

Ongoing Assaults on Schools and Healthcare in Northern Nigeria: A Grim Future for the Region

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Background

Armed conflicts continue to pose significant challenges to global health, education, and socioeconomic stability [1,2]. Boko Haram insurgency in north-eastern Nigeria and the surge in armed banditry in the country's northwest and north central regions remain significant concerns in Nigeria [3]. Targeted attacks on educational and medical facilities have increased because of the rising instability in northern Nigeria, which is being fuelled by covert alliances between terrorist organizations, such as Boko Haram and local gangs [4,5]. Due to the significant disruption caused by these assaults, rates of maternal and neonatal mortality, malnutrition, and infectious diseases have all increased [5,6].

On the other hand, the education sector has also suffered greatly. Thousands of pupils and teachers have been killed, abducted, raped, and forced to flee as a result of terrorist organizations and bandits working together [7,8]. More than 1,000 pupils were abducted in 2021 alone, while dozens of educational facilities were demolished or left unattended [8]. As a result, the number of children not in school has increased from 10.5 million prior to the conflict to approximately 20 million in 2022, underscoring the crisis' impact on enrolment [9]. In the month of April alone, two female students were abducted from their hostel in Zamfara [10], and ten other students were held hostage in a separate attack in the nearby Kaduna State [11]. In a related event,

a separate attack in Zamfara resulted in the kidnapping of approximately 80 school-age children [12]. These attacks have devastating consequences for the healthcare and education systems in the affected areas, ultimately jeopardizing the future of millions of Nigerians [4,5].

This piece seeks to emphasize the urgent need for a comprehensive approach that addresses the root causes of these conflicts, fosters peace and stability, and provides humanitarian assistance to achieve sustainable development in northern Nigeria. Failure to act will result in dire consequences for the region's future, as a lack of access to healthcare and education could perpetuate a cycle of poverty, violence, and instability for generations to come.

Generational Consequences of the Conflicts

The conflicts in northern Nigeria have generational implications that extend beyond the immediate impact on healthcare and education [8,13]. A prolonged lack of access to quality healthcare and education will lead to a population that is less healthy and less educated, limiting their ability to contribute to the region's development and break the cycle of poverty and violence. The psychological trauma experienced by children who have been kidnapped, witnessed violence, or been forced to flee their homes will also have long-lasting effects on their mental health and overall well-being [14]. Furthermore, the ongoing conflicts exacerbate existing social, economic, and political challenges in the

region, such as poverty, inequality, and weak governance. The instability created by these conflicts makes it difficult for government and non-government organizations to provide essential services and implement development projects, further hindering the region's progress [15]. As the situation continues to deteriorate, there is a risk of a "lost generation" of children who have been deprived of their right to education and healthcare, which will have profound consequences for the future of northern Nigeria and the broader African continent.

The Need for a Comprehensive Approach

An all-encompassing strategy that addresses the origins of the conflicts, fosters peace and stability, and offers humanitarian aid is required to solve the grave situation in northern Nigeria [15]. To improve security and restore vital services in the area, this policy should involve cooperation between the Nigerian government, regional allies, and the international community.

1. Addressing the Root Causes

Tackling the root causes of the conflicts in northern Nigeria requires a multifaceted approach that addresses poverty, corruption, weak governance, and other underlying factors that fuel the violence [15]. The Nigerian government and its regional and international partners must work together to develop and implement policies that promote economic growth, reduce income disparities, and create opportunities for the population, especially young people, to engage in productive activities [3]. Additionally, efforts to combat corruption and strengthen governance should be prioritized as this will contribute to improving public trust in government institutions and fostering a sense of social cohesion.

2. Promoting Peace and Stability

Efforts to promote peace and stability in northern Nigeria should focus on enhancing the capacity of local authorities and security forces to protect communities, as well as engaging in dialogue with armed groups to negotiate ceasefires and disarmament [3]. This process should involve regional and international actors, including the African Union and United Nations, to ensure a coordinated and effective response. Furthermore, peacebuilding initiatives should include support for local community leaders, religious figures, and civil society organizations that can help mediate conflicts and promote dialogue between different ethnic and religious groups. Such initiatives are crucial in fostering understanding, trust, and reconciliation among communities affected by violence.

3. Providing Humanitarian Assistance

The dire situation in northern Nigeria calls for urgent humanitarian assistance to alleviate the suffering of the affected population [3]. The international community, including donor countries and aid organizations, should work closely with the Nigerian government and local partners to provide essential services, such as healthcare, education, food, water, and shelter to those in need. This support should also include psychosocial services for children and adults who have experienced trauma due to conflicts.

Moreover, humanitarian assistance should be complemented by longer-term development efforts aimed at re-building the region's infrastructure, restoring essential services, and creating an enabling environment for economic growth and social progress [3].

4. *Achieving Sustainable Development*

To address the concerns raised by the ongoing conflicts in northern Nigeria, it is essential to strive for sustainable development that encompasses economic growth, social progress, and environmental protection [3,16]. This approach should involve the active participation of all stakeholders, including the government, private sector, civil society, and local communities, to ensure that the region's development is inclusive, equitable, and environmentally sustainable. Investment in education and healthcare infrastructure, teacher training, and the provision of safe spaces for learning and healthcare services should be at the forefront of international aid and development initiatives. Additionally, programs that promote skills development and vocational training for young people can help create employment opportunities and reduce their vulnerability to recruitment by armed groups. Another crucial element of sustainable development involves harnessing the inherent expertise of local communities and promoting their leadership in driving change [17,18]. This approach necessitates capacity building within these communities, empowering them not just to collaborate, but to spearhead initiatives, thereby ensuring the longevity and self-sustenance of the implemented programs.

Conclusion

The ongoing attacks on healthcare and education infrastructure in northern Nigeria threaten the region's future, trapping generations in poverty, conflict, and instability. A comprehensive strategy addressing the root causes, promoting peace, and providing humanitarian aid is crucial. The Nigerian government, regional allies, and the international community must work together to encourage economic growth, reduce socioeconomic disparities, and create opportunities for the youth. Prioritizing efforts

to combat corruption and improve governance will foster public trust and social cohesion. Investment in education and healthcare infrastructure, teacher training, and safe spaces for learning and healthcare services should be emphasized in international aid and development programs. By tackling these challenges, sustainable development and a better future for northern Nigeria can be achieved.

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