

Boko Haram Insurgency: The Agony of the Families of the Missing Persons in Gwoza, Nigeria

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Abstract

The activities of the terror group named “Boko haram” whom earlier joined alliance with the Islamic State of west African Province (ISWAP), has endangered the lives of many Nigerians and by large, the lives of many Africans, hence the heinous crimes perpetuated by the proscribed group has negatively affected the peaceful coexistence of the people of Niger republic, Mali, Chad, Cameroun Central African republic, and of recent the people of Burkina Faso. This paper investigated the pitiful state and agony of the families that lost their members due to such terror activities in Gwoza, Borno state, which was once the headquarters of the boko haram insurgents. The researchers utilised qualitative method to arrive at their results, using face-to-face interview and focus group discussion (FGD). Participants were sampled through purposive sampling method. The results revealed that so many families has lost their bread winners which forced them to the street finding food and shelter, while others remain in the refugees camp. The paper posits that the federal government and other relevant agencies local and international should endeavour to create an avenue to find out the missing persons, and take care of the families wandering on the street.

Keywords: Missing persons, Boko haram, Insurgency, abductions, refugee’s camp.

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INTRODUCTION

Globally, August 30 of every year has been designated as the International Day of the Missing Persons, or the International Day of the Disappeared, to commemorate persons who went missing during era of conflict, violence, and disaster, and whose whereabouts are unknown. Many still live in the dark about the fate of their dear ones who went missing without a trace. Families in north-east Nigeria are often separated while fleeing attacks. Others have had loved ones abducted or detained and do not know their whereabouts. The ICRC works with the Nigeria Red Cross and other Red Cross and Red Crescent societies in the region to trace missing people by showing photographs, calling out names, and going door-to-door in camps and communities.

In Nigeria, the history of missing persons will forever be linked with the terrorist and deadliest organization called “Boko Haram” and the heinous activities of the kidnapers and bandits in every parts of the country Statsense (2022). The inception and sprouts of the deadly terrorist organization Boko Haram started in the Borno state Nigeria, after the killing of its

spiritual leader, Mohammed Yusuf by the Nigerian police in 2009. Prior to the killing of the leader, the group were on missionary rampage from one village to another selling their ideas of Jihad (Holy war) against the established political system of Nigeria (Democracy). Their rebellious nature started with disobeying some rules and regulations governing the country, such as the traffic rules, like wearing the safety helmet by the motorcycle riders, jumping the traffic red lights and committing other civil offences. Boko Haram endorses a kind of Islam (dissimilar to all Islamic sects) which makes it "haram", or illegal, for Muslims to take part in any activity related with Western society. This includes participation in electoral activities, partaking in a secular education and any other religious event that they did not subscribed. Boko Haram regards the Nigerian state as being run by infidels, regardless of whether the leader is Muslim or Christian (Chris, 2021).

Thus, above made the group to launch splurge attacks on the people of Nigeria, regardless of their faith, which caused the loss of so many lives and many are at large without clear evidence of their whereabouts which put their families and friends in agony of their

disappearance. A missing person is an individual who has vanished and whose status is as whether alive or dead cannot be ascertained and the location and fate are unknown. A person may go missing through a voluntary disappearance, or else due to an accident, crime, death in a location where they cannot be found (such as at sea), or many other reasons. In most parts of the world, a missing person will usually be found quickly. While criminal abductions are some of the most widely reported missing person cases, these account for only 2–5% of missing children in Europe. Dami (2021) observed that by contrast, some missing person cases remain unresolved for many years. Laws related to these cases are often complex since, in many jurisdictions, relatives and third parties may not deal with a person's assets until their death is considered proven by law and a formal death certificate issued. The situation, uncertainties, and lack of closure or a funeral resulting when a person goes missing may be extremely painful with long-lasting effects on family and friends.

Research Questions

1. What are the socio-economic effects on the families of the missing persons?
2. What are the psychological effects on the families of the missing persons?

Research Objectives

1. To explore the socio-economic effects of the families of the missing persons.
2. To explore the psychological effects of the families of the missing persons.

