

Analysis of Violence and Insecurity in Zamfara

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February 2020

¹This analysis was conducted by Chitra Nagarajan with assistance from Mubarak Bawa and Samira Bappa. We were assisted by Save the Children, particularly Nura Mohammed and Abubakar Aji, both of whom gave generously of their time. Saleh Momale and Umar Mohammed Maradun of Pastoral Resolve (PARE) provided valuable help by facilitating interviews with Fulbe leaders. This analysis was commissioned by the UK government but its contents do not reflect the UK government's views in any way.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Based on interviews with 80 respondents (23 women and 57 men), this analysis presents historic trends and current patterns.

ROOT CAUSES Changes in land ownership, encroachment and sales of grazing land to farmers and environmental factors led to largely peaceful coexistence shifting. Fulbe communities felt marginalised by government. Criminality, perceived as perpetrated by Fulbe men, increased. After renewed violence post 2011 elections, many Hausa communities mobilised *yan sakai* or *yan banga* from late 2014 onwards. In response, Fulbe communities created their own militias, hostilities escalated and groups engaging in criminality made strategic alliances. Armed opposition groups (AOGs) threatened physical violence if Fulbe men did not join them. Meanwhile, as every man tended to be involved, all Hausa men were seen as legitimate targets. Fulbe victims invited Fulbe people from elsewhere to take revenge. Another key factor was increased cross-border flow of arms. The previous state government's support for (Hausa) community militias inflamed tensions and soldiers tended to assume all young Fulbe men were 'armed bandits,' adding to grievances. Attempts to negotiate peace were unsuccessful due to failure to effectively address drivers of violence, breaking of agreements, and as continued attacks and sexual violence caused cycles of reprisals to restart. The current administration has taken promising action but lacks capacity and conflict sensitivity. The relative peace brought about by the mid-2019 peace deal remains fragile.

IMPACTS The conflict has killed and disabled thousands of people. People with disabilities face increased difficulty escaping violence. They are more likely to remain in insecure areas as are their female caregivers. Women and girls are raped in homes, in the bush and when kidnapped. They endure trauma and are often ill-treated. Women and men can take different approaches on whether to leave with women forced to remain in areas they feel are unsafe. Of those who leave, many are reliant on good will of host communities. Due to numbers of men killed or migrated for work, women head many households and struggle to cope. Malnutrition is high as are levels of sexual exploitation and abuse. The situation is worsened by diversion of humanitarian aid. Displaced Fulbe people face particular difficulties as they can be discriminated against and are unable to migrate out of Zamfara. In general, IDPs face a difficult choice: to remain in sites of displacement without food, shelter, water and services or to return to areas where attacks and violence are likely. The violence also has had catastrophic impacts on livelihoods. Displaced people struggle to find income and rebuild their lives. Kidnapping for ransom has reduced savings and capital. Due to high sexual violence, many women and girls have stopped fetching firewood.

GENDER DYNAMICS There is a two-way interaction between gender and violence. Violent conflict profoundly affects gender roles. Gender norms escalate conflict. In flux beforehand, violence has accelerated shifts in gender realities. More men tend to be deliberately targeted during fighting, viewed with suspicion by opponents and, for Fulbe men, by security agents. Meanwhile, women and girls have experienced physical violence, been raped and forcibly married. The majority of those who survive attacks are women and children. They live with lasting physical and psychological impacts and are more likely to be displaced, head households and provide for the family. Certain groups of girls, particularly orphans, are more likely to be married at younger ages. Gender norms also drive conflict. Women and girls are the first and last to experience violence. Sexual violence heightens tensions and makes violence more likely. Communities see its continuation as indication of insecurity. Gender norms and entrenchment of militarised masculinities goad men into fighting. While it seems few women commit direct violence, women of all sides have urged violence. As dynamics developed, some women started engaging in peacebuilding but their exclusion from formal decision-making processes restricts their impact. As a result, the potential of women in Zamfara to contribute to peace remains largely untapped and women, excluded from peacebuilding interventions, act to entrench conflict further.

FACTORS BRINGING PEOPLE TOGETHER Violence has severely ruptured the social fabric and reduced social cohesion within and between groups. Yet, some areas see persisting good relations while others do not, contingent on the level, nature and quality of pre-conflict social interactions, provision of support and government action. Areas where interactions were frequent, of a positive nature and with sufficient depth show greatest social cohesion. A key indicator of strong social cohesion is the continued practice of intermarriage between Fulbe and Hausa individuals. Provision of support across identity lines deepens social cohesion but civil society actors warned that relations may deteriorate if displacement seems as it will continue without end. Lastly, successive state governments have tried to promote peace but while these efforts are promising, they tend to be at the local government level, are not inclusive and do not have wide reach.

KEY ACTORS Although many AOG fighters are Fulbe, a significant proportion come from other ethnic groups and a common narrative of 'foreigners destabilising Nigeria' was rebutted. While there have been attempts by AOGs in northeast Nigeria (commonly known as Boko Haram) to come to Zamfara, no evidence of sustained presence or links was found. The peace process has led to increased inter and intra group violence due to different attitudes as to whether to put down weapons, increasing factionalism and power tussles. The military launched Operation Sharan Daji in early 2016 and the police are instrumental in facilitating peace dialogue but some respondents claimed security agents were said to be benefitting from violence. There are three main community militia groups with some mutual membership and interaction: yan banga (which existed beforehand); yan sakai (those who act in response to violence); and CJTF (set up by the previous state government in response to yan sakai human rights violations committed and disbanded by the present administration). The committee for finding solutions to armed banditry in Zamfara state listed the names of community leaders, security agents and politicians suspected to be linked to AOGs but recommendation for sanction has yet to be implemented. Zamfara is rich in natural resources. Many respondents believed the mining sector is a significant contributor of insecurity through payment of protection money. The current administration emphasises the work done to bring about peace and has set up a new Ministry of Security and Home Affairs. Civil society and government respondents alike spoke of the need for institutional capacity strengthening.

POTENTIAL TRAJECTORIES There are three potential trajectories: 1. A slow return to peace; 2. Criminality and banditry persist in rural areas and increasing fragmentation and factionalisation of AOGs; and 3. A total collapse of peace deal and return to high levels of violence, proliferation of groups and, potentially, attempts by AOGs in northeast Nigeria to link with AOGs in the northwest.

There is potential for continued peace consolidation in Zamfara but significant risk of collapse of the peace process and a return to high levels of violence. Many policies are being designed and implemented in conflict insensitive ways and with little regard to promoting social cohesion and gender sensitivity. At the same time there is openness and willingness to engage by many political actors.

ACRONYMS

AFAN	All Farmers Association of Nigeria
AOG	armed opposition group
CJTF	Civilian Joint Task Force
GBV	gender-based violence
JASDJ	Jama'atu Ahl al-Sunna li-l-Da'wa wa-l-Jihad
IDP	internally displaced person
ISWAP	Islamic State West African Province
LGA	local government area
MDAs	ministries, departments and agencies
NEMA	National Emergency Management Agency
NGO	non-governmental organisation
NSCDC	National Security and Civil Defence Corps
SEMA	State Emergency Management Agency
SHOA	State House of Assembly
SSS	State Security Services
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

INTRODUCTION

Zamfara has seen increased levels of violence in recent years. Conflict has spread to neighbouring states particularly Sokoto and Katsina but also Kebbi, Niger and Kaduna, caused death, displacement and disability, destroyed livelihoods, seen high levels of gender-based violence (GBV) and differentially impacted populations according to age, disability, gender and location. While the Nigerian state has responded, most notably via military operations and a peace process initiated by the Governor, there are widespread allegations of complicity and collusion of security agents, community leaders and politicians in perpetuating insecurity. The situation not only has grave humanitarian and human rights impacts on conflict affected communities but the potential for security to deteriorate and violence to spread.

