

**Y! AFRICA**

# #WESURVIVED BOKO HARAM

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## EDITOR'S NOTE

This morning, we begin a story series on YNaija.com called 'We Survived Boko Haram'. Over the past month, we have sent a reporter to the North-East of Nigeria to tell stories you don't usually read, or hear – in between the din of breaking news, news as porn, and then as commodity.

This reporter went around the cities of Konduga, Bama, Mubi, Yola, Damboa and Biu, meeting the people who actually live the daily lives beyond the headlines, after the carnage of Boko Haram, and the continued incoherence of government intervention.

He has returned with stories that are important: individual narratives of Nigerian citizens – who experience the very many sides of being Nigerian, in Nigeria. The realities of a complex, complicated country with a huge capacity to give and bring out the best and the worst (sadly, mostly the latter) from its citizens.

YNaija.com has undergone several iterations over the last 5 years – and all of this mirrors the evolution of the online space, and that of pioneers in that space. And while sometimes we have strayed, at all times we have kept sight of the core of who we are (across our online and TV property including #RubbinMinds on Channels TV and #eXploring on ONTV): driving the conversation about the issues and ideas that actually matter for Nigerians and that should matter for young Nigerians.

And here is a fact you don't hear often: Citizens matter.

Citizens matter. Their stories matter. Their every day lives matter. And not just as porn ("Man kills wife in Ikorodu!") exaggerated to titillate, to spark urgent fast-food reaction, while the shades, and textures and angles of their humanity are subsumed until they disappear.

If a man killed his wife in Ikorodu – we want to know why. We need to know his story, and her story, and the story of the community and nation that maybe created the conditions for that death. It's not enough that people are facing a hunger crisis in the North-East. The context is important – where did the rain begin to beat them? How do they survive each day? How can we connect with that story?

There are too many untold stories across our country, too many incomplete stories.

To tell these important stories, tragedy porn is wholly inadequate, even irresponsible, even if it is, for those of us who experience daily the upheaval in media business models and low barriers for entry, understandable.

News should not just be about understanding why Muhammadu Buhari does what he does, why Dino Melaye is the way he is, why Kemi Adeosun speaks the way she does. News – especially in a time of global upheaval from #Brexit to #Bernie – should also focus on the very ones who society is really all about: every day people, communities, citizens.

That is why at YNaija.com, we have two crucial beats that are innovations on existing media models: a Conversations (to trail the issues and ideas that matter in a fast-paced, social-media driven news cycle) beat, and a Citizenship (to take a step back every day and distill how those issues and ideas affect everyday people) beat.

The Citizenship Section, and its editor, focus on community and social change. We have our thrice-weekly #Impact365 series that finds and profiles change makers and the work they are doing across the country, and our bi-monthly Special Reports that tackle phenomena that define everyday existence – witness for instance our piece on the rise of Yaba and that on Nigeria’s betting industry.

To that, we add our monthly Citizenship Series, launching today, that takes big stories from the nook and cranny of Nigeria, and delves deep into them through a succession of personal and communal narratives.

Fully funded by this Internet newspaper (in partnership with our sister organisation, The Future Project), they are a demonstration of our commitment to tell the stories that matter, and to ensure the conversations that matter. Indeed, as we are publishing this, our reporters are already back on the road – telling textured stories from another corner of Nigeria.

Investing in this crucial imperative is for us a mission, one that sees us ready to take a temporary hit in vanity metrics to instead build a dedicated, inquisitive audience that cares about the things that are truly important – which is, according to our data-driven insights, how the educated, digital-connected young reader of the immediate future, will mostly be.

We are here in front of that coming future, armed with the stories we need to tell, and that you need to read.

It is our commitment that this will be a continuing story that will never end.

And we thank you for joining us.

Chude Jideonwo  
Editor-in-Chief  
Y!/YNaija.com



# INTRODUCTION

In an age where social media has made it increasingly urgent for newsrooms to break the news at, well, breakneck speed, and in a country where media budgets are crippled by a lack of depth, there is also the temptation to leave the story in their barest forms – simply sensational headlines, numbers – ‘25 dead’, ‘Boko Haram husband’, ‘soldiers retreat’.

As a journalist, I have always believed in looking for under-reported stories or the unseen angles in a widely reported story – after the hoopla has gone down, and everyone has left the scene. So in April 2016, I decided that I would go to Nigeria’s North East where the Islamist group Boko Haram has been waging a war since 2009 against the Nigerian government, even annexing at some point a territory almost the size of Belgium.

But rather than stories about doom and gloom (not that they are unimportant), I promised myself that my purpose was to go find stories of survival and hope in the region. Of human beings and the triumph of their spirits.

My initial scope was Maiduguri, but YNaija.com was already commissioning a series capturing the untold stories of citizens across Nigeria, and so they decided to support the project, so I could go even farther, to Konduga, Bama, Mubi, Yola, Damboa and Biu.

Sadly, due to the state of the road networks to Chibok, security alerts by the military about Potiskum and the inaccessibility of some other areas like Malafatori, those were as far as I could go.

I went with an agenda – to tell stories of triumph – but had a mandate not to sugarcoat reality. Thus I was pleasantly surprised. The NE held stories even deeper than I had any right to expect – stories of love, happiness in the midst of nothing, sacrifice, resilience, economic empowerment – even though there were, of course, the inevitable tinges of bitterness.

As a former commercial hub in West African, Maiduguri for instance is not back to its place of former glory – not by a mile. But the peace has returned.

There are still checkpoints with soldiers and local vigilante as well as an existing curfew, but children playing on the streets in the early evening, without fear, is proof of a rebirth.

In the twenty narratives you will read in this series (‘They Survived Boko Haram’ starting today, you will find that the different lives of these people are connected by a common thread – the insistent, stubborn, earned will to live on after having escaped death at the hands of its agents.

Make no mistake, these citizens need help, as they begin a slow march to a semblance of their former lives. But, as a key part of that journey, they need someone to tell their stories, the way they would prefer their stories to be told – first and foremost as humans, with dignity.



In the coming months, commissioned by YNaija.com, I will be investigating, immersing myself in and sharing stories about the lives of everyday Nigerians across a country bristling with stories – so that citizens, together, can connect with a shared humanity.

And understand what our country stands for – and what our country can, and should, be.

This series is just the beginning.

Eromo Egbejule

You hear a lot of stories about North-East Nigeria, a slice of the country that has been at war since 2009, at the hands of Boko Haram. But we have largely only heard a single story. Sending a reporter across 7 cities, we tell a more complete story – personal tales of survival and recovery – that speak to hope, to strength and to faith. Stories that speak to life. Across 20 narratives over the next 3 weeks, you will hear the most inspired and touching stories about Nigerians – at their best, even when they have only just recovered from their worst.

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THE BOY FROM  
**BAMA**

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It was 6am in Bama one Saturday morning in July 2014 as 18-year old Dauda Abubakar was getting ready for soccer practice that Boko Haram struck.

As soon as he heard repeated gunshots, the teenager fled the town with nothing but his jerseys and soccer boots.

Four hours later, after he had trekked all the way to Konduga, he remembered that he had a family.

“Shekau’s people came into town targeting the barracks and were shooting at anything they could find,” he says.

The rest of the family, save for his father and a couple of his siblings, hid in Bama and escaped only twenty-one days later.

In Konduga, a group of people going to the capital Maiduguri took him along in a van and together. They all journeyed to Dalori camp for Internally Displaced people in the heart of the city.

Four months ago, his father died in the camp.

The teenager was left with the responsibility of catering for the needs of his mother, his pregnant stepmother and 14 of his 16 siblings. The 15th and most senior of them all grabbed another and ran off to Jamare in Bauchi state.

“My brother’s wife is from that village so he ran there to continue welding that we both learnt from our father before he died,” he shares.

Dauda was also well-versed in welding but in the camp, there were no tools for him to earn a living from the trade that had kept his family going for years while they living peacefully back in Bama. His dreams of becoming the next big footballing superstar, he has had to put aside too.



Destruction in Bama

With diminishing food rations and unhealthy living conditions in the Dalori camp, the teenager knew he had to do something to keep his family from starving – so he began to regularly bribe the local vigilante members stationed at his entrance to allow him go into town to beg for alms.

Eventually, he started learning how to make the ‘Bama cap’, buoyed by little donations from good Samaritans bringing food to the camps: “I noticed that everybody was just making the hat.”

One day while selling the caps on the street, he ran into Bala Geidam, one of Maiduguri’s most popular realtors who listened to his story and instantly took an interest in the boy. The older man bought three caps at N12,000 each and gave the teenager a place to stay – with some other young boys.

Every Friday, he goes back into the camp to give his family money and food items, but still has to pay a bribe to get into the camp with his package – a necessary rite given that the others still get just one meal a day in the camp.

In the meantime, he plans to continue in school. Geidam was instrumental in convincing him to do so, paying for a diploma entrance form into College of Education Bama, with its base currently in Maiduguri because of the crisis.

Having secured admission to study Political Science this September, it seems the blues have been banished for young Dauda.

Dauda has had to become a man, without his permission. And somewhere in Bama, the soccer ball – like his footballing dreams – remain, at least, suspended.

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# F IS FOR FATI, AND FAITH

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It is almost 5pm on a weekday and as Fati Abubakar drives to one of the popular restaurants in town for lunch after a day of work with a visiting researcher to town, she fiddles with her phone.

“I'm sorry but I have to reply this email”, she apologizes. “Everybody wants to come into town and some people need my help navigating Maiduguri to get their stories so I'm getting

many emails. I don't always drive like this.”

Since being profiled in the New York Times last June, Ms. Abubakar has become something of a celebrity and the deserved multiple recognition for her documentary photography project, Bits of Borno has followed on CNN, Reuters, Voice of America, Marie Claire and more. At the military cantonment in the Pompomari area of town, she is easily recognizable. “Hajia Fatima, you are here againfa?”, one soldier asks when she brings yet another journalist around.

The soft-spoken 30-year old was born and bred in the city and save for a spell in London for a postgraduate degree in Public Health, has lived there all her life. While in the United Kingdom, she nurtured her love for photography, bought herself a camera and a couple of lenses including a 50mm one which she cherishes for taking her famed portraits.

