

# Crises of Abduction of School Children in Nigeria: Implications and Policy Interventions.

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**Abstract:** *Nigeria nation-state is currently overwhelmed by torrents of enormous strands of insecurity that threaten its integration and existence. For the past few months, public outrage is wide spreading over incessant abduction of school children in the North Region of the federation by invading bandits. Accordingly, this paper examines the nature and trends of this unprecedented phenomenon in Africa most populace country. The design of the discourse is qualitative where secondary and observational sources of data collection were explored to content analyze issues and events. The political system theory is applied to illuminate the gap between public expectations and governance measures to stem the tide. The paper revealed that North-West region is the cradle of abduction incidences and fatalities in Nigeria federation occasioned with UNICEF report of over 950 students abducted in the last seven months (December, 2020 to July, 2021) with adverse effects on education development in a region that constitute 60 percent of 13 million out-of-school children and contribute 29.7 percent to literacy rate amid policy interventions. From these findings, the paper advocate for policy measures in deference to public anxiety, synergized responsibility between federal and state government, review of organizational framework and policy targets of Nigeria Safe School Initiative for optimal performance, youth development and empowerment among other imperatives to ensure safety of public schools in Nigeria.*

**Keywords:** Education, banditry, policy and national security.

## Introduction

Nigeria nation-state is currently grappling in crises of insecurity. The unabated onslaught of Boko Haram and Islamic State of West Africa Province, ISWAP in Kanuri states of Borno and Yobe occasioned with insurrectional agitations in South-West and Rain-Forest region to the menace of armed Fulani militia and banditry in Guinea savanna region undoubtedly showed the alarming height of a diminishing federation. Today, Nigeria's economy is replete with recessive trends embellishing in 18.12% inflation rate with double digits unemployment where nearly 70% of over 200 million Nigerians groan in misery and penury with less than 1\$. And, the inadequacy of social service and infrastructural deficits adds to hardship of a nation-state in blood and tears.

Unfortunately, these woes of a nation-state adversely benighted the values and development of the country's education system. In this vein, Ero (2021) stressed that the country is currently in a full blown war against the confederacy of Boko Haram, Islamic State of West Africa Province, ISWAP and bandits all united in their bizarre agenda to deal a deadly blow on education in a region that wear unglamorous emblem of being educationally disadvantaged. In credence to Ero's assertion, the literacy level between the North and South in Nigeria is wide and accentuated by the following realities:

- i. Huge geographic disparities exist in the percentage of out-of-school children. The percentage of out-of-school children in the North-East is 30 times greater than the percentage in the South-East of Nigeria.
- ii. Northern Nigeria has 60% of the country's 13 million out-of-school children (Report of Safe School Initiative, 2018: 2 and Adekunbi, 2021:19).

This unpleasant situation is currently heightened by the onslaught of school invasion and abduction of students by the bandits in Northern region. In this regard, the Report of Safe School Declaration, SSD (2018) stressed that in Nigeria, attacks have ranged from hoodlum attacks, break in and vandalism of school properties by hoodlums and drug addicts to attack involving burning of school, kidnapping, detaining or torturing students, teachers and academics. Hundred have died as a result and hundreds of thousands have dropped out of school in flagrant violation to right to education.

Sadly, North-West region has in few years become the epic-center of Islamic extremism and restiveness to further worsen the nearly decade of insurgency of North-East. To this end, the Report of Nigeria Watch (2018) acknowledged the fact that Nigeria's arid of North-West is beset by violence between herders and farmers which has been compounded by an explosion in criminal activity and infiltration by Jihadist groups into the region. Succinctly, BCC documentary report (2021) revealed that at least 1, 030 students had been kidnapped from 2014. After Chibok, there had been Dapchi abduction in Yobe state, Kagara abduction in Niger state, Kankara abduction in Katsina state and Jangebe abduction in Zamfara state. However, Ero (2021), observed that BBC statistics pales into insignificance with more recent abductions in Kaduna state which appears to be hot-bed of such attacks.