Location of the Study

Gwoza is one of the local government areas of Borno State. It is 135 km away from the capital city (Maiduguri). Borno is the second largest Nigerian state after Sokoto, covering 70,898Km². The landmass and forests gave the people high advantage in their farming activities, where they produce most of the needed grains in the state. However, the mass land also provided the Boko haram insurgency a hiding place around the Sambisa forest. Gwoza has rocky and hilly topography. Gwoza Hills, with heights of about 1300m above sea level provides scenery and is made up of the Mandara Mountains, which form a natural barrier between Nigeria and Cameroon, starting from Pulka village. However, in an attempt to provide a proper record on the missing persons, the federal government of Nigeria has launched a register for missing persons (Ochojila, 2021). The effort was made possible through the National Human Rights Commission on the international day of the missing persons.

METHODOLOGY

Qualitative research method was adopted for this study. Primary data were sourced through the use of in-depth interviews. The participant's permission was sought after a detailed clarification of the purpose

and the nature of the study, and the areas where their input was needed. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the research results. The total population of these study includes 12 participants purposefully selected from the research areas. These include; three children whose parents went missing, three women whose husbands went missing, three husbands whose wives went missing, three friends of the missing persons. Creswell (2014) observed that in research population, saturation or fullness, which refers to a limited satisfying number of participants, is more important in the qualitative study rather than large numbers. The participants of this research that were drawn from divergent sectors to fulfill the saturation level as observed by Creswell (2008). Guest, Johnson, and Bunce (2006) posit that, for research work where the aim is to understand the views and experiences of a group which is moderately homogenous, 12 participants should be enough to arrive at saturation.

The research questions were directed towards exploring the challenges faced by the family and friends of the missing persons in Gwoza Borno state of Nigeria.

Sampling Method

Purposive sampling technique (Extreme Case Sampling) was used in this research work, where the researcher selected the informants and the place that were envisaged as the best targets to respond to the research questions. Purposive sampling was used because it gives room for the researcher to select participants and locations that can best help researcher as observed by (Yin, 2011). The samples are selected consciously in order to get a befitting result. There are different types of purposive sampling, which include: (i). Extreme case sampling (ii). Typical case sampling (iii). Theory or Concept case sampling (iv). Homogeneous case sampling v. Critical case sampling (vi). Opportunistic case sampling and (vii). Snowball case sampling (Creswell, 2014). Out of the seven above mentioned types of purposeful sampling, Extreme case sampling was the most suitable for this research work. Extreme case sampling was selected because it is the kind of sampling in which the researcher examined the prominent task or the case that displays significant characteristics as postulated in Creswell (2014).

Research Participants

There are twelve (12) research participants as mentioned earlier. Purposive sampling strategy was employed in order to have direct access to the relevant stakeholders of the study. Creswell (2014) observed that in research population, saturation or fullness, which refers to a limited satisfying number of participants, is more important in the qualitative study rather than large numbers. The participants of this research that were drawn from divergent sectors to fulfill the saturation level as observed by Creswell (2008). Guest, Johnson, and Bunce (2006) posit that, for research work where the aim is to understand the views and experiences of a

group which is moderately homogenous, 12 participants should be enough to arrive at saturation.

Participants Representation

SN	Participants	Coding	Frequency	%
1.	Women whose Husbands went Missing	WHM	3	25
2.	Men whose Wives went Missing	MWM	3	25
3.	Children whose Parents went Missing	CPM	3	25
4.	Friends of the Missing Person	FMP	3	25
			Total 12	100%

Children Whose Parents Went Missing

In the phenomena of missing persons, children happen to be most vulnerable for their total dependence on the adults. After missing their parents, the whole life happenings of the children cease to function as usual, they turn out to be helpless and hopeless. In the cause of this study, the three children identified suffer great deal in day-to-day life subsistence.

Women Whose Husbands Went Missing

Women are next to children in the agony of missing their husbands for in most cases in this part of the world, and specifically Gwoza, husbands takes the total responsibilities of their family, therefore, missing of husband is losing everything. The three identified women in the study represents the typical Gwoza women whose husbands went missing and suffers neglect, poverty, hunger, malnutrition and psychological trauma.

Men Whose Wives Went Missing

Despite their gender, the men also suffer unequivocal hardship when it comes with missing of close person such as wives. The wives comfort the husbands and take care of the little ones in the family. Due to the absence of the wives, the men have to provide the basic needs as well as take care of the children.

Friends of the Missing Persons

The friends of the missing persons also played a significant role in this study; hence they provide useful information with regards to their missing friends. The friends were purposely selected as well due to their close ties with the missing ones, and the extent in which they are familiar with the conduct, life style and personality of their missing friends.