Before she left the city of her childhood, a group led by a dissident cleric, Mohammed Yusuf had sprung up and was fighting against the Nigerian state in a bid to establish its own caliphate. Eventually, the war killed thousands of people and left millions more displaced, effectively turning Borno state into the hotbed of insurgency. Its' image and that of the entire North East region seemed irreparable. Until Fati Abubakar returned.

Inspired by the world-famous 'Humans of New York' account on Instagram, she launched her own social media campaign to transform the outlook about her favourite city from that of a war-torn area to one of survival and restoration. Twitter, Facebook and Instagram became her favourite stomping grounds for posting photos of positivity from Borno. Her tools? Her camera and a square notebook.

“The focus has entirely been on the bomb blasts, the deaths and the displaced”, she said in a recent interview. “I wanted people to see [those] left behind.”

The social media has blossomed, with the Instagram account in particular reaching a followership just a few numbers shy of five thousand since the first post in September 2015. In terms of impact, she has been able to move a few mountains too; some of her followers...

Given the traditionally conservative Kanuri society in which she lives, Ms. Abubakar admits that she attracts attention from onlookers who are surprised to see an unmarried Muslim woman walk around town mostly alone.

Throw in the fact that she is perhaps the only known female photojournalist around for miles and it is easy to see why she has become a walking sensation.

“Some of them are hesitant but many of the people are friendly”, she says over a meal of plantain [“I can eat plantain every day of the week”, she announces proudly] and kidney sauce at the restaurant, while sending overdue replies to an interview request from yet another foreign media. “They are happy to allow me shoot.”

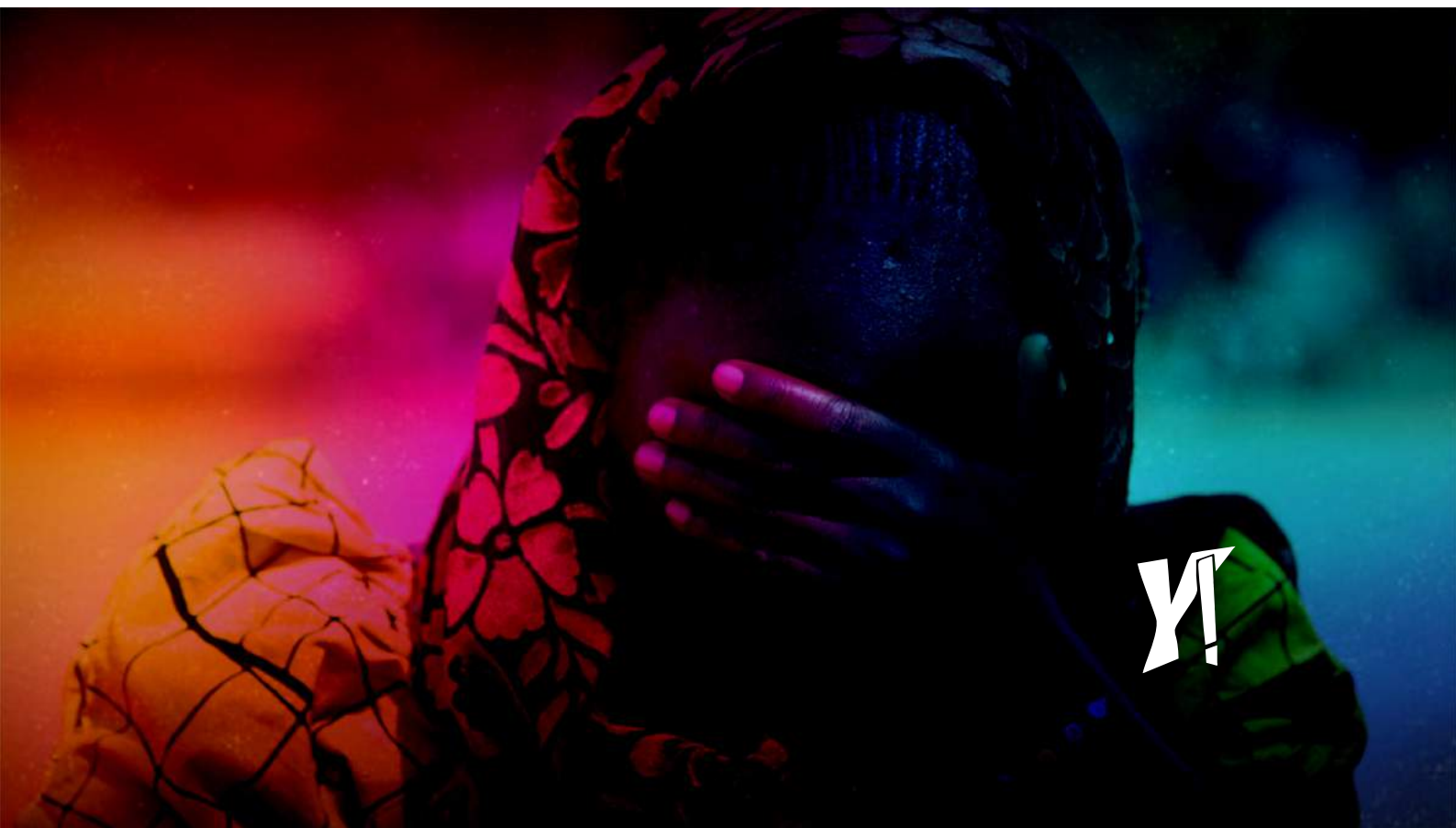
And she has a special touch with children who pose happily for her. After speaking to a child with brightly coloured hair extensions in one of the camps for Internally Displaced People (IDPs) around town, the youngster runs off to call many like her who have similar hairdos to her.

“This is my favourite city. Only marriage or work can take me away from here.”

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WE SURVIVED SHEKAU'S MEN,  
WE CAN SURVIVE HUNGER

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In the summer of 2014 when Boko Haram attacked Bama, one of the largest local government councils in Borno State yet again, 30-year old Falmata was pregnant with her fifth child. She remembers the date vividly; it was 13th August 2014 and it was a Monday morning. She was preparing to go about her usual business of selling kolanuts and sachet water when she heard the sound of sporadic gunshots

punctuating the peace. Two of her husband's goats died, followed by a neighbour's ten-year old son.

The insurgents who first sacked the military barracks within the LGA, came armed with swords and guns which looked extra menacing as they moved from house to house, seeking men and young boys to kill.

“They forced the women among us to attend qur'anic schools”, says Falmata, now 32. While some did as they were told, a majority hid in the bushes, coming out early in the morning to scout for food. One day as she went out looking for drinking water, she miscalculated her steps and fell down a slope; the outcome was a few bruises and an unfortunate miscarriage.

Six months after, she and her four children escaped to Maiduguri where she has been housed by a distant relative ever since in a host community for Internally Displaced People in Galtimari, a suburb of the capital. Initially established by the Norwegian Refugee Council and a few other sister organizations, the settlement is yet to attract the attention of the government at federal and state levels through the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) and the Borno State Emergency Management Agency (SEMA). And that of the international NGOs seems to have waned as they divert funding to many other communities also in need.

“We left Dalori camp because the feeding there is too poor. We eat once a day while the people running the camp take the food items out at night and give their wives to sell.” With Falmata's husband still in the Dalori camp in the heart of the city with his other wife and five children, the onus is on her to provide for her kids – and her parents who joined them earlier this year. There are many like them in pockets around the city, stretching its population from two million around this time last year to an excess of three million people. “There is nothing I am doing to support me and my children and we have to depend on my relative and any gifts we get from time to time. And that takes time; the last gift I got was two pieces of soap from the ward head in this community.”

“But we will manage till something better comes so my children can go to school. We survived Shekau's men, we can survive hunger.”

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# JIBRIN WENT BACK TO SCHOOL

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Jibrin was only six years old when it happened. Over the weekend, he had fallen ill and rashes had developed all over his body, from neck to back. So on July 1, 2014, his father took the youngster and set out to get a diagnosis and treatment at the government hospital in Maiduguri, capital of Borno state in North East Nigeria. On their route was the famous Monday Market in the city, the commercial nerve centre.

Despite the violent campaign of the insurgent group Boko Haram which had risen from a few followers in 2009 to thousands of foot soldiers in 2014, the area was still bustling with people and activity. As they passed that morning, a bomb placed by insurgents in a parked vehicle laden with charcoal exploded. Jibrin's father died instantly; he was one of the thirty-five casualties whose deaths were confirmed by officials of the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA).

The boy was rushed to the hospital but the damage had been done and his face was left permanently disfigured.

Then Fiona Lovatt of the Lovatt Foundation heard about his case. Her organization, which runs three homes in Maiduguri - under the 'Children of Borno' initiative - where children who have lost one or both of their parents to Boko Haram and in most cases left to wander the streets, live and school, took him in.

"I heard about his situation and we asked our children if they could be kind to a child who had lost a lot of his face and fingers", says Fiona. "They accepted."

Now he is one of 30 children being homeschooled there, growing with other children his age in an atmosphere of love and friendliness and getting to eat three square meals on a daily basis. Like the other children, Jibrin is also taught six subjects – English Language, Arabic, Mathematics, Social Studies, History and Agriculture – over the course of every week by Mallam Umar, the 'father of the house' together with three other teachers who equally live there.

"He's a good child and is learning fine", says Umar. "Everything is going well and he plays and runs around with the other children too."

Like the other children, Jibrin will also get a chance to be integrated into other schools in the metropolis and a chance at higher education in a couple of years.

But there is work to be done; there are regular medical checkups but reconstructive surgery is needed. For now, he wears a mask on his face to keep his ears and skin in place.

"One big man visited the house and made a pledge to pay for all ongoing medical expenses [but] his pledge was only a pledge. The child needs many more surgeries."



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# THE BANKER

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In June 2015, there was a double suicide bombing one evening at the popular Jimeta Modern Market in Yola as traders were haggling with buyers over open fires about food, second-hand clothing and various other merchandise. There were also a lot of commuters were going home in the ubiquitous Toyota Starlet taxis and tricycles. The incident disrupted the last-minute transactions.

Everyone was rushing home to beat the curfew which was from 7pm-5am at the time, as a result of the state of emergency imposed in 2013. Travellers have to stop, park and sleep in their vehicles, if they do not make it to their destination before 9pm, becoming easy targets for night marauders and roving insurgents. And this was so in many parts of the North East until late 2014 when the curfew was reviewed to begin at 10pm.