This current intense dimension of national security challenge has in the recent time elicited national anxiety and global concern which had unfortunately overwhelmed the federal government and state governments in the North. To this end, this discourse examines the severance of this situation and its implications on the nation's education which resonate the need for a way forward.

### **Conceptual Explication**

Education is a concept replete with myriad of definitions and interpretations. Accordingly, education in general term is the process of transmitting societal values and desirable attitude from one generation to another. Education seeks to socialize individuals so as to equip them with desired mode of behaviour that is in conformity with the way of life of the society in which they live (Ademola and Ojo, 2018:24).

Furthermore, education is the process of teaching, training and learning in schools and colleges for the development of knowledge and skills so as to prepare individuals to live happily with themselves and others in a society. No wonder one hears such expression as "You are not enlightened" to refer to the person that behaves different from norms of those who have been to school, "the educated" or "the wise one". But is it adequate to describe a person that has not attended a formal school system as "uneducated"? (National Teachers Institute, 2012: 5). The NTI's interpretation of education ostensibly underscores four fundamentals. First, education is knowledge and skill. Second, teaching and learning for knowledge and skill is facilitated in a school setting and thirdly, education is also a process beyond the school system otherwise known as informal education.

Subsequently, school is a formal institution that ensures knowledge internalization and skill development and competencies for functional behaviour in deference to societal expectations. This therefore accentuates the fact that education is the bedrock of national development. Hence, the National Policy on Education (2013) enumerated the broad objectives of Nigerian education:

- a. Development of the individual into a morally sound, patriotic and effective citizen.
- b. Total integration of the individual into immediate community, the Nigerian society and the World.
- c. Provision of equal access to qualitative educational opportunities for all citizens at all levels of education, within and outside the formal school system.
- d. Inculcation of national consciousness, values and national identity, and
- e. development of appropriate skills, mental, physical and social abilities and competencies to empower the individual to live in and contribute positively to the society.

These objectives can be realized through teaching and learning processes under formal school setting structured in 6-3-3-4 Nigerian system of education.

However, the lofty ideal of formal knowledge exposure and skill development is today challenged by banditry in states of the North. In a conceptual sense, banditry as a term is vague and deplete with many definitions.

Accordingly, the concept of banditry has been changing over the time, space and circumstances. A bandit in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe and America was seen as a freedom fighter whose aim was partly to ensure the emancipation of the downtrodden from upper class or colonized over the colonizer. In pre-industrial societies, peasants see bandits differently from the state not as outlaws, hoodlums and miscreants but as "avengers". However, a bandit in traditional setting is entirely opposite to that of America and Europe, the

former specialized in armed robbery and other related crime (Warto, 1994: 128, Cricott and Fink, 2018) cited in Ahmed (2018: 2). Hence, Ahmed (2018), conceived banditry as occurrence or prevalence of armed robbery or violent crime. It involves the use of force or threat to that effect to intimidate a person with the intent to rob, rape and kill. Banditry is a crime against person.

As earlier noted, the current wave of banditry has not only undermined educational development in the North but constitute a potential threat to national security. Hence, the concept of national security begins with the relevance of what security entails? Security as a term apparently denotes the condition of safety or being safe. However, the term “security” is riddle in ambiguities which stems from its multi-disciplinary orientation. David (2006) remarked that security is the condition of safety from harm or danger, the defense, protection, and the absence of threat to acquire values. Similarly, Wolfers (1962), indicated that security in objective sense measures the absence of threats to acquire values and, in subjective sense, the absence of fear that such values will be attacked (cited in Nwanegbo and Odigbo, 2013:286). It is therefore obvious that security entrenches peaceful co-existence, orderliness and stability.

Okolie (2014) aptly illuminated the broad nature and meaning of security which remarkably captured certain indices as expressed below:

- i. Freedom from hunger, want, starvation and disease.
- ii. Conviction that the “needs” of the stomach are safeguard and guaranteed
- iii. Mustering of adequate security machinery in a given polity to protect the lives, property and investment of the citizens.
- iv. Guaranteeing the future of the people through responsible and responsive governance.
- v. Instituting adequate safeguard against oppression, suppression and alienation of the mass of the citizens.
- vi. Evolving political actions that will deeper affective, ascriptive and evaluative orientation among citizens.
- vii. Implementing state craft policies based on effective protection and equitable distribution of socially produced wealth.
- viii. Improving the residues of patriotism, solidarity and cooperatives behaviour.

