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## An Overview of the Activities of Different Actors in the Reconstruction Efforts in Borno, Nigeria: 2016 - 2023

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## **An Overview of the Activities of Different Actors in the Reconstruction Efforts in Borno, Nigeria: 2016 - 2023**

### **Abstract**

Nigeria-Boko Haram's competition for dominance has been the subject of many scholarly works and commentaries. Evidence shows that Nigeria is emerging victorious in the military struggle and the country is building on this relative success by engaging in infrastructural reconstruction that is akin to post-war rebuilding. With Borno State as the focal point, this article summarizes the activities of different actors (local and international) in the reconstruction efforts. Through a qualitative survey of different primary documents such as reports, news articles, videos, and other relevant materials, this study finds that the reconstruction efforts in Borno State between the years 2016 and 2023 is the third in a tripartite arrangement (which are reclamation of territories, return of governmental administration to recovered territories, and infrastructural reconstruction in the state—all still supported by the military). It concludes by emphasizing that while this article has summarized reconstruction in Borno State, the success or failure of this reconstruction efforts requires a future assessment through further studies. Finally, it recommends that Nigeria, as the dominant actor, must continue to assert its influence to avoid a relapse that could undo the ongoing reconstruction in the affected areas.

### **Acknowledgements**

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## Introduction

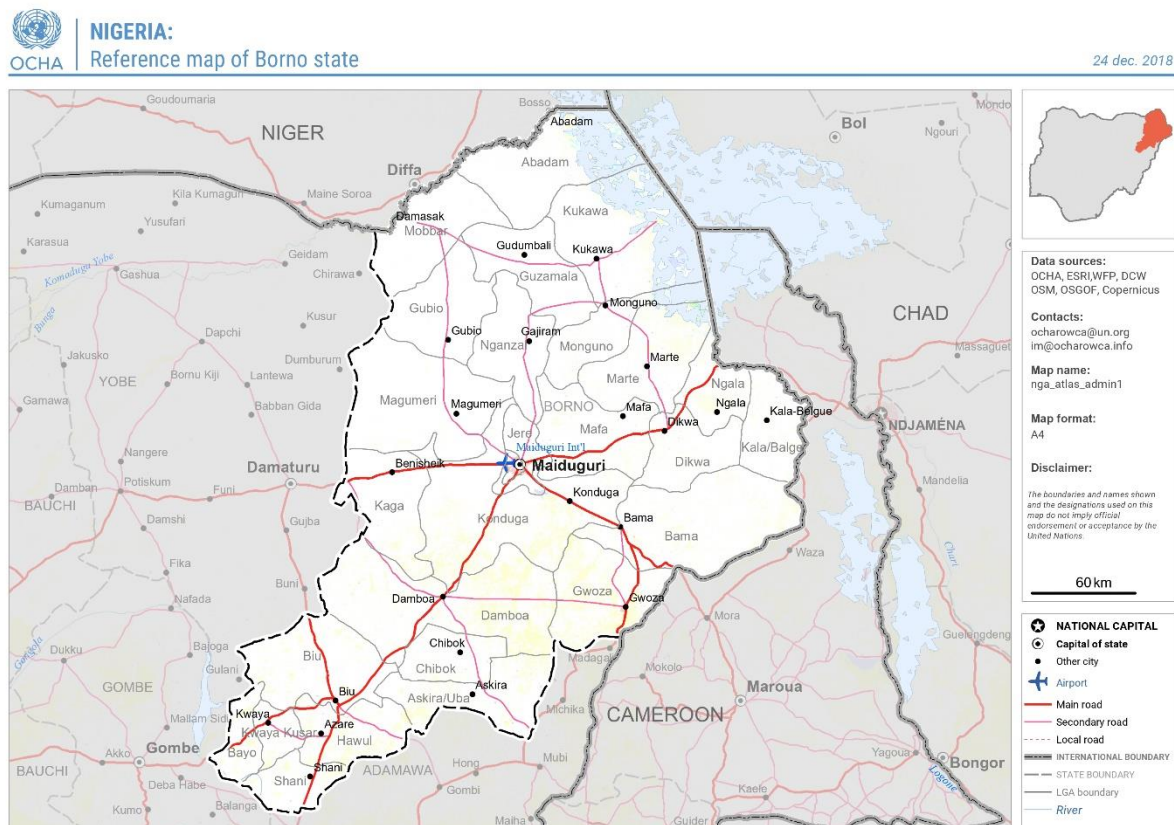
The crisis in the northeastern part of Nigeria has been the focus of a plethora of studies. Between 2009 and 2024, several experts explored different aspects of Boko Haram (and, by extension, ISWAP) in terms of its genesis, atrocities, support system, prospects of the counter-terrorist approach of the country, and the ideological composition of the group.<sup>1</sup> Others have examined the impacts of the activities of the group in the affected regions.<sup>2</sup> More recently, we have also seen the positioning of the crisis in relation to other forms of insecurity such as banditry, kidnapping, cattle rustling and more.<sup>3</sup> While the crisis is still far from over, as we have seen from recent activities and occasional attacks by terrorists, concerted efforts to rebuild the affected communities have already begun, especially in Borno State.<sup>4</sup> Despite this, existing studies on the conflict have largely neglected the phenomenon of the reconstruction as it relates to Boko Haram terrorist groups and its splinter groups, such as Islamic State's West African Province (ISWAP). Against this backdrop, this study intends to give an overview of the efforts to rebuild affected communities in Nigeria with a focus on Borno State, which was one of the epicenters of the crisis in the beginning.