So it was precisely at rush hour that the bomb went off, killing at least five people and wounding a lot more. "It only took two days for the market to reopen", says Asauten Anderibom, head of operations at a local microfinance bank. "Everyone has to feed their families so they went back to trading right at the same spot Boko Haram struck, and also around it. It was unbelievable for me and I couldn't even drive around there for a bit but these people are so resilient."

Born in Jalingo, Taraba state almost thirty years ago, he obtained degrees in economics from the Benue State University and Aliyu Modibo University of Technology, Yola before settling down in Adamawa state.

Since the insurgency began, his bank has had to cut down its workforce and the number of daily deposits has reduced too. "Many people left the city and the queues at the bank have reduced", he says.

There was another blast in November 2015 but in a repeat of the situation five months earlier, economic activities resumed only a few days later.

Things began to take a turn for the better earlier this year, even though there was a lot of uncertainty about the economy, given the slow pace of the Muhammadu Buhari administration in fixing its economic policies.

These days, he can afford to stay out long and drink with friends at one of the many spots in town without worrying about security. And with the inflow of international aid organizations and donor agencies into town, the conditions of IDPs are getting better; a few are even going to the banks to deposit their savings from their meagre earnings running small businesses.

"People are coming back; it's just that they are not spending money like before because of the state of the economy. But I'm not leaving here. It's like home."

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# THE COMMUNITY

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Umaru Ibrahim, 34 was one of the first people to settle in Malkohi II, a small community of about 1,500 Internally Displaced People (IDPs) behind the Gibson Jalo Cantonment, Jimeta, Yola.

Three years ago, he and his family fled from Gwoza in the neighbouring Borno state after an attack by Boko Haram and trudged past villages for days before eventually settling in this little community in Adamawa state where he is the

ward head

“We kept moving and moving after we left Gwoza, then one day I saw someone I knew from my hometown here and then we decided to settle here.”

The community is a predominantly farming community, growing maize, beans, millet, rice and beans to sustain their families and also sell in the main Jimeta town. Over time, some buyers have begun to drive the long distance to the settlement to pay directly.

At its' entrance, just beside a mosque is a meat seller, Abubakar who says he sells at least one full goat every day – either as raw meat or as balango (spiced meat sold in brown papers juiced up with seasoning). “Business is good”, beams the native of Bama, also in Borno state.

There is also Ibrahim Wala, the 42-year old farmer and blacksmith who moved from Wala in Borno two years ago with his four wives and sixteen children. He fashions most of the hoes and farming implements being used in the community and sometimes barter them for food. “On the days I work here, I make 500 naira. On other days, I go to the farm.”

Over time, the Japanese and Australian governments together with Oxfam International have made significant donations to the community. The Australians in particular are running a programme teaching women in the community to make eco-friendly cooking stoves from clay; Oxfam and the European Union have donated most of the tents around.

The Japanese in conjunction with the United States Agency for International Aid (USAID) established from scratch, a safe space for women and girls to discuss issues of sexuality, marriage, motherhood and the trauma of losing their loved ones in the insurgency crisis. Three times a week (on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Fridays), specialists come from town to advise them

But there has been no single visit or help from any government official, says Ibrahim. “We need solar panels or anything to pump water to help us in farming and for use in our houses. There is no electricity too.”

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# THE COMMANDER

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When Boko Haram overran Maiduguri in the summer of 2013, Abba Aji Khalli was still an auditor working for the Borno state government happy to go home daily to the embrace of his three wives and twenty children.

A few months later, 'Elder' as his troops affectionately call him, became the commander of an 8,000-man unit of the civilian joint task force (civilian J.T.F), the local vigilante that is

widely credited with chasing the insurgents out of Maiduguri, the capital when the military seemed overwhelmed.

During a three-year period, Khalli and his men, mostly young boys and men with little or no military or paramilitary training and armed with charms and locally fashioned weapons including sticks, daggers and dane guns.

“They are children of necessity because they were formed to fight the insurgents”, the 52-year old said about his 'boys' who volunteered to keep the peace. “There were places the military could not attempt going to in Maiduguri but my boys went there to liberate them. We cleared this city within one week.”

Growing up in Maiduguri prepared Khalli for his future life as a protector of his people. As one of his father's nineteen children from four different wives, he was sent to live with his grandfather and often envisioned being a military officer. However, he did not follow through with his childhood dreams and eventually studied accounting at a technical college in the city.

For the children who equally gave up their childhood dreams and now serve as part of the civilian JTF, Khalli also wants a better future for them, away from the welcoming arms of crime. Before the crisis snowballed proper, many of his men worked as roadside vendors, selling airtime cards or working as black market fuel operators, with no tangible capital to return to these businesses, if they wanted.

“The Federal Government should engage these boys”, he says, almost pleading. “They have tasted war and can handle weapons so we need automatic slots into the security outfits in the country. There are heroes that we have lost and for some of them, their children can't feed.”

Already, 250 of the local vigilante have been absorbed into the army and over the last thirteen months, the Department of State Security has employed thirty of them as junior personnel.

The Kashim Shettima administration has also setup a youth empowerment scheme to cater directly to the civilian JTF and 1,850 of them are paid a monthly stipend of N15,000 monthly. But that is a drop in the ocean for an outfit with over 12,000 members, a fact that Khalli recognizes, especially with the possibility of them becoming election thugs for desperate politicians or evolving into a full-fledged ethnic militia.

“The state government has a lot of responsibilities so it cannot do it all. “

For Khalli, the generosity of the Nigerian government in dealing with the principal actors in the Niger Delta crisis ought to be extended to those who fought Boko Haram.

“I ask the federal government: 'between the Niger Delta militants and my boys, who are more responsible? Who ought to be taken care of?'"", he asks rhetorically.

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# THE MAJOR

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Greg Odika (not real names) was only ten when he made up his mind to join either the police force or the armed forces as soon as he was old enough. His father, a civil servant had died two years earlier and his mother, grappling under the weight of catering for him and his younger brother, had defaulted on their house rent.

“The landlord came around one day, ate the food my mother offered him and then told her to pack

her things and move out instantly”, he remembers. “We were owing for six months' but we had no money to pay. As she was crying and pleading with him while he was shouting at her, a police sergeant walked in, fully dressed in his uniform and called the landlord aside. He was our neighbour from the next street and the landlord calmed down and gave us more time to pay.”

The influence of the policeman impressed Odika and he later joined the army, rising up to the ranks of Major. Now 35 and stationed at the Jalo cantonment in Yola, he says he has never regretted the decision. His dream is that when he gets married, one of his children will also carry the baton on.

Until last March, he was stationed in Maiduguri (“I'm still administratively under Borno”, he reveals) helping to restore peace fully to the birthplace of Boko Haram. “It is a shame what has happened to that city. That was a major trading city for people across the borders in Niger, Chad and Cameroon.”

Since the transition from the Jonathan administration to that of Buhari, ammunition supplies and officer welfare has improved, Odika says. “Whatever happened under Jonathan, we don't know. Some say he signed money for weapons but that was diverted. Buhari gave us weapons and the body language of the soldiers is to fight till death now – that's why we are winning this war.”

He also says that the Bank Verification Number (BVN) has been critical to the removal of ghost workers from the payroll.

While there, Odika would regularly go to drink with some of his fellow officers at the Lake Chad Bar, one of the city's most popular hangout joints. On one occasion, a fellow officer was 'bitterly lamenting' the lack of attention given to some of the captives of Boko Harm rescued from Sambisa forest – something he would ordinarily not do at the regular army officers' mess.

“More girls have been rescued from Sambisa but the media doesn't care and the army hierarchy as well. Everybody just wants to hear Chibok girls; if it's not Chibok girls, they go back to sleep.”

The lack of empathy of some sections of the populace with the army also worries Odika. During the liberation of Dikwain August 2015, he was involved and says the army was the first point of humanitarian assistance for the locals who had been cut off from food supplies and were largely malnourished.

“We shared our food with them, even with some of the insurgents who surrendered. Our men bathed these people and took care of them before the NGOs and NEMA got access, but you don't hear that in the news. It's a shame.”



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# THE GREAT TREK

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Between 'Big Tuesday' 15th February 2012 and 'Black Sunday' 14th September 2014, Abba Mamman had the privileged misfortune of witnessing twelve different attacks by Boko Haram insurgents seeking to overrun his hometown and forcibly install an Islamic caliphate.

The thirteenth, which commenced at 5am was the final straw that broke the proverbial camel's

back and sent the 43-year old father of six scrambling for his dear life.

At the time, Mamman was an irrigation farmer who also dabbled in animal husbandry, leaving his diploma certificate in Sharia & Civil Law from the Borno State College of Legal & Islamic Studies to gather dust at the bottom of a travelling box. The other Boko Haram attacks had been targeted at military installations in the city and government buildings only, so he figured he and his household were safe. The general rationale in town was that the terrorists were fighting against the state and not private citizens, so there was no immediate threat to their lives if they stayed indoors during the routine raids.

Until the Fourteenth of September.

So that morning as he prepared to go about his daily business with the usual spring in his step, the rattle of gunshots in the air and multiple screams of 'Allahu Akbar' halted him in his tracks and woke up his sleeping wife who in turn woke up the rest of the family.

"We came out of our house and saw people running helter-skelter; confusion everywhere. So all of us started crawling on the street because of the stray bullets."

After crawling over 200 metres, his wife advised that they split, sensing that the insurgents would in all likelihood kill the men in the town first. So while he moved towards the barracks for safety with other men and a few teenagers of both sexes, she and their children fled in the opposite direction towards the gates of the town.

"On our way there, we saw soldiers pulling their uniforms and flinging their weapons in the bush. Everyone was running. Someone told us trucks of young men dressed in camouflage were heading towards the barracks and burning houses on their way. So we changed direction again."

Mamman claims that two fighter jets were also bombing the barracks at this point so he knew the takeover of the town would be complete soon. Abandoning the body of a thirteen-year old girl – the age of his first daughter – who died in his arms from a stray bullet, he too realized that journeying towards Maiduguri was his only option.

"We shared our food with them, even with some of the insurgents who surrendered. Our men bathed these people and took care of them before the NGOs and NEMA got access, but you don't hear that in the news. It's a shame."

Four hours later he was there and within a week, he was reunited with his wife and

and their youngest child. “She told me that the other children had split from her while they were running and she had no idea where they were.”

