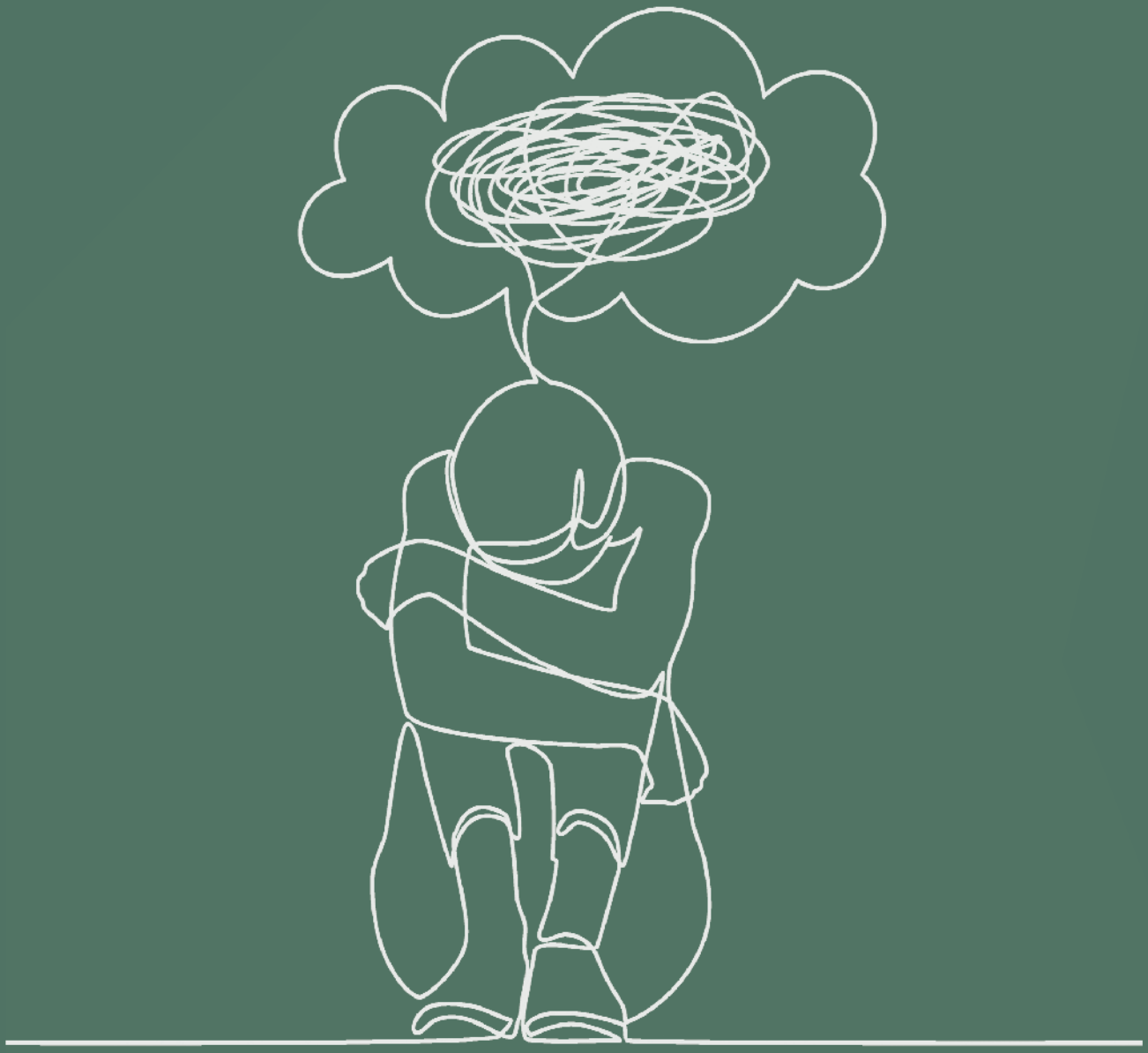

RAPPORT 1 2 3

Conflict-related sexual violence in North East Nigeria

ANALYSIS OF THE MODUS OPERANDI AND CONSEQUENCES OF SUCH VIOLENCE

CONTEXTUAL REPORT

NIGERIA

Innovative technologies to prevent and combat conflict-related sexual violence

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INTRODUCTION

This report constitutes the second section of the analytical series produced as part of the project *"Nigeria: innovative technologies to prevent and combat conflict-related sexual violence"*, jointly implemented by **We are NOT Weapons of War** (WWoW) and **Bibliothèques Sans Frontières** (BSF), with the support of the **Crisis and Support Centre** (CdCS) of the French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs (MEAE).

This report was produced and written by the teams of We are NOT Weapons of War (WWoW), with the support of the Grassroots Researchers Association (GRA), WWoW's local operational partner based in Maiduguri.

Building on the findings of the previous contextual study, this second report specifically examines the use of sexual violence in armed conflicts in North East Nigeria, with a particular focus on Borno State, the epicentre of the insurgency led since 2009 by Boko Haram and its splinter factions. Despite a decrease in the military intensity of the conflict, abuses against civilians persist: targeted killings, suicide attacks, abductions, destruction of infrastructure, forced recruitment, and sexual violence continue to leave a lasting impact on the region[1].

The objective of this study is to characterise conflict-related sexual violence based on field observations, testimonies collected, and data drawn from institutional sources and humanitarian actors. It seeks to identify perpetrators, describe their operating methods, understand the underlying logics and objectives of these crimes, and assess their impact on individuals, families, and communities.

In accordance with the definition adopted by the Office of the Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict (SRSG-SVC), conflict-related sexual violence includes "rape, sexual slavery, forced prostitution, forced pregnancy, forced abortion, forced sterilisation, forced marriage and any other form of sexual violence of comparable gravity committed in connection with an armed conflict"[2]. Such violence may affect women, men, girls, and boys, regardless of their identity or sexual orientation, as well as internally displaced persons, refugees, or individuals associated with armed groups[3].

In this perspective, the report is structured around three complementary sections:

- → Direct sexual violence, perpetrated by armed groups as part of a strategy of control, domination and terror over civilian populations;
- → Indirect sexual violence, observed in contexts of detention, displacement or prolonged militarisation, where power relations are reshaped by the conflict;
- → The multidimensional consequences of such violence, affecting physical and mental health, social cohesion, livelihoods, and community stability.

This analysis aims to inform the strategic reflection of the WWoW and BSF project, strengthen understanding of the local dynamics of conflict-related sexual violence, and support the design of interventions tailored to the needs of survivors, through a human rights–based approach centred on prevention and community resilience.

