ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Communicating Security Intelligence and Inclusive Participation of Women in Reporting Early Warning Signs in North Central Nigeria

GYANG MUSA BERE

Institute of Strategic and Development Communication Nasarawa State University, Keff Bgbere83@gmail.com

Abstract

The non-inclusion of non-state actors such as women and youths in gathering and communicating security intelligence and early warning signals in Nigeria has worsened the level of security challenges confronting the country, where women and youths have remained vulnerable and victims of violent attacks. The unhealthy development has swelled up various internally displaced persons camps across the country with the population of women and children. The scenario has overwhelmed rural communities in North Central Nigeria where dozens of women and children have been butchered, massacred and sometimes roasted like chickens during coordinated attacks carried out by suspected herdsmen. Some of the women who survived the onslaughts lost their spouses while some youths lost their parents during the bloodbath encounter thereby becoming orphans. This paper examined the role of women gathering security intelligence and reporting early warning signals in North Central Nigeria where women have continued to be victims of attack. Both primary and secondary data were used. Four security experts and stakeholders were interviewed. Diffusion of innovation theory was deployed as theoretical framework. The study found that it is extremely important for policy makers in government, security agencies and traditional rulers at the community level to ensure women and youths' participation in gathering and communicating security early warning signs to security agencies for swift action. It was also discovered that women have not been given the opportunity to grow to the peak in the security sector in Nigeria where critical security decisions are taken. The study concludes that women and youths form the largest components of the Nigeria population and have the ability and capacity to contribute immensely in strengthening and building robust security architecture through gathering and communicating early warning signals to avert further security breach. The paper recommended that women and youths should be given a place in the security architecture in Nigeria; they should be trained and empowered with communication skills to communicate early warning signals to security agencies for prompt action.

Key words: communication, security intelligence, women participation, early warning signs

Introduction

The inability of security agencies in Nigeria to properly engage community leaders, women and youths in identifying, gathering and communicating early warning signals and security intelligence in various communities across Nigeria has contributed hugely to the current security challenges confronting the nation. The security challenges ranging from Boko Haram, farmer/herders clashes, banditry, and kidnapping among others are orchestrated by various criminal elements who have unleashed terror on innocent citizens (Kwaja, 2020). The unhealthy development in some cases is as a result of lack of proper flow of information from the security agencies to non-state security actors and rural communities that often lead to mistrust and lack of understanding. It is against this backdrop that communication is increasingly considered very essential in facilitating stakeholders' engagement in community policing to promote social cohesion (Mefalopulos, 2008). The swelling security challenges in the country are traceable to lapses in intelligence gathering and proper communication of early warning information to security agencies for timely response. According to Keyserlingk and Kopfmuller (2006), the "concept of early warning" was first developed during the Cold War in the field of national military intelligence to enhance the capacity of predicting potential attacks. At the level of United Nations, early warning was introduced as an instrument to forecast natural disasters such as droughts and earthquakes, among others. In Nigeria, early warning is employed to predict or respond to both

natural disasters and violent attacks in rural communities. However, early warning efforts in rural communities in Nigeria do not intend to suppress conflicts, but to respond swiftly to the trajectory of conflict. The term early warning is often used to describe activities such as conflict analysis and monitoring, data analysis, risk assessment or advocacy, which are related to early warning, but do not represent early warning approaches in the strict sense.

Early warning is understood as:
A part of mechanism that helps us to size up threats of early crisis by reporting such promptly to the appropriate decision makers to take action. Failure to respond appropriately to stem the tide of the crisis might brew bigger consequences to manage. (Keyserlingk & Kopfmuller, 2006).

The main concern of early warning is to dictate the signs of conflict escalation or dysfunctional conflicts in early warning in order to initiate preventive measures which are early response and early action. Keyserlingk and Kopfmuller (2006) posit that early warning is used to describe an initiative that focuses on systematic data collection, analysis and formulation of recommendations, including risk assessment information sharing, whether they are quantitative, qualitative or a blend of both.

No doubt, early warning manifests differently in different circumstances depending on the composition of the issues and actors in the emergent conflict. There would be different expectations on how early warning systems should perform and what they achieve. This means that conflict early warning system, early warning services, comprehensive early warning networks and complex early warning mechanisms have different tasks.