From its broad nature, Adedayo (2011) classified security as Political security, Regional security, National security, State security and Community security. Thus, national security is imperative for safety and development of every economy. In this regard, Lipman (1995) and Aja (1999) observed that a Nation is secure to the extent that it is not in a position to lose core values, lives, properties and liberties, property or other important goals and values.

National security is therefore a process entrenched to protect lives, safeguard rights and facilitate avenue for comfort, development and survival of the citizens. And, its core value and essence can also be realised through appropriate policy frameworks. To this end, Okeke (2001) underlies the fact that Policy is decisions and choice. In a specific sense, Policy is a set of decisions taken by a political actor or group concerning the selection of goals and the method of attaining them relating to a specified situation (Roberts and Edwards, 1991:98) cited in Okeke (2001:1). Hence, Policy is the highest level of state craft, embodying both objectives of the state and the means of attaining them (Ugwu, 2006:1). From this indications, the whole gamut of definitions of public policy revolves around governmental actions, governmental decisions, governmental proposed actions, etc (Okeke, 2001:3). Hence, Public Policy is purposeful and instrumental to public plights and expectations such as safety and other fundamentals of social existence and welfare which can be realised through plausible processes of implementation. However, the challenges of implementation in developing economies such as Nigeria alienate the masses from the intentions and essence of public policy. In other words, this problem may be attributed to the failure of government response efforts to the crises of banditry and abduction of school children in the North which has eroded process towards educational development and created atmosphere of terror and fear in other parts of the country.

### Theoretical Explication

To theorize the crises of abduction of school children and its implications in the context of Nigeria state underlines the imperative of scientific framework and analysis. Hence, David Easton political system theory is appropriate framework to embellish the affinity between anxiety of banditry in public schools, public expectations and government policy measures.

Accordingly, David Easton, an American behavioral political scientist conceptualized political system framework in the perspective of correlation between public expectations and public policy in the matrix of input-output processes. In this regard, Hara Das and Choudhury (1997:28) writes,

David Easton was the first political scientist who systematically developed a framework on the basis of the system approach for the study of politics instead of merely adopting it from anthropology and sociology. David Easton selected the political system as a basic unit of analysis. He put forward his idea in this work entitled: “The Political System: An Enquiry into the State of Political Science” published in 1953. The concept was elaborately explained in two of his book namely, “A Framework for Political Analysis and A System Analysis of Political Life” both published in 1965.

The basic assumption of political system framework developed by David Easton is summarized under the following:

i. Political system as a set of interactions abstracted from the totality of social behavior, through which value are authoritatively allocated for society. A system of interaction in any society through which binding and authoritative allocation of values are made and implemented”

ii. The importance of input and output processes to establish the effects of the system on the environment and the influence of environment on system. Succinctly, input is stream of influences from the environment to the political system and, the reaction or response of the political system to the stream of influence and events from the environment is seen as output. In explicit sense, Verma (1974:197) further dissects the input and output processes,

Inputs consist of demand and support. Demands and support are received in the system from the society. A demand, according to Easton, is an expression of opinion that an authoritative allocation with regards to particular subject matter should or should not be made by those responsible for doing so. On the other hand, the concept of support is essential for the persistence and survival of the political system. The support is both overt in the form of actions that are clearly and manifestly supportive attributes and sentiments. The political system receives considerable support from the environment without which naturally it cannot survive. The concept of output of the political system is decision and actions of the authorities and help in organizing the consequences flowing from the behavior of the members of the political system.

Thus, Easton’s political system framework amid its fascinating assumptions is vulnerable to certain limitations.

However, the assumptions of political system theory is logically relevant to the theme of this discourse to establish the fact that Nigeria is a political system which acknowledges the ideal that government should make and implement binding and authoritative allocation of values for purpose of safety of lives and welfare of the citizens as enunciated in the provisions of Federal Republic Constitution of Nigeria, 1999. Also, political system as indicated is not isolated from its environment. Hence, Nigerian government is currently overwhelmed by the enormous crises of banditry and abduction of school children in the North.