SUMMARY

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

A

ACJA

Administration of Criminal Justice Act

B

BAY

Borno-Adamawa-Yobe

BSF

Bibliothèques Sans Frontières

C

CDCS

Centre de Crise et de Soutien

CEDAW

Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women

CJTF

Combined Join Task Force (ou FMM : Force Multinationale Mixte)

CPA

Criminal Procedure Act

CPC

Criminal Procedure Code

CRSV

Conflict-related sexual violence

CSO

Civil Society Organization

G

GBV

Gender-Based Violence

GRA

Grassroots Researchers Association

I

ICC

International Criminal Court

ICL

International Criminal Law

ICRC

International Committee of the Red Cross

IDPs

Internally Displaced Persons

IHL

International Humanitarian Law

IHRL

International Human Rights Law

INGO

(International) Non-Governmental Organization

IOM

International Organization for Migration

ISWAP

Islamic State in West Africa Province

J

JAS

Jama'tu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-Jihad

L

LGA

Local Government Area

M

MDM

Médecins du Monde

MEAE

Ministère de l'Europe et des Affaires étrangères

MSF

Doctors Without Borders (Médecins Sans Frontières)

N

NAPTIP

National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Person

NIAC

Non International Armed Conflict

NSAG

Non-State Armed Groups

O

OCHA

Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

P

PHC

Primary Health Center

PUI

Première Urgence Internationale

U

UN

United Nations

UNHCR

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

S

SRSG-SVC

Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict

T

TPA

Terrorism Prevention Act

U

UNICEF

United Nations Children's Fund

UNFPA

United Nations Population Fund

V

VAPPA

Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act

W

WWOW

We are NOT Weapons of War

PART 1

THE USE OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE BY ARMED GROUPS

This section analyses the use of sexual violence in the armed conflicts in North East Nigeria. It seeks to identify the forms of sexual violence used, the actors involved, and the objectives pursued. The purpose is to shed light on the dynamics of this violence in order to support the design of prevention, protection, and reparation actions within the framework of the project.

1 THE SCALE AND DIFFERENT FORMS OF CONFLICT-RELATED SEXUAL VIOLENCE

The true scale of sexual violence committed in Borno State remains difficult to determine. The lack of official figures reflects underreporting, due to social and religious norms as well as the stigma faced by survivors[4]. Available estimates nonetheless indicate a significant persistence and spread of this violence since 2009.

According to the United Nations, these violations continue in Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe States; they primarily take the form of rape, forced marriage, and other abuses, often following abductions or forced recruitment by Boko Haram and Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP)[5].

In 2024, the United Nations recorded **412 girls and 7 boys** as victims of conflict-related sexual violence. These figures reflect the persistence of systematic sexual practices in areas affected by prolonged insecurity.[6]

The temporal continuity of this violence is also evident from earlier humanitarian data. In **2018**, 1,142 cases of gender-based violence were reported in Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe States, with the majority occurring in Borno State[7]. In **2019**, an additional 1,666 incidents were recorded, **35%** of which involved minors; women and girls accounted for the vast majority of survivors[8]. These trends demonstrate that, far from being sporadic, sexual violence accompanies successive phases of the conflict and persists in situations of displacement and captivity.

Observations from 2024 confirm that this violence occurs mainly in areas where state authority remains weak: rural areas, transit routes, and internally displaced persons' camps. This evolution shows that sexual violence does not constitute isolated episodes but a **structural component of the conflict**. It occurs both during periods of territorial expansion by armed groups and during periods of retreat, revealing a continuity of use that has withstood successive military operations.

1 Christ, K, Gender and Terror: Boko Haram and the Abuse of Women in Nigeria, Georgetown Journal of International Affairs, April 5, 2022.

2 United Nations, Report of the Secretary-General on Conflict-related sexual violence (S/2025/389), United Nations Security Council, 2025.

3 Ibid.

4 United Nations, Armed conflict in Nigeria: Security Council warns of situation facing children and calls for better protection, Press Release, 2024.

5 United Nations, Report of the Secretary-General on Conflict-Related Sexual Violence (S/2024/292), United Nations Security Council, April 4, 2024, §§85–86, read on October 22, 2025.

6 Ibid.

7 UNHCR, Final SGBV Reporting January – June 2018, Borno, Adamawa, Yobe, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2018.

8 UNHCR, SGBV 2019 Annual Report, Maiduguri, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, March 2020.

The sexual violence identified in North East Nigeria covers a wide range of violations. Sources from international institutions, combined with interviews conducted by WWoW and GRA, have identified five major forms of sexual violence:

- → **Rape**, often gang rape, used during abductions, raids, or prolonged detention;
- → **Forced marriage**, imposed on captives in order to reinforce ideological control and internal group discipline;
- → **Sexual slavery**, combined with domestic exploitation and prolonged captivity, aimed at providing fighters with permanent "wives" or "servants";
- → **Forced pregnancies and abortions**, used to mark the appropriation of bodies and the erasure of community identity;
- → **Sexual violence against men**, less frequent but documented in contexts of detention or coercion, and remaining significantly underreported[9].

UN reports emphasise that armed groups, notably Boko Haram and Islamic State West Africa Province, employ such violence for distinct purposes:

- → **Punishment and terror** against hostile communities and women deemed non-compliant;
- → **Territorial and moral control**, by imposing a gender hierarchy consistent with their religious interpretation.

These forms of violence also aim to regulate the lives of civilians under insurgent domination and to assert religiously codified male superiority. These intersecting dynamics explain both the concentration of violence against women and girls, and its recurrence during each phase of humanitarian crisis or displacement.

9 WWoW–GRA interview, Maiduguri, December 2024.

2 WOMEN AND GIRLS: MAIN TARGETS OF ARMED GROUPS

Women and girls are the main victims of the conflict in North East Nigeria. Since 2009, sexual violence, abductions, and forced marriages have been part of the strategy of armed groups, particularly Boko Haram and Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP). These practices constitute a deliberate tactic of domination, social control, and community intimidation.

Reports from the United Nations Secretary-General show that armed groups exploit pre-existing gender inequalities and social norms in the region[10]. In Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe States, social structures are highly gendered: women have limited access to land, education, policing and justice services, and public representation. Moreover, women and girls are generally expected to fulfill the roles as wives and mothers. Most are married at a very young age, often to older men, which restricts their autonomy and perpetuates their dependence. These norms, deeply rooted in family and religious structures, restrict girls' opportunities for education and empowerment[11].