Keyserlingk and Kopfmuller (2006) propose five main objectives of conflict early warning signal which communities should observe thoroughly and communicate promptly to avert the transformation of conflict into violence. These objectives include:

- To continuously monitor the development process of potentially violent conflicts;
- To serve as a neutral source of information:
- To analyze any given situation to define and detect trends for future development;
- To introduce information regarding conflict into the public domain to encourage discussion and awareness;
- To influence the course of conflicts to prevent or de-escalate violence.

Conflict early warning systems are designed to provide reliable information on potential conflict threats to peace and security in a timely manner. The information should be analyzed to create scenarios, anticipate most likely development and to propose appropriate response options designed to prevent and or limit violent conflicts in urban and rural communities in Nigeria. Based on the available information, certain pattern of conflicts in Nigeria can best describe the trend of conflicts that transpires in Africa as a show of lack of effective and proactive structure for early warning system. This can be blamed on the Westphalia notion of security that places emphasis on the security of states or regimes security while human security that is inclusive of all is relegated to a secondary position.

According to Fusato (2003), one of the frameworks of early warning puts the marker of early warning into two categories: signs and indicators. The indicators include data which when studied over time give insight into the economic and political conditions. They are long term in perspective and include quantitative and qualitative information such as crime rates among certain group, trend in unemployment, negative attitude forms of expression and political association.

Signs are more sudden and irregular but point to fundamental changes in a situation of a country or the worsening of inter-group relations. They include sharp increases in violent crime, vandalism, protests, threats or rhetoric as well as upsurge in ethnic and religiously motivated attacks (Fusato, 2003).

With the daily increasing security challenges in Nigeria that have perished dozens of lives, particularly women and children in rural communities, government and security agencies

should put more efforts to ensure inclusive participation of women and youths in gathering and communicating conflict early warning signals through bottom-top communication approach. This will help in addressing the unabated farmer-herders' conflict in rural communities in North Central Nigeria that slides into violent attacks that lead to loss of lives and property.

This paper seeks to advocate inclusive participation of women and youths who are victims of most conflicts in gathering and communicating conflicts' early warning signals in rural communities in North Central Nigeria. The deliberate recruitment and inclusive participation of women, youths and community leaders in identifying and analyzing conflict early warning signals and reporting same to constituted authorities for early response would check if not curb the unabated violent attacks between farmers and herders in Plateau, Benue and other states in North Central.

The study is hinged on four objectives: to encourage inclusive participation of women and youths in gathering and communicating conflict early warning signs for early response in rural communities in North Central Nigeria; to advocate bottom-top participatory communication approach between security agencies and rural communities; to address violent attacks in rural communities; to empower women and youths with communication gadgets to communicate conflicts early warning signals.

Methodology

The study is a qualitative research using secondary data from journals, books, newspapers, seminar papers, internet and other materials from different archives. Interviews were also conducted with security experts to ascertain their views with regard to communicating security intelligence and inclusive participation of women in conflict early warning signals.

Contextualization of Nigeria security challenges

Since Nigeria returned to civilian rule in 1999, the spate of insecurity raging from Boko Haram, farmer/herders clashes, banditry and kidnapping among other forms of criminalities have spontaneously and steadily increased across the six geo-political zones in the country. Scholars have confirmed in their studies that the last 20 years of civil rule have been horrible with worsening forms of security challenges that undermine the sovereignty of Nigeria nation (Angwanwo, 2014, Odey & Umoh, 2015). Since the Nigeria nation witnessed a bitter civil war that culminated into huge loss of lives and property between 1967 and 1970, the country has never been so confronted with a large scale of violence as it is witnessing presently. The Global Peace Index (GPI, 2021) ranked Nigeria 146 out of 163 countries assessed. This put the country in the league of least peaceful countries such as Afghanistan, Yemen, Syria, South Sudan and Irag. In Africa, Nigeria came 8th among the least peaceful countries. It came after South Sudan, Somalia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Libya, Central African Republic, Sudan and Mali.

Steve Killelea, the Chief Executive Officer of Institute for Economic and Peace (IEP) said, "There has been a very slight decrease in peacefulness in 2020. That was mainly caused by an increase in the number of violent demonstrations and the levels of political instability. The results show that the average level of global peacefulness deteriorated by 0.07 percent, which is ninth deterioration in peacefulness in the last 13 years" (*The Sun* Newspaper Editorial 2 July, 2021). This is an incontrovertible fact. In terms of societal safety and security, Nigeria scored very low. Boko Haram terrorists are estimated to have slaughtered over 40,000 people in 10 years. In 2020, the insurgency reportedly led to loss of about 1,606 lives in the North East. Over 2.5 million others have been displaced. Outside Boko Haram, there are Islamic State of West Africa Province (ISWAP), criminal herdsmen, bandits, kidnappers and many others who have made life unbearable for Nigerians. Even students and children are not spared as they are routinely abducted from their schools for ransom (*The Sun* Newspaper, July 2021). The most peaceful country, Iceland ranked number 1 with a score of 1.027 and the least peaceful, Afghanistan, ranked 163 with a score of 3.574 (Onifade, Imhonopi &

Urim, 2013).

Currently, Nigeria's insecurity appears daunting such that it causes hundreds of fatalities and the high, the average and the low citizens lose valuables, businesses and overall trust in the country's security architecture (Adegoke, 2014). Although, the incumbent administration of President Muhammadu Buhari pledged at inception in May, 2015 to come up with policies that will mitigate the level of insecurity and corruption in the country, the effort has not yielded the desired result as the menace continues to stir it ugly face, thereby making global headlines. The citizens are currently living in despair with the stark realities caused by the turbulent economic downturn coupled with the devastating impact of the novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. More than ever, the average Nigerian is groaning that life has become more difficult and miserable due to rising poverty and palpable security threats.

Even though, the government has regained most of the communities controlled by the insurgents between 2014 and early 2015, the group continues to launch sporadic and deadly operations (Aghedo, 2020). According to Animasawun (2017), the estimated insurgent groups' activities and the states' repressive tactics to contain the insurgents have perished over 20,000 lives and swelled up the number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) to about 2 million since 2010. Maza, Koldas and Aksit (2020) reported that such deaths and displacement figures have exceeded 100,000 and 2.4 million respectively.

Sadly, women and children bear the brunt of all the violent crises and deadly attacks that erupted the country either orchestrated by the Boko Haram, farmer/herder clashes, bandits or kidnappers. Most of these women survived as deformed widows with several numbers of children to fend for themselves without sources of livelihood, yet they are in most cases excluded from gathering and communicating conflict early warning signals and decision making in Nigeria.

Women and the burden of insecurity in Nigeria

In Nigeria, women are particularly marginalized in the area of peace and security, especially when critical decisions are taken and resource allocation are decided. It is evident that Nigeria has never had an elected female President who is saddled with the constitutional responsibility of organizing, directing and commanding the nation's security apparatus during war, national emergency or distress. At the moment, Nigeria has no female governor who is the Chief security officer of a state and the only four female Deputy Governors are not constitutionally empowered to take decision on security except otherwise. They are dominated by their male counterparts and in most cases have their voices muted.

The situation is not different to what is happening in the Nigerian Armed Forces where critical security decisions are taken with adverse effect on women, yet no woman is among the four Service Chiefs in the country. For instance, Chief of Defence Staff; Chief of Army Staff; Chief of Naval Staff and Chief of Air Staff are all men. The Inspector General of Police, Director of State Services, Commandant of Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps are all male officers, leaving the female counterparts as Junior officers, who are reduced to carrying files and entertaining guests in offices among others. The marginalization of women in peace building and conflicts resolution processes has affected development and community resilience, particularly at the local level where women are raped, made widows and killed mercilessly by bandits (Building women capacity for peace, 2016).

Women in Nigeria have paid huge price in conflicts that have been ravaging the country, especially in the past two decades. They have been subjected to unprecedented levels of sexual violence, involuntary pregnancies and health complications, increased food insecurity and internal displacement in the North East and North Central Nigeria due to violent extremism as a result of Boko Haram and grievances over land due to competition over natural resources between farming and herders communities in most parts of Nigeria (CEDAW, 2007). Unfortunately, the violent conflict in the North East has resulted in massive loss of

lives, property and means of livelihood. The Boko Haram's attack and increased militarization in the region have continued to pose a devastating impact on women and girls. The abduction of girls and school children, their recruitment as sex slaves and forced labourers, and the continued attack by bandits leading to an increased rate of women and girls in the internally displaced persons camps across the country. The number of persons who are internally displaced as a result of conflicts with Boko Haram and Bandits is estimated to be more than 2.2 million, with 80 percent of them in Borno, Plateau, Benue and FCT among other states, hence the need for conflict warning signals (Recent report by the Special Rapporteur on the Human Rights of Internally Displaced Persons on his visit to Nigeria (UN, 2016)).

The increasing competition for natural resources between farmer and herders communities in most parts of the country, especially in the North Central and South East, has led to many violent clashes, including bloody attacks that led to death. The resulted crisis has affected the life and security of women and youths, particularly widows as they are often killed, raped and rendered homeless. In rural communities where the majority of women are farmers and farmlands are constantly destroyed and abandoned out of fear that cattle would graze on the crops, thereby increasing poverty and food shortage in the country. Women do not have adequate access to security and they are not involved in security decision making in their rural communities (UN Report, 2016). Therefore, gender equality and increased population of women is crucial to achieving a truly reformed security sector where women will be deeply involved in communicating security intelligence in their rural communities (Ghittoni, Lehouck & Bastick, 2019). The UN encourages an increase in the number of female in peace operations, and domestic services because the representation of women is critical to operational effectiveness and efficiency. This is because women can be trained to be proficient in firearms, leadership positions, public order management, specialized tactics intelligence and high-risk operations. The UN police believed that female officers help to rebuild trust in some societies. In post-conflict setting where gender-based violence has been used as a weapon of conflict, community members are more likely to approach female police officers (UN Police, 2016). Therefore, inclusion of women and youths in gathering and reporting conflict early warning for early response will help in reducing the myriad of security challenges bedeviling Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

Diffusion of innovation theory

Diffusion of innovation theory places its emphasis on innovation as an agent of behaviour change, with innovation defined as an idea, practice or object perceived as new (Rogers, 2003). The idea of communicating security intelligence and conflict early warning signals appears relatively new in our security architecture where the demand for inclusive participation of women and youths in community policing is highly required to stem the current security challenges in Nigeria.

Consequently, it is the perceived attributes of innovations that determine its rate of adoption to a greater extent the characteristics of the adopters. The theory was originally published in 1962, building particularly on rural sociology reference into the importance of agricultural technology in the U.S.

Diffusion of innovation theory posits four main elements of behaviour change, innovation, communication channels, time and social systems (Rogers, 2003). As Rogers (2003) noted that diffusion is a process in which an innovation is communicated through certain channels overtime among the members of a social system. It is a special type of communication in that the message is concerned with new ideas. The theory posits that behaviour will change more rapidly if innovations are perceived as being better than previous options and consistent with the existing values, experience and needs of potential adopters if they are easy to understand, testable via limited trials and their results are visible. Inclusion of women and youths in gathering and communicating security intelligence such as early warning signals in Nigeria today is an innovation that will produce positive result in the

fight against insecurity in rural communities in the country. In most communities in the North Central Nigeria, women are mostly victims of violent attacks of Fulani Herdsmen in the farm. Most of these women are often raped, beaten and sometimes killed in their farms and recruiting them into the social system for gathering and communicating early warning signals to nip in the bud any security threat is necessary.

However, different information exchange relationships have specific impacts in terms of innovation diffusion. This theory particularly highlights the different roles of mass media and interpersonal channels of communication which are useful for creating awareness amongst potential adopters and the latter being more effective in terms of persuading actual adoption. It is argued that innovations are evaluated "through the subjective valuations of near peers" rather than via experts or scientific analyses (Rogers, 2003), thus interpersonal communications, security intelligence and conflicts early warning signals.

In relation to the present study, diffusion of innovations is adopted because communicating security intelligence and inclusion of women participation in community policing is a new innovation that needed to be adopted by policy makers where women and youths are recruited in gathering and communicating conflicts warning signals for prompt action against terrorist groups. In 2016, the United Nations Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) had the CJTF listed to the annexes of the Secretary – General's Annual Report for children and Armed Conflict for the recruitment and use of children. However, in 2017, the CJTF signed an action plan to end children recruitment (UNICEF, 2017). The CJTF has been engaged in security operations and providing security for people at the internally displaced persons (IDP).

The non-state security sector just like the state security sector recruits women who work to regulate private security companies. They provide guarding services, helping to deter crimes and report early warning signals. In 2017, about 50-100 female CJTF members were helping to fight insurgency with responsibility such as" conducting head counts of women to churches, mosques and other public places, gathering intelligence, and arresting suspected female insurgents (Hassan, 2017). Through the efforts of female (CJFT) members' successful intelligence gathering, several other attacks were presented. The same argument of women's involvement also rabbinate with the Niger Delta struggle where women were put as militias protecting their communities. As members of the informal security groups, they acted as spies and emissaries (Oriola, 2016). These non-state security groups are also found in the North-West, South-West (Amotekun), South East, South South and the North Central for the purpose of intelligent gathering and communicating early signal for early response.

Table: Profile of Non-State Security Providers in North-Central

NORTH CENTRAL	STATE	VIGILANTE GROUP OF NIGERIA	SPONSOR
	Benue	-Vigilante Group of Nigeria -Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF)	Benue State Government
	Nasarawa	-Nasarawa State Youth Empowerment Scheme (NSYES) -Vigilante Group of Nigeria -Neighborhood Watch	Nasarawa State Government
	Kogi	-Vigilante Group of Nigeria - Enyidudu community	Self-sponsored -Host Community
	Plateau	Operation Rainbow Vigilante Group of Nigeria Neighbourhood Watch Hunters Association	Plateau State Government Self-Sponsored Host communities Self-Sponsored

Views of security experts on citizen's engagement on early warning reporting:

NAME	CITIZENS' ENGAGEMENT
The Chief of Defence Staff	- Individuals be conscious of their safety and security - Understand who your neighbours are, what are their characters, behaviour pattern and report anything suspicious. - Report activities that may be injurious to you or cause harm to the society to security agencies. - Take measures to ensure you understand basic security tips. - Provide information little as they may be to both the police and other security agencies close to you for prompt action. - Everyone should work toward peace and report early warning signs. - Journalist should work with officers in providing information capable of triggering violence for action. - Individuals and communities should be more proactive in reporting early warning signs. - Issues of security early warning and response should be known to everyone. - Media should educate the public to communicate issues of conflict. - Security is everybody's business.
First Commander Multi-National Joint Task Force North East	- Nigeria will remain united if there is a sense of equity, a sense of justice, a sense of belonging, a sense of responsibility that everybody belongs to this country. - All right meaning individuals, lecturers and citizens must rise up to their responsibility and check the slide to anarchy that is going on in this country. - There are situations where citizens will take responsibility for their security and come together and take a decision to put a stop to all form of insecurity. Saturday Sun July 31, 2021
GOC 3 Army Division and Commander OPSH	- Encourage communities to communicate security information for prompt intervention - Provide complains and help lines for citizens to communicate early warning signs or report attacks: 08074633336; 08149000091; 08090498333; 08074633336
Lt. Gen. J.T. Useni (Rtd)	- Understand security tips and report early warning signs to security agencies. - Defend yourself when you are under attack - Develop security network in communities and communicate security threats for prompt intervention.
Equal Acess International (NGO)	- Empower women and youths to identify and report early warning signs - Empower women with communication skills to report violent attacks. - Provide women and youths with communication gadgets to report early warning signs from rural communities.
Centre for the Advocacy of Justice and Right (CAJR)	- Train women and youth to report early warning. - Distribute information in Plateau. Sunnewsonline.com 16th July, 2021.
Plateau State House of Assembly	- Stop recruitment of teachers and order state government to recruit vigilante, hunters including women to gather and communicate security intelligence. Vanguard 27th August, Punch 26th August, 2021.

The non-state security outfits were conceived in view of the rising security challenge in the region to protect the people to some extent, gather security intelligence and communicate early warning signs for early response to minimize and avert breakdown of law and order.

Conclusion

This study c is very critical in stemming the tide of security challenges confronting Nigeria. It is obvious that lack of identifying and communicating early warning signal to security agencies for prompt action is responsible for the current security

challenges in most rural communities in North Central Nigeria and the country at large. Therefore, the role of women in tackling security challenges cannot be overemphasized as they have always been the victims of any outbreak of violence and recruiting them for the purpose of gathering and communicating security intelligence will go a long way towards reducing cases of violent outbreak if not preventing it completely.

Recommendations:

1. There should be deliberate state policy to involve women in all forms of state regulated or community supported non-state security organisations for effective gathering and communicating security intelligence. Enabling appropriate women's participation will reduce men's domination that influences the organization for their self-interest.
2. There is need for adequate collaboration between security agencies and women in various communities in the country on security intelligence gathering and reporting.
3. Policy makers in the country should adapt bottom-top communication approach; particularly the security agencies to enable them gather and respond swiftly to security information.
4. Security information or intelligence received from individual members of the community should be treated with all sense of seriousness and should be given adequate attention and response.

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