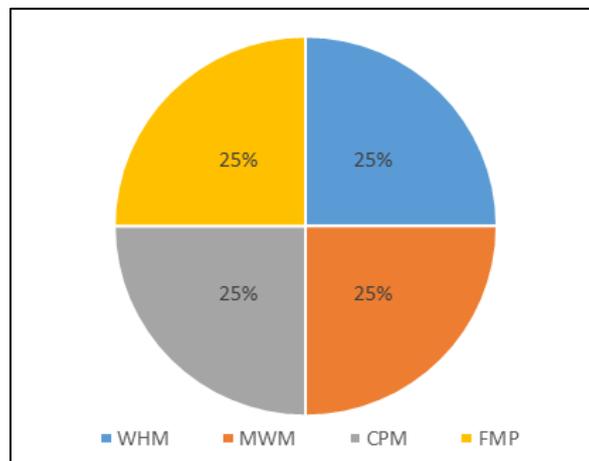


Figure 1: Participants Representation

Source: Research work (2022).

LITERATURE REVIEW

The issue of missing persons has been a subject of concern since time immemorial. In the ancient time, people used to get missing for one reason or another such as war, floods, earthquake, taken by wild animals. Recently, people got missing in multiple ways which includes natural disaster and man-made crises. Natural disaster makes people to disappear and re-appear or get lost forever. People got missing in earthquakes, floods, inferno and volcano. While the man-made related causes includes; wars, road

accidents, civil disorder, terrorism, kidnapping and suicides. In Nigeria, there is no institution that is saddled with the responsibility of taking the statistics of the missing persons; there is no commission as it is obtainable in other countries like Spain, Russia, United States and many more nations. In Bosnia Herzegovina, the International Commission on Missing Person (ICMP) has conducted a comprehensive research in the year 2001, where governments, nongovernmental organizations families of the missing persons and DNA

laboratories contributed in fishing out the number of the missing persons.

International...Convention

In 2003, the International Conference of Red Cross and Red Crescent directly addressed the issues of missing persons and the plights of families of the missing. Similarly, in 2006, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, all aimed at bringing to light the matter surrounding this group that tends to be forgotten says a person is considered missing when he or she disappears and his or her whereabouts are not known and or the person is killed in the aftermath of armed conflicts or disasters and the body is untraceable (Ogora, 216). According to the Premium times (2020), over 23,000 persons got missing in Nigeria in the past eight years. Victims or families of the missing persons and other people at large have held varying opinions about whether such a day should be remembered or not. Those in agreement argue that it reminds them of the plight and importance of the missing persons since many people seem to have forgotten about them. "Up to 24,000 Nigerians have been reported as missing to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC, 2022), during a decade of conflict in northeast Nigeria, the highest number of missing persons registered with the ICRC in any country. Large swathes of the northeast of the country remain completely inaccessible to humanitarian organisations. People have also been displaced by fighting many times, making them harder to find. Two million people are estimated to be displaced from their homes in northeast Nigeria ICRC (2022).

Massacres and Displacements in Gwoza

Gwoza is a local government area of Borno State, Nigeria. Its headquarters are in the town of

Gwoza, a border town "about 135 kilometres South-East of Maiduguri." The postal code of the area is 610. Gwoza has been called "a notorious hide out for the Boko Haram insurgents, who arrived in the area in 2009 from Maiduguri. The area has suffered considerable violence as a result of the Islamist insurgency in Nigeria, and IRC observed that as of 19 October 2014, an estimated 3,000 Gwoza residents displaced by fighting are "squatting on the fringes of Abuja", according to a local relief committee spokesman, with "the need for shelter, food, clothing and Medicare for the displaced also becoming dire.

Boko Haram claimed that it had formed an Islamic caliphate in Gwoza town. In December 2014, one hundred eighty five people in the Gumburi village area were kidnapped by Boko Haram. It was also reported that "people too elderly to flee Gwoza Local Government Area were being rounded up and taken to two schools where the militants opened fire on them." Over 50 elderly people were killed. A "gory video" was released of insurgents shooting over a hundred civilians in a school dormitory in the town of Bama. In March 2015, the Nigerian army was reported to have retaken Gwoza town from Boko Haram forces.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Theme 1 the Socio-economic Effects on the Family of the Missing Persons

This section examines the social challenges of the family of the missing persons. Such as the absence of parents in the life of the children who sometimes miss their parents in their early lifetime. The study gathered that, the smaller children cry bitterly and continuously in the first week their parents disappeared. Below is the table of data depicting the participant's identity?