### Impacts of Terrorist Attacks on Borno State

Borno has been chosen for this study because the state is one of the most affected states in Nigeria as a result of attacks by Boko Haram and ISWAP. The genesis of the group itself is tied to Borno State because the late leader and founder of Boko Haram, Muhammad Yusuf, began his active campaigns in Maiduguri, the capital of Borno.<sup>5</sup> Accordingly, it has been noted that the destruction of lives and property is specifically severe in Borno State, where there have been millions of internally displaced persons and other impacts such as the weakening of agricultural production due to loss of human lives, properties, and livestock.<sup>6</sup> A recent study shows that the Boko Haram insurgency has led to the deterioration of "social, economic, and political structures and processes" in Borno.<sup>7</sup> Other impacts include disruption of well-being and development.<sup>8</sup> According to a survey by the Borno State government, the destruction of "physical and socioeconomic infrastructure by the insurgency is severe and significantly affects development. The quantum of infrastructure damage in Borno State is valued at about 1380 billion Naira".<sup>9</sup> The extent of damage and the

degree of need for infrastructural development as part of reconstruction is further re-affirmed when we consider the sheer size of Borno State. With its sprawling 70,898 km<sup>2</sup> of land area, Borno is almost the size of the BENELUX countries of Belgium (30,688 km<sup>2</sup>), the Netherlands (41,850 km<sup>2</sup>), and Luxembourg (2,586 km<sup>2</sup>). Thus, it can be suggested that the impacts of the terrorist attacks on Borno, as well as the size of the state provide an important background for this brief study.

Image 1 Map reference of Borno State, Nigeria



Source: UNOCHA

## Theoretical Frames: Post-Conflict Reconstruction Framework (PCRF), Idealism and Soft Power Diplomacy

*PCRF*: This study underlines the phenomenon of reconstruction in Borno through the frame of the Post-Conflict Reconstruction framework as expounded by the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) and the Association of the United States Army (AUSA).<sup>10</sup> The framework holds that reconstruction begins with the cessation of active violent engagement or full-blown war and the onset of normalization. The period of normalization begins with limited outside intervention, the return of governance, and economic projects, and the

conduct of external or internal affairs in an acceptable way., devoid of active violent engagements.<sup>11</sup> Although the framework fits largely into inter-state or country-wide reconstruction efforts such as the post-USA invasion of Japan and the defeat of Nazi Germany, it nonetheless offers a frame to understand the activities of different actors in Borno which is just one of the states affected in Nigeria. The framework outlines four key pillars of reconstruction which are “security; justice/reconciliation; social/economic well-being; and governance/participation.”<sup>12</sup> The relevance of this theory to the present study rests on its emphasis on the need for partial cessation of full-blown war before reconstruction efforts begin. Based on this, it is understandable that the rebuilding of infrastructure, as led by the federal government of Nigeria does not necessarily require the full cessation of violent conflicts or wars.

Similarly to this, recent scholarship activities have sought to establish a link between development and insecurity in Nigeria as noted by Ugbedeajo and Aliyu.<sup>13</sup> They posit that peace and development, or in this case, reconstruction requires an atmosphere devoid of violent conflicts. Thus, it became imperative to understand that the gradual reconstruction efforts in Borno State are an indicator of a gradual return to normalcy in the state. Although this framework has provided a basis for the commencement of reconstruction efforts by Nigeria, it does not fully explain why different foreign actors have contributed to the ongoing reconstruction effort. To understand this, it is imperative to look at idealism and soft power diplomacy.