Subsequently, the theory also argued that the challenges of the political system are communicated (in form of demand) to the structures of governance through appropriate channels for prompt action. This is further revealed in the intermittent spontaneous protest occasioned by media conference and meetings to express displeasure over an unpleasant situation of banditry and invasion of schools in Kaduna, Zamfara, Katsina states and other cities in the North. Expectedly as advanced in the logics or assumptions of the theory, the demands of the environment in form of input stimulates responses from the political system in form of outputs which informs the specific targets of public policy. In reference to the current situation of abduction of school children, the government has responded through policy programmes and security measures. However, it is the argument of this discourse that government responses or reactions are yet to yield positive results and support in deference to public expectations as the ugly situation has heightened in the recent time.

In a conclusive sense, the empirical assumptions of political system theory are lucid and relevant to the analysis of this discourse. This is premised on the fact the crises of abduction of school children across states in the North is a function of systemic failure and illuminates the gap between public anxiety and governance as underscored in the logics of political system framework.

### **Crises of Abduction of School Children in Nigeria**

As earlier noted, the North is currently experiencing an excruciating situation of daily abduction of primary school pupils, secondary school students and undergraduates of Tertiary institutions which had adversely undermined prospects of education development in the region. Today’s ugly situation obviously has its root in Boko Haram’s onslaught against western education. The name “Boko Haram” literally implied that “western education is forbidden” further demonstrate its resolve by the abduction of 276 female students of Government Secondary School, Chibok, Borno State in the early hours of April 14, 2014. This action expectedly spurred global outrage and condemnation culminating in a popular global campaign “Bring Back our Girls”. Subsequently, Adekunbi (2021) remarked that more of such audacious abductions have been carried out in other schools. This fierce and sanguinary war against western education has also claimed lives of several male students -42 at the Government Secondary School, Mamudo Village in Yobe State, July 6, 2013; about 44 students and teachers, September 21, 2013 at the College of Agriculture, Gubi, Yobe State and about 8 students at Kano State School of Hygiene, June 23, 2013.

Furthermore, the abduction of 104 students of Government Secondary School Girls Science and Technical College, GGSTC, Dapchi in Yobe State on February, 2018 again resonate national anxiety in the safety of schools and girl child education in the North-East region. In this regard, United Nations Report in 2017, revealed that “115 children (38 boys and 77 girls) had been used as human

bombs'' which is six-times higher than in 2016''. Many may have tragically gone on a journey of no return with little or no hope of rescuing them like 112 out of the 276 Chibok girls and Leah Sharibu, the Christian Dapchi school girl (Ero 2021:19).

Also, Report of Nigeria Watch (2019) underlines the dynamics and crises of kidnapping and killings in Northern states and the South as seen in kidnapping for ransom increased from 290 fatalities in 2017 to 358 in 2018, mainly Bauchi, Benue, Cross River, Ebonyi, FCT, Jigawa, Kaduna, Kebbi and Kwara. Kaduna maintained its status as the most dangerous state in respect to kidnapping with a record of 23 deaths in 15 incidences. Abuja-Kaduna expressway and Birnin-Bwari local government area remained hotspots for kidnapping activities.

In the recent months, the security situation has taken a turn for the worse particularly in the North-East geo-political zone. There has been a resurgence of attacks by Boko Haram terrorists operating around communities in Borno state. The military bases and formations in the region have also come under persistence attacks resulting in heavy casualties. In the North- West and North-Central regions, armed bandits have practically taken over several communities, killing, maiming and kidnapping for ransom. The most embarrassing of these violent activities is the serial raid on schools and mass abduction of students and teachers. These abductees are usually taken into the remote forests where the bandits hold them captive for long as it takes the state government to pay huge ransom placed on their heads by the bandits (Onwuka, 2021:24).