Table 2: Participant's Data

Participants Data				
SN	Coding	Age	Gender	Relationship with Victim(s)
1	WHM-1	40	Female	Husband/3 brother
2	WHM-2	35	Female	Husband/father
3	WHM-3	37	Female	Husband
4	CPM-1	14	Male	Father/mother
5	CPM-2	14	Female	Mother/brother
6	CPM-3	10	Female	Father/mother
7	MWM-1	45	Male	Wife/2 children
8	MWM-2	40	Male	Wife/brother
9	MWM-3	37	Male	Wife/sister
10	FMP-1	42	Male	Friend
11	FMP-2	35	Female	Friend
12	FMP-3	40	Male	Friend
Total Number 12				

Source: Research work (2022)

The research gathered that all the children whose parents are missing don't have any other means of the daily meal. CPM-3 narrated that:

I couldn't believe that my father is missing; I can still imagine his smiling face and asking me to bring water for him to perform ablution. Currently, we hardly find what to eat on daily basis.

While CPM-2 mentioned that:

We are four in our house two girls and two boys. Our father loves us all, he really cares for us, even though his resources are limited, but he makes sure he provide for our daily needs according to his capacity. I always cry when I think of him. This is seven years since we lost him. Now we face great difficulties in meeting our daily bread.

A woman whose husbands went missing commented on the economic roles of her husband she mentioned:

My husband earn very low income, we cultivate our farms manually during the raining season and harvest some bags of millets and maize. Part of the farm products would be sold on the market days to exchange for other food items like the seasoning, oil, salt, vegetables, and fire-wood (WHM-2, 35, F.).

One of the children whose parent(s) is missing exclaimed that:

I used to help my parents with the farm work, a little segment of the farm was allocated to me, one day we were working at the farm we heard gun shots we started running towards our home, my father held my hand asking me to run faster, but couldn't, because we were all hungry, our mother didn't bring the food to the farm that day, unknown to us that the armed men were in our area killing people. As we approach our house my father ask me to hide on one of the thick trees on the street, I climbed the tree and waited till night fall, I think it was around 11pm, then I went home, that was the last time I saw my father. Now we lost our farm, the source of our living (CPM-1, 14, M.).

A friend of the missing person bemoaned his intimate friend and mention how he is currently saddle with taking care of his friend's family, he stated:

After a serious attack on our village and the neighbourhood, my friend's wife came to my house in search of her husband, I told her I didn't see him, she broke into tears and exclaiming "they have killed him" if he is alive by now he must have returned home. We kept checking all possible places where he might have ran to, but all to no avail, till this moment I'm talking to

you he is nowhere to be seen. All his four children and now staying with my family (FMP-1, 42, M.).

Another friend of the victim narrated that:

We were sitting in our normal place within our vicinity, under mahogany tree discussing the calamity of Boko Haram that engulfed our locality, my friend told us he wanted to go to the bush and get some firewood. We hesitated, and told him to hold on because it was risky to go to the bush at that moment, but he insisted noting that if he didn't get the wood there will be no food for his family, so we bid him farewell and pray for his safety. That was the last time we saw him till today (FMP-3, 40, M.).

A lady friend informed the researcher on how she lost a female friend in Gwoza, she narrated: It was on Friday while all the male in the community went to the mosque, and we were sitting in the compound of my friend while four armed men jumped over the wall of the house and met us one of the men showed my friend and said "that is her" they command us to be silent or they will kill us, they asked her to move out and follow them, and she complied. That was the last time I saw her. My friend happed to be my business partner, and after she left the business has collapsed (FMP-2, 35, M.).

A woman whose friend got missing stated that:

I use to grind some grains for our neighbourhood with mortar and pestle, while my husband used to be a farmer. We were living happily though not with much wealth but we feel ok. I always remember my husband's last word to me "Always be strong and fend for yourself, don't rely on anybody". I feel ashamed every time I look at my defenceless position now, that I have no means of income with five children living in a refugees camp (WHM-1, 40, F.).

WHM-3 explained that:

It was sporadic gunshots in the mid night that made my husband to jump the wall of our house, but before he left he asked me and my three children to hide under our beds and not to answer anybody and that if we didn't see him in the morning we should go to his father's house. In the morning, around 10am we didn't see him we started crying and headed to their family house. The house is highly populated, there are over 15 children in the house and three wives. Therefore it is difficult to survive in that house; therefore we have no option than to join the refugees' camp.