### *Idealism and Soft Power Diplomacy*

To understand why state actors have come together in a collective effort to assist Nigeria in the reconstruction effort, I emphasize the relevance of idealism as a theory of international relations and borrow from the concept of soft power diplomacy. According to proponents of idealism, the international system as defined, is an environment where states must cooperate to maintain their interests. Thus, when one state actor is affected by a crisis or humanitarian disaster, others are wont to assist. Linking this to soft power diplomacy – which proposes that states engage in humanitarian and similar activities to project positive images and by extension, influence future behaviors of the benefactor state, it becomes clear that the international actors in Borno State are also advancing their diplomatic influences by providing humanitarian assistance to Nigeria. As argued by Peter Wilson, “entrusting international security to the UN, creating an African Union on the

model of the EU, or the global eradication of poverty and injustice” are parts of the ideals of idealism.<sup>14</sup> These two frameworks – idealism and soft power diplomacy are apparent in the rhetoric of some principal actors in the reconstruction efforts in Borno. In the case of the EU for example, it is explicit that “continued instability in this region of Lake Chad basin can have negative consequences on migration, spill-over of conflicts, organised crime, proliferation of small arms and light weapons as well as terrorism.” As such, the provision of reconstruction aid to the region is one of the EU’s efforts to address, among other reasons, immigration to the EU on humanitarian grounds.<sup>15</sup>

### Actors Involved in Reconstruction Efforts in Borno

The numerous actors that have been involved in the reconstruction efforts in Borno State can be classified broadly into two which are local actors such as the federal government, state government, private groups and NGOs that are domiciled in Nigeria. The second category of actors are international groups such as regional organisations like the EU, states like the United States of America, United Kingdom, and other foreign NGOs.

#### *National Actors*

Due to the overwhelming cost of the conflict and its severe impacts on “Nigeria as the primary (state of) target for more than a decade”, it is understandable that the country is at the front seat in terms of reconstruction in Borno State.<sup>16</sup> Nigeria initiated reconstruction plans and institutions such as the TY Danjuma-led committee that collated the Buhari Plan for Rebuilding the North East in 2016 through the Presidential Committee on Northeast Initiatives (PCNI) and the eventual institutionalization of the North-East Development Commission, Victim Support Fund, Borno State Agency for Coordination of Sustainable Development and Humanitarian Response (BOACSDHR) and other institutions.

#### *North-East Development Commission (NEDC)*

Established through the NEDC Act of the year 2017, the group is responsible for coordinating all developmental efforts in the North-Eastern part of the country with the aims of fostering long term reconstruction and rebuilding of the region.<sup>17</sup> It is saddled with:

the responsibility of, among other things, receiving and managing funds allocated by the federal government and international donors for the resettlement, rehabilitation, integration and reconstruction of roads, houses and business premises of victims of insurgency and terrorism as well as tackling the menace of poverty, illiteracy, ecological problems and any other related environmental or developmental challenges in the north-east states; and for related matters.<sup>18</sup>

The states that are covered include the North-Eastern states of Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Taraba, and Yobe.<sup>19</sup> In the inaugural speech by the President at the time, the group was tasked with:

resettlement and rehabilitation of internally displaced persons to their original homes or new communities, (and to) shift focus from humanitarian assistance as soon as possible in all relevant areas of developmental and infrastructural projects such as reconstruction of houses and educational institutions and business premises destroyed by Boko Haram.<sup>20</sup>

In 2019, the commission was inaugurated with a take-off budget of about 10 billion naira (about 6,5 million USD).<sup>21</sup> It has since continued to receive tremendous financial support from the federal government. In 2022, the commission developed its elaborate plan in a document known as the North-East Stabilization and Development Master Plan (NESDMP) with key pillars for long-term development. The key pillars, according to the document, are to ensure:

peaceful society, connected region, leadership in agriculture, healthy citizens, educated populace, flourishing trade, productive entrepreneurs, purposeful infrastructure, industrialisation, memorable experience, and protected environment.<sup>22</sup>

After an elaborate assessment of a ten-year development plan, the commission's managing director, Mohammed Alkali, remarks that they would require an estimated ₦31.05 trillion or \$80 billion.<sup>23</sup> The NEDC has reportedly executed more than 200 development-related projects in more than 100 local government areas under its geographical

sphere.<sup>24</sup> Other projects include NEDC Educational Endowment Fund and other interventions.<sup>25</sup>

