Targets Of Insurgency In North-East

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◀ Alice Loksha Ngaddah (UNICEF) and Grace Taku (ACF) enslaved by ISWAP.

Humanitarian organisations on the ground in North-East Nigeria have been on the frontline of the war against Boko Haram, with aid workers putting themselves directly in the line of fire.

Aid organisations, among them the United Nations World Food Programme, Action Against Hunger (ACF) and the UK's Department for International Development (DfID) and many others, have been providing aid to the victims in the region.

According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), 12 aid workers were killed in Nigeria in 2019, and twice as many in 2018.

Since 2019, 17 aid workers have been killed by terrorist groups, with Action Against Hunger also stating that Islamist insurgents had abducted five humanitarian workers in Borno state, one of which was their employee.

Ishaiku Yakubu was kidnapped in June by an armed group, alongside his colleagues from other humanitarian organisations.

Terrorists have repeatedly targeted aid workers throughout the insurgency in the region.

In July, six other humanitarian workers were kidnapped by the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), including an ACF

employee.

“These are humanitarian workers who chose to devote their lives to helping the most vulnerable communities in Nigeria,” the ACF’s statement said, demanding their release.

Five of them were executed barely a month later, while the female ACF employee remains in captivity.

The victims were later identified as workers from the State Emergency Management Agency, Action Against Hunger, Rich International, and International Rescue Committee.

According to the United Nations, two aid workers remain in captivity. One of them is Grace Taku, who was working with Action Against Hunger in Borno.

Action Against Hunger provides food assistance every month to approximately 300,000 people in the northeast who lack access to food.

Alice Loksha was also abducted in the line of duty at an IDP camp in Rann in March 2018 while working for UNICEF.

The two other health workers with whom she was captured, Saifura Hussaini Khorsa and Hauwa Mohammed Liman, were slain by the insurgents.

“We are extremely worried that aid workers, who are mostly Nigerians working to deliver critical life-saving humanitarian assistance to fellow compatriots, have increasingly become direct targets of attacks and abduction by non-state armed groups,” remarked the United Nations Humanitarian Coordinator in Nigeria, Mr Edward Kallon.

Five aid workers who were abducted in early December 2019 were also released

last January by ISWAP after negotiations led by a Nigerian journalist came through. Although this was a welcome development, the UN has called for the release of Taku and Loksha from captivity.

Speaking on the occasion of the 2020 World Humanitarian Day, Mark Lowcock, the UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, commended humanitarian workers for their courageous work in the front lines of ongoing conflicts.

“You are saving lives every day, and as new challenges and crises are piling on to existing ones, your perseverance is an inspiration,” he said.

He added that the best way to pay tribute to humanitarian workers is through funding their work and ensuring they are protected.



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