

**BOKO HARAM INSURGENCY AND DISTRESSED ECONOMY IN
NORTHEASTERN NIGERIA: FEMALE RADICALIZATION EXPERIENCE**

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Abstract

One of the most fundamental problems currently facing the Nigerian State is how to permanently tackle the menace of Boko Haram insurgency and its crippling effects on the economy of northeastern Nigeria states. The northeastern states are predominantly agrarian states but since the inception of Boko Haram insurgency and its activities in the area, the economy of the area has continued to decline and most people have lost their sources of livelihood and lives. Recently, Boko Haram has cashed in on the drastic economic conditions in the region (caused by the insurgency), to champion the massive recruitment and radicalization of females (voluntarily and involuntarily) for their ungodly course. This unprecedented and dynamic strategic change of Boko Haram recruitment is strongly aided by the declining economy of the region, thus regarded as the most fearful terrorist organization, not only in Nigeria but in the entire Lake Chad Basin. Greater percentage of these recruited Boko Haram female terrorists have since 2014 been deployed as suicide bombers and over 6,000 people have died from their attacks. This is because the female suicide bombers penetrate targeted areas easily and spread far-reaching terror in Nigeria. This paper therefore aims to investigate how the dwindling economy of Northeastern Nigeria caused by Boko Haram insurgency has aided in the recruitment and radicalization of female terrorists. The paper will draw inferences from secondary sources, including textbooks, newspapers/magazines and journal articles published already. The study will rely on poverty breeds conflict theory for its postulations. The paper amongst others recommends that issues bothering on climate change like drought, deforestation of bush land and spread of the Sahara be adequately handled; that livelihoods of the people of the Northeast be sustained and that the rising level of poverty in the region be resolved by the Federal, State governments and other humanitarian agencies involved and that the economy of the Northeast should be revamped in order to curtail the recruitment and radicalization of females by Boko Haram insurgents in Nigeria.

Keywords: Boko Haram, Female Radicalization, Insurgency, Nigerian State, Northeast, Nigerian Economy.

Introduction

Since the return of civilian government in 1999, after more than 16 years of military dictatorship, the Nigerian State has been engulfed by ethno-religious conflicts with resulting consequences of huge human and material losses. Within the span of administration of Late President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua in Nigeria (2009-2010) and thereafter, security challenges became very important issue of discourse, hence the issue of Boko Haram insurgency. For a couple of years now, the Boko Haram uprising has become the most fearful organization not only in the northeastern region but also in Nigeria and other parts of the Lake Chad Basin because of its constant use of sophisticated arms, ammunition and its dynamic strategies in operation and organization. This was noted by (Opoloye, 2012) "the Boko Haram insurgency with its destabilizing propensities is another challenge of serious concern for which the Federal government is yet to find solution."

The Nigerian salafi-jihadi insurgency known as Boko Haram (formerly titled Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-jihad) or more recently, the Islamic State's West Africa Province [ISWAP] has wreaked havoc throughout the Lake Chad Basin since 2009 when the group's campaign of violence began in earnest (Matfess, 2015). In its bid to overthrow the Nigerian State and install its strict interpretation of Sharia law, Boko Haram's violence has expanded beyond Nigeria to Chad, Niger and Cameroon.

Boko Haram insurgency spread over time and the Nigerian government has provided strategic counter-insurgency campaign aimed at stopping its activities collectively. However, it has claimed more than 35,000 lives since May 29, 2011 (Nigerian Security Tracker Report, 2012). In 2015, Boko Haram gained the lamentable distinction of being the deadliest terrorist group in the world, outstripping the Islamic State, al-Qa'ida, al-Shabaab, and the FARC in terms of the total number of people killed within the calendar year (Global Terrorism index, 2015).

Boko Haram insurgency alongside with military operations conducted by the federal government in the northeast of Nigeria has had a devastating impact on the region of Nigeria (and specifically the states of Borno, Adamawa, Yobe, Bauchi, Gombe and Taraba) (UNDP, 2017). These impacts have dealt greatly on the economy and sources of livelihood of the dwellers of the northeastern Nigeria,

especially the women who are among the most vulnerable in every conflict. Boko Haram insurgency has resulted in the forceful displacement of over 2 million people and the widespread loss of livelihoods and access to essential social services (UNDP, 2017). At present time, the humanitarian situation in the region is rapidly approaching towards critical level, which is characterized by extreme levels of food insecurity, malnutrition and exposure to diseases. Fourteen million people across the six states of northeastern of Nigeria (out of a total population of 18 million) are estimated to have been affected by the conflict, with 8.5 million people in need of humanitarian assistance.