### *Victim Support Fund (VSF)*

As part of the reconstruction efforts and outside the ongoing physical infrastructural development, the government also introduced an initiative called the Victim Support Fund (VSF) for individuals. It was initiated to assist the Internally Displaced Persons (IDP). The group was initially set up in 2014 through the Presidential Committee on Victims Support Fund (PCVSF). Led by T. Y. Danjuma, the group's primary mission is to raise funds for victims of terrorist attacks and to assist in administering the necessary positive changes.<sup>26</sup> The program areas of VSF include empowerment of women through economic initiatives, educational support initiative, foster care, infrastructural intervention, health, and peace building. The activities of the group have culminated into re-housing and resettling of more than 80,000 Internally Displaced Persons.<sup>27</sup> Apart from this, the group has provided psycho-social support, educational training, agricultural-based intervention, boreholes, household support, and distribution of food to assist in the humanitarian area as a part of reconstruction.<sup>28</sup>

Image 2 One of the infrastructural projects by VSF. Source: <https://victimssupportfund.org/gallery-grid/>





Other efforts by the Nigerian government include the activities of the Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs, Disaster Management, and Social Development, such as the donation of 70,600 clothing materials to affected women and men, respectively.<sup>29</sup>

*Borno State Agency for Coordination of Sustainable Development and Humanitarian Response (BOACSDHR)*

Apart from the humanitarian and developmental plan at the national level, the Borno State government has also embarked on projects of reconstruction at the state level. In 2019, the state's government launched BOACSDHR. The primary aim of the initiative was to harmonize and assist in the implementation of the developmental plan in the state while working with "international and national non-governmental organizations (INGOs/NNGOs) and civil society/community-based organizations (CSOs/CBOs) operating in the state".<sup>30</sup> In June 2020, the state under Governor Zulum published its 25-year development framework and ten-year strategic transformation plan.<sup>31</sup> According to the plan, the state intends to move away from humanitarian assistance and resettlement of victims from the state to the actual economic transformation of Borno State.

The intended transformation includes making the state a reliable commercial hub for agriculture-related business to ensure long-term sustainable development. This is especially important given the sheer size of the state and the abundance of land for various agricultural endeavors. BOACSDHR outlines five strategic pillars which are: human capital development, leadership in agriculture, healthy citizenry, sustainable environment, and becoming a regional trade hub. To ensure the success of this plan, they added four enabling strategic pillars, which are: (i) reconstruction, rehabilitation, and resettlement, (ii) purposeful infrastructure, (iii) accountable governance, and (iv) peace & security.<sup>32</sup> Other key concerns for long-term development include revitalization of health and education sectors, addressing gender-based violence and infrastructural deficit.

The relative success of these combined efforts in terms of planning and implementation has been gradual. Reports show that more than 40 new primary healthcare centers have been built and equipped in 19 Local Government Areas in Borno State.<sup>33</sup> According to Governor Zulum, 18 general hospitals in 13 Local Government areas have been rehabilitated for use in the state within the last four years spanning

2019 to 2023.<sup>34</sup> Other notable projects include schools, roads, electricity, and patrol vehicles.<sup>35</sup>

## International Support for Recovery

Several international actors have also been involved in the recovery and reconstruction efforts in Borno. These include foreign countries such as the USA and the United Kingdom; regional organizations such as the EU; Governmental International Organizations such as UN agencies; and other international non-governmental organizations.

### *European Union*

In 2017, the EU approved the EU Support to Response, Recovery and Resilience in Borno State.<sup>36</sup> With a start date of 28 Apr 2017 and an EU contribution of €20 000 000, the project was aimed at strengthening the reliance of affected communities in Borno.<sup>37</sup> .<sup>38</sup> As an international group, the regional organization partnered with the Food and Agriculture Organization, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality, and the Empowerment of Women, as well as the World Food Programme – WFP. According to the EU, the main objective of the initiative was to improve the resilience of affected citizens and inhabitants of Borno State in areas that relate to food security. With the plan, they also sought to enhance the development of subsistence farming, to facilitate access to basic social services for vulnerable persons through the provision of access to basic health care, nutrition, water, sanitation, and hygiene. An important part of their intervention is the drive to promote the protection of women youths, and other vulnerable groups.