These pre-existing constraints facilitate the perpetration and justification of sexual violence committed against women and girls[12]. Forced marriages are thus presented by armed groups as legitimate unions, intended to ensure religious purity and group stability. This narrative enables coercive practices to be transformed into instruments of ideological discipline and internal loyalty[13]. The central role of women in the strategy of armed groups is explained both by their social position and by how they are perceived within society. For Boko Haram fighters, and subsequently for Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'Awati wal-Jihad (JAS) and Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), women represent an instrument for consolidating the group: they are used to enhance fighters' social status, provide sexual and domestic services, and contribute to the economic and logistical survival of the movement.

For this reason, such violence intensifies during periods of crisis, when institutional and social structures collapse. The absence of civil authority, the disorganisation of justice systems, and precarious living conditions facilitate the use of sexual violence as a means of terror and subjugation. Population displacement, the concentration of women and children in overcrowded sites, and restricted access to resources increase their vulnerability to abuses committed by armed groups and, at times, by certain security actors.

10 United Nations, Report of the Secretary-General on Conflict-Related Sexual Violence (S/2024/292), United Nations Security Council, April 4, 2024, §§85–86.

11 UNICEF, Child Marriage in West and Central Africa: Statistical Overview and Reflections on the Elimination of this Practice, UNICEF, 2016, pp. 72–73; Diamond, G, Social Norms and Girls' Education: A Study in Eight Sub-Saharan African Countries, GCI Policy Brief, 2016, pp. 37–39.

12 UNHCR, Final SGBV Reporting January – June 2018, Borno, Adamawa, Yobe States, Maiduguri, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2018.

13 United Nations, Report of the Secretary-General on Conflict-Related Sexual Violence (S/2024/292), United Nations Security Council, April 4, 2024, §§85–86.

However, it is essential to understand that the use of conflict-related sexual violence can serve different objectives for armed groups.

The role of women and girls is not exclusively passive. Boko Haram has exploited the constraints imposed on women as a means of recruitment. Under the guise of piety and the restoration of an Islamic moral order, the group has promoted female religious education and participation in certain community activities, offering marginalised women symbolic recognition within a rigid ideological framework.

Over the course of the conflict, some women have joined the command structures as messengers, spies, cooks, wives, or fighters[14]. Others have been used for suicide attacks, particularly from 2014 onward, following the Chibok abductions, when Boko Haram and ISWAP began using women—often widows of deceased fighters—as suicide bombers.

Some women, such as **Hafsat Bako** within JAS, held high-ranking positions. She served as head of the group's female wing and was also responsible for recruitment and the management of suicide attacks. Another woman, **Talha**, had been appointed head of the entire female section of ISWAP (arrested during a military operation on January 16, 2025)[15].

14 United Nations, Report of the Secretary-General on Conflict-Related Sexual Violence (S/2024/292), United Nations Security Council, April 4, 2024, §§85–86.

15 APA News, Nigeria: Army claims victory against ISWAP in the north, 16 January 2025.

Men and boys are also affected by sexual violence, although such cases remain underreported. Available data indicate assaults and rapes occurring in contexts of detention or forced recruitment. However, stigma, fear of community rejection, and the lack of appropriate services significantly limit the documentation and support available to these victims. While awareness of sexual violence against men is beginning to emerge within organisations and support structures, it is still struggling to translate into concrete actions to raise advocacy, combat, and provide support.

The invisibility of these forms of violence has significant consequences: it hinders the implementation of prevention and support programmes tailored to all victims.

Within the framework of the project, it is essential to integrate this dimension in order to ensure a genuinely inclusive approach, based on the specific needs of women, men, girls, and boys affected by conflict-related sexual violence.

3 MODUS OPERANDI: PRACTICES THAT DIFFER BETWEEN ARMED GROUPS

"While continuing to relentlessly carry out killings, abductions, and looting, Boko Haram fighters rape women and girls and subject them to other forms of sexual violence during their attacks."[16].

The analysis of sexual violence in the conflict in North East Nigeria reveals distinct patterns of action depending on the armed group involved. While based on a set of common methods—raids, abductions, prolonged captivity, and forced marriages—these practices reflect different operational and ideological logics. Understanding these dynamics is essential in order to design appropriate responses in terms of prevention, protection, and documentation within the framework of the project.

Common practices: abductions, captivity and forced Marriage

Sexual violence most often occurs during armed raids, village attacks, or forced displacement. Women and girls are targeted as **spoils of war**, **instruments of terror**, and **strategic resources**. Once captured, they are frequently subjected to forced marriages, gang rape, or forms of sexual slavery combining domestic labor and sexual exploitation[17].

Data collected by WWoW and GRA from a sample of 60 survivors confirm the systematic nature of these practices[18] :

- → 70% suffered sexual violence directly related to the conflict;
- → 80% were held in captivity, including 43.8% for more than five years;
- → 66.7% were forcibly married;
- → 69% gave birth to at least one child during or after captivity.

These practices reflect the persistence of a model of domination based on the possession of women's bodies and the enslavement of civilian populations.

16 Amnesty International, Nigeria, Les violences de Boko Haram contre les femmes et les filles exigent une réponse de toute urgence, Amnesty International, August 17, 2021.

17 Christ, K, Gender and Terror: Boko Haram and the Abuse of Women in Nigeria, Georgetown Journal of International Affairs, April 5, 2022.

18 Beneficiaries supported during focus groups conducted by GRA and WWoW as part of the project "Nigeria: innovative technologies to prevent and combat conflict-related sexual violence", in partnership with BSF and funded by the CDCS of the MEAE.

19 United Nations, Report of the Secretary-General on Conflict-Related Sexual Violence (S/2024/292), United Nations Security Council, April 4, 2024, §§85–86.

20 Hegarty, S, Chibok abduction: The Nigerian town that lost its girls, BBC News, April 14, 2016.

21 Hegarty, S, Chibok abduction: The Nigerian town that lost its girls, BBC News, April 14, 2016.

22 RTBF, Enlèvement de masse dans le nord du Nigéria : plus de 100 femmes portées disparues, RTBF, March 7, 2024.

Boko Haram

Under the leadership of Abubakar Shekau, Boko Haram has used sexual violence as a tool for collective punishment and ideological intimidation. Rape and forced marriages are intended to **humiliate Christian communities** and to **punish women deemed impure or non-compliant** with the group's religious vision[19].