In the three worst-affected states (Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe), 5.1 million people are currently in food insecurity (with an estimated 100,000 people at famine levels of food insecurity), representing a total 50 percent increase since March 2016. In addition, 1.2 million children under 5 and pregnant and lactating women are malnourished and an estimated 6.9 million people are vulnerable to disease in the absence of access to health care. The current humanitarian situation is aggravated by high levels of conflict-induced displacement (with an estimated 1.8 million people currently displaced) (UNDP, 2017).

However, in reference to human life, population displacement and destruction of productive assets, economic infrastructure and social services, have significantly disrupted economic and social systems essential for livelihoods, social cohesion and individual well-being. As a result of the Boko Haram crisis in the northeastern Nigeria (of which children and women are the major victims), several young girls and women have been recruited into the sect forcefully or willingly, radicalized and have been made to take varying positions in the terrorist group. The most devastating of these positions is suicide bombing.

Accordingly, Bawa noted that “since June 8 2014, Boko Haram’s use of female suicide bombers became unprecedented, having deployed 244 women suicide bombers between June 2014 and June 2017. Boko Haram has now used more female suicide bombers than any other insurgency group in history, surpassing the record established by the Tamil Tiger who used 44 suicide bombers over 10 years” (Bawa, 2016). ISIS-affiliated terror group, Boko Haram, sent 80 women to their deaths in 2017 alone- and the number is only likely to keep rising (Hayden, 2017). The April 2017 UNICEF report noted that “one in every five Boko Haram suicide bombers is a child, with three-quarters of child bombers being female.” And as of February 28 2018, a recorded 469 female suicide bombers have been deployed or arrested in 240 incidents, and they have killed more than 1,200 people across four countries: Nigeria, Niger, Chad and Cameroon (Zenn, 2018).

Statement of the Problem

One of the most fundamental problems currently facing the Nigerian State is how to permanently tackle the menace of Boko Haram insurgency. This insurgency has over the years had terrible impacts on the economy of the Northeast region and these economic consequences resulting from the terrorists' nefarious activities have greatly aided the sect's campaign for and success in female radicalization. This study therefore investigates how the economic distress inherent in the northeastern region of Nigeria has contributed to Boko Haram's radicalization of females and the successful deployment of these females (young girls and women alike) as suicide bombers within and outside the northeastern region.

Literature Review

Insecurity, terrorism, conflicts and violence are caused by the high poverty rate in most societies (Gurr 1970). Academic debates continue on the correlation between poverty and insecurity. Some scholars have argued that most of the conflicts in developing countries are caused by the prevalence of poverty (Awojobi, 2014). Poverty and unemployment have been identified by some studies as common causes of terrorism (Ayegba, 2015; Akinola, 2015). Low income and economic inequality are found to be possible causes of terrorism. Pinar Derin-Gure found evidence that the greater the income inequality there is in a country, the greater the incidence of domestic terrorist attacks (Derin-Gure, 2009).

Ayegba argued that poverty and unemployment are the driving forces behind insurgency in Nigeria. Further in the study, Ayegba claimed that the high rate of youth unemployment has resulted in poverty and insecurity in Nigeria (Ayegba, 2015). Frustration, lack of income, unemployment have prompted the youths in the northern Nigeria to become foot soldiers of Boko Haram (Awojobi, 2014). The never-ending attacks by Boko Haram in Borno, Adamawa and Yobe States have a severe impact on the economic lives of people living in these areas. A case in point is that of working duration of most commercial banks in the affected areas hit by Boko Haram bombings has been reduced from eight hours to three hours (Mohammed, 2012). "In Maiduguri, Borno State, where the sect originated, the frequent bombings and clashes between Boko Haram and the security agents have weighed down seriously on the commercial and businesses activities in the city as many businesses have reportedly crumbled while many people have fled the state" (Shiklam, 2012).