Their hopes of finding them soon turned into despair as weeks turned into months but poor Mamman kept on searching. His faith was rewarded when one sunny day as he was walking back from a fruitless search two months in, he heard “Baba, we are here”. It was the voice of his exhausted thirteen-year old child who had led her four siblings for three days trekking over 75km through inner villages to Maiduguri. They had hidden in the town for two months before escaping when they ran out of food supplies.

“I knelt and cried with them for minutes before remembering that I had to take them home. Losing one child is never a good thing, not to mention three. The memory of seeing that thirteen-year old die in front of me is still with me. And that could have been my daughter.”

These days, he is a 200-level student of Public Administration at the University of Maiduguri, scrapping off funds being donated infrequently by well-wishers including the former provost of his old school, for catering to the needs of his family.

“We want to go home”, he laments. “I miss my source of livelihood and being able to take care of my family.”

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# THE INSTRUCTOR

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After graduating from the University of Maiduguri in 2003 with a degree in Public Administration, Christiana Stephen was posted to Bodinga in Sokoto for the mandatory-one-year National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) programme.

There, she began teaching the women something else she learned while in school – making beads, dresses and other small-time domestic craft.

' My father was a lecturer and I had sewing machines in our garage where I learnt how to sew and eventually began teaching the children of other staff on campus. The few times I had gone to Lagos, I realized that there was serious value for these skills, but here in the North, we tend to look at it as just a hobby. So I took it seriously."

A decade later, Christiana began teaching in a more formal capacity at the newly established Centre for Entrepreneurship and Enterprise Development (CEED) at the University of Maiduguri. She was the first staff of its fashion design unit, a position she holds till date.

Around that time, Boko Haram the insurgents who had grown from one man (Mohammed Yusuf) and a few followers in 2009 to thousands of fighters in 2013, intensified attacks in Borno State. Christiana who had been born and bred in Maiduguri, was caught together with her immediate family, in the crossfire between them and the military – but they survived.

Her uncle and his teenage son were killed in Maiduguri one day when two of the insurgents pretending to be customers, knocked on the door of his wife's shop. As soon as the older man opened, they proceeded to spray the house and everyone in it with bullets.

"His wife and their smallest child survived by lying under the bed. It was a very tough period for us all – at some point, I had to even stop going to work."

Later that year, the local vigilante – the civilian JTF – spearheaded a massive defeat on Boko Haram and together with the army, drove the terrorists out of town. With the resulting peace came Internally Displaced People (IDPs) trooping from all corners of the state and even from the neighbouring Adamawa and Yobe states. The population of the capital swelled from two million people to slightly over three million of them; in the camps, host communities and even on the street.

And Christiana knew she had to act. Early in August after the end of the university's activities in the 2015/2016 academic session, she began running a month-long vocational training course for some of the IDPs. The first batch – 15 people in all – was sourced from the youth fellowship at one of the local churches, Church of Christ in Nigeria.

From Monday through Friday every week, she teaches from 9am till 2pm, the art of making dresses, extracting coconut oil as well as shaping ribbons and other accessories. "They are so happy to learn and it is a joy to be able to empower them to stand on their own after this period."



“Many of them had thriving businesses in their hometowns but the crisis made them lose everything. The other day, I asked them to share their stories but they were too traumatized to talk so I let them be.”

At the moment, all the funding for the programme comes from her own purse – not that Christiana is complaining. “There's no support from anywhere and I hope that in time, the government can support those of us who want to help the IDPs stand on their own. I'm grateful to the DPO of the nearby police station who gave us two police officers for protection every day, at no cost at all. No cost.”

And it is encouraging to hear that she has plans for more: “I've also thought of the civilian JTF, of integrating them into our trainings but they need therapy first. I got a psychologist from the university to speak to my students here. After that, we can start using local resources in our environment to create livelihoods - neem oil, sesame seeds.” “But first, they have to go through therapy, they have seen so many things.”

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# THE MUSIC VIDEO

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Earlier this year, Tabitha Ari was in her office one day when she was told that the head of the Department of State Security Services in Biu, Borno State had come around looking to arrest and detain her.

“He said he came to arrest me for bringing musicians to the IDP camp to come and take photos and shoot a music video”, said the Head of Programmes at NTA Biu who is also a respected

member of the community. “I was so surprised. It sounded like a joke but it was real.”

The 'music video' in question was a documentary shot at the Government Girls' Secondary School camp for Internally Displaced People (IDPs) by one of several doctors who had come as part of Adopt-A-Camp, a Lagos-based charity.

Between 2013 and 2014, a series of unending attacks by Boko Haram across the state had left many displaced but even though the insurgents passed through Biu a few times, the town was never captured and the destruction was minimal. So late in 2014, the Kashim Shettima administration sent trucks to bring IDPs from everywhere – Chibok, Gwoza, Hawul, Shaffa and even as far as Damaturu and Potiskum in the neighbouring Yobe state – to the camp in the town. “There were even some who were released from Sambisa forest but because they were not part of those Chibok girls, only their families celebrated their release.”

Then officials of the Red Cross took over the administration of the camp and providing food with varying levels of support from UNICEF and officials of the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) and Borno State Emergency Management Agency (SEMA).

So in December 2015, Tabitha whose cousin, a clergyman was killed by the insurgents, organized clothes, cardigans and other relief materials together with some other friends in Biu and took them to the camp. She had heard that many of the IDPs were sleeping in the open and there was no aid for those who were ill.

The next month, her path crossed with that of Adopt-A-Camp and its founder, Bukky Shonibare when a mutual friend introduced them to each other. Soon after, the organization raised funds to improve the living conditions of the IDPs and brought along a huge bonus, a team of doctors.

“Madam Bukky is a very nice woman; very helpful”, Tabitha says of her new friend. “She is always asking for details about how to help the children and I do my best to account for every kobo she sends because this is a woman who trusted me without even meeting me.”

When the team came, they built sixteen blocks of toilets and bathrooms, furnished a mini-clinic and also established a school.

So on the day of her 'arrest', Tabitha told the DSS chief the story from the beginning and pictorial evidence. “I showed him photos of the doctors treating and offering advice to patients for the five days they were here and that was how he left.”

Whenever she visits the camp, the children come running to her looking happy and grateful. “The last time we did a drive and brought some clothes for the children, I was looking at them trying it. One of the little ones who I think her mother was pregnant when she was captured and taken to Sambisa, came to me in her new clothes and told me XYZ [Hausa for 'Thank you; it is so beautiful'. My heart melted.”

Ms. Shonibare is returning to Biu soon, says Tabitha. This time, she is bringing books, crayons, pencils, toys and schoolbags for the children under what is aptly called the 'School-in-a-Bag' initiative. “The children are happy now but they will be able to learn properly when those items come.”

There's no telling if the DSS chief will pay her another visit; not that she cares.

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# DEATH ANTIDOTE

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In 2011, Sandra Bernard was a sixteen-year old freshman studying Economics at the University of Port Harcourt and staying at an off-campus apartment with a fellow undergraduate. Her parents had separated when she and her twin brother were five and after what seemed like a lifetime of growing up with different relatives, she had gotten seamless admission to study the course of her choice.

It seemed like everything good had finally come.

But when a chance visit to a friend in town saved Sandra from certain death at the hand of her roommate who thought she was an informant to her cousin in a rival cult, she had to flee for her dear life.

The very next day, she took a direct bus to Maiduguri to stay with a friend and start her education afresh. A few months after, she wrote the Joint Admissions Matriculations Board (JAMB) exams and was eventually admitted into the city university to study Accounting.

In her sophomore year, she came close to death again. This time, a member of Boko Haram, the insurgent group that had begun waging war against the Nigerian government in 2009, threatened to kidnap her and three of her friends because of her tomboy fashion. And because she was a musician (the insurgents had brutally butchered Halima, an extremely popular female rapper for similar reasons in September that year).

“We had to go to my pastor who called soldiers to go and pick him up because he was insisting that 'they' were coming back to abduct many girls”, Sandra remembers. This was in 2012, two years before the kidnap of the Chibok girls.”

Her pastor ensured that her attacker was picked up by men of the Joint Task Force (JTF) in Maiduguri and all seemed well again. The Kashim Shettima government decided to intensify its efforts in protecting students of the university even during holidays. It would provide shuttle buses to convey them from their different states of residence all over the country to and back again during holidays.

“Then every student's ID card was their ticket home. The Rivers state government under Rotimi Amaechi also sent buses to pick its indigenes, then we were given tokens after the drivers dropped us in our respective houses.”

Then Black Friday – March 14, 2014 – came along.

As students in the hostels were preparing to attend 7am lectures that morning, the sound of gunshots disrupted the peace and continued almost till midnight. Boko Haram had attacked the Giwa Barracks, which was not so far away, seeking to free some of its members imprisoned in the infamous guardroom. Stray bullets spilled into the university premises, killing two students and leaving many others wounded.

“My friend who was going to write a test was hit by a bullet, right in her left breast. She survived but left the school after and never returned.

There was another guy who jumped from a two-storey building and broke his leg. I was lucky that I had slept over in a friend's house in 303 Housing Estate.”

The Nigerian Army had to send for two jet fighters from Yola in the neighbouring Adamawa state; the lead was a notable lady pilot who had helped the military secure crucial victories in the fight against Boko Haram.

Lectures resumed the next Monday but from 8am onwards. After the kidnap of over 200 schoolgirls in April from Chibok, two hours away from the capital, rumours surfaced that the insurgents were coming for the female undergraduates in the university.

Sandra remembers that everyone became super alert. “Girls were ready to commit suicide rather than be abducted like the Chibok girls. Then in UNIMAID, every girl was sleeping with only one eye closed and wearing jeans or leggings. We were carrying one small bag packed at every time of the day; inside your ATM card, ID card, credentials and spare underwear.”

“At night, if you walked through the female hostels you'd hear people praying loudly for forgiveness of sins in case they were killed at night. Muslims would be chanting Allahu Akbar while Christians would be praying: “Lord give me the strength not to deny you tonight”. It was a scary time.”

Sandra graduated early in 2016 but has come to love Maiduguri and is staying behind. “I want to work in development. I've seen too much in this life that I just want to help others.”

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# FAKKHRRRIYYAH VISIT

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In mid-August 2016, 23-year old Fakhrriyyah Hashim took a break from her farm on the outskirts of Abuja, the nation's capital to spend one week in Maiduguri, capital of Boko Haram-ravaged Borno state. She had stories about the place the press commonly referred to as 'the birthplace of Boko Haram' but had never been there.