THE EXAMPLE OF THE CHIBOK GIRLS' ABDUCTION

On the night of April 14, 2014, Boko Haram stormed the premises of a Catholic school in Chibok, Borno State, in North East Nigeria. The armed group abducted 276 girls during one of the most organised attacks of its insurgency.

The girls were taken to the Sambisa Forest, where they were raped, forcibly married, converted, and used as bargaining tools for the release of prisoners. This operation, unprecedented in its scale, marked the transition to a phase of systematic sexual exploitation and served as a model for subsequent abductions, particularly in the rural areas of Borno and Yobe States.

On May 5, 2014, Boko Haram's leader, Abubakar Shekau, claimed responsibility for the abduction in a public statement, releasing a video showing 130 young girls dressed in hijabs and chadors[20].

This abduction reflects a clear and recurrent strategy employed by Boko Haram. The young girls were used as new wives for fighters—they were raped, forcibly married, subjected to forced pregnancies, and coerced conversions to Islam—and as a bartering system in negotiations with the Nigerian government for the release of high-ranking members of the organisation. While the incident drew international attention to the situation of women and girls in North East Nigeria, notably through the global "Bring Back Our Girls" campaign led by figures such as Michelle Obama, it also revealed, on the international stage, the strategic failures of the Nigerian military and the federal government's difficulties in protecting its population[21].

Abductions have increased in recent years in Nigeria and remain a recurring tactic of armed groups, for example, the abduction of more than 100 women and girls in the rural Ngala area in March 2024[22].

Today, ten years after the events, the support committee established for the release of the schoolgirls reminds that around a hundred of them are still missing and calls upon national authorities to assume their responsibilities and work towards securing the return of the girls[23].

23 Le Monde Afrique, Nigeria : dix ans après l'enlèvement de Chibok, le comité de soutien dit sa frustration et sa colère, Le Monde Afrique, April 2024.

24 Grassroots Researchers Association, Report on the Use of Sexual Violence by Armed Terrorist Groups, Grassroots Researchers Association, 15 February 2024.

25 Ibid.

26 Ibid.

Diversification of modus operandi following the fragmentation of Boko Haram

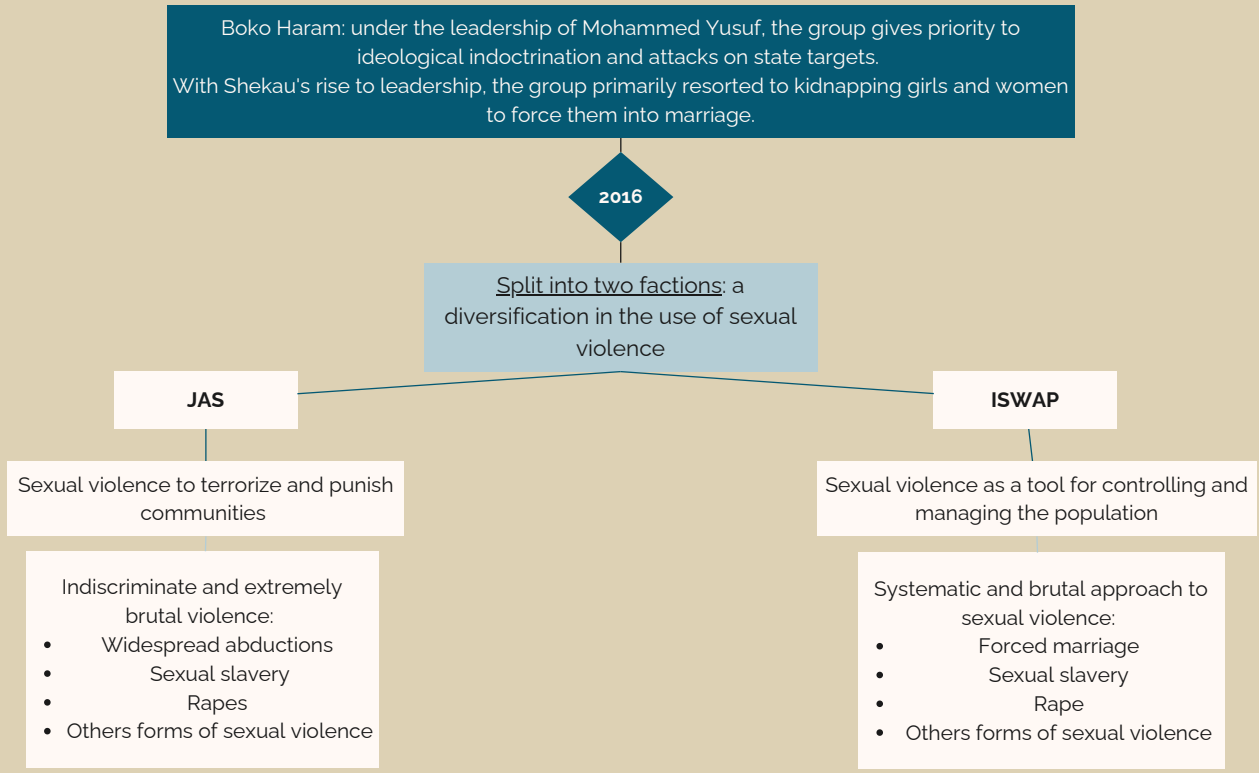
In **2016**, following internal tensions over combat methods and religious interpretation, Boko Haram split into two entities:

- → **Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'Awati wal-Jihad (JAS),** which remained loyal to Shekau, continued to pursue a strategy of terror based on brutality and suicide attacks;
- → **Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP)**, affiliated with the Islamic State, adopted a more hierarchical approach, seeking to establish a form of local administration in areas under its control[24].

ISWAP's focus on territorial control and the creation of a proto-State has led to the use of **sexual violence as a tool of domination and population management**. ISWAP more frequently targets communities that do not adhere to its interpretation of Sharia law[25].

Under Shekau's leadership, JAS uses **sexual violence more as a means of terrorising communities and punishing its perceived enemies**, targeting a broader group that includes both Christians and Muslims deemed insufficiently observant[26].

THE USE OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE BY BOKO HARAM AND ITS SPLINTER FACTIONS



"It has become an adaptive instrument of governance, population control, and the reproduction of gendered hierarchies."

The fragmentation of the Boko Haram movement has therefore resulted in an intensification and diversification of modus operandi.

In areas under JAS influence, violence remains brutal and arbitrary, intended to punish, terrorise, and subjugate.