However, lack of employment opportunities and poverty create the condition for people to join terrorist organizations (Ayegba, 2015). While poverty remains a critical issue considered as a precipitating factor in the continuous discourse of violence and insecurity, the impact played by it in the northeastern region of Nigeria in relation to acts of terrorism perpetuated by Boko Haram insurgents

remains a critical issue of discourse. As a consequence of Boko Haram insurgency, there's already a dichotomy in the north and south development in Nigeria (Awojobi, 2014). The insurgency has badly damaged the Lake Chad basin economy, destroyed or driven away the little services (and cash infusion) the state provided and forced some traders to flee. Nearly 9.2 million of the 20 million living in the affected areas face severe food insecurity, and in Borno State some 50,000 are starving (International Crisis Group, 2016).

The main drivers of food insecurity and famine risk are the ongoing conflict and pervasive violence of Boko Haram in which civilians are primary targets. The resulting loss of human life, population displacement and destruction of productive assets, economic infrastructure and social services, have significantly disrupted economic and social systems essential for livelihoods, social cohesion and individual well-being (United Nations Development Programme, 2017). David et al argued, "socio-economic indices such as poverty, unemployment, insecurity, inequality, economic underdevelopment, low education, inter alia, encourages the emergence and persistence of Boko Haram terrorism (David, Asuelime and Onapajo, 2017).

Accordingly, Okereocha (2012) observed that "human capital and investors drain is hampering economic developments in the northeast and this is due to the attacks in banks, markets, parks and government departments." Thus, Shiklam (2012) posits that:

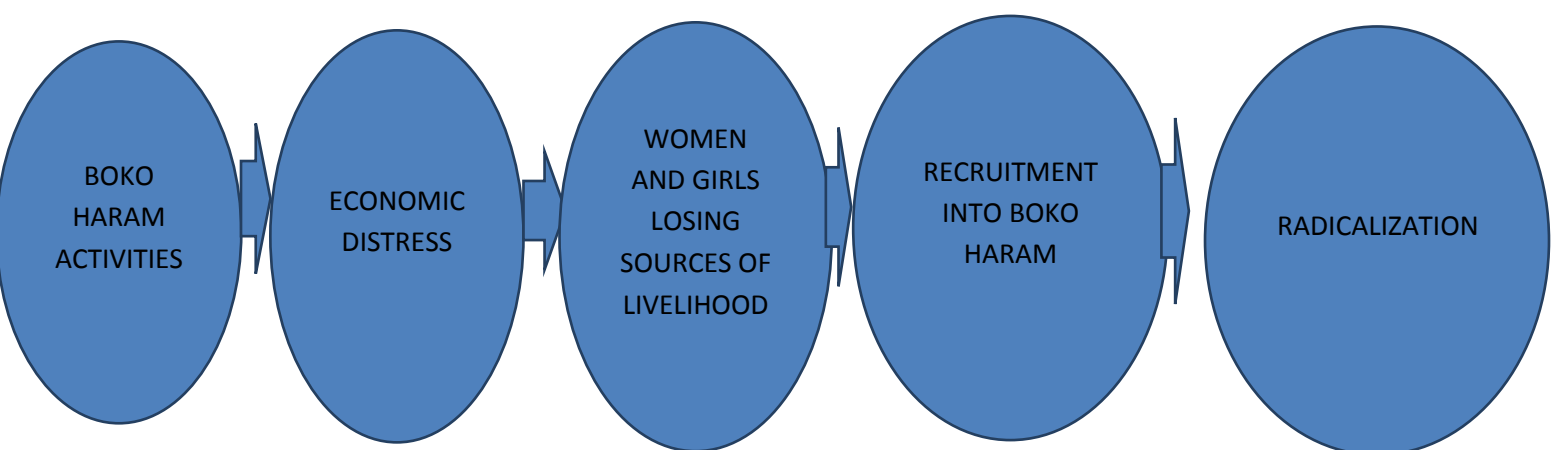
The Maiduguri Monday Market said to be the biggest market in the city is reputed to have seriously been affected as hundreds of shops owners, especially Southerners are said to have closed their businesses and left the troubled city. About half of the 10,000 shops and stalls in the market were said to have been abandoned by traders who have fled the city." (Shiklam, 2012).