A few months earlier, she had signed up to

volunteer for Abuja-based NGO, Girl Child Concerns which focuses on education of the girl child and empowering women across Nigeria.

Finding time to escape from the rigours of work on the farm which she personally supervises was hard, but for Fakhrriyyah who was born and bred in Kano to Yemeni parents, sacrificing her time to make Nigeria great is equally necessary. Since returning to Nigeria after completing a degree in Business Administration at Abu Dhabi University, she has been campaigning for a better future for young girls like her.

Her visit to Maiduguri alongside Dr Mairo Mandara, chairperson of the GCC board to empower girls and women among the Internally Displaced People (IDP) in the host communities, came on the heels of a fundraiser and picnic in Abuja.

“We went to Borno in order to facilitate an income generation scheme for female IDPs”, she says. “What we focused on was something that women from Borno specialize in – capmaking. So yeah we bought all the items they needed and we shared it among a hundred and twenty-five of these women. The women call the caps Aisha Buhari.”

“What we plan on doing is, after every month, when they've made enough caps, we buy at market price from them and sell to people [outside Maiduguri]. Whatever proceeds they get from sales, they reinvest as capital to do more.”

For maximum impact, the duo also advised the women to take others in the camps under their wings. For the girl child, there was also a package.

“You know, since GCC focuses on girls' scholarship scheme and is focusing on IDP girls, we went there to make arrangements for primary six students to take exams and those of them that pass, are going to be given a scholarship and will be taken to Kaduna and they'll start schooling there and GCC will sponsor every aspect of it for six years.

While in Maiduguri, Fakhrriyyah heard stories of loss, of anguish, of frustration, of helplessness and of hope too. Curiously, the standout experience of her stay was not the story of any of the girls or women she and her boss spoke to. It was Abubakar, a 14-year-old boy from Gwoza who charmed her.

One night, Boko Haram invaded his village and in the ensuing melee, he and his parents went in opposite directions. “Nice kid”, she remembers. “The reason why he stood out for me from all the others was because of how calm and collected he was. He does not know where his parents are and whether they are alive or not.”

“He's a kid that I definitely will go back to Maiduguri for when I have a concrete plan for him. The identification thing – we can't really depend fully on government to find families of displaced kids and reunite them. So I need to actively work on something that will help him be reunited with his family. And if they are dead, I'll probably have to find a means for him to move on.”

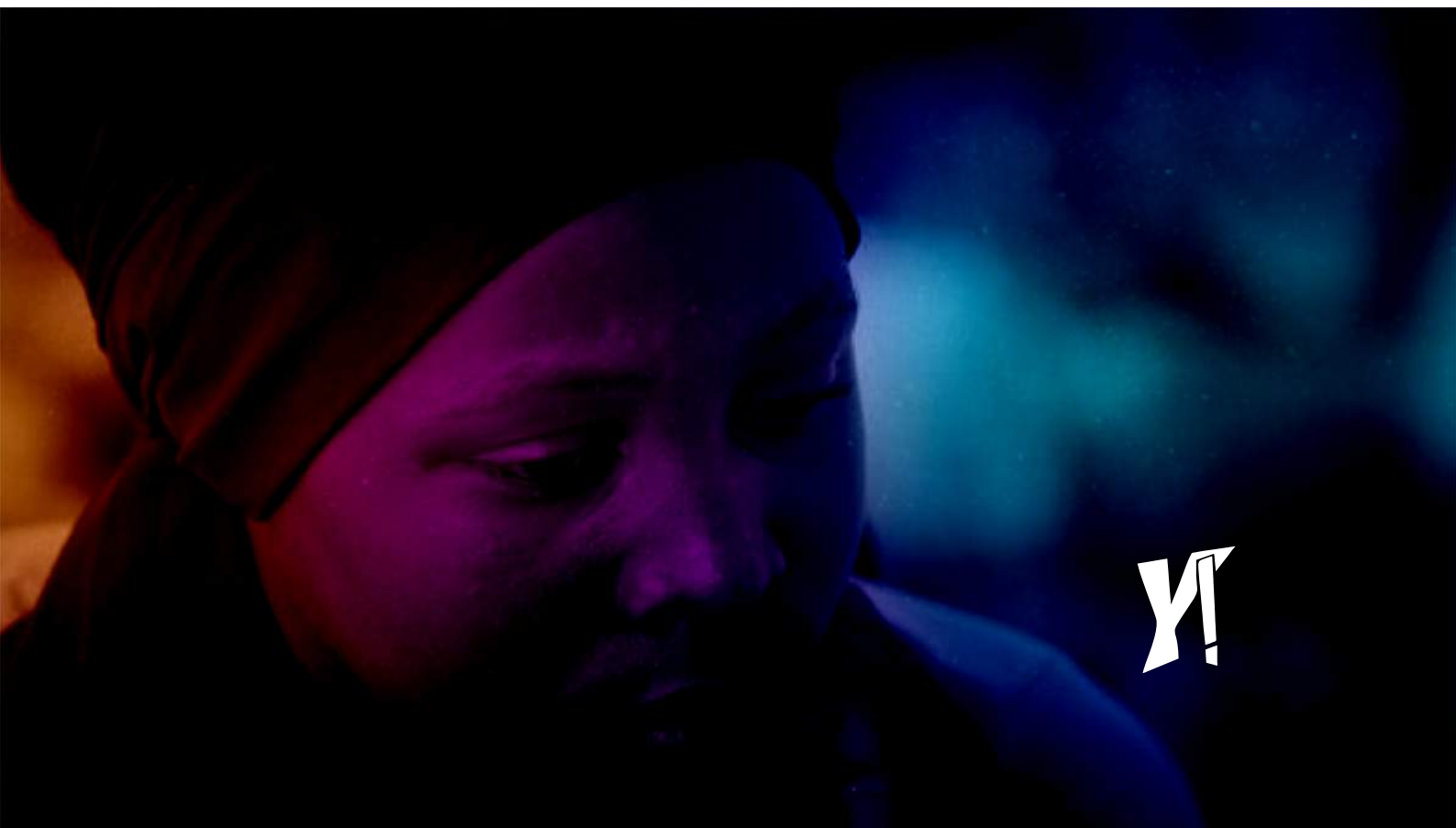
For a young woman with all the trappings of a good life and a business running smoothly, why risk her life to go to a conflict zone? “I just don't like seeing people vulnerable. It kills me.”



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# FROM BAGA TO JERUSALEM

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Dorcas Musa was scheduled to be sold on a Thursday. And she knew.

The 13-year old had eavesdropped on a conversation in Kanuri between two members of Boko Haram, the insurgency group that had kidnapped her and four others from her hometown of Baga a few months earlier. One of them had been sold the week before so Dorcas knew that it was only a matter of time before she

became a sex slave or child bride.

So she later that night she ran, keeping to the bushes and walking when she felt her energy levels dropping, then running again when she heard any sound. Two days later, she stopped in one of the villages exhausted but luckily she got a free ride to Maiduguri.

Her mother, Esther remembers that they came on the 3rd of May, 2014. They had gone to the farm that morning at 5am and were already working when they heard shouts of 'Allahu Akbar'. Even before they looked up, they knew that they had company. It was Boko Haram troops.

They killed a lot of the men and boys in Baga who did not manage to escape in time and abducted five teenage girls. Her husband and her seven-year old son were killed and Dorcas, her teenage daughter was one of five abducted girls.

"We ran", Esther narrates. "We ran all the way out of town, stopping to catch our breaths then running again, until we reached Monguno. Thankfully, the government had sent vehicles there to carry displaced people and so we joined them to Maiduguri."

In the capital, they were soon relocated to a camp for internally Displaced People just on its outskirts by the bypass. At the camp, someone who had escaped from Chibok mentioned that there was a camp being run by the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), Borno State chapter in an area called Jerusalem Wulari. Things were better there, he insisted.

"So we spoke to the camp officials about relocating there and one of the churches under CAN sent a car to take us there."

One day, they were at the camp when Dorcas walked in. It felt like a dream to a mother who was learning to live with the fact she would never see two of her four children again. A happy dream.

Living in the camp and depending on someone else for life's basic necessities is strange to her. Before the crisis, she was a petty trader with a thriving business while her husband was a prosperous farmer growing plenty of food for his family and for the markets. In the camp, resources are stretched thin by the increasing number of IDPs coming in.

"Living in the camp is never like living in your own home. Before, they would cook and serve us food, but that is no longer the case. There's no food here."

Recently, some officials of the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) visited the camp and drew up a list of widows to be given grants that would empower them to fund their own small businesses.

But Esther's name didn't make the list. “They said they would take it in another batch. We are still waiting.”

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# HASSAN GETS A REPRIEVE

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Y!



One evening two years ago, Hassan Hassan then a 30-year old farmer in Dikwa, Borno state, hurried home from a day in the farm to pray. As he finished his ablution and knelt down to start praying, he saw six gunmen walk into his house with guns and knives. He knew they were Boko Haram.

One of them pointed a gun at his forehead and was ready to smash him into smithereens but

Hassan, who had decided in his heart that he was not ready to die yet, began to struggle with his assailant. Eventually, he managed to escape but not without bullets grazing his hip region.

He knew why they had come. His younger sister was married to a Boko Haram lieutenant who wanted Hassan to be recruited. She had directed them to his house and twice, they had come looking for him. Twice, he was absent and this was the third time they had come knocking.

The younger of his two wives had been killed by the insurgents but the other escaped with three of his five children; no one knows the whereabouts of the other two till date.

When Hassan escaped he ran to the house of another sister who was still loyal. “She hid me under the mattress and when they came looking for me, she told them she hadn't seen me in days. Luckily they decided not to check the house.”

Afterwards he fled to Maiduguri where he now lives with his wife and three children at the Sanda Kyarimi Primary School Camp in the popular Customs Area. The welfare of the almost 3,000 Internally Displaced People (IDPs) in the camp is taken for granted, says Hassan. Most of the attention by aid workers and the scrutiny by the press is directed at the Bakassi and Dalori camps, the biggest in the city. Like Sanda Kyarimi, most of the other camps get no love. Each tent has no lighting and the massive heat within makes the residents extremely susceptible to heat rashes.