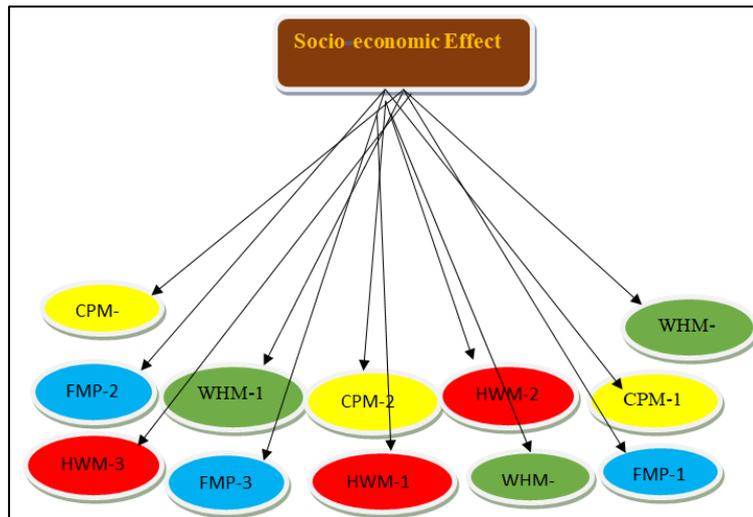


Figure 2: Socio-economic Effect

Source: Research work, (2022)

Theme 2 The psychological effects of the family of the missing persons

The findings of this research indicated the trauma of disappearance of the loved ones affects the lives of their family and friends. Scholars like Jamaluddin (2013), Tabbaa, Lei, Liu & Wang (2017) emphasized the importance of parents to live with their children more especially in their early life period. Teenagers that were accorded closer ties and good supervision from their biological parents were found less involved in delinquent behaviours (Jamaluddin, 2013).

CPM-1 exclaimed the trauma of missing his father, he noted:

I love my father very well; he was the source of my happiness because he always does everything to please his children. One faithful day, in the afternoon around 1pm a terrorist invaded our village killing everyone at sight, in that attack they killed over 20 people. But after they left we crosschecked all the corpses but my father was not among the dead bodies. We contacted all our close and distant families and friends but there is no link to my father. This makes us devastated whenever we think of him (CPM-1, 14, M.).

In his part, the other participant who suffers psychological shock for missing his parents stated that:

I used to dream of my father frequently, sometimes I dream that he comes back and we are welcoming him, while sometimes I used to have bad dreams that some terrible looking men are dragging my father towards the abattoir, where they slaughter him, that's the time I would wake up and start crying (CPM-2, 14, F.).

CPM-3 stressed that:

I can't believe that my mother is gone, my mother engaged into petty trading after Boko Haram had

killed our father in 2014, the last time we saw her was when she went to the market in July, 2017, and she didn't return till this time I'm talking to you. I and my four siblings solely rely on our mother, she was the source of our inspiration, and happiness and we love her so dearly. The disappearance of our mother has psychologically affected our talkative little brother. He hardly speaks now he only shook or nod his head to communicate with us. Now our lives are full of sorrow, we think of her every day and every time (CPM-3, 14, F.).

WHM-1 could hardly hold her tears during the interview as she narrates how her husband was forcefully dragged away from her. She asserted

"It was around 2:00am my husband's phone rang and one strange voice asked him if he was at home, my husband demanded the identity of the caller, but the line went off. Ten minutes after the call, we heard a loud bang on our door, they broke the entrance of our house and before my husband made any move about seven armed men surrounded us and asked my husband to follow them, as he opened his mouth to ask where, one of the men used the handle of his gun and smacked his mouth when he fell on the ground they dragged him on the floor and took him away" it was in the morning that I regained my conscience, but I was paralysed due to the shock and I'm still battling with the situation (WHM-1, 40, F.).

Among the participants, who is terribly affected by the disappearance of his friend explained how intimate they used to be with his missing friend, he stated:

Where ever you see me, definitely you'll see my friend near me or I can tell you his whereabouts instantly. Though all of us have families, but I feel like I lost a pair. We do everything together, we sew the same clothes together, wear same cap, shoes, wrist watch and everything that we are able to do. Now that

he's gone, I'm highly devastated, my life can never be the same again, and I don't think I can get a friend comparable to him forever (FMP-1, 42, M.).