Aside the migration of people who have businesses in the northeast to other parts of Nigeria, foreign nationals of Chad, Cameroon and Niger are being repatriated to their home countries. Definitely, those who have businesses in cities like Maiduguri, Damaturu and Yola will form part of those that are sent home which will actually affect the economic activities in these cities (Awojobi, 2014). Ovaga (n.d) asserts that under this situation, the economy of the Northeast will seriously be affected if foreign citizens who contribute large quota to the development of the Northeast vis a vis their economic activities are sent back to their countries of origin (Awojobi, 2014).

While men have disproportionately been killed as a result of Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria, women are an overwhelming majority among the estimated 1.8 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the northeast (International Crisis Group, 2016). Many women and girls are bearing the burden of the insurgency such as social displacement, psychological problems, gender-based violence, hunger and deplorable health conditions (Abdu and Shehu, 2019). Boko Haram's rise has dramatically changed the lives of thousands of women and girls, often casting them voluntarily or by force into new roles outside the domestic sphere. Some joined to escape their social conditions (International Crisis Group, 2016).

With patriarchy, poverty, blockage of sources of livelihood, etc, some women saw an opportunity in Boko Haram to advance their economic freedoms or reduce their hardship (International Crisis Group, 2016). Poverty played a significant role in influencing young women to join Boko Haram. A former member of the group confessed that she joined to earn a living. According to her, "we had nothing to eat; thereafter when the group came, I had to join. All my parents were killed so I was left with only brothers who encouraged me to join this group to earn a living" (Abdu and Shehu, 2019). Summarily, Boko Haram insurgency has greatly deteriorated the economy and sources of livelihood of most girls and women in the northeast Nigeria and this has made it easy for them (females) to be radicalized by Boko Haram. The diagram below illustrates this assertion

Figure 1: The relationship between Insurgency, Distressed Economy and Female Radicalization in Northeast Nigeria



Source: The Authors

Theoretical Building

The study will use the poverty breeds conflict hypothesis for the theoretical framework. The academic debate on the correlation between poverty and insecurity is on ending. Some scholars have argued that most of the conflicts in developing countries are caused by the prevalence of poverty. There is causality from high poverty rate to conflict (Kanbur, 2007 cited in Awojobi 2014). Insecurity, terrorism, conflicts and violence are caused by the high poverty rate in most societies (Gurr 1970). Sarmiento and Bacerra (1998) and Sarmiento (1999) are the leading scholars on the poverty breeds conflict hypothesis (Awojobi, 2014).

Empirical evidence from the works of Collier and Hoeffler (2002); Bellows and Miguel (2006) indicated that poverty was the major cause of conflict in Africa. For instance, Collier and Hoeffler (2002) examine conflicts in Africa, from their findings, they notice the interface between income and conflict. Rice et al. (2006). Collier and Hoeffler (2002) has subscribed to the notions that poverty helps to extend conflicts once it got started. Evidence has shown that when income drops there is a tendency for conflict to surface or reignited (Awojobi, 2014). A study by Paul Collier and Hoeffler from the Oxford University, James Fearson and David Laitin both from the Stanford University, and Professor Nicholas Sambanis from the Yale University gave credence to this hypothesis (Collier and Hoeffler 2006). They all are of the opinion that extreme poverty line as a result of food scarcity serves as a breeding ground for crisis and chaos. This can be exemplified by the activities of female radicalization in Nigeria today by Boko Haram terrorist group.

Boko Haram insurgency has been blamed on the high rate of poverty in Nigeria. Its swelling rank is as a result of a huge reservoir of unemployed urban youths from many parts of the country. These youths who have completely become disenfranchised are ready to provide the group with foot soldiers who commit all manners of atrocities, including assassination and suicide bombings in the name of religion (Awojobi, 2014). In Onuoha (2013) "empirical study on why do youth join Boko Haram, the findings of the study indicated that poverty played a major role in luring the youth in joining Boko Haram." A great percentage of these youths are females who are radicalized by the insurgents and used to perpetrate far-reaching attacks on targeted areas within and outside the northeastern Nigeria.

Indicators of Female Terrorism in Nigeria

With the kidnap of over 200 female students from Chibok Secondary School, in Borno State on April 14 2014, female suicide terrorism has been multifaceted problem in Nigeria. The first female suicide bombing in Nigeria occurred on June 8, 2014 when a reportedly middle-aged woman carried out an attack on the Northeastern Nigeria Gombe Barracks (Warner and Matfess, 2017). The female

suicide bomber, on a motorcycle, struck a military checkpoint in northeastern Nigeria, killing herself and a soldier in the process. Since then, Boko Haram has used more female suicide bombers than any other militant group in history (Hile, 2015).