Tired of feeding only once a day and an unchanged menu of rice and beans every day, Hassan knew he had to do something. Three months ago, in an attempt to do what he knows best – providing for his family like a man, he stresses – he went to one of the shops just outside the camp to buy food items on credit. Every morning and evening, he would go and take a little more, until the shopkeeper mentioned to him that his tab was now N13,600 in the red and he needed to pay up.

“The man seized my phone and said he would not give me until I pay up. But I had no money to pay up and I had no phone to reach any of the aid workers that give me small tips. I was confused.”

A few weeks ago, Fatimah, a friendly aid worker came around with a colleague. As soon as Hassan went to meet her, one of the female camp officials followed suit. In the two hours the visitors spent in the camp, the lady trailed her waiting to see if there would be any money gifts.

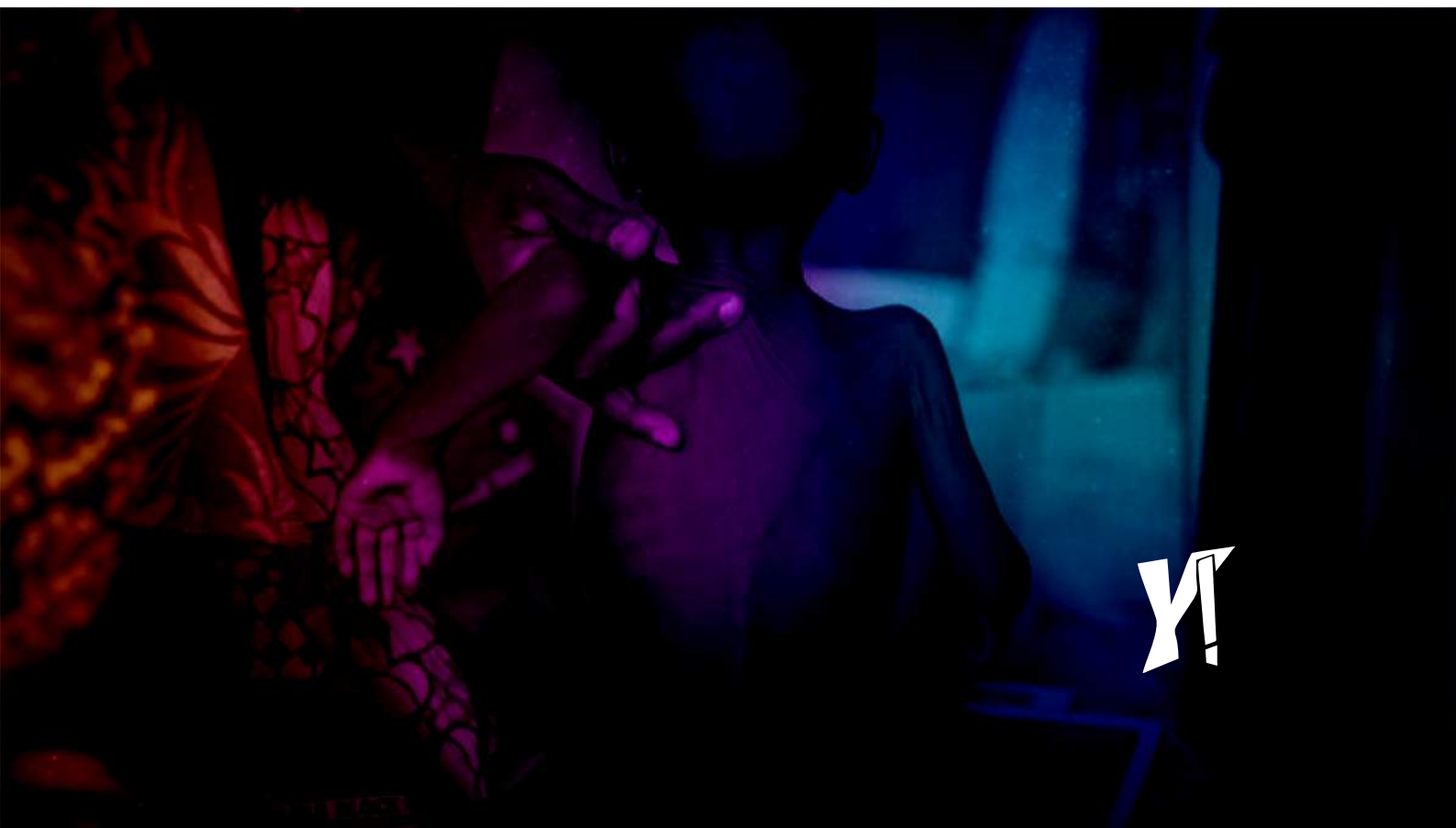


Two days after the visit, Hassan called Fatima to thank her for slipping N20,000 into his hands when the camp official was not looking. He had been able to pay his debt, gotten back his phone and used the remainder of the money to buy foodstuff for his family. But he had news – the camp officials were angry that Fatimah had not 'registered the case' with them first. They had lost their anticipated bonus.

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# HUNGER IN MAIDUGURI

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In June this year, Borno state governor, Kashim Shettima was summoned to Aso Rock by President Muhammadu Buhari to be scolded – if the rumours were to be believed – about the severe cases of malnutrition in the state.

The invitation came on the heels of viral photos and a statement released by Medicine Sans Frontieres (MSF) about the increasing level of malnutrition in the state.

The photos showed children with arms resembling wings and bodies so sickly that the authorities were embarrassed and claimed the doctors were being sensational. But from all indications, the doctors were right about the Internally Displaced People (IDPs).

A recent report by FEWS NET, a network set up by USAID to provide early warning on famine and food insecurity, said surveys and screenings indicated Global Acute Malnutrition rates in Borno and Yobe state were “ranging from 20 to nearly 60 percent.

Thierry Laurent-Badin, programme director for Action Contre la Faim (ACF) in Nigeria, estimates that about 244,000 children are currently suffering from severe acute malnutrition in areas that used to be a complete no-go due to security restrictions, a figure also announced recently by UNICEF.

Until March this year, many of the towns previously under control by Boko Haram were still inaccessible to humanitarian organizations like the ACF.

“We just got access to areas previously under Boko Haram control and completely inaccessible for the last few years; areas like Monguno, Baga, Kukawa, Gamboru-Ngala, Dikwa, Bama, Gwoza and more,” Laurent-Badin told YNaija by email in July.

For those who have been nursed back to life by aid workers, the quantity of food is still a problem, especially in the camps. “In almost all the camps, they eat only rice and beans”, says Khadeejah, an aid worker at the IDP camp in Shehuri area, Maiduguri. “All SEMA officials add is a little oil to colour the rice to make it look better. No salt, no pepper, no proteins.”

In places like the 75,000-man camp at Dikwa which is about 120 kilometres away from Maiduguri, their only meal every day is brunch which comes at 2pm because of the time wasted in cooking such a sheer volume of food for that number of people.

At a meeting earlier in the year between the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) and the Borno State Emergency Management Agency (SEMA), it was agreed that the former would provide the rice and major foodstuffs while the latter would be in charge of condiments, seasonings, firewood and water.

Neither complied fully, says another aid worker at the Bakassi camp, speaking anonymously. “A lot of sharing and sorting is done, so not everything gets to the IDPs at the end of the day. Right now in Bakassi camp, IDPs say they are given raw food rations weekly, and left to figure out how they get it cooked, I suppose.

The arrangement used to be that NEMA provides staples then SEMA provides firewood and condiments, but SEMA hasn't been living up to their end. A lot of money has gone down the drain. You need to hear [the] ridiculous amounts they claim to use to get stuff like firewood.”

Things reached a crescendo late in August when there were multiple protests in IDP camps across Maiduguri – from Shehuri to Farm Centre, Dalori and Bakassi – with some of the protesters claiming they had not been given food by camp officials for weeks. Khadeejah remembers seeing some of them blocking the road and protesting peacefully on her way to one camp.

“It was heartbreaking to see that happen. The worst thing is that the food meant for these people ends up in the shop of one NEMA official's wife. As an IDP, if you wake up in the middle of the night to see food donated for your welfare being taken out silently, how would you feel?”

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# THE BOOK SELLER

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28-year old Okechukwu Agu runs a small bookshop in Hong, a sleepy town of 196,000 people two hours away from Yola and surrounded by rocks. Originally from the southeastern state of Enugu, he moved down to join his elder brother there almost ten years ago, in search of greener pastures.

His business, 'Okey Plc International Bookshop' provides textbooks for most of the school

children in the town and bibles for the adults, among other books. Since relocating to the town, he has learnt to speak Hausa and is keen on improving his knowledge of Kilba, also widely spoken in Hong.

Once every week, his supplies come along with a public transport service from the commercial city of Onitsha to the town of Mubi, about 40 kilometres away from his base and it is from here that he picks them up. One day in February, he got a call to pick them up from Gombi, a smaller town between Hong and Song, a 40-minute drive from Yola.

"I was told that the bus was not going to Mubi again so I have to come and pick up my goods at Gombi or else they would turn back and carry them to Onitsha", he says.

"The reason was everyone had heard Boko Haram was coming soon." A few days after, he and his brother, owner of a local medicine store fled to family in Jalingo, eight hours away and waited till it was safe to return.

Unlike Agu, not everyone has a place to run to in the face of oncoming danger. Across the street from his shop, a fellow Igbo man had nowhere to run to when Boko Haram foot soldiers attacked the town, so he locked himself up in the same shop where he sells plastic bowls and buckets on every day of the week – and waited for a seemingly inevitable death.

It never came.

Instead, the visitors shook hands with him and then forced him to fold his trousers, then pray at a nearby mosque, before letting him go. Still traumatized, he has refused to speak to strangers about the experience till this day.

Boko Haram went on to burn churches, schools and the local government council headquarters, symbols of westernization and government that the sect considers "haram" – forbidden.

But in December 2014, the army recaptured Hong and word of the town being back in the hands of friendly forces soon reached Jalingo. Okechukwu and his brother knew it was time to go back home. "I packed my bags and returned to start selling my market. This place is like home, regardless of the Boko Haram trouble and that has even come and gone. Hong is very peaceful and the people are hospitable."

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# THE ELASTICITY OF YAKUBU

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The smile on 27-year old Yakubu Abana's face gates his cumulative anguish.