The youngest lady of the participant who missed their husband shared her ordeal, she stated:

After my husband got missing, I had encounter multiple challenges, but the worst still is the trouble I'm carrying in my heart, the agony to live without him, it is difficult. (The lady mentions this while sobbing), (WHM-2, 35, F.).

On the part of the men who lost their wives, three participants were interviewed, the first man stated that:

My wife was not only living partner, she was part and parcel of my joy and happiness. We got married fifteen years ago; we have five children with her. We use to join hand in taking good care of our children. She used to get worried whenever I couldn't come back home on time as well as my humble self too. Sadly, on Saturday, 26th June, 2016 I went to the market to get my wife new clothes we heard sporadic gun shots, everybody ran for his life. When I reach home

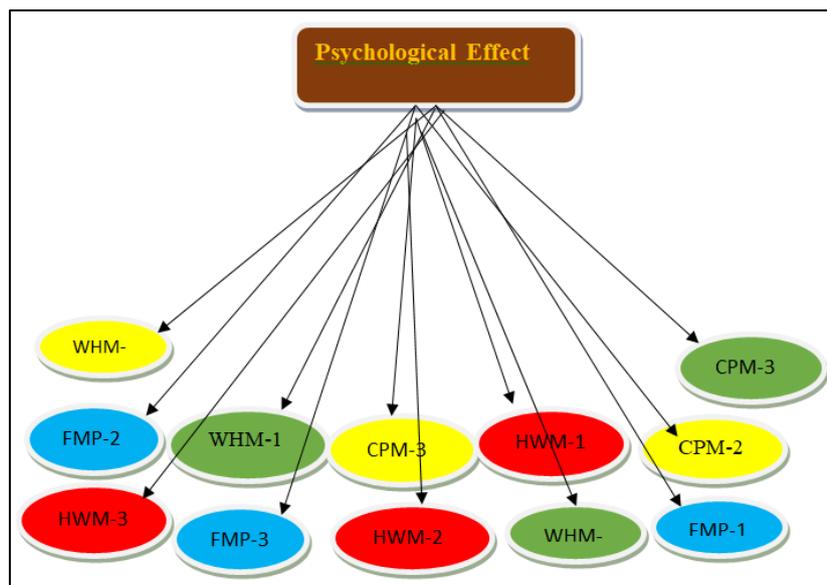
my wife was not there, and up till today it remains a mirage (MWM-1, 45, M.).

Another man stressed that since he lost his wife his life is a living hell now. He lamented:

They kidnapped my wife in my presence, they shot me on my leg and left me unconscious on the floor, they thought I was dead. The gun shots, my wife's sound crying is what wakes me up in the middle of the night daily. She is always in my mind (MWM-2, 40, M.).

The third person explains that:

I lost my wife and my sister on the same day. I happened to be the bread winner of my extended family, most of my brothers and sisters and cousin stays in my house. Because my wife was very caring and loving all my family like her. One day, I travelled out for a business trip outside my state (Borno state) when I came back, there was nobody on the street, then I started seeing corpses on the floor and some houses were on fire, I rushed home to ensure the safety of my family but it was too late, they carted away with my wife and my sister (MWM-3, 37, M.)



Source: Research work, (2022)

CONCLUSION

Terrorism has been a source of destabilising the livewire of every society. People of Borno state of Nigeria and the Gwoza town in particular, had suffered the vicious activities of the Boko Haram terrorist, ranging from mass killing, kidnapping rape and forceful recruitment of captives into new members. Many people got missing without any trace which left their family members in financial and psychological trauma. Some of the victims resorted to street begging and others engage in menial jobs in neighbouring towns and villages.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper is of the view that:

- i. Borno state should endeavour to rebuild and resettle all the destroyed villages and towns including Gwoza.
- ii. Federal and international donors should come to the aid of the people of Gwoza, by establishing and investing projects of economic values that will support the people of Gwoza.
- iii. Federal and Borno state governments should establish a commission that will be saddled with the responsibility of searching all the

- missing persons and linking them with their families. (That can be done in collaboration with International Commission of Red cross).
- iv. Governmental and non-governmental organizations should assist with building and equipping the schools that the terrorists destroyed many years ago.
 - v. The children of such areas should be given a total free education from primary school level to the university degree.

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