Boko Haram has sent more than 80 female suicide bombers to their deaths in 2017 alone and the number is likely to keep rising (Hayden, 2017). From 2014, Nigeria has witnessed increasing feminization of terror by Boko Haram in two paradoxical ways- involving young girls as both the victims and vanguards of terror. As victims of terror, in the form of abductees, their fate has received the greatest international condemnation. As vanguards of terror, Boko Haram has graduated from using young girls as couriers of arms, foodstuff and money as well as recruiters to increasing deployment of them as suicide bombers (Onuoha and Teminola, 2015).

Table 1: Boko Haram female suicide bombers attacks on markets/bus stations

S/N	DATE OF ATTACK	STATE	NATURE OF ATTACK AND LOCATION	CASUALTIES
1.	November 26, 2014	Borno	2 female suicide bombers attack a market in Maiduguri	45 killed, many wounded
2.	January 11, 2015	Yobe	2 female suicide bombers attack a market in Potiskum	4 killed, 46 injured
3.	February 12, 2015	Borno	A female suicide bomber attacks a market in Biu	7 killed, over 20 wounded
4.	February 17, 2015	Yobe	A female suicide bomber attacks a restaurant	3 killed
5.	February 24, 2015	Yobe	An 8 year-old girl detonates in a market	5 killed
6.	March 8, 2015	Borno	A suicide bomber attacks a market in Maiduguri	Kills 6
7.	April 2, 2015	Gombe	A suicide bomber a market	20 killed
8.	June 22, 2015	Borno	A suicide bomber attacks a market in a bus station near a fish market in Maiduguri	20 killed
9.	June 23, 2015	Yobe	2 suicide bombers attack a market	15 killed
10.	July 25	Yobe	A 40 year-old woman described as mentally	14 people killed

			unstable detonates in a crowded market in Damaturu	
11.	July 31, 2015	Borno	A female suicide bomber arrived on a tricycle-KekeNapep, and detonates in Gomboru market in Maiduguri	8 killed
12.	November 7, 2016	Adamawa	2 female suicide bombers attack a local market in Madagali	30 killed
13.	December 9, 2016	Borno	2 female suicide bombers attack a food market in Madagali	30 killed, 45 wounded
14.	December 25, 2016	Borno	2 female suicide bombers attack Cattle market in Maiduguri	2 killed
15.	March 7, 2017	Adamawa	A young girl strapping a baby to her back detonated in a market	Killed herself and the baby and several others.
16.	March 15, 2017	Borno	4 female suicide bombers attack a bus station in Maiduguri	6 killed
17.	August 11, 2017	Borno	2 female bombers attack a phone market	4 killed, 46 injured
18.	August 16, 2017	Borno	3 female blew themselves up in a Maiduguri market	27 killed, scores wounded.
19.	December 2, 2017	Borno	2 female bombers attack a phone market in Biu	17 killed
20.	February 17, 2018	Borno	3 female bombers detonate in a crowded fish market in Konduga	20 killed, 70 wounded.
21.	June 20, 2018	Borno	2 female suicide bombers attack 333 Artillery Mammy Market in Maiduguri.	Only the suicide bombers died and 15 persons were injured.

Source: Compiled by the researchers; Vanguard (2018); The Punch (2017).

The April 2017 UNICEF report noted that “one in every five Boko Haram suicide bombers is a child, with three-quarters of child bombers being female.” As of February 28 2018, a recorded 469 female suicide bombers have been deployed or arrested in 240 incidents, and they have killed more than 1,200 people across four countries: Nigeria, Niger, Chad and Cameroon (Zenn, 2018). In spite of the success recorded by the military, there have been over 100 suicide bombings so far executed by girls and women in Northeastern Nigeria since Boko Haram commenced the use of female suicide bombers in June 2014, (Abdu and Shehu, 2019).