As Nigerians were celebrating the triumph of democracy in the 2015 general elections and electoral observers were wondering how an incumbent had lost the presidential elections to a serial challenger, his family was mourning. His father, Pastor Abana Pogu had been killed just a month before in his hometown Chibok

by members of the dreaded Islamist sect, Boko Haram

The night it happened, Yakubu was faraway in Warri on a business trip. Once every fortnight, he would shepherd 35 cows in a trailer from the neighbouring Banki market and take to the oil-rich city, making as much as N65,000 per trip. His customer was a rich businesswoman who could not speak Hausa but was interested in buying cows from the North – a random meeting in the market convinced her he was the right partner for her. It was the life he knew, the livelihood that was supporting him, his young wife and the extended family. A few years earlier, he had to drop out of secondary school in Bama to go take care of his elder brother who was involved in a fire accident in Ibadan. His mother who should have gone, was nursing a baby.

When Boko Haram visited Chibok that morning in March 2016, his father was the only one at home. “Boko Haram had sent a letter that they would be coming to take what was theirs so my father sent my mother and two sisters away from Chibok. He was waiting to sell off the family properties when they came.”

He pauses to bite his lips before continuing, the potency of suspense in his next words so unmistakable. “They burnt him and the house together almost to the point of no recognition. Everything came to the ground.” Yakubu blames the government and the few soldiers in the town for not taking action when the letter came; but he was not surprised, it was all de ja vu.

In April 2014, just before the world-famous kidnap of over 200 schoolgirls including his cousin, another letter had also come the week before, says Yakubu. But it was ignored too and the exams the girls were to write, as allowed to go on. “Boko Haram knew everything before they came. They had informants, they knew about the girls, everything. Whenever they were coming to a place, like 200 of them could come.” The night of the abduction, he was also in Warri for business.

After losing both father and niece to the clutches of the insurgents, Yakubu moved to Lagos to find greener pastures. While working as a security man, word came that his wife was seriously ill. He resigned, went home and took her and their two kids to Kano. In the coming months, his two sisters and his mother joined them.

Certain that they were in control, Boko Haram visited Chibok yet again that year and Yakubu who had gone to assess the situation of things at home, escaped narrowly with knife scars only.

“Of the three of them, no one carried gun so I was dragging the knife with them and it scraped me here and here in my waist.”

He escaped from Chibok to his uncle's house in Askira Uba, a border town with the neighbouring Adamawa State. It was from here that he got to Yola and took a bus to Lagos – for good this time.

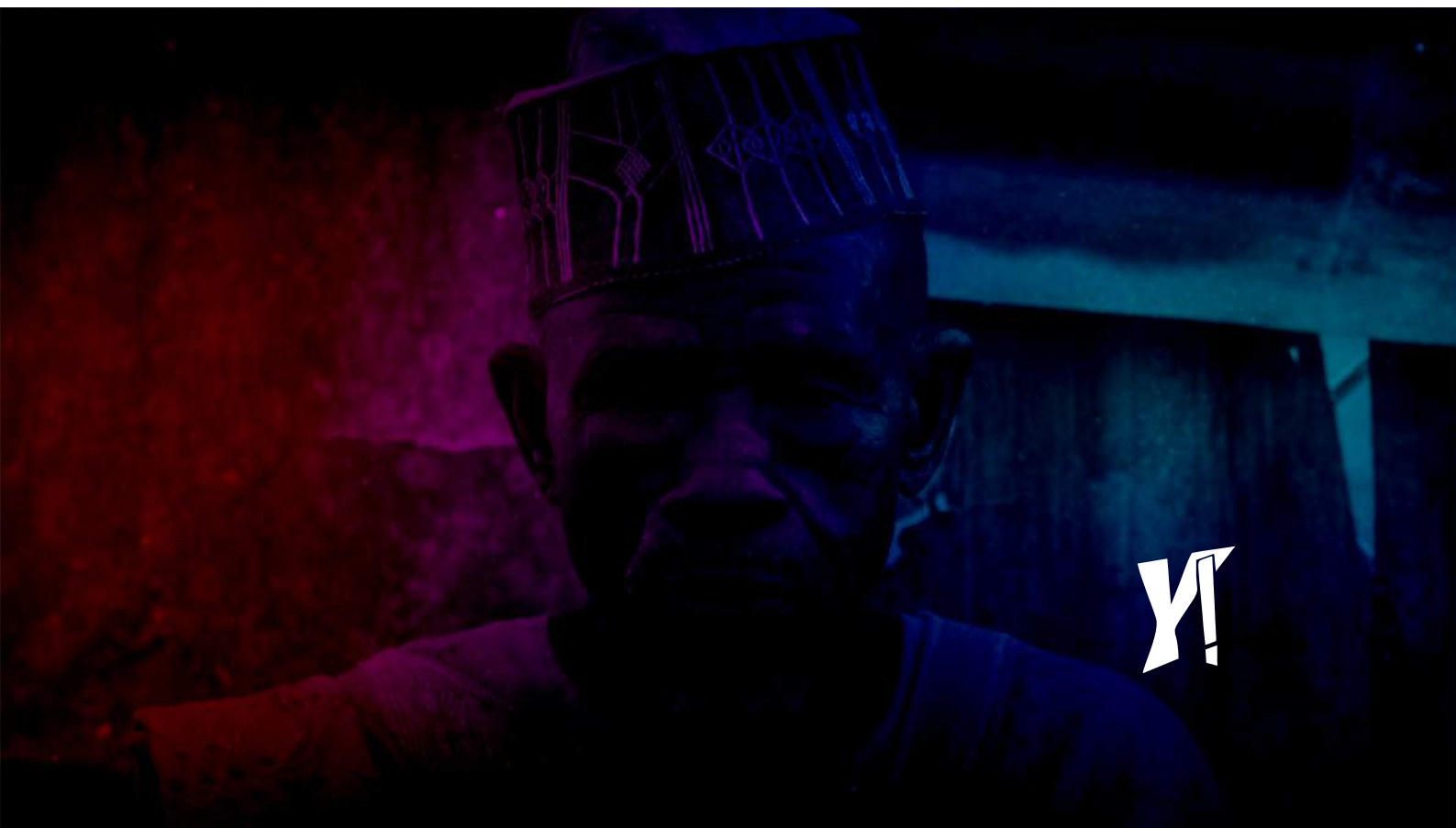
These days, he squats in a one-room apartment with an old friend from his earlier sojourn in the city. In the mornings, he goes out to look for all kinds of menial jobs to pay the rent for and support his family in Kano. Hauwa, one of his sisters now runs her own call centre, selling recharge cards and making small money to keep body and soul together.

Back in the now-peaceful Chibok, the rest of his extended family is still hoping against hope that his niece, whose mom died waiting for her return, will eventually return.

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# THE MEN FROM HONG

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In 2014 when Boko Haram attacked the town of Hong, two hours away from Yola, capital of Adamawa state in North-East Nigeria, no one knew what was happening.

"We just heard gunshots and heavy boots marching in the streets and we thought the end had come", says 68-year old Muhammadu Dadi Hong who has lived in the town since he was born.

His neighbour and best friend Musa Saidu Hong, 75 also heard the sounds of the invasion and rounded up his two wives and seventeen children. Together they all ran into the rocks surrounding Hong, sleeping in the open air at night.

"They came through Mubi shooting their guns and the moment we heard, we all ran up behind the hills and rocks for hours", says Muhammadu Hong. "I ran up to 10km or even more with my wives and children", Saidu interjects. "We left no one behind."

They survived by eating raw food from unmanned plantations in the bush because there was nothing to cook with; no pots or pans and fire. "There was no shelter. The days it rained, it rained on us", Muhammadu reminisces. Eventually, soldiers came to liberate the town after the villagers had been in the bush for weeks.

According to a 2011 report by the National Agricultural Extension and Research Liaison (NAERL) of the Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Adamawa is one of the leading eight states in agricultural production in the country. The instability caused by terrorism has severely dented production output from places like Hong (reportedly named as an acronym for Headquarters of Nigerian Groundnut) as farmers like Muhammadu and Saidu fled the town in the face of uncertainty of life. Many are yet to return.

After the army recaptured the town from the insurgents late in 2014, both men went back to the farms but things have not been the same. The road to Gombi nearby where they sell some of their produce is yet to be fixed and fertilizers no longer get to them as easily as it used to under the Goodluck Jonathan administration, they say.

"Buhari is trying but he should do what Jonathan did so we can have our fertilizers again", says Muhammadu. His eldest son who is an electrician with the Yola Electricity Distribution Company (YEDC) has been supporting the family from his meagre salary, but there's only so much his pockets can carry.

"I don't feel like a man to be depending on my son for everything I need. Before the crisis, it was not like this. We need government to help us for me to stand on my feet again."

A few months ago, Saidu lost one of his children to acute malaria; the herbal mixture one of his wives made didn't work and he could not afford to take the boy to the hospital for treatment.

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# THE RECEPTIONIST

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Y!



At the City Blues Hotel in Yola where Alice Bwala works as a receptionist three days a week for N10,000 a month, patronage is fluctuating. "People don't come to our bar like before," she says. "And the management is sacking people up and down."

The reason? In 2009, a radical preacher – Mohammed Yusuf – and his followers began waging war against the Nigerian state, calling

government and symbols of westernization including schools, hospitals and churches, 'haram'. The war which began in Maiduguri, birthplace of the sect called Boko Haram, finally extended to the rest of the North-East including Adamawa State.

In Yola the state capital, there were a series of explosions between 2012 and 2015, with special focus on the Jimeta Modern Market in the city. Alice's elderly mother lost her shop during one of the market bombings so consequently, her earnings dropped significantly. As a result, the 24-year old has become breadwinner for her family of five.

"It is hard. You work from morning till night for peanuts and watch men stare at you, then hand over most of the money to your family because they need it."

Because of its Southern cuisines, the hotel used to attract visitors from out of town with rates increasing during some weekends in keeping with the demand. But since mid-2015, things have changed. One of the three cooks has been laid off and the food portions have reduced, just to be able to balance the books.

At the peak of the crisis, Alice graduated from secondary school with hopes that she would be proceeding to one of the tertiary institutions. But with the war came failed dreams.

Her father was killed two years ago when he went to Michika to attend the funeral of one of his relatives and that dampened her hopes. But it was the bombing of the Yola market that finally extinguished it, she laments.

"I don't think I'll ever be able to enroll in the university and I've settled that in my mind. But I want to start a small business – knitting sweaters and small caps for babies. It's small but it will help me provide for myself and buy small things like toiletries."