The North-West since December 2020 till date remained the vortex of banditry and abduction of school children as seen in Kaduna, Katsina and Zamfara states and isolated incidences in Niger state in the North Central region. In this vein, Report of Nigeria Watch (2019) dissect the regional, demographic, socio-political and economic attributes of the North-West,

Nigeria's North-West one of the Country's six geo-political zones comprises seven of the Country's 36 states. These states are Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Kebbi, Sokoto and Zamfara. It covers an area of 201,665 sq Km or 25.75 percent of the Country's total land mass close to the size of the United Kingdom, UK. Its major ethnic groups are the Hausa and Fulani, who historically share strong cultural ties and very much intermixed with other smaller groups especially in Kaduna state. The region estimated population of 33 million (based on figures from the contentious 2006 census) is predominantly Muslim (Sunni). Most of the population (about 80 percent are farmers, pastoralists, agro-pastoralists or small scale entrepreneurs. The region has substantial solid mineral deposits including gold exploited by artisan miners in open pit mines. Despite its economic potentials, the North-West has the highest poverty rate in Nigeria. As of 2019, all seven states in the Zone had poverty levels above the national average of 40.1 percent led by Sokoto (87.7 percent), Jigawa (87 percent) and Zamfara (74 percent). Millions lack access to basic health care and clean water, and immunization coverage is far below national goals while the region has a long and proud history of Islamic and Arabic scholarship, apathy towards and inadequate investment in formal education over the decades have contributed to the literacy rate of 29.7 percent. The Zone currently has the highest number of out-of-school children in Nigeria.

Beside Chibok and Dapchi mass abductions of students, the following is a chronicle of recent events in the abductions of school students, undergraduates of Tertiary institution and staff across the Federation:

i. March 2, 2016, gunmen invaded the female hostel of Babington Macaulay Junior Secondary School in Ikorodu Lagos where they abducted 5 female students, a hostel mistress, Cook and Teacher.

ii. January, 2017, 5 students and 3 staff members of the Nigerian-Turkish International College, Isheri, Ogun state were kidnapped by unknown armed men.

iii. December, 15, 2020, bandits invaded Government Science Secondary School, GSSS Kankara in Katsina state and abducted 344 students.

iv. February, 17, 2021, bandits invaded Government College in Kagara, Niger State and abducted 42 students including 3 teachers and 9 family members while one student was killed in the raid.

v. February, 26, 2021, armed bandits raided Government Girls Science Secondary School in Jangebe in Zamfara state and abducted 279 female students.

vi. March 11, 2021, bandits struck at Federal College of Forestry Mechanization, Afaka, Kaduna State and abducted 39 students.

vii. April 20, 2021, bandits struck at Greenfield University, a private institution located in Kasarachi, Chikun local government area of Kaduna state and abducted 23 students while 5 of them were murdered.

viii. July 5, 2021, 140 students of Bethel High School in Kaduna State were abducted after bandits opened fire and overpowered security guards of the school.

The list of abduction of students is endless as the bandits continue their onslaught with little or no resistance from the security agencies. It is however important to note that some of the abducted students in some of these incidents have regained their freedom after millions of naria were paid as ransom to these bandits. In this vein, Negedu (2021:12) reports,

After spending 57 days in the hands of their abductors and one day in the Hospital following their release, the remaining 27 students kidnapped from Federal College of Forestry Mechanization, Afaka Kaduna were on May 2021 reunited with their families. 39 students were kidnapped from their school about 58 days ago while 10 of them were earlier released, two were said to have escaped and remaining 27 were released on May 5, 2021. The bandits initially demanded 500 million naria ransom from Kaduna state government but met a stiff opposition from the administration of Governor Nasir EL-Rufai who ruled out the option of negotiation and payment of ransom. However, millions of naria were later paid to the bandits by the mobilized parents of the abducted students. However, it is not clear whether 500 million naria initially requested was paid.

Similarly, Atori (2021) also remarked that parents of the over 130 abducted pupils of Tanko Salihu Islamiyya school, Tegna, Niger State have expressed their disappointment over the delay in getting their children released following the news that over 80% of them are very sick and could no longer walk. The bandits have reduced the ransom to 50 million naria but the parents of these students were only able to raise 26 million naria but the abductors have refused to accept unless it is 50 million naria initially demanded.