In territories under ISWAP control, sexual violence takes on a more organised and ideological form, presented as morally justified.

This development complicates documentation and prevention efforts: sexual violence assumes different forms depending on the local context and the command structure in place. It has become an adaptive instrument of governance, population control, and the reproduction of gendered hierarchies.

For field actors, understanding these differentiated dynamics is essential in order to adjust protection, early warning, and survivor support strategies.

PART 2

SEXUAL VIOLENCE INDIRECTLY RELATED TO THE CONFLICT IN NORTH EAST NIGERIA

Sexual violence observed in North East Nigeria is not limited to military tactics deliberately employed by Boko Haram, JAS, or ISWAP. Beyond violence intentionally used as a weapon of war, the conflict has led to an environment of insecurity and impunity conducive to other forms of abuse. This violence, known as "indirectly conflict-related", is not necessarily ordered by the parties to the conflict, but stems directly from social breakdown, the militarisation of civilian space, and the increased vulnerability of displaced populations.

The United Nations defines three criteria for qualifying such violence as "indirectly related" to an armed conflict[27] :

- → **The temporal criterion:** it implies a proximity between the act of sexual violence and the period of conflict, even if the perpetrator is not directly a combatant.
- → **The geographical criterion:** it encompasses conflict-affected areas, including regions under military control, displacement camps, and border areas.
- → **The causality criterion:** it establishes that such violence, which pre-existed the conflict, is amplified by its effects—displacement, institutional collapse, poverty, and impunity.

The distinction between so-called *direct* and *indirect* sexual violence thus lies in their degree of intentionality and their connection to a military strategy. Direct violence is instrumentalised by armed groups as a means of warfare or domination, whereas indirect violence emerges in a climate of disorganisation and normalisation of violence. In contexts where the rule of law is weakened, the trivialisation of these abuses leads to an expansion of the phenomenon: civilians, members of security forces, or community actors reproduce practices of coercion and sexual exploitation[28].

27 United Nations Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, Handbook for United Nations Field Missions on Preventing and Responding to Conflict-Related Sexual Violence, United Nations, 5 juin 2020.

28 Blair, A. H., Gerring, N., Karim, S, Ending Sexual and Gender-Based Violence in War and Peace: Recommendations for the Next U.S. Administration, United States Institute of Peace, September 2016.

1 SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN DETENTION FACILITIES

Following their escape or release from areas controlled by Boko Haram, many women and girls were arrested by the Nigerian armed forces, and accused of complicity with armed groups[29]. Several Amnesty International reports indicate that they were detained without due process of law in military detention facilities, notably at the Giwa Barracks in Maiduguri, Borno State[30]. Detention conditions were particularly harsh: overcrowding, lack of medical care, deaths of young children, and prolonged detention without charges have been documented.

During these illegal detentions, many women were subjected to sexual violence or systematic forms of exploitation. According to Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, soldiers demanded sexual relations in exchange for food, water, or other basic necessities[31]. Refusal frequently resulted in deprivation, physical abuse, or public humiliation.

These practices, notably observed at Giwa detention centre and in displacement camps under military control, demonstrate the instrumentalisation of women's bodies as a means of domination and coercion in a context of persistent impunity[32].

In December 2022, a Reuters investigation revealed the alleged existence of a forced abortion programme carried out by the Nigerian armed forces since 2013 as part of the fight against Boko Haram. Based on interviews with survivors, soldiers, and medical personnel, as well as military documents, the investigation describes forced abortions on women and girls, often without their consent. If confirmed, these acts could constitute inhuman or degrading treatment under international humanitarian law and conventions on women's rights[33].

Following these revelations, the National Human Rights Commission of Nigeria (NHRC) announced in 2023 the launch of an internal investigation; however, its findings have not yet been made public[34].

This violence occurs within a broader context in which counterterrorism efforts in Nigeria have often served to legitimize institutionalised abuses against women perceived as "wives" or "accomplices" of Boko Haram. Their systematic criminalisation, combined with social stigma, perpetuates their marginalisation and hinders their reintegration after captivity.

29 Amnesty International, Nigeria, Les autorités manquent à leur devoir envers les jeunes captives ayant échappé à Boko Haram – nouveau rapport, Amnesty International, June 10, 2024.

30 Amnesty International, Nigeria, Children and women face sexual violence in Borno prisons, Amnesty International, August 22, 2022.

31 Human Rights Watch, Nigeria, Officials Abusing Displaced Women and Girls, Human Rights Watch, 2016.

32 Ibid.

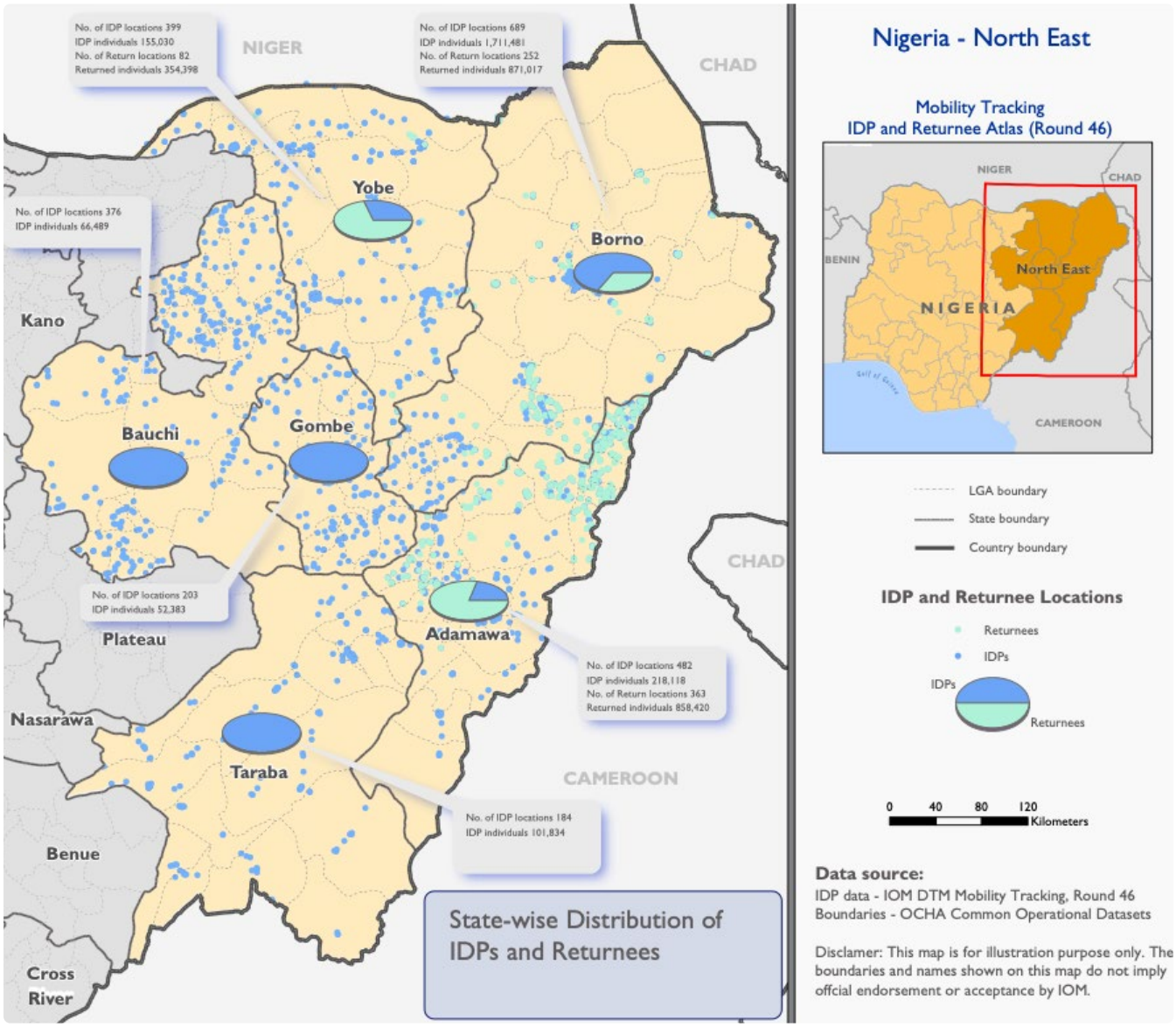
33 France 24 English, Nigerian military allegedly ran secret mass abortion programme in war on Boko Haram, France 24, December 8, 2022.