These days, Yola is peaceful, even moreso than Maiduguri and Damaturu, capitals of the other two states that were particularly ravaged by Boko Haram. But while patronage dimmed as a result of the insecurity and the curfew that came with the crisis then, the current economic crisis is the cause of the sustained low returns.

Alice says she has been tempted to resign many times but has resigned to fate until she gets another job. "I have no choice in this matter."

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# WHAT SHALL WE DO ABOUT THE NORTH-EAST?

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Surely you must have noticed, the North East of Nigeria has been on a multi-year war that had killed thousands and left millions homeless.

Which is perhaps the problem – a lack of precision can lead to a lack of empathy, so that slowly a citizenry finds itself deadened to 'thousands' and 'millions'; just another set for numbers for a distant tragedy.

So maybe some specific numbers.

Between 2009 and the date this piece was written, Boko Haram reportedly killed over 20,000 civilians across several Northern states (a clear majority of the terror attack localised in the North East, particularly Borno state) and displaced over 2.3 million persons from their homes.

As politics led to paralysis with government, the insurgents grew in numbers, along the way acquiring sophistication and expansion of operations, including outside Nigeria.

What started off with soft targets, as the world now knows, soon grew into a fearless operation on the offensive against our military, attacking government locations, and claiming territories faster than a conquering army. Indeed it was only last year that the Global Terrorism Index tagged this band of killers the most deadly terror group in the world.

## WE, THE PEOPLE OF NIGERIA

And what about the people who Boko Haram has willed to crush?

First, in 2013, Nigerians met a local group of superheroes if there ever was – the Civilian Joint Task Force, a loose group of citizens first formed in Maiduguri who decided that enough was enough.

Soon, working with the military, these civilians managed to push Boko Haram further and further away from territories previously held, liberating towns and powering down the capacity of the enemy.

And as the military pushed the militants away, citizens in the region planted their feet firmly on the ground, determined to succeed and, simply, to live again.

The citizens are the real story.

They have been relayed, newspaper to public, research paper to world, as numbers. And inevitably, the victims of a single story – of helplessness, and gloom, and the erosion of a future, for those who had seen the very worst.

But no one had told the story of Dauda Abukabar.

Originally from Bama – the second largest local government area in Borno state – the 20-year-old Abubakar's life changed forever the day Boko Haram attacked his hometown. And then he lost his father only a few months after, saddled with caring for his fourteen siblings and his father's two wives.



Slowly taking charge of his life, he moved with his family to the Dalori camp for Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), where Abubakar learnt how to make the popular 'Bama cap.'

Then his luck changed. Taken under the wings of BalaGeidam, a philanthropist and realtor, Abubakar is now a Political Science student at the College of Education, Bama.

But trouble remains for other boys in the region.

Over 12,000 young people are members (mostly boys and young men) of the Civilian JTF. Their lives disrupted, as the war winds to an end, they find themselves with nothing to do.

Young men who have seen war, whose arms have been trained for battle, and who may or may not have access to local weapons – what will their hands find to do?

The thought keeps Abba AjiKhalli awake at night.

The man who has commandeered the CJTF in the past few years, Khalli, referred to as 'Elder' by his troops, is a former auditor employed by the Borno state civil service. Born and educated in the ancient city of Maiduguri, Khalli moved to save his beloved city from the hands of blood thirsty terrorists. His troops, possessing little training and weapons, went where the armed forces hadn't, pushing the terrorists away from Maiduguri and restoring peace to the region.

About 250 of the CJTF members have been absorbed into the Nigerian military while another 1,850 are paid a monthly stipend of N15,000 by the state government. Yet a great majority of them are left with little to do, and nothing with which to make a living.

Khalli truly fears.

"I ask the federal government," he says "Between the Niger Delta militants and my boys, who are more responsible? Who ought to be taken care of?"

## STILL, WE RISE

"But we will manage till something better comes so my children can go to school," says Falmata, a 32-years-old mother of four who had suffered a miscarriage months after surviving a Boko Haram attack on her village. "We survived Shekau's men, we can survive hunger."

There is Mamman Abba, a 43 year-old father of six children, who has seen it all.

He survived thirteen different Boko Haram attacks, until the fourteenth one forced him to flee his home, abandoning the life he had always known. In a bid to save himself and his family, Mamman was cut off from his wife and six children for days, lucky to find them after a long trek to Maiduguri.

This is a man still scarred from losing his 13-year-old daughter, who died in his arms in an attack on his hometown.

It took him months and cost him hope, but Mamman - now a 200 level student of Public Relations at the University - finally found his family. And hope. Then there is 6-year old Jibrin – his scars emotional, and jarringly physical. Jibrin lost his father in a terror attack, one that left his face so badly burnt, he needs major facial reconstruction surgery.

Now, he must wear a mask, and not just to hide his scars, but also to keep his ears and skin from falling off.

Fiona Lovatt, founder of a not-for-profit called Lovatt Foundation has taken the wounded child under its care. But for now, they can only do the basics of sustenance until Jibrin can get the medical intervention, and reconstruction he urgently needs.

## WE ARE PART OF THIS

Adamawa, like Borno, is also picking up its pieces.

Boko Haram's repeated incursions have left a trail of bombs, death and destruction. But Yola, Maiduguri, Mubi and all across the huge swaths of land and humanity, hope is impossible to kill.

There is for one, economic restoration.

“This economic rebound is most evident in how property prices have recovered, and even surpassed pre-insurgency levels, particularly in the three major cities in the region: Maiduguri, the northeast's biggest city—home to some two million people in Borno state; Potiskum, the commercial capital of Yobe state and Mubi, a town on the Cameroonian border that is the commercial hub of Adamawa State,” Mark Amaza wrote in Quartz in May.

“There have been reports that Maiduguri property owners have been able to make up to 500% profit on their properties and there is an increasing demand for land for residential homes construction. The rebound in Maiduguri is particularly notable because it had been Boko Haram's stronghold for several years before the Army's operations pushed the majority into the nearby Sambisa Forest.”

There is the same story in Mubi, where he reports that “the population in the city now has even increased to even more than pre-insurgency levels as many from neighboring villages and towns have resettled in Mubi, thus increasing demand for housing and driving prices upwards.”

In Yola, the capital of Adamawa state, a banker, AsautenAnderibom, has firmly refused to run away from his home. Yes, he tells our reporter that he lives in the mortal fear of the past but he is resolute that the future will demonstrably “be better”.

And he is not waiting for government, before he picks up the pieces. Neither are many of them.

Just some kilometers away from Anderibom, a number of refugees have built a thriving community for themselves without the intervention of government.

In Malkohi II, this small community of about 1,500 Internally Displaced People (IDPs) behind the Gibson Jalo Cantonment, Jimeta, Yola, is the perfect example of how societies grow even in hard times.

The women are learning to make economic stoves and start up small holder business that at least enable them survive.

But more importantly, they are learning to confront the trauma that has brought them here. They build communities and support groups, held together by not-for-profit organisations that have chosen the North East for mission, and they talk, and they remember, and they fan hope – even if they can't find good water, they have forgotten good roads, and even food can be a luxury.

No one knows tomorrow is a popular Nigerian saying. But today, at least, the survivors of Boko Haram have chosen to live, and then to thrive.

2,400,000



The estimated number of Internally Displaced People (IDPs) who are scattered across the North-East as a result of the insurgency.

20,000

The length of territory in square miles controlled by Boko Haram as at March 2015, renamed the Islamic Caliphate of West Africa and approximately the size of Belgium.

YNaija.com

## IDPS IN NIGERIA'S NORTH EAST THE NUMBERS



244,000



The estimated number of children that Thierry Laurent-Badin, Programme Director for Action Contre la Faim in Nigeria and Doune Porter, UNICEF Communications chief in Nigeria say are currently suffering from severe acute malnutrition in areas that used to be a complete no-go due to security restrictions.



8,000

NUMBER OF FIGHTERS in the local vigilante, the 'civilian JTF' in Borno State

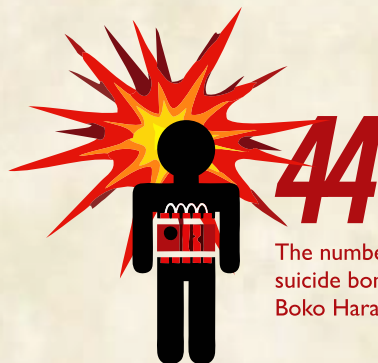
1,200

NUMBER of extra-judicial killings that Amnesty International estimates have been carried out by the army



70

The number of churches in the Roman Catholic Diocese of Maiduguri bombed by Boko Haram since 2009



44

The number of kids who carried out suicide bombings across West Africa in Boko Haram-coordinated attacks.

3

Number of states affected by Boko Haram (Borno, Yobe and Adamawa)

1

NUMBER of meals in most of the camps in Borno State

## HOW TO HELP



**YNaija.com**



### LOVATT FOUNDATION (CHILDREN OF BORNO)

The Lovatt Foundation runs three houses in Maiduguri- one for widows and two for children who have lost their parents to the insurgency. In these houses, setup discreetly across the city, the children are homeschooled by former IDPs, given three square meals daily and taught animal husbandry and horticulture in addition to the regular curriculum.

**FIONA LOVATT 0807 494 9802** [fiona@lovattfoundation.org](mailto:fiona@lovattfoundation.org)

### ACF INTERNATIONAL

ACF International is helping IDPs across Borno and Yobe state in particular overcome the problem of malnutrition and in some cases, empowering them as part of its resolution to ending world hunger. The organization also provides communities with access to safe water and sustainable solutions to hunger.

**THIERRY LAURENT-BADIN** [tlaurentbadin@actionagainsthunger.org](mailto:tlaurentbadin@actionagainsthunger.org)

**ELIZABETH WRIGHT** [ewright@actionagainsthunger.org](mailto:ewright@actionagainsthunger.org)

**STANFORD TONDERAY** 08025866089



### BORNO WOMEN DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE

BWDI is a Maiduguri-based NGO that is actively engaged in providing educational opportunities and counselling services to the displaced women and children in Borno and Yobe states.

**FATIMA ASKIRA** [fatimaaskira@gmail.com](mailto:fatimaaskira@gmail.com)

### GIRL CHILD CONCERNS

GCC empowers and promotes girl child education and provides educational support to young people through its Female Students Scholarships Scheme. It also focuses on empowering women and girls among the Internally Displaced People (IDPs) in Borno State.

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