In a continuous effort, in January 2018, the EU launched a comprehensive €123 million (estimated at 133 million USD) program that continued the same overall objective. <sup>39</sup> As a complementary effort, the regional group worked in synergy with other actors in the region, especially through the federal, state, and local government partnerships that had been designed in Nigeria earlier. In their sectorial contextualization of the aid, the EU outlines that terrorist-induced instability and violent conflict in the “region of Lake Chad basin can have negative consequences on migration, spill-over of conflicts, organized crime, proliferation of small arms and light weapons as well as terrorism.”<sup>40</sup> The EU intervention in the region also includes:

- Multi-sector support to the internally displaced persons in Adamawa and Borno States implemented by the International Rescue Committee (EUR 4,000,000)
- Promotion of peaceful coexistence among displaced communities in Northeast Nigeria implemented in Borno State with EUR 2 123 000
- Supporting the stability program implemented in Borno and Adamawa by donating EUR 5,500,000
- Investing in the Safety and Integrity of Nigerian Girls (I-SING) – implemented in Borno by Mercy Corps with EUR 3 500 633
- Enhancing community-level conflict management capacity in the Northeastern states of Yobe, Borno and Adamawa by British Council by committing EUR 21 000 000.<sup>41</sup>

### *UK Government*

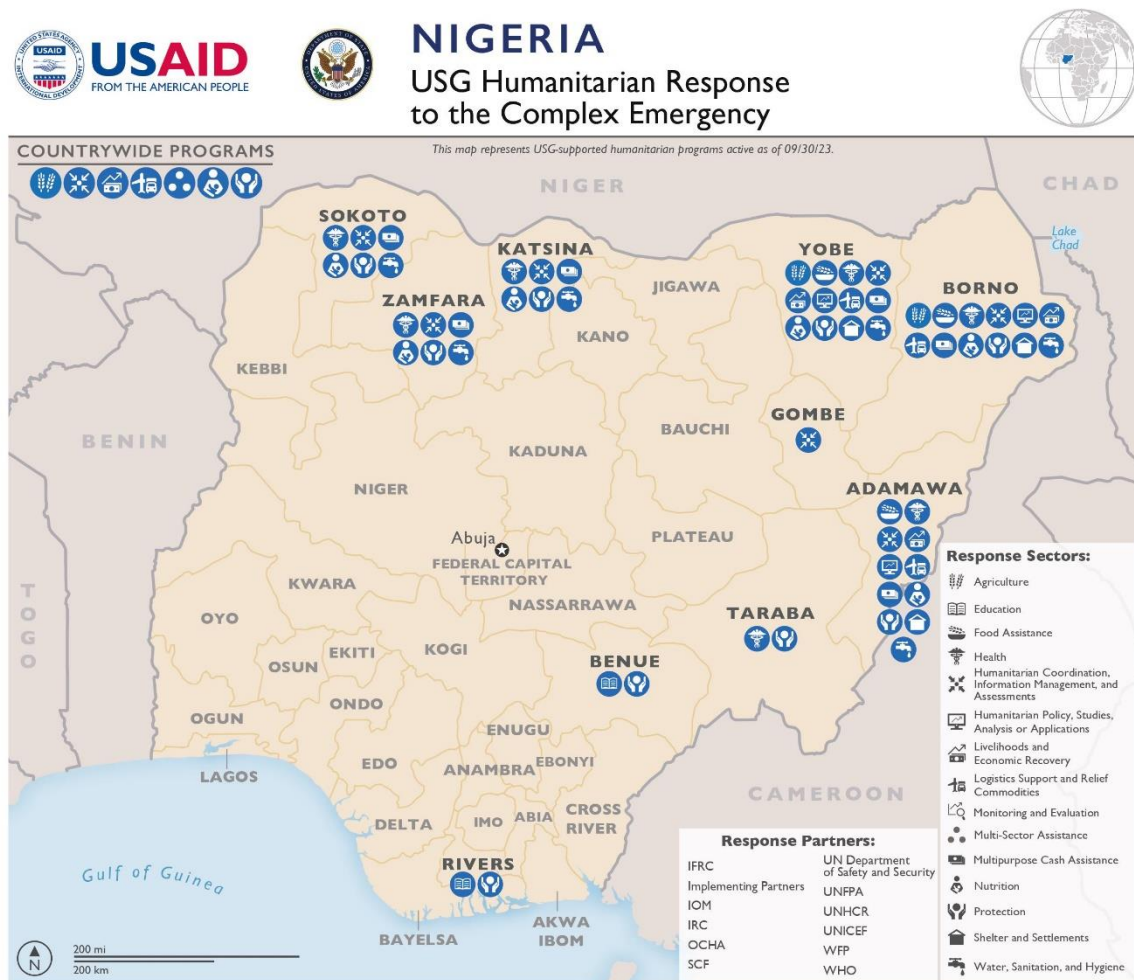
As part of the collective efforts at helping in the reconstruction of places affected by the Boko Haram group, the UK government under Boris Johnson, during a visit to Borno, outlined plans to assist in the efforts of the Nigerian government. In 2017, the UK International Development Secretary, Priti Patel announced a five-year plan at the cost of £200 million to help in combating famine, infrastructure, and lack of access to education. In the words of the UK Development Secretary, the provision of aid and support in the reconstruction of the region is “about helping a Commonwealth partner in its time of need as well as addressing the root causes of international challenges such as migration.”<sup>42</sup> Other programs through the Ukaid scheme include support to the Lafiya Programme and other measures.