34 United Nations Security Council, Report of the Secretary-General on Conflict-Related Sexual Violence (S/2024/292), United Nations, April 4, 2024, §§85–86.

2 SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS CAMPS

As clashes continue in North East Nigeria, hundreds of thousands of people have fled rural areas to seek refuge in internally displaced persons (IDP) camps located on the outskirts of major cities, notably Maiduguri. In 2025, Borno State had approximately **1.75 million internally displaced persons**, representing nearly **77%** of the total recorded in the three most affected States—Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe—according to the International Organisation for Migration[35].

35 IOM, Displacement Tracking Matrix – Nigeria, 2025.



These camps, administered by the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) and State Emergency Management Agencies (SEMA), with the support of the IOM and other humanitarian partners, face extremely precarious living conditions: overcrowding, shortages of drinking water, inadequate sanitation facilities, limited access to education and reproductive health services, and inadequate security measures. This situation heightens the vulnerability of women and children, who are particularly exposed to abuse and sexual violence[36].

During an exploratory mission conducted in February 2024, **WWoW** teams observed these conditions of extreme precarity at Muna camp in Maiduguri, as well as among humanitarian staff responsible for managing it. The density of shelters, the lack of appropriate educational and medical services—particularly in reproductive health—and insufficient access to water and sanitation contribute to a situation of extreme vulnerability. Recurrent insecurity within and around the camps exacerbates this climate of danger and dependency[37].

According to **Human Rights Watch** and **Amnesty International**, sexual violence has been committed in several IDP camps in the North East Nigeria by camp officials, police officers, members of the security forces, and members of host communities[38]. This violence include:

- → Rape;
- → Sexual blackmail;
- → Sexual exploitation;
- → Forced abortion;
- → Other forms of sexual violence.

Women and young girls are often coerced into sexual relations in exchange for food, water, hygiene products, or promises of protection. The coercive environment imposed by armed forces and members of the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) makes any notion of consent impossible, turning these situations into systematic sexual violence[39].

The **reports of the United Nations Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Sexual Violence in Conflict** for 2018 and 2019 confirm these violations and explicitly mention the involvement of police officers, members of the Nigerian Security and Civil Defence Corps, and the CJTF. These reports also highlight the persistent stigma faced by women formerly held captive by Boko Haram: perceived as "wives" or "accomplices" of fighters, they are frequently rejected, harassed, or forced into survival prostitution[40].

Finally, the deterioration of socio-economic conditions in the camps has led to a significant increase in **early and forced marriages** among displaced populations. While these unions are often perceived as a form of protection or a survival strategy, they nonetheless reproduce dynamics of exploitation and expose young girls to an increased risk of sexual violence, unwanted pregnancies, and domestic abuse[41].

36 Christ, K, Gender and Terror: Boko Haram and the Abuse of Women in Nigeria, Georgetown Journal of International Affairs, April 5, 2022.

37 Visit conducted by WWoW teams on February 16, 2024, Maiduguri, Nigeria.

38 Human Rights Watch, Nigeria: Officials Abusing Displaced Women, Girls, Human Rights Watch, October 28, 2022.

39 Amnesty International, They Betrayed Us: Women Who Survived Boko Haram and Were Detained, Raped and Starved by Nigeria's Military, Amnesty International, May 2018.

40 Amnesty International, Nigeria : Ils ont pris nos maris et ont fait de nous leurs "compagnes" : des femmes affamées et violées par leurs prétendus sauveurs dans le nord-est du pays, Amnesty International, London, 2018.

41 Afulukwe, O, Obianwu, C, The Conflict in Northeast Nigeria's Impact on the Sexual and Reproductive Rights of Women and Girls, Center for Reproductive Rights, 2020.

	MANAGEMENT	FACTS	LOCATIONS
Satellite Camps[43]	Initially managed by the Nigerian armed forces, supported by the CJTF. From 2016/2017 onwards, these camps were officially managed by NEMA and SEMA, with the support of organisations and NGOs. In practice, the army and the CJTF continue to intervene in the management of these camps.	The army and the CJTF have been accused of committing sexual violence against camp residents, including: → Rape; → Sexual blackmail; → Sexual exploitation; → Other forms of sexual violence.	Bama Hospital camp, Banki, Rann, Damboa, Monguno, and Dikwa.
Formal Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) Camps	Camps are primarily managed by NEMA and SEMA, with the support of organisations (IOM) and NGOs, and with assistance from the Nigerian army and the CJTF.	The army, members of the CJTF, camp officials, and NEMA personnel have been accused of sexual violence against camp residents, including: → Rape; → Sexual exploitation; → Sexual blackmail.	Internally displaced persons (IDP) camps in and around Maiduguri.