Furthermore, it was reported that 7 students and 2 lecturers of Nuhu Bamali Polytechnic regained their freedom recently after 10 million naria ransom was paid by their families (Negedu, 2021:3). The July, 2021 Report of United Nations Children Emergency Fund, UNICEF revealed that no less than 950 students had been kidnapped from their school in the last seven months (December, 2020 to July, 2021) in the North-West region and other parts of the federation. Nearly, 500 students were abducted in four separate incidents across the North-Central and North-West in the last six weeks. It was also reported that between 2011 and 2020, Nigerians had spent about 18 million US dollar in ransom paid to the abductors by either the government or parents/relatives of the victims to secure their release. The incessant attacks and invasion of school by bandits is a wrong signal to the nation's education development which has become comatose following the multifaceted challenges confronting the sector over the years. In the same vein, the Report of Safe School Declaration, SSD (2020:1) embellished the crises and affects of school invasion and abduction of students,

An estimated 1, 400 schools have been destroyed since 2014 with over 1, 280 casualties among teachers and students. The crises has further devastated the education system where the safety of children, teachers and school were under serious threat and danger. The short-term impact of attacks on school includes death, injury and destruction of education infrastructures. And, the long term impacts include disruption in attendance, declines in student enrolment, diminished quality of education and lower rates of transition to higher education levels and reduction in teacher recruitment. Also attacks on high education have undermined research and teaching and have resulted in brain drain. All of the above can prevent Nigeria from fulfilling the rights to education and other rights as well as achieving educational and development goals. Most importantly, attacks on education have also compromised school's capacity to protect students from social risks thereby leaving learners more vulnerable to sexual and other forms of exploitation such as child labourers, or child soldiers, early marriage and pregnancy including other negative influences.

In a similar perspective, Adegrooye (2021) noted that the former deputy Governor of Central Bank of Nigeria, CBN Dr. Obadiah Mailafia has lamented that the current massive pernicious business of kidnapping of students especially in the North will worsen the region's retrogression and put its education in jeopardy. About 1,500 students in Borno, Kaduna, Zamfara, Yobe, Katsina and Niger states especially girls had been abducted at various times between 2014 and 2021 by gunmen in exchange of ransom.

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Adversely, the unpleasant situation of school invasion and abduction of school children has led to closure of public and private education institutions across most states in the North. For instance, Kaduna State government in March, 2021 through a Memo issued from the Ministry of Education directed all Heads of public and private institutions to shut down in view of the prevailing security situation. In a similar note, dissatisfied with the state of insecurity threats, the Catholic Archdiocese of Abuja shut down all schools under its jurisdiction and directed pupils and students to embark on an indefinite vacation. It was also learnt that a directive has been issued to all headmasters and principals of Catholic Mission Schools across Abuja to shut down until the federal government show it has serious plan to forestall kidnapping of school children across the country (Nzeshi and Otokpa, 2021:12).

In a generic sense, the motive for targeting schools, the Universities, students, teachers and other education staff include the desire to block education of girls, abduct children for use as combatants, sex slaves, or logistical support in a military operation or abduct students and teachers for ransom, seize school and universities for use as barracks or base or firing position or attack schools because they are being used for these purposes by opposing forces (Report of Safe School Declaration, SSD, 2020:2). And, to make a lot of financial gain in view of millions of naria ransom paid to free or release abducted students and staff.

This unpleasant development has indeed elicited more concerns on why abduction of school students persists in isolation of vehement efforts of resistance from the government and appropriate authorities concerned. It seems that the government and security agencies are overwhelmed by these torrents of security challenges in view of failure to stem the tides of Boko Haram onslaught and incessant offensives of the armed Fulani militia occasioned by systemic security lapses and infrastructural deficit.