Climate Change and Female Radicalization in Northeast Nigeria

Climate change has been found to be of great help to Boko Haram in its recruitment and eventual radicalization of female members. This has been shown in the high percentage rate of deployed as suicide bombers in northeast Nigeria. The climate crisis has become a strong catalyst for terrorism in the northeastern Nigeria. According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crimes, 2019, “northern Nigeria is currently losing an estimated 1,350 square miles- roughly the equivalent of Lagos State- to desertification every year” (UNODC, 2019). In March 2017, Security Council Resolution 2349, which addressed the predations of Boko Haram in the Lake Chad Basin, specifically recognized “the adverse effects of climate change and ecological changes among other factors on the stability of the Region. This includes; water scarcity, drought, desertification, land degradation and food insecurity” (UNODC, 2019).

Predominantly, daughters and wives in northeastern Nigeria are farmers, and when they lose farmlands and agricultural products to climate change events like, rapid desertification, excessive heat, irregular rainfalls, drought, etc, they are rendered redundant and easily lured to join Boko Haram terrorist to escape dying from hunger or suffering from other economic losses.

The menace of climate change in Northern Nigeria in general and the northeast in particular, has resulted in several women who have been economically displaced easily become prey for recruitment and radicalization by Boko Haram terrorists who are very active in those areas. The consequences of climate change are devastating on women and girls in northeast Nigeria most especially than their men counterpart. During the rainy season, there are floods and during the dry season, severe drought becomes frequent in those areas. Most farmers (majorly females) fight against harvest shortages and lose of means of livelihoods in other for them to survive.

Shades of Female Redicalization

There are several ways through which Boko Haram insurgents radicalize females. Among them are through: brainwashing, hypnotism, enticement, threat of hurting loved ones and family members, threats of making them (females) die slowly and painfully, killing of recalcitrant abductees in front of others, etc. There seems to reasons for this attack which are highlighted below;

There are several reasons why Boko Haram uses more female terrorists than male terrorists in the northeastern Nigeria. Chiefly among them is that women and girls are less likely to be considered potential threats in public places. Women and girls are generally thought to be non-combatant, non-threatening (innocent) and less likely to be searched by male security officers, particularly in an area as socially conservative as northern Nigeria. Another reason is that women and girls can easily conceal explosive devices in hijabs and inside their long clothes and can easily pass security checkpoints undetected.

Another prominent reason why Boko Haram radicalizes females is that when female suicide bombers attack targeted places or areas, such attacks garner wide publicity, either press or otherwise. Boko Haram recognizes the power of the media as a weapon and it is female terrorists that can easily give them that wide publicity who helps in publicizing their reach, brutality, course, etc. Girls and women radicalized in Boko Haram also help the group in recruitment of other members. They also serve as spies, fighters and domestic labourers

The very hope of escaping from hunger and poverty, quest to revenge the death of loved ones who were killed or are being held by the Nigerian security forces or the Civilian Task Force, believed heavenly rewards understood from the teachings and publications of members of the sect, donations of girls by parents, abductions and bad treatments in IDPs camps are some of the outstanding reasons why women and girls join Boko Haram.

Recommendations

- The Federal Government of Nigeria should map out pragmatic policies and programs that will help is solving the issue of climate change in northeastern Nigeria.
- Employment opportunities should be provided for young girls and women in the northeastern Nigeria by the Federal, States and Local Governments to cusion the effect of the hardship.
- Early marriages should be discouraged among the girls of northeastern Nigeria, especially through their local authorities.

- Good education and standard educational institutions should be provided for in northern Nigeria, especially in northeastern Nigeria.
- Sufficient food, water, recreational activities and other useful materials should be provided for the people in the Internally Displaced Person's (IDPs) camps.
- Psychological supports, adequate health services and proper community reintegration will in a great way help girls/women in the region.

Conclusion

The emergence of Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria has brought enormous repercussions to the Nigeria State and the states of the Northeastern Nigeria, especially Borno, Yobe and Adamawa. The nefarious activities of these insurgents have brought untold economic hardships on the dwellers of these insurgency-ridden states. Pathetically, women and girls have borne the major brunt of the economic disasters which Boko Haram insurgency has brought upon the region. As a consequence, the women and girls of the region easily become dangerous tools in the hands of the terrorist group with a good number of them being radicalized by the terrorists.

However, adequate and pragmatic actions by the local, state and federal governments and other stakeholders that will be geared at restructuring and rebuilding the already destroyed economy of the northeast region of the country, will to a large extent help in revamping the economy of the region, put a stop to female terrorism in Nigeria and de-radicalize the already radicalized Boko Haram female terrorists.

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