↑
Summary table of locations and reported forms of sexual violence in camps[42]**:**

The precarious living conditions observed in internally displaced persons (IDP) camps—characterised by poverty, lack of livelihoods, limited access to reproductive healthcare, education, and security—expose women, girls, and boys to a high risk of sexual violence.

The absence of effective mechanisms for identification, protection, and access to justice exacerbates this vulnerability. In contexts of economic dependency and social control, sexual blackmail and exploitation become normalised practices, often perpetrated by actors entrusted with protective functions.

Within the framework of the project ***"Nigeria: innovative technologies to prevent and combat conflict-related sexual violence"***, it is essential to integrate these realities into prevention and response strategies. This involves the implementation of coordinated actions, including:

→ **systematic, gender-sensitive data collection** to document violence in detention and displacement settings;

→ **strengthening local capacities and training humanitarian and security personnel** on international protection standards;

→ active **participation of women and girls** in the design, implementation, and evaluation of prevention programmes;

→ and **awareness-raising among community and religious** authorities to reduce stigma and foster a safe environment for reporting violence.

Integrating these actions within a community-based, intersectoral, and human rights–based approach is essential to sustainably reduce the vulnerability of displaced populations and to ensure a coherent, inclusive response that respects the dignity of survivors.

42 Amnesty International, They Betrayed Us: Women Who Survived Boko Haram and Were Detained, Raped and Starved by Nigeria's Military, Amnesty International, May 2018.

43 Camps set up by the Nigerian army in towns recaptured from armed groups.

PART 3

THE MULTIFACETED CONSEQUENCES OF CONFLICT-RELATED SEXUAL VIOLENCE

The analysis of conflict-related sexual violence cannot be limited to an examination of its methods or perpetrators. Such violence is protracted in nature and produces complex effects that extend far beyond the initial act. It leaves deep physical and psychological scars, while also generating persistent social, economic, and community repercussions. Its impact extends beyond survivors themselves: it weakens family ties, erodes collective trust, and hinders processes of recovery and social cohesion.

These multiple and interconnected consequences affect individuals, families, and community structures. They manifest through a chain of trauma, stigma, and social rupture that perpetuates vulnerability and exclusion. Understanding this plurality of effects is a necessary prerequisite for the implementation of prevention, care, and rehabilitation strategies that are genuinely adapted to field realities and the needs of affected populations.

1 PHYSICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL CONSEQUENCES

Sexual violence exposes survivors to severe physical and psychological harm, the effects of which extend well beyond the initial assault.

Physical consequences include genital and internal injuries—such as tears, haemorrhaging, or the development of vaginal and anal fistulas—as well as a high risk of sexually transmitted infections, including HIV[44].

In Borno State, access to healthcare remains limited, particularly for survivors from rural areas or displaced populations. **Stigma, fear of reprisals, and lack of confidentiality deter many from seeking care from available health facilities.** As a result, many continue to suffer, months after the events, from chronic pain, infections, or untreated obstetric complications[45]. Community-based information and awareness-raising efforts are essential to encourage healthcare seeking of behaviour, ensure confidentiality, and establish referral mechanisms adapted to local humanitarian and security constraints.

The physical and psychological consequences of pregnancies resulting from rape are particularly severe. Although no comprehensive data exist to measure the extent, testimonies collected in IDP camps indicate numerous cases of unwanted pregnancies following abductions, raids, or abuse in captivity. In a context where access to obstetric care remains inadequate and abortion is prohibited under the Nigerian Penal Code[46], survivors face increased risks of malnutrition, childbirth complications, maternal and neonatal mortality, as well as resorting to unsafe clandestine abortions. The lack of adequate prenatal and postnatal care further compromises the health of both mothers and newborns[47].

The psychological repercussions are equally profound. Sexual violence frequently results in post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, anxiety, panic attacks, nightmares, and persistent feelings of shame and guilt[48].

Individuals formerly held captive by armed groups often display an increased traumatic vulnerability, due to the repetition and duration of the abuse endured—particularly rape, sexual slavery, or forced marriages. These experiences lead to loss of trust, emotional dissociation, impaired concentration and memory, as well as social isolation that hinders any attempt at reintegration.

These cumulative physical and psychological consequences reflect the depth of both individual and collective trauma generated by conflict-related sexual violence. They underscore the urgent need to strengthen healthcare, psychological support, and rehabilitation services in affected areas.

44 Doctors Without Borders, Prise en charge des victimes de violences sexuelles, Médecins Sans Frontières, s.d.

45 Amnesty International, Nigeria : des jeunes filles rescapées qui ont échappé à Boko Haram témoignent, Amnesty International, June 2024.

46 Federal Republic of Nigeria, Penal Code (applicable in Borno State), Chapter 345, Articles 232–236, Nigeria Government.

47 Afulukwe, O, Obianwu, C, The Conflict in Northeast Nigeria's Impact on the Sexual and Reproductive Rights of Women and Girls, Center for Reproductive Rights, 2020.

48 Olomojobi, Y, Frontiers of Jihad: Radical Islam in Africa, Safari Books Ltd, Ibadan, 2015.

2 STIGMATISATION AND SOCIAL MARGINALISATION

The rejection and re-victimisation of women, girls, and children affected by sexual violence must be understood within the context of the ongoing insurgency in North East Nigeria[49]. In a region deeply scarred by abuses committed by Boko Haram and ISWAP, survivors are often perceived as a potential threat.

Within many communities, women, girls, and children born of rape are considered to be linked to armed groups. Beliefs rooted in local cultural representations—particularly those associated with witchcraft—reinforce these collective fears. The scale of violence suffered by populations in Borno State fuels widespread mistrust, turning survivors' suffering into a social stigma. Women and girls returning from captivity are referred to by communities as "Boko Haram wives", "Sambisa women", "Boko Haram blood", and "Annoba", meaning epidemic.

Describing women as an "epidemic" reflects **fears that exposure to Boko Haram has radicalised them** and that, once reintegrated into communities, they may radicalise others[50].

This perception often leads to deep family ruptures. Some survivors are rejected by their husbands, fathers, or other family members, while others receive a more tolerant reception, often based on the belief that they were abducted against their will rather than have left voluntarily[51].

Social rejection, stigmatisation, and fear surrounding survivors perpetuate their marginalisation and compromise prospects for sustainable reintegration, while fuelling a cycle of discrimination, isolation, and poverty.

49 UNICEF, Bad Blood: Perceptions of Children Born of Conflict-Related Sexual Violence and Women and Girls Associated with Boko Haram in Northeast Nigeria, UNICEF, 2016.

50 Amnesty International, Nigéria : des jeunes filles rescapées qui ont échappé à Boko Haram témoignent, Amnesty International, s.d.

51 Ibid.

3 ECONOMIC CONSEQUENCES OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE

Economically, conflict-related sexual violence has devastating and long-lasting effects. Inability to work due to physical and psychological trauma is compounded by fear of rejection or stigma within communities of origin. **This marginalisation leads to increased economic dependency and structural impoverishment among survivors.**

In Borno State, many women who have experienced sexual violence are expelled from their homes or excluded from their communities. Deprived of familial or social support, they lose their livelihoods and find themselves in situations of extreme precarity. This exclusion also represents a loss of economic productivity for affected communities and increases pressure on already fragile social systems. In order to survive, some survivors are forced into high-risk informal activities: precarious labour, forced migration, or survival prostitution, exposing them to new forms of exploitation, trafficking, and revictimisation.

4 CHILDREN BORN OF RAPE

Stigmatisation does not stop with the survivors. **Children born of rape** constitute another particularly vulnerable group.

In a context characterised by fear, restrictive social norms, persistent impunity, and limited access to essential services, the underreporting of sexual violence remains widespread. Reports by international and local organisations highlight the frequency of forced marriages and imposed pregnancies during raids and captivity, yet their exact scope remains difficult to determine[52].

According to data collected from a sample of 60 direct female beneficiaries, **nearly 69% of survivors of sexual violence gave birth to a child.**[53]. These children are often perceived as the offspring of Boko Haram fighters and symbolically associated with the enemy. This social perception leads to rejection, discrimination, and physical or psychological abuse. Even when some families adopt more nuanced attitudes, the majority of affected communities remain reluctant to accept these children, who are seen to carry a legacy of violence and shame.

Without prevention, awareness-raising, and community dialogue initiatives, these children risk being stigmatised throughout their lives, thereby perpetuating cycles of exclusion and marginalisation[54].

Ultimately, the economic and social consequences of sexual violence fuel a spiral of vulnerabilities: loss of autonomy, economic dependency, isolation, and the disintegration of the social fabric. Within the framework of the project implemented in Borno State, understanding these dynamics is essential in order to design integrated response strategies that combine psychosocial support, economic empowerment, and sustainable community rehabilitation.

52 United Nations, Report of the Secretary-General on Children and Armed Conflict: Nigeria (S/2024/559), United Nations Security Council, 2024.

53 Beneficiaries supported during focus groups conducted by GRA and WWoW as part of the project "Nigeria: innovative technologies to prevent and combat conflict-related sexual violence", in partnership with BSF and funded by the CDCS of the MEAE.

54 UNICEF, Bad Blood: Perceptions of Children Born of Conflict-Related Sexual Violence and Women and Girls Associated with Boko Haram in Northeast Nigeria, UNICEF, 2016.

INTERVIEW

MY NAME IS

Fatima...

... I am a national leader of the Women and Children Conflict Survivors Foundation (WCCSF). I have worked with the survivors' network for almost seven years and previously served as coordinator for the survivors network in Maiduguri. The network has nine leaders across three state Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe with three in each. As coordinator, I convene and organize meetings whenever necessary, especially when programs or activities are scheduled. My role focuses on mobilizing survivors, fostering peer support, and ensuring that survivors' voices are represented in local, national and international platforms.

Based on your experience within the network, what are the most prevalent forms of sexual violence in the context of the conflict in Borno State? Have you observed changes over time in the practices of armed groups?

From my experience, the most prevalent form of conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) has been forced marriage, representing about 96% of reported cases, followed by abduction and rape. During insurgent attacks, women were often abducted, forcibly married, and subjected to rape while in captivity.

In recent years, however, there has been a huge reduction in cases especially in the communities we work in. This decrease is linked to a reduction in insurgent attacks on communities. When attacks were frequent, abductions and forced marriages were widespread, but as attacks lessened, the scale of CRSV also dropped.

Nevertheless, the consequences of forced marriages and rapes committed in the earlier years of the insurgency continue to affect survivors and their families, especially in terms of stigma, rejection, and trauma. While the tactics of armed groups may have shifted with reduced attacks, the legacy of these crimes remains deeply present in the lives of survivors.

You have worked for several years in a leadership role within the network. Based on your observations and your personal experience, what are the most significant consequences faced by survivors of conflict-related sexual violence in Borno State, both at the individual level and within their communities? How does your network respond to these consequences?

The most significant consequence survivors face is stigmatization and rejection by their families and communities. Survivors are often blamed, excluded, or seen as dishonored. Children born of the conflict suffer discrimination, being called names such as "Boko Haram children," and are treated differently from other children. This deeply affects both the mothers and the children, creating a cycle of exclusion and emotional pain.

Survivors also struggle with psychological trauma, and some

resort to negative coping mechanisms, such as transactional sex or substance abuse, to survive or cope with rejection. This compounds their vulnerability and exposes them to further risks.

As a network, we work to counter these consequences through sensitization, counseling, and awareness creation. We engage both survivors and their families and also address wider community members to reduce stigma and promote reintegration. These interventions have been impactful, cases of stigma and rejection have reduced but we know that there is still more we can do, though we are limited by resources. Survivors are increasingly finding acceptance, and families are more open to supporting them. While challenges remain, these efforts have helped to restore dignity and hope to many survivors.

Does your network also provide support to male survivors of sexual violence? If so, what specific obstacles or forms of stigma do they face compared to women and girls?

Until recently, our network did not include male survivors, as they were often perceived as perpetrators rather than victims. However, during mobilization under the GSF IRM project, we encountered male survivors and recognized that they also suffer from CRSV.

One case involved a boy abducted at age 15 who was forcibly married and had three children before turning 20. Others reported being raped, including through anal sexual violence. These cases revealed that men and boys are also subjected to severe abuse.

Despite this, male survivors face extreme stigma, even more than women, because awareness has largely focused on female survivors. There is limited community acceptance of men speaking out about sexual violence, which increases their isolation and prevents them from accessing support. Our network is only beginning to address these realities, but much work is needed to reduce stigma and create safe spaces for male survivors to be heard and assisted.

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