Again, the non-resistance of many incidences of abductions may portend that the security agencies may have been compromised. For instance, in a recent interview showed by Arise Television Station, a popular Islamic Cleric in Kaduna State, Sheikh Ahmad Gumi alleged that Nigeria security agencies are colluding with bandits in terrorizing Northern part of Nigeria. He said that some bad elements in nation's security are aiding the activities of the bandits. Also, Audu and Mohammed (2020) corroborated this allegation and argued that it will be naïve to exonerate the government at all levels from the blame and shenanigans that posed as a great danger and threat to further jeopardize and befuddle the entire nation's education system for the failure to do the needful and secure the schools from the bandits.

These issues raised ostensibly underscores the need to evaluate the viability of policy measures initiated to stem the tide of terrorism against Nigeria Education system.

### **Policy Response to Abduction of School Children in Nigeria**

The shocking April, 2014 massive abduction of over 200 female students preparing for senior school certificate examination in Government Secondary School, Chibok in Borno State obviously elicited sustained concerns and strident remarks on the safety of schools in war-torn Northern region. Hence, security and policy measures emerged in this regard.

In response to the Chibok incidence, Dr. Goodluck Ebele Jonathan administration launched National Safe School Fund. To synergize in realisation of the specific targets of the Fund, Nigeria Safe School Initiative and Multi Donor Trust Fund, MDTF were established to leverage the benefits of UN support. Hence, in cognizance of global outrage of massive abduction of school children in Chibok and danger the ugly incidence portray on girl-child education and security of schools across the country, the United Nations Special Envoy for Global Education, Gordon Brown alongside Nigeria Global Business Coalition for Education and private sector at World Economic Forum for Africa, in 2014 launched, "Safe School Initiative" with the objectives to ensure school-based interventions, community interventions to protect schools and measures for at-risk populations. The target states include Adamawa, Borno and Yobe states, and other risk-states in the North and South, as a national initiative, to cover the entire country.

The Fund was originally designed for a lifespan of 3 years. In coordination with the national Fund, the Nigeria Safe Schools Initiative, NSSI and Multi Donor Trust Fund, MDTF represents a rapid and flexible financial mechanism to disburse co-financing to the participating UN Organizations and implementing partners, be it national or international NGOs, private sector partners and community-based organizations (CBOs) in the North-East of Nigeria. To operationalize the Nigeria Safe Schools Initiative MDTF, a set of guidelines and terms for community and organization access to the Safe Schools Initiative funding was set up, requiring that schools demonstrate the enthusiasm that they are able to provide the minimum conditions to promote learning, inclusion, stimulation and a friendly environment to sustain students, teachers, school personnel, etc. Projects was funded by the Nigeria Safe Schools Initiative and MDTF was aimed to build resilience and promote vigilance and awareness of threats (UNDP Report, 2016:3).

Subsequently, Nigerian government also partner with the national governments within and beyond Africa in strategic alliance and response to the insecurity problems bedeviling educational institutions across the world. In this regard, the action plan on Safe School Declaration emerged. Accordingly, the Report of Safe School Declaration (2020) noted that The Safe Schools Declaration is an intergovernmental political commitment that provides countries with the opportunity to express support for protecting students, teachers, schools, and universities from attack during times of armed conflict; the importance of the continuation of education during armed conflict; and the implementation of concrete measures to deter the military use of schools. Nigeria was part of the first group of 37 states that “endorsed” the Safe Schools Declaration on May 29, 2015 and signed the letter of endorsement on March 8, 2018. In addition, signatories to Safe School Declaration action-plan are committed to ensure safety of students, teachers and schools through the following measures:

- a. To highlight the incidence and impact of attacks on education in conflict and insecurity among key actors and cultivate public support for safe education.
- b. To promote better systems for monitoring and reporting attacks on education.
- c. To promote effective programmes and policies to protect education from attack, including prevention and response.
- d. To encourage adherence to existing international laws protecting education and the strengthening of international norms and standards as needed; and
- e. To fight impunity for attacks on education by promoting and supporting a range of accountability measures (Nwabuisi and Adewale, 2020:34).