### *USA and USAID*

Also lending humanitarian support to complement the efforts of Nigeria in the region is the USA government. In 2016, USAID supported five NGO partners, UNICEF and the UN World Food Program, for the coordination and implementation of nutrition activities in the BAY states of Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe.<sup>43</sup> The humanitarian package includes cash vouchers, volunteer mobilization of local volunteers, provision of ready-to-use therapeutic food (RUTF) for severely malnourished children, and technical assistance to local centers.<sup>44</sup> As one of the committed international groups in the region, the United States, through USAID and others has been active. According to a document:

From November 2016 to October 2018, USAID maintained a Disaster Assistance Response Team (DART) to lead the USG response to the humanitarian crisis in northeastern Nigeria. To support the field activities of the DART, USAID also established a Washington, D.C.-based Response Management Team, which deactivated in August 2018. Support was transitioned to the USAID/BHA Humanitarian Assistance Response Technical Office based in Nigeria’s capital city of Abuja.<sup>45</sup>

Image 3: Active spots of USG for Nigeria Complex Emergency, 2023.



### Agencies

Different agencies of the United Nations such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR), the World

Food Programme (WFP), and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) have also been involved in one way or another. UNICEF, for example, has been able to train volunteers who have been instrumental in rebuilding the lives of individuals who were displaced due to the insurgency. The group was also important in procuring polio vaccination, grassroots mobilization, and support to primary healthcare.<sup>46</sup>

## Conclusion

Between 2009 and 2015, Boko Haram managed to destabilize the northeastern region of Nigeria in what could easily be referred to as the biggest disaster in the recorded history of the region. It is also the second largest humanitarian disaster in Nigeria after the civil war. In combating Boko Haram, Nigeria spearheaded the counter-terrorist efforts while other state actors contributed in similar ways. The Nigeria-Boko Haram competition for dominance, and indeed, the country's fight against terrorist groups (including ISWAP) can be classified into three broad stages which are (i) reclamation of territories under Boko Haram, (ii) governmental administration of the area and (iii) reconstruction of reclaimed territories.

The reclamation of territories that were once under Boko Haram through military force began with the intensive commitment of military assets to the area. As observed in a previous study on Boko Haram, especially on territorial integrity and the drive to establish a Caliphate by Boko Haram and ISWAP in parts of Nigeria, "there can only be one dominant sovereign player . . . or two players in different states depending on the outcomes."<sup>47</sup> By asserting its military dominance, Nigeria as a sovereign state has reduced the territorial influence of the group and validated the importance of maintaining a robust capacity by state actors.<sup>48</sup> The administration of Borno State and, indeed, the other local states in the region has also become cemented through the activities of the state government. To ease the reconstruction effort, local state officials have re-established their authority in stark contrast to the previous declaration of martial law in parts of the northeastern region and the establishment of a parallel state by the group. As evidenced in the body of this work, the reconstruction effort is the last step in the tripartite arrangement of reclamation-administration-and-reconstruction, which is still ongoing. However, it is instructive to note that although Nigeria, as a state actor, has made relative progress in the war against terrorist groups, the war is still far from over. As a result,

more still needs to be done to avoid a large resurrection of terrorist groups in different forms that may undo the recorded gains in the reconstruction efforts.

Finally, to understand the success or failure of the various reconstruction efforts, future studies will require an evaluation of the different developmental programs in Borno State.

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