This analysis presents current conflict patterns and identifies options for promoting peace, public safety and security. After outlining methodology used, it addresses the following research questions in turn:

1. What are the root causes of violence and insecurity? What are the key grievances held by different groups and how do they manifest in violent and non-violent ways?
2. What is the impact of violence and insecurity on people (differentiated according to age, disability and gender)?
3. What are the gender dynamics around conflict and how do gender norms and realities drive violence and/ or peace?
4. What are the factors (including government, security force and community action) bringing people together and/ or promoting peace and stability?
5. Who are the key actors with influence, means and motivations to mobilise groups and resources into collective action for peace or for violence and what are links between them?
6. What are the potential trajectories, both positive and negative, around peace and security?

A note on language

It is difficult to know what to call those engaged in what is seen as 'banditry.' As a male civil society activist said, "Banditry is a media name. We are talking about neglect of this part of the country. When talking about banditry, nobody will be ready to support as they cannot be supporting criminality... We are trying to educate people about language – we are not talking of criminality or banditry but two warring groups trying to defend themselves." At the same time, there was a common elision between 'bandits' and 'Fulbe' even among respondents who said there were 'innocent Fulbe' not involved in these groups. Yan sakai was often used to describe all community militias and their members including those who were part of other groups and among some people associated with AOGs, there was a conflation of 'yan sakai' and 'Hausa.' In order to avoid stereotyping and conflict insensitivity and ensure accuracy, the term armed opposition groups (AOGs) is rather used. Where quoted respondents use Fulbe or bandits, these terms are replaced by [AOGs]. Similarly, where quoted respondents use 'Hausa' to refer to community militias or 'yan sakai' to refer to all community militias, these terms are replaced by [community militias].

A note on sources

Presently, there is a lack of written sources on conflict dynamics in Zamfara. As a result, while this paper draws on what does exist, most of the information contained comes from interviews conducted in the state and all quotes (except where a footnote with reference is provided) are by respondents. Information collected from respondents was triangulated and veracity confirmed by two or more separate sources. This report clearly states where doing so was not possible.

METHODOLOGY

Building on a preliminary desk review, this analysis has been developed using qualitative methods. The author interviewed a total of 80 people. Respondents consisted of 13 representatives (1 woman, 12 men) of Zamfara state ministries, departments and agencies (MDAs), 22 representatives (4 women, 18 men) of international and national non-governmental organisations and UN agencies. They also included 45 people (18 women, 27 men) affected by violent conflict including those who had taken part in the fighting on all sides of the conflict. Respondents in conflict-affected communities were selected to ensure diversity in terms of age, disability, gender and ethnic backgrounds. Ensuring gender balance was challenging as most civil servants, politicians, civil society members and people involved in violence are men. However, all women were interviewed individually, with more time spent with them. The team encouraged participants, especially those often excluded, to feel comfortable in discussing sensitive issues of power, discrimination and additional axes of marginalisation such as ethnicity, religion, occupational group, gender, age and location. These participants included but were not limited to women, young women in particular, young men and people of all genders with disabilities.

In addition to the state capital Gusau, we conducted interviews in the following towns and surrounding villages and hamlets: Anka; Badarawa; Bakura; Birnin Magaji; Mada; Maradun; Shinkafi; and Zurmi. These locations were chosen for the following reasons:

- to ensure good geographical spread (please see Figure 1 for a map of Zamfara)
- to enable examination of some cross-border dynamics
- as situation in these communities and along the roads leading to them are currently secure
- to include communities that have seen improvement in peace and security.

Figure 1: Map of Zamfara State



Limitations: The 12 days data collection period restricted the number of people interviewed. We spoke with those who had participated in violence but were unable to access groups still engaged in fighting. We declined invitations to visit villages where those associated with AOGs reside for security reasons given risks of kidnap and around military operations. Indeed, the security situation was dynamic with attacks on research communities requiring flexibility, cancellations and adjustments. Finally, the absence of agencies and civil society organisations operational in the area limited the numbers of people with knowledge of the situation whom we could interview.

WHAT ARE THE ROOT CAUSES OF VIOLENCE AND INSECURITY? WHAT ARE THE KEY GRIEVANCES HELD BY DIFFERENT GROUPS AND HOW DO THEY MANIFEST IN VIOLENT AND NON-VIOLENT WAYS?

Different groups largely coexisted peacefully with relations consolidated by social activities, mutual economic dependence and intermarriage. However, changes in land ownership, encroachment onto grazing routes and environment and climate factors led to relations shifting. Sale of grazing land to farmers by government officials and community leaders escalated tensions. Fulbe communities, particularly in rural areas, felt marginalised by government and aggrieved by perceived injustice in dispute resolution. Concurrently, levels of criminality in Zamfara, perceived as perpetrated by Fulbe men, were increasing. State farmer and pastoralist leaders reduced tensions somewhat but, after renewed violence post 2011 elections, many Hausa communities mobilised pre-existing or new local security groups known as yan sakai (volunteers) or yan banga from late 2014 onwards. In response, Fulbe communities created their own militias which they called yan bindiga (people with guns), hostilities escalated and groups engaging in criminality made strategic alliances with either of these groups. AOGs would visit Fulbe settlements and demand a man of fighting age from each family join them, threatening physical violence if they did not and so forcibly recruit many young men and adolescent boys. Hausa communities felt safer as a result of actions of (Hausa) community militias in repelling attacks but, as every man of fighting age tended to be involved, all Hausa men came to be seen as 'yan sakai' and legitimate targets. Fulbe victims of yan sakai violence invited Fulbe people from elsewhere to assist in taking revenge. Another key factor was increased availability and cross border flow of arms from Libya and other countries experiencing violence. The conflict expanded to neighbouring states from late 2015., In 2016, the military was deployed. The previous state government's support for community militias further inflamed tensions. Moreover, soldiers tended to assume all young Fulbe men were 'armed bandits,' thereby engaging in harassment at checkpoints and firing against groups of Fulbe men, particularly in rural areas, adding to grievances. A number of state government attempts to negotiate peace failed due to failure to effectively address drivers of violence, breaking of agreements, and as attacks carried out by those who did not join the process caused the cycle of reprisals to restart, particularly in response to widespread sexual violence. The current administration, which campaigned on a platform of returning security to Zamfara, has taken promising actions but lacks capacity and conflict sensitivity which risks inflaming tensions once more. A peace deal was signed in the middle of 2019 but the relative peace it has brought about remains fragile.

Historically, different groups in what is now Zamfara state² largely coexisted peacefully with relations consolidated by social activities, mutual economic dependence and intermarriage. They socialised and attended festivities together. Farmers invited livestock onto farms after harvest to increase soil fertility. Pastoralists lent or rented cows to farmers to plough fields. Sedentary people asked those more migratory to look after animals while migratory families kept belongings in their houses. Inter-marriage was common. Indeed, identity lines tended not to be sharp, particularly in urban and peri urban places, as many families conducted different livelihood activities concurrently and intermarriage was so common it could be hard to say if individuals were Hausa or Fulbe. Many Fulbe families had been settled for decades with younger men travelling with livestock to graze. Conflict over farmlands and grazing areas happened but was mostly resolved between individuals and did not escalate to violence.

However, changes in land ownership practices, demographics, encroachment onto grazing routes and environment and climate factors led to relations shifting. Population increase due to numbers of children surviving infancy and as people came to Zamfara to settle heightened

²Although seen as predominantly Hausa and Fulbe, Zamfara also has other ethnic groups including those from neighbouring states and other parts of Nigeria. Exact demographics are unknown due to lack of up to date census data.

demand for land. Although grazing lands were demarcated with knowledge of demarcation widespread, people started to farm on these areas. A Fulbe leader interviewed in Gusau said farmers cut down trees and plants to farm, thereby removing vegetation livestock would eat, increasing heat and reducing cover, which led to migration into new areas. A state government farmer-pastoralist dispute resolution committee was established but community leaders, politicians and civil servants did not preserve the integrity of grazing areas. In Kaura Namoda local government area (LGA) around 2008/ 2009, livestock belonging to migratory Fulbe who were following the grazing route destroyed crops planted along it. The community leader reported the incident and security agencies were summoned to the area. According to one man present, "I saw lots of cattle. At the time, the Fulani would come along with their guns [for] use in the south as that area is forested and there were a lot of animals there – but [because of what happened], they were forced to use their guns. They brought out their guns as the army was shouting at them. They made the army go back. They were exchanging fire and some cows scattered. The mobile police were killing cows and asking the local people if they wanted to eat."

The main factor in escalating tensions was reduction in grazing areas as land was rented or sold to farmers by the state government and community leaders. Pastoralists had no other option but to encroach onto farmland. In some areas, beacons that demarcated grazing routes were destroyed. At the same time, according to a male civil society activist in Gusau, "The process of transferring knowledge of grazing routes broke down as they were no longer taken seriously." As a result, farmers encroached on grazing land intentionally and mistakenly. Hausa men, now richer than Fulbe men who had become more impoverished, were now more able to marry the women of their choice, including from Fulbe communities. One civil servant said some Fulbe men were unhappy about Hausa men taking away 'their' girls, adding further to grievances.

Fulbe communities, particularly those in rural areas, felt marginalised in government interventions and aggrieved by perceived injustice in dispute resolution. Fulbe respondents characterised past administrations as not only showing lesser support when their communities were attacked but blaming them for violence. They said their exclusion from education in particular meant they could not fight for their rights as Hausa people with better education and connections took them to the police so they were judged at fault and had to sell cattle to be released from detention. According to one Fulbe male leader, "Some courts or community leaders would see us as bushman, illiterate, a person who does not know his rights. If we are supposed to pay N30,000 [for destruction of crops], they would add money getting to N100,000. He would reject and say he will not pay. If he rejected, he will be taken to a higher authority, to court then put in prison. This boosted the issue to worse as we feel they are doing injustice."

Concurrently, levels of criminality in Zamfara, perceived as perpetrated by Fulbe men, were increasing, starting from the 1980s linked to the economic situation at the time including impacts of the structural adjustment programme.³ The mid 2000s saw armed robberies on highways and roads, 2009 onwards saw greater incidence of cattle theft which morphed into cattle rustling from around 2013 and culminated in village raiding from 2014 onwards.⁴ The cattle rustling, reduction of grazing areas, stigmatisation and blame for criminality coupled with perceived lack of government care has led to deep seated grievances.

State farmer and pastoralist leaders were somewhat successful in reducing encroachment of grazing land by farmers and promoting mutual understanding between 2008 and 2010. However, things escalated again from 2011 onwards. Respondents said groups of predominantly

³Loans provided by the International Monetary Fund and World Bank that required borrowing countries to implement certain policies. Its emphasis on privatisation and austerity led to slow wage growth, fall in living standards, reduced expenditure on social infrastructure, increased inequality and high levels of debt: Chukwuma Ogbonna, 'Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) in Nigeria: An Empirical Assessment,' 2012 6(1) *Journal of Banking* 19-40.

⁴Pastoral Resolve, Search for Common Ground and Terre des Hommes, 'Zamfara Conflict Analysis and Multisectoral Needs Assessment,' October 2019.

Fulbe young people were used as 'political thugs' in the highly contested 2011 elections (please see political actor mapping below) after which politicians failed to fulfil their promises to them.

In response to renewed violence linked to the 2011 elections, many Hausa communities mobilised into pre-existing or new local security groups known as yan sakai (volunteers) or yan banga from late 2014 onwards. Despite insecurity affecting people from all ethnic backgrounds, most community militias comprised only Hausa members. The emergence of these groups 'further heightened tensions and polarised rural communities.'⁵ The state government administration supported their actions, providing vehicles and stipends. These groups viewed all Fulbe people with suspicion. They banned them from entering towns. Men were blocked from taking livestock for sale to markets. Women could no longer sell milk. Fulbe people of all genders were unable to buy goods and produce. This restriction of movement had profound consequences for livelihoods and access to services including healthcare. These community militias attacked on rural pastoralist communities believed to be harbouring fighters. Not only Fulbe people but other groups close to them such as the Sullubawa, a group descended from intermarriages between Hausa and Fulbe in Sokoto state, experienced this violence.

In response, these Fulbe communities created their own militias which they called yan bindiga (people with guns), hostilities between these two groups escalated further and groups that had been engaging in criminality made strategic alliances with either of these groups.⁶ A cycle of vengeance was set in motion with these groups attacking, committing physical violence and killing each other. Villages were burned, women and girls raped and abducted and people of all ethnic backgrounds displaced, disabled and killed. Fulbe women were harassed, threatened, chased away, beaten and at least threatened with sexual violence. They were viewed with suspicion. For example, in Badarawa, Hausa men who had taken herbs to prevent bullets entering their bodies but found they did not work concluded Fulbe women were putting something in the milk they sold to stop these herbs from working. They confronted a Fulbe woman and subsequently killed her and other Fulbe women selling milk. Fulbe men too experienced physical violence. In Shinkafi, in an open area opposite the cattle market, 18 Fulbe people were killed and their bodies set on fire in what was known as the 'human abattoir.'⁷

Hausa communities felt safer as a result of the actions of (Hausa) community militias in repelling attacks but, as every man of fighting age tended to be involved, even if they did not wish to do so, all Hausa men came to be seen as 'yan sakai' and valid targets. In Badarawa, a Hausa woman spoke of an incident where even young Hausa children between the ages of five and ten years were killed as "they thought they will become yan sakai members in the future so they kill them before they can do that." This perception mirrored that of Hausa communities that all Fulbe people were 'bandits' and so legitimate targets of violence.

AOGs would visit Fulbe settlements and demand a man of fighting age from each family join them, threatening physical violence if they did not and so forcibly recruit many young men and adolescent boys. When their community was attacked by yan sakai for including 'bandits', these young men would launch attacks against those who had attacked their families. Not only did these events perpetuate the cycle of reprisals and counter-reprisals but it also bonded young men to groups they had not wanted to join as these groups had assisted them in taking revenge against those who had harmed their loved ones. According to a Fulbe man interviewed in Anka, "If a thief steals, he then goes into the bush to re-join his gang. The yan sakai

⁵Pastoral Resolve, Search for Common Ground and Terre des Hommes, 'Zamfara Conflict Analysis and Multisectoral Needs Assessment,' October 2019, p. vi.

⁶Pastoral Resolve, Search for Common Ground and Terre des Hommes, 'Zamfara Conflict Analysis and Multisectoral Needs Assessment,' October 2019, p. viii.

⁷Murtala Ahmed Rufa'i, 'Vigilante Groups and Rural Banditry in Zamfara State: Excesses and Contradictions,' 2018 7 (6) *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention* 65-73.

will come to the village and find his parents. If they do not see the boy, they burn down the village and kill the parents. So, then the gang comes back and takes revenge.”

Many Fulbe people who had been the victims of yan sakai violence felt forced to act and invited Fulbe people from elsewhere to assist them in taking revenge. People came from other states in Nigeria and across national borders. Relations deteriorated further with groups linked to the Fulbe which engaged in cattle rustling saying “all cattle belonged to Fulbe and who allowed the Hausa person to own cattle?” according to one Fulbe male leader. They stole cattle from people of all ethnic backgrounds, including the Fulbe, and used money from sales of cattle to buy guns for use in reprisal attacks. While Fulbe leaders tried to reach out to those engaging in attacks and reason with them on the importance of peaceful coexistence, these efforts proved unsuccessful especially in the face of continued attacks from predominantly Hausa community militias and what was seen as lack of concerted action and continued neglect by the government.

“The Fulbe gathered, realised what the government is doing in collaboration with vigilante and that they have a plan to eradicate all Fulbe in Zamfara so they gathered and provided themselves with weapons. They took animals to Niger, Cameroon and other neighbouring countries to keep there and started taking revenge. [Name redacted]’s family had a thief amongst them who was not there. [The yan sakai] instructed him to bring the thief and when he refused, they killed him in front of his family... From that day, the Fulbe resolved to take revenge... They went house to house looking for [members of community militias], brought them out of their house and killed them. Then the [members of community militias] would go to one ruga of Fulbe and attack them.” – male Fulbe leader interviewed in Gusau

A key factor was the increased availability and cross border flow of arms from Libya and other countries experiencing violence. These weapons meant conflict easily escalated into violent and caused fatalities which led to cycles of revenge attacks. Kidnapping for ransom and protection money from mining sites became sources of revenue that enabled their purchase. In contrast, guns used by Hausa community militias were locally made by blacksmiths.

The conflict in Zamfara expanded to neighbouring Kaduna, Katsina and Sokoto states from late 2015 and, in 2016, the military was deployed. Civil military relations were variable. Some respondents spoke of a change over time, pointing to increased responsiveness and deployment to areas to protect civilian populations. A displaced Hausa woman praised soldiers deployed to her area who died while trying to protect the community and was visibly upset when recounting what she characterised as their sacrifice. However, other respondents spoke of security agents intimidating community members and engaging in sexual harassment and violence. According to a man working for a Zamfara based civil society organisation interviewed in Gusau, “Uniform men would say we need this girl and she must come. They intimidate them so they come to them and they have sex.” The scale of sexual violence is unknown as a culture of silence largely prevails. Respondents also spoke of lack of coordination between security agencies, poor communication to civilians and communities asking for protection from attacks that was not forthcoming.

Soldiers tended to assume all young Fulbe men were ‘armed bandits,’ thereby engaging in harassment at checkpoints and attacking groups of Fulbe men, particularly in rural areas, further driving grievances. Fulbe respondents spoke about how difficult it was for Fulbe people whose cows had been stolen then recovered to get security agencies to release their cows to them. Although it was not possible to verify specific incidents, some Fulbe respondents claimed security agents had engaged in extrajudicial killings of Fulbe, working together with the yan sakai. As a result, Fulbe people feel unable to report threats of attacks to security agencies and tend to have high levels of mistrust and lack of confidence in them. Fulbe communities are particularly caught in the middle, facing threats from security agencies, Hausa community militias and AOGs alike.

“Soldiers do not trust Fulbe. Anyone they see is Fulbe, they always put questions on them, molest them and take illegal actions without knowing if you are good or bad. Whoever is Fulbe who visits [the nearest market], yan sakai will tell soldiers that here is Fulbe and soldiers will hold you, take to the bush and kill you without any investigation. Even in town, soldiers have killed many relatives even though they are not [AOG members].” – young Fulbe man interviewed near Birnin Magaji

The previous state government was seen as uncaring about the gravity of the security and humanitarian situation. Its support for community militias was appreciated by members of these groups but seen as further inflaming tensions by others.

Its peace effort reduced violence for some time but eventually failed. All sides agreed to a ceasefire and to end kidnapping. During this time, according to a Hausa yan sakai member, Fulbe and Hausa people were connected so “If a Hausa man was attacked, I know who to call [his focal point among the Fulbe] and they would take care of the issue themselves. If a Fulbe person complains that a Hausa man has done something, it is our responsibility and we would hand him over [to the authorities].” However, AOG fighters were arrested on return from haj. Compensation promised for weapons surrendered was unpaid. The government did not address root causes.⁸ Attacks continued at a smaller scale, leading cycles of reprisal to restart. Widespread sexual violence against women and girls was a major factor in increasing tensions as men vowed to take revenge. Not only violence did resume but it escalated to new heights.

“It was the rape of people’s wives that brought back the issue. Fulbe were blocking roads, raping women on roads or taking women in towns. I called the Fulbe leaders but it beyond their power as the boys were not listening to them anymore. This happened 3 years ago. Everything just got worse. We had already surrendered our arms but they still had theirs. They would come, steal, kidnap, rape. The government did nothing. So, our committee guarding the town went and purchased arms again.” - Hausa man interviewed in Badarawa

The current administration has taken promising action but lacks capacity and conflict sensitivity which risks inflaming tensions. Having campaigned on returning security to Zamfara and maximising the opportunity of a clean slate, it reached out to AOGs to find out and discuss how to address grievances. It banned the activities of Hausa community militias leading to improved Fulbe freedom of movement, access to markets and ability to sell milk. It cancelled allocations of grazing land to farmers and promised to provide modern grazing reserves in each senatorial zone with housing, schools, health clinics, veterinary clinics and other services. It encourages surrender of weapons.⁹ The state government constituted a committee for finding solutions to armed banditry in Zamfara state in August 2019 chaired by a former Inspector General of Police but its report has yet to be made public and its recommendations actioned.

“I cannot tell how things have deteriorated to this level where we have no trust. I never thought this thing could ever happen. Hausa and Fulbe are naturally like brother and sister but this issue of banditry has separated us.” - Hausa woman interviewed in Zurmi

A peace deal was signed in the middle of 2019 but the relative peace it has brought about remains fragile. Not surprisingly, while matters have improved somewhat, tensions and suspicion still persist as exemplified by a sharp decrease in intermarriage. Current dynamics will be discussed further at the start of the future trajectories section below.

⁸Pastoral Resolve, Search for Common Ground and Terre des Hommes, ‘Zamfara Conflict Analysis and Multisectoral Needs Assessment,’ October 2019.

⁹As of mid-January, state civil servants said that over 500 guns had been given up by Hausa community militias and over 80 by members of armed opposition groups – a good start but only a small proportion of weapons in the state.

WHAT IS THE IMPACT OF VIOLENCE AND INSECURITY ON PEOPLE (DIFFERENTIATED ACCORDING TO AGE, DISABILITY AND GENDER)?

Thousands of people have been killed and disabled. People with disabilities face increased difficulty escaping violence. They are more likely to remain in insecure areas as are their female relatives who stay behind to look after them. The treatment of those kidnapped varies with men often physically beaten while women and girls are (gang) raped. Women and girls are also raped in homes, communities and when collecting firewood. In addition to enduring trauma, these women and girls are often ill-treated. Violent conflict has caused widespread displacement. Women and men can take different approaches on whether to leave, with women forced to remain in areas they feel are unsafe. Of those who leave, many are reliant on good will of host communities in the absence of adequate humanitarian assistance. Due to numbers of men killed or migrated for work, many households are headed by women who struggle to cope. Malnutrition levels are high as are levels of sexual exploitation and abuse and survival sex. The situation is worsened by diversion of humanitarian aid. Displaced Fulbe people face particular difficulties as they can be discriminated against by host communities and are unable to migrate out of Zamfara. Insecurity has worsened an already low level of access to services, particularly when it comes to education and health. Many respondents spoke about the fear under which they live and lasting impacts of experiencing violence. Despite widespread nature and high levels of conflict-related trauma, there is no agency providing mental health and psychosocial support. In general, IDPs face a difficult choice: to remain in sites of displacement where they do not have adequate food, shelter, water and services or to return to areas where attacks and violence are likely. Zamfara has many protection issues but no protection actors and very little protection mainstreaming. The violence has also had catastrophic impacts on livelihoods. Displaced people struggle to find income in sites of displacement and, when they return to their villages, find it difficult to rebuild their lives. The livelihoods of people in relatively safe towns have also been affected as people are unable to travel to trade and have less resources. High levels of kidnapping of people and cows for ransom have reduced savings and capital in both rural and urban areas. Due to high sexual violence, women and girls in many locations have stopped fetching firewood. High levels of kidnapping of people and cows for ransom have reduced savings and capital in both rural and urban areas. People with disabilities have found it particularly difficult to find livelihoods.

PHYSICAL VIOLENCE

Thousands of people of all ethnic groups have been killed. The committee for finding solutions to armed banditry in Zamfara state reported 6,319 violent related deaths but this figure does not include unreported deaths in rural areas.¹⁰ Although people of all ages and genders were killed, as described above, men were particularly targeted. Many families are coping with the loss of loved ones. Relatives look after orphaned children who struggle to cope with particularly given reduced economic circumstances. Some children are forced to look after themselves.

Many people have become disabled when running away from attacks and due to violence, including that aiming to disable. AOG fighters have cut off hands of civilians in villages across Zamfara. While some people recover from injuries, many become permanently disabled often due to inadequate provision of healthcare. A displaced Hausa woman in Birnin Magaji described how, while running away, she fell and had her wrist dislocated and arm fractured. The health clinic gave her only pain medicine She has now lost the use of her left arm. In some cases, women are returned to families as husbands do not want to bear healthcare costs. These dynamics need to be viewed in light of pre-existing exclusion of people with disabilities, with women facing intersecting axes of oppression and marginalisation due to gender and disability.

¹⁰According to Usman Nagogo, the Commissioner of Police, in a January 2020 press briefing: Author's notes from press conference, verified by copies of his speech distributed to those present.

Those with disabilities before the violence face increased difficulty escaping violence so are more likely to remain in insecure areas. A displaced Hausa man interviewed in Anka said six children with intellectual disabilities caused by lead poisoning were left behind when villagers fled even though non-disabled children were taken to safety. By the time people went back to retrieve them two days later, they were hungry, scared and had had no idea what was happening. A displaced Busawa woman interviewed in Bakura described how she had to wheel her elderly mother in a wheelbarrow to safety. Her brother who has mobility issues stayed behind while everyone fled. She said, “Almost all in the town have fled, only a small number remain. Those that remain are not up to 10, most of them are old people including my brother who is crippled.”

Female family members of disabled men can also stay behind to look after them and be at risk of harm. While people with disabilities seem not directly targeted, their female relatives can be at risk. In the above case, the brother’s wife and daughter remained in the village. When fighters returned, they said they would take the brother’s daughter with them and only relented after the young girl insisting she would not go with them as she needed to look after her parents.

Many people have also been kidnapped for ransom. A woman respondent said her captor apologised for his actions and looked after her and other captives well but good treatment does not seem the norm and other former captives gave different accounts.¹¹ Women and men have been killed in captivity. Those abducted have different experiences according to age and gender. While abducted men experience more beating, women and girls are often raped by many men. Fighters have also come to communities and forcibly married women and girls. Fear of punishment coupled with potential stigma means many in this situation do not try to escape.

Women and girls are also raped in homes, communities and when collecting firewood. A Hausa woman interviewed in Badarawa estimated over 20 women and girls in the town alone had been raped when collecting firewood. She said, “They choose one of two things. One, they rape them then leave them to go. Two, they put battery in their vagina and tell them to go with that so it causes harm to them before they come back. Even if you ask the girls, they do not tell us what has happened to them but usually they have been raped by more than one man as they often are unconscious. We see them lying in the bush and take them to their houses.” All members of AOGs interviewed, when asked why they rape women, denied their group does this, agreed this happened and stated ‘their’ women are also raped. While more information about the rape of Hausa and Fulbe women not associated with AOGs was forthcoming, there were some indications that women associated with AOGs also face sexual violence as a form of collective punishment.

In addition to enduring trauma, these women and girls are often ill-treated. Husbands divorce wives. Fiancés break off engagements. Even if there is no divorce, rape can be raised during marital arguments and used by other community members to belittle and demean these survivors. If pregnant, women and girls are taken for abortions. A Hausa woman interviewed in Badarawa said, “It is the only option as some of the girls get pregnant from the first rape and we do not want to have any relationship with [AOGs] as we do not know where they come from and we do not know who raped her.”

DISPLACEMENT

Violent conflict has led to widespread displacement from rural areas to towns, the state capital, other parts of Nigeria and across national borders. According to a man working for the State Emergency Management Agency (SEMA), there was some displacement before 2011 as

¹¹When we interviewed those who had been kidnapped and released, we asked them to tell us whatever information they wanted to share. While we asked follow up questions to men, we refrained from doing so for women given likelihood of GBV. Women civil society activists and other women in their communities provided information about the sexual violence that kidnapped women and girls often experience.

small groups of farmers on grazing land had to move when pastoralists returned. Mass killings in Kizara, Langadi and Galadima in 2013 caused displacement which was augmented by multiple attacks from 2017 to 2019. A male respondent tracking displacement said displacement reduced slightly from March to July 2019 due to the actions of the Joint Task Force. During this time, there were 5 camps for internally displaced people (IDPs) in Zamfara: one in Mada in Gusau LGA, two camps in Maru LGA, one camp in Anka and a school in Shinkafi where IDPs stayed for a few weeks. This period saw new and cyclical displacement.¹² From July to September 2019, some people returned to communities hoping to resume livelihoods, particularly given lack of assistance. However, as of January 2020, many who had gone home had been displaced once more with respondents working for humanitarian agencies attributing this to the surge in military operations from November 2019 onwards. For example, in mid-January 2020, a reported 300 families came to Anka town as they worried AOGs would attack their villages in retaliation for soldiers killing their members as they suspected villagers had passed information to the military.

Women and men can take different approaches on whether to leave. For example, in a Fulbe/ Sullubawa hamlet in Gusau LGA, every woman interviewed expressed fear of staying and desire to leave. Here, 3 women had been abducted then released with AOGs warning they would come back. The only woman who left with her children was a widow with the freedom to make this decision. Women complained bitterly reluctance of male relatives to leave and that, particularly in the absence of family members to whom they could go, they had no option but to stay.

Of those who leave, many are reliant on good will of host communities in the absence of adequate humanitarian assistance by state actors and agencies. The state government has provided some aid and humanitarian agencies are operational in some areas but this assistance, given weak state capacity, absence of humanitarian actors and diversion of humanitarian aid, is inadequate to meet needs. Even where people plan leaving communities, the food and commodities they bring run out. A displaced Busa man interviewed in Bakura said, “Since we have so many dependents and we could only take away the farm produce we could move, our food will only last until the end of this month. After that, we are planning to rely on God who will provide.”

At present, there are three official IDP camps in the state (in Anka, Mada and Maradun) with many more IDPs living in unofficial and informal settlements and in host communities. According to a senior SEMA official, displacement continues to be dynamic. Latest figures showing 87,251 people displaced in Zamfara but many IDPs are uncounted so real numbers are higher. He approximated only 16,730 people lived in the three official camps.

Due to the numbers of men killed or migrated for work, many households are headed by women who struggle to cope. Many respondents said they went around the community begging for food or looking for work. According to a displaced Fulbe woman interviewed in Bakura, “We see a wheelbarrow pusher or people holding heavy things and ask to give to us so we can hold for them. We are not familiar with city jobs so we are just learning now.”

Malnutrition levels are high. MSF Spain’s recent nutrition survey found levels of severe and acute malnutrition were at 5 percent in Zurmi and Shinkafi. A food security and nutrition assessment in August/ September 2019 found global acute malnutrition in displaced children aged 6 to 59 months was at 31.1 percent, 73.1 percent of displaced household had insufficient food intake and 86.7 percent of households engaged in food based coping strategies such as reducing portion sizes, skipping meals and restricting adult consumption so children can eat.¹³

¹²There are discrepancies as to the extent of displacement during this time. While IOM reports that, as of August 2019, there were 72,161 displaced people in Zamfara, UNCHR reports that this figure was 144,996: IOM, DTM Report North Central and North West Zones Round 1, August 2019; UNHCR, Joint Protection Assessment Mission to Northwest Nigeria, 25 July – 4 August 2019.

¹³World Food Programme and National Bureau of Statistics, ‘Rapid Food Security and Nutrition Assessment among Internally Displaced Households in Katsina, Sokoto and Zamfara States of Nigeria,’ September 2019.

The situation is worsened by diversion of humanitarian aid. According to a displaced Busa man in Bakura, “When they give out things, some will get and others will not... Anyone close to the source of supply is the one who will get.” In Anka, the IDP camp is on land belonging to the Emir who set up a camp management committee which does not include IDPs. Here, food trucks arrived and IDPs, asked to offload items, were awaiting distribution only to find food taken away at night. When they complained, the Emir told them they had two weeks to leave. After intervention by others, the Emir relented. In Shinkafi too, respondents recounted aid being diverted. A displaced Hausa woman interviewed there said, “The leaders assigned hijack everything. Hardly anything reaches us. Last year, they sent items through politicians who brought it and shared within their own relatives... [Once] we stayed the while day until 5pm, they took pictures with the items behind us but they did not distribute but packed and went away with them after they took the photos.” All these respondents stressed the need for aid to directly reach them rather than be funnelled through local leaders, politicians or government officials.

There are high levels of sexual exploitation and abuse and survival sex. Civil society representatives and civil servants said that women and girls often had no other choice to feed themselves and their families as homes continue to be unsafe and they have no other income sources. For example, a respondent working on child protection talked of a 13-year-old girl raped by a son of a politician who continued to have sex with her afterwards and give her money that she subsequently gave to her mother to look after the family. According to a respondent working with displaced women, “They are forced to become sex workers and sexually exploited by men including those hosting them. I have heard of seven cases where men host women and sexual exploit.” Perpetrators include soldiers as well as community men with power and influence.

Displaced Fulbe people face particular difficulties as they can be discriminated against by host communities. They tend to stay separately from Hausa IDPs in their own settlements often with displaced Sullubawa people. A senior SEMA official characterised relation between Hausa host communities and Fulbe IDPs as largely cordial but “sometimes, there are episodes where people look at them, see they are Fulani, get aggrieved and start to abuse them.” Some Fulbe respondents said they had found it difficult to find shelter and that all Fulbe are mistrusted. In some places, community leaders regularly visit settlements of displaced Fulbe people to count numbers with suspicion falling on new people present. A Fulbe man interviewed in Anka said, “People look at us as if we are part of them – they say we have children among bandits.” He said, “I feel should just pack up things and migrate. The only reason I’ve not left is I’m from Nigeria, my whole lineage is from here and I don’t know anyone elsewhere and don’t know where else to go.”

Due to stigma and suspicion, many Fulbe have also been unable to migrate out of Zamfara either as part of regular migration or to seek safety. Research in the Middle Belt in 2019 found high suspicion of Fulbe from Zamfara among all ethnic groups – including other Fulbe who refuse to permit them to settle nearby as they do not want ‘Zamfara problems’ in their area¹⁴ According to a civil society respondent, the government in the past has told security forces to “lock down the border and prevent them leaving as people were leaving Nigeria and moving to Chad.”

“In the past, it was cordial and there was no problem. Now, since all those people in [the south] have been touched by people they believe to be our tribe, they are reluctant to allow us to be there... The cattle path is blocked and when they see a Fulbe person, someone will kill you or sometimes ask for papers and if you do not have [an indigeneship certificate], they will kill you and take your cattle and give to the government saying it was a thief. Fulbe from other places are not fair to us when we go there also. Everywhere, you find bad eggs but here, they have classified all of us to be bad eggs.” - Fulbe man interviewed in a village in Bakura LGA

¹⁴Chitra Nagarajan, “No Tribe in Crime”: Changing Pastoralism and Conflict in Nigeria’s Middle Belt, (Mercy Corps, forthcoming).

In general, IDPs face a difficult choice: to remain in sites of displacement where they do not have adequate food, shelter, water and services or to return to areas where attacks and violence are likely. Due to lack of assistance, people tried to return home to restart livelihoods only to have to flee again. As a result, they do not want to go back. This reluctance to return is particularly true of women as AOG fighters are currently less likely to engage in attacks but are still committing sexual violence. According to a displaced Hausa woman in Mada, “In the villages near us, [the fighters] still go there, take women and rape them. We are sure they will continue from where they stopped if we go back.”

REDUCED ACCESS TO SERVICES

Insecurity has worsened already low levels of access to services.¹⁵ A 2019 assessment noted gaps in WASH services with 38 percent of those surveyed having no nearby latrines, 58 percent using pit latrines and 42 percent practicing open defecation.¹⁶ Children do not attend schools due to lack of money, destruction of classrooms, fears for safety, lack of teachers who have fled violence and the need to earn incomes: 33 percent of children aged 5-17 had completely dropped out of school and a further 29 percent had never attended school.¹⁷ Some families have withdrawn children from Islamiyya schools for these reasons. Some almajirai have been recalled by families due to fears for safety while others have continued as families cannot provide for them if they return. Respondents worried what lack of education may mean for children’s future in terms of livelihoods, attitudes and behaviour. Access to health has also been affected as health clinics have been attacked and health workers abducted. Agencies working in hard to reach areas to expand access scaled back programming. The conflict has increased unsafe abortion¹⁸ linked to rates of sexual violence, women and girls forced to engage in survival sex, reduced availability of contraception and as stigma attached to pregnancy outside marriage was more likely with husbands absent. A reproductive health practitioner said, “We see the incidence of women dying from unsafe abortion and coming to health services for post abortal care increasing.”

Fulbe people have experienced particularly restricted access to education and health. They were unable to come to primary healthcare facilities when Fulbe people were being killed, harassed or chased away from villages and towns with serious health consequences. A similar dynamic existed around access to education for Fulbe children going to school in nearby Hausa towns. This particular barrier to and denial from healthcare and education eased after the state government ordered community militias to no longer operate but many Fulbe people still have residual fear of being in places dominated by those of other ethnicities which restricts access.

PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACTS OF VIOLENCE

Many respondents spoke about lasting impacts of violence and fears it will return. Given gendered patterns of harm where many men were killed, many women and children, more

¹⁵For example, Zamfara has only 12 percent immunisation coverage, is a state with one of the highest indices of acute malnutrition nationwide, 42.8 percent of its children are on track with early child development criteria and only 11.4 percent of young women and 53 percent of young men have basic literacy skills. Statistics are provided in Pastoral Resolve, Search for Common Ground and Terre des Hommes, ‘Zamfara Conflict Analysis and Multisectoral Needs Assessment,’ October 2019, at p. v.

¹⁶ Pastoral Resolve, Search for Common Ground and Terre des Hommes, ‘Zamfara Conflict Analysis and Multisectoral Needs Assessment,’ October 2019, p. xii.

¹⁷ Pastoral Resolve, Search for Common Ground and Terre des Hommes, ‘Zamfara Conflict Analysis and Multisectoral Needs Assessment,’ October 2019, p. xi.

¹⁸According to Sections 232-236 of the Penal Code and sections 228 and 230 of the Criminal Code Act, abortion is a felony only permissible when the mother’s life is at risk. Islam is more permissive: interpretations allow abortion until the foetus has been ‘ensouled’ at around 4 months. An estimated 2.7 million abortions are likely to take place annually, 65.6 percent done in ways that are least safe (81 percent for women with no education and 82 percent for the poorest women) and unsafe abortion is a leading cause of maternal death: PMA 2020 Abortion Survey Results: Nigeria, April-May 2018, available at https://www.pma2020.org/sites/default/files/AbortionModule_Brief_111518.pdf.

represented among those who remain, continue to experience severe psychological distress. Women spoke about how fear impacts the body and relationships. A displaced Hausa woman interviewed in Badarawa said, “There is a lack of peace in your home if you are married. There are also so many [babies born with disabilities or defects] and miscarriages due to fear as you start labour before your time.” People working with children spoke about psychological impacts and a cycle of violence where conflict-affected children enact abuse on other children. A senior SEMA official said, “They don’t know who to trust. They have no parents. They had people killed in front of them. They need psychosocial support.”

“Many of our people have been killed. They burned the house of our immediate neighbours with people including small children inside. The most painful thing that happened was that we could not even identify dead bodies as they were so badly burned... We have seen the terrible side of life... Up to now, whenever I remember, even if I chew food, I cannot swallow due to bitterness.” - displaced Hausa woman interviewed in Zurmi

Fulbe people spoke being caught in the middle - between Hausa neighbours and fellow Fulbe - and how this position gave rise to emotional distress. Both sets of people had caused harm. They were unhappy how previously positive relations and interactions with Hausa neighbours, with families living together for multiple generations, had deteriorated. They distanced themselves from those who sought to portray their actions as in defence of their ethnic group, pointing out AOGs were also attacking and stealing from Fulbe communities. They were deeply traumatised that fellow Fulbe had attacked their villages, destroyed their farms and taken away their cattle. A Fulbe man interviewed in a Fulbe hamlet in Birnin Magaji LGA said, “I am not happy about it being Fulbe people doing this. I am proud of being a Fulbe man. We do not need what they are doing but we do not have any chance or right to change them or stop them. I feel in my heart, I hate what they are doing. I have no option since I cannot stop them.”

Despite widespread nature and high levels of conflict-related trauma, there is no agency providing mental health and psychosocial support. Sometimes, violence leads to severe psychological problems. According to a male civil society member, “We have women who have become mad because they saw their children and husband killed and their animals and property were taken. [A woman], before the attack, was planning to sell cows and go on haj so now whenever you see her, she keeps repeating that she is going to Mecca. She’s living on the street and roaming about. We have women who cannot stay alone in a room 6 months after attack as remembers what happened and gets scared by any small sound they hear.”

LIVELIHOODS AND ECONOMIC IMPACTS OF VIOLENCE

The violence has had catastrophic impacts on livelihoods. People from rural Zamfara are displaced into peri-urban or urban areas where they struggle to earn incomes. Many wish to return home but cannot do so due to persistent insecurity and fear of attacks, killings and sexual violence. They contrast current realities with lives before violence. They spoke of having had animals, farmlands and food stores, and engaging in multiple income generation activities. Now, they struggle to find whatever income they can, working as day labourers on other people’s farms or in household service to those in host communities - if they are lucky.

Displaced people who return find it difficult to rebuild their lives given homes have been burned, food stores and farm implements destroyed, animals stolen and savings spent. Livelihoods activities are uncertain and dangerous. According to a senior SEMA official, “IDPs continue to suffer. They go back to farm crops during the day then come back in evening as there is no safety - they do hit and run farming. When harvest commenced, [the AOGs] took their cattle to eat crops.” It is not only farmers who face difficulties. Respondents said their livestock is still being stolen and they are unable to go to their grazing areas for pasture due to insecurity. A Fulbe man interviewed in a hamlet in Birnin Magaji LGA said, “Our relatives with many cows still went

[to a grazing area]. They were attacked and they took away their cows. We are finding it difficult to feed the cows that remain now... They are not as healthy as before as we cannot feed them well now and this affected their fertility.”

The livelihoods of people in relatively safe towns have also been affected. Women no longer go to the main road to sell food they had cooked due to insecurity. They no longer want to use loud machinery such as sewing or grinding machines as doing so would alert attackers to the fact someone is at home and they would be caught unawares as the sound of the machine would mask the attackers’ entrance. Fulbe women who had previously sold milk and milk products have seen incomes drastically drop as families now had less cattle and the ones that remained did not produce much milk due to lack of adequate pasture.

“We lost 22 cows. I cannot define the condition we are in. It is beyond comment. I still sell milk but the cows that used to get milk have been taken away. There are not many cows which has affected women’s business. We used to go out every day to sell milk but now only go out once a week as the milk is not much. We do not have money to buy things. We sometimes go 1 or 2 days without eating food.” - Fulbe woman interviewed in a hamlet in Zurmi LGA

Due to high sexual violence, women and girls in many locations have stopped fetching firewood. In many communities, men now do so instead but take care to go early and come back quickly. Since firewood collection shifted from women to men, women have reduced control over incomes. Moreover, insecurity has reduced the amount of firewood collected which often is now no more sold but used for cooking fuel. Widows without grown sons or women whose husbands do not go to collect firewood particularly struggle to find fuel for cooking.

High levels of kidnapping of people and cows for ransom have reduced savings and capital in both rural and urban areas. Fighters have also extorted protection money from communities and threatened to attack them if this money is not paid. Amounts demanded range from N500,000 to N10 million. In order to pay these sums, people sell produce and cows. One Fulbe man in Balgare said he had to sell six of his 16 cows to contribute money demanded.

People with disabilities have found it particularly difficult to find livelihoods. A displaced Hausa man who now using crutches after sustaining an injury while fleeing violence said other men from his village have gone to Abuja in search of work but he is unable to do so. A displaced Hausa woman interviewed in Birnin Magaji who lost the use of her left arm during the attack is still unable to do any work over a year afterwards and is reliant on her mother to take care of her.

MANY PROTECTION ISSUES BUT NO PROTECTION INTERVENTIONS OR ACTORS

Very few agencies from outside the state are currently operational in Zamfara and no agencies that are operational there do protection work. There is a lack of knowledge of protection issues let alone mainstreaming of protection into interventions. For example, a UN staff member working on child protection said he was unsure if there were any children associated with armed groups. Dynamics around GBV are under-examined, not sufficiently included in organisational analysis and do not influence programming. Agencies providing healthcare say they have no experience in or knowledge of protection and while they treat women who come to health clinics having experienced sexual violence, they are currently taking no action to mainstream protection into their work.

WHAT ARE THE GENDER DYNAMICS AROUND CONFLICT AND HOW DO GENDER NORMS AND REALITIES DRIVE VIOLENCE AND/ OR PEACE?

Zamfara sees a two-way interaction between gender and violence with violent conflict profoundly affecting and changing gender roles and gender norms escalating conflict. Gender norms differ between groups and gender roles were in flux before the violent conflict. These shifts have been accelerated and influenced by violence. While people of all genders have been killed, injured and made disabled, more men have tended to be deliberately targeted during fighting, viewed with suspicion by the opposing side and, for Fulbe men, by security agents. Men and boys of fighting age of all sides to the conflict have taken roles in violence, falling on a spectrum of being forced to being intrinsically motivated to do so. Meanwhile, women and girls have experienced physical violence, been raped and forcibly married. Given the numbers of men who have been killed during violence, the majority of those who survive attacks are women and their children. Not only do they live with lasting physical and psychological impacts of violence, but they are also more likely to live in sites of displacement, head households and be forced to strategise ways to provide for the family. Economic factors have also affected rates of marriage and divorce with certain groups of girls, particularly those whose parents had been killed, now more likely to be married at even younger ages. Gender norms have also driven conflict. Women and girls are the first and last to experience violence, their bodies used as battlegrounds to attack the opposing group. Sexual violence heightens tensions and makes violence more likely. Communities see its continuation despite the current peace process as indication of continued insecurity. Gender norms and entrenchment of militarised masculinities have also been used to goad men into fighting and commission of violence. While it seems few, if any, women committed direct acts of violence, it is clear that women of all sides have enabled or urged violence. As dynamics developed, some women started changing their stance and engaging in peacebuilding. However, women's exclusion from formal decision-making processes, including those around peace, restricts the impact they can make. As a result of these patriarchal gender norms, the potential of women in Zamfara to contribute to peace remains largely untapped and women, excluded from peacebuilding interventions, can continue to act and speak in ways that deepen and entrench conflict dynamics further.

PRE-EXISTING GENDER NORMS

Gender norms differ between groups. gender roles were in flux. According to a woman rights activist interviewed in Gusau, Fulbe men can migrate for significant lengths of time while women remain in settlements, take care of families and sell milk from a few cows left with them which their children (girls and boys) take for pasture. In contrast, Hausa men tend to work on farms while women “process products, cook, go for firewood, fetch water and shoulder the responsibility of the children.” While kulle (seclusion) is still practiced in some communities, levels have reduced and are fluid in practice with women’s presence in public spaces including schools, hospitals and markets increasing.

Gender roles were changing even before the violent conflict with men no longer always playing breadwinner roles ascribed to them by Hausa culture and increased pressure on women to provide. According to a male civil society activist interviewed in Gusau, “Hausa men are supposed to be the breadwinner but they are not able to do so. We find that women took care of the family before the conflict.”

Yet, despite a history of women playing powerful economic, social and political roles in northern Nigeria, Zamfara, as elsewhere, saw high levels of gender inequality before the conflict. According to a male respondent who works for a Zamfara based civil society organisation, “Women are marginalised in the area of decision making and not educated to be able to reach managerial positions.... They find it difficult to own property and even if they own,

their husband controls the property and wealth of women... Women feel they cannot contribute even in decisions that affect them including [as relates to] this conflict.”

VIOLENCE AS A DRIVER OF CHANGING GENDER ROLES

Shifts in gender roles have been accelerated by violence. Men present in conflict affected communities tend to be elderly men or young boys. There are few men of fighting age because they have already been killed, have been kidnapped, are with AOGs or have left communities for fear of attacks or in search of work. Most women respondents said husbands who leave to look for work do not send money to them and sometimes leave without telling women where they have gone to. There have been cases of men returning to communities after to find wives in relationships with other men. Despite having been in relationships with other women themselves and often have not been in communication while away, this discovery can lead to conflict.

As a result, many conflict-affected women head households. They are forced to assume this role and strategise ways to provide for the family. While women always contributed to the household, they now more visibly play decision making roles. Even where husbands and fathers are present, there is increased pressure on women to provide which can translate into greater power in household decisions. This change has not always been viewed positively by the men concerned. Men with disabilities who face even greater challenges in earning incomes in particular expressed a sense of infringement of masculinity. It was not possible to find out what the relation is between this injured masculine pride and domestic violence and abuse in the time available but some women’s rights activists estimated rates had increased as men sought to continue to exert their power and authority.

“In the past, as a man, you have your source of income and there are so many things you can do but you can no longer do this and income is not enough. For example, you would go to bush to cut wood or pluck fruits to sell. If you go to that place [now], they will either kidnap you for ransom or shoot you. These changes have affected relations in the household but you need to exercise patience. When you were the breadwinner before and now she is the breadwinner, some responsibilities she starts to take up. You tell her to do something and she does not do it. The respect has come down. We are not happy about these changes.” - displaced Hausa man interviewed in Birnin Magaji who now has to use crutches to walk after being injured in an attack

Economic factors have also affected rates of marriage and divorce with certain groups of girls, particularly those whose parents had been killed, now more likely to be married at even younger ages. While NGOs had had some success in decreasing rates of early and forced marriage before the conflict, they saw increasing prevalence once more due to violence. Factors include increased poverty and parents’ inability to provide, the numbers of orphaned girls whose caregivers felt they had little choice but to marry off and a protective strategy of marrying daughters to mitigate the likelihood of AOG fighters forcing parents to hand over unmarried girls for marriage to them. A Fulbe woman interviewed in a hamlet in Zurmi LGA said she had married off her son’s daughters aged 13 years old but the girls would still be unmarried if her son had not been killed. Conversely, other respondents spoke of not being able to marry off daughters due to lack of money. Before the violence, marriages would take place after crops harvested had been sold. As there had not been any harvest for some time, the women’s family was unable to buy bride gifts and men could not pay bride price even though this amount had drastically fallen. There are also less men around as many men, younger ones in particular, have moved elsewhere in search of work and to escape being killed.

GENDER AS A DRIVER OF VIOLENCE

Women and girls are the first and last to experience violence. Sexual violence is used to make them feel unsafe, humiliate an entire group and heighten tensions further.¹⁹ Harm towards women was the precursor of violence against men and women's bodies became the battlefield of the conflict, used to attack male opponents. This use of sexual violence is clear from accounts where women were raped in front of male relatives to humiliate husbands, fathers, brothers and sons and stories where men inserted objects in vaginas intending on damage. As a Hausa yan sakai man interviewed in Zurmi said about how violence started, "They came to your villages and raped one of your wives if you have two wives. When they're done, they gave the husband N200 to buy soap to clean her." Not surprisingly, men reacted negatively to violence against their sisters, wives, daughters and mothers, spurred by outrage about how loved ones were violated and as norms of masculinity put women under the care of male relatives charged with protection.

"Up until now, the men of this town have it in them to take revenge one way. Even Fulbe girls who used to bring milk to sell, youth used to attack them. They sometimes run away spilling milk on the floor and finally stopped coming here to bring milk as the men always threaten to take revenge one day. And they have it in mind to take revenge one day. They have never disclosed [to us] how they will make revenge – they will flog the Fulbe women even if they do not rape them... The rape of Hausa women has brought so many tensions as we always feel bad seeing Fulbe men molesting our girls." - Hausa woman interviewed in Badarawa

Killings have reduced but sexual violence continues, a form of violent conflict in and of itself as well as an indication of its continuation. The peace pact, in contravention of international best practice,²⁰ did not address conflict related sexual violence and require its cessation amongst its ceasefire conditions. Furthermore, monitoring of implementation does not seem to consider GBV which continues to be ignored in discussions around peace and security.

Gender norms and entrenchment of militarised masculinities have also been used to goad men into fighting and commission of violence. According to a male journalist talking about two different community militias, "The yan sakai call the CJTF women as they do not kill armed combatants but are more of a deterrence presence." Members of Hausa militias strongly stated they had to act because they are men of the community and that it is the job of men to protect families and communities.

It seems that few, if any, women committed direct acts of violence yet it is clear that women of all sides have enabled or urged violence. Fulbe and Hausa women alike have urged their sons and husbands to take up arms to defend their families and communities. According to a senior civil servant, "The Fulani mother grooms children to become [AOG fighters]." Women's rights activists said women are not only abducted but choose to join AOGs, saying motivations were largely financial but also some women could be intrinsically motivated to seek revenge for killing of family members. Women also support their husbands who are members of these groups, providing them with food, advice, affection, encouragement and other services and comforts. A woman's rights activist spoke of the desire among women to "contribute to protect family

"If some husbands did not have money to buy rifle, women would sell livestock to buy a rifle for their husbands due to the threat they are facing in the bush. We always advise them to sell livestock to buy rifles and always keep them in the house. If any man said he didn't want to join, if we see a man who does not want to join, we will encourage him even if this means we have to buy him a rifle." - displaced Hausa woman interviewed in Zurmi

¹⁹That no sexual violence against men and boys was disclosed does not mean it does not take place.

²⁰United Nations Department of Political Affairs, Guidance for Mediators: Addressing Conflict-Related Sexual Violence in Ceasefire and Peace Agreements, 2012.

members and the family name.” They hide their husbands and keep the information about their locations and activities secret. There is also some indication that they are involved in the importation and transport of guns as suspicion is less likely to fall on women than men travelling. Moreover, women who support AOGs are not only Fulbe. Women of all ethnicities serve as informants. According to a male civil society activist, “Women are informants in the cities and along the roads. You see women and people who cannot walk begging on the streets. People see them as nobody and disregard them but they collect all the information about who is passing and what is happening and they are the informants.” Women that return from time with AOGs are seen as informants