It is instructive to note that these safe schools programmes are complemented by other policy initiatives by state governments in the North in response to security challenges of schools occasioned by deployment of security personnel especially the members of the armed forces but schools in the North remain vulnerable to insurgency. The persistence of these problems amid efforts to stem the tide may be attributed to;

- a. Lack of commitment on the part of government to ensure effective realisation of the lofty ideals of school safety programmes enunciated by the Nigeria Safe School Initiative, Multi Donor Trust Fund, MDTF and Safe School Declaration action-plan.
- b. Failure of state governments in the North to show enough commitment through policy and programmes to synergize with federal government institutions and Donor agencies in achieving the mandate of safe school initiatives.
- c. Failure of bureaucracy and transparency in the disbursement of funds for the safety of public education institutions and rehabilitations of freed abductees in the states of the North.
- d. Failure of adequacy of security of public schools and armed offensives against insurgency in the North. Most public schools are vulnerable to attacks in view of absence of security details.
- e. Unemployment, poverty and illiteracy are the visible triggers that predispose thousands of Northern youths to criminality and banditry. Hence, millions of dollars paid as ransom for the freedom of abducted students becomes a lucrative venture for many uneducated and poor young persons in North.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The discourse introduces a Nation-State, Nigeria that is grappling with myriad of insecurity challenges that stem from crises of insurgency and abduction of school students in Northern regions of Nigerian federation. The discourse further explored concepts of education, banditry, national security and policy and, showed affinity of these concepts in the context of crises of abduction of school children. The empirical assumptions of political system framework establish that the crises of abduction of school pupils, students and undergraduates ostensibly illuminate the gap between public expectations and government disposition. The discourse in apt sense further dissects the menace of school invasion in North where the North-West region leads in number of incidents and fatalities along with its underlying implications. Hence, analysis of policy responses to the tide showed enthusiasm of the government to ensure safety of Nigerian schools and students but the current situation makes mockery of these efforts and illuminates the bedeviling limitations which are systemic.

From these findings, the discourse recommends that the federal authority and state governments in the North should engage constructively with the populace in the troubled region and states of banditry and abduction of school children. Hence, the policy responses of the government to mitigate occurrence and effects of this crisis should reflect public anxiety and expectations. It is



really embarrassing when families of the abducted students and staff mobilize to raise millions of naira as ransom for the bandits in a situation of apparent insensitivity of the government. It is therefore expected that government should exhibit reasonable sense of empathy and drive to engage with the families of these victims in difficult times.

The discourse recommends that in view of the alarming height of abduction of school children, the federal government should review targets, organizational framework, modality and response of National Safe School Initiative. The Nigerian Governors' Forum should also synergize with the federal government through an inclusive and participatory mechanism in collective drive to combat the menace of insurgence in our public schools. And, there should be more commitment from Northern Governors' Forum to develop effective collaborative network and policy programme in response to a challenge that has adversely engulfed the region.

The discourse advocate for proactive efforts from the Nigeria security forces in a synergized drive to ensure safety of public educational institutions. The security authority should also entrench credible internal reform process to weed off bad elements and reposition men and officers on the task ahead. Also, the visibility of the security personnel and vehicle within school premises adds to the safety of students and staff.

Advocacy on Safe School Initiative among staff and authority of the schools. There is need to educate students and staff on safety measures against intruders and strangers within and surroundings of school premises. This process can be further strengthened and sustained through internal school mechanism known as Emergency Preparedness Group.

Subsequently, certain infrastructure is also critical for safety of schools. Hence, the need for perimeter fence and security post within the school premises. And, the nearness of Police Station to school building is also important for safety of students and staff. In addition, the local vigilante should also be mobilized to complement the efforts of the security agencies.

The United Nations International Children Emergency Fund, UNICEF and other Donor Agencies should not relent in their strategic collaboration with the Nigerian government in providing relief and psychological support for the freed abductees and their families. It is therefore expected that such collaboration with UN and Donor Agencies shall strengthen security of public schools and further encourage students to go back to a safe and secured school environment.

Finally, state governments in collaboration with local authorities in the North should begin to embark on policy programme of youth development and empowerment to mitigate illiteracy and poverty among its productive population. This has not only become imperative but timely to dissuade them from banditry and other forms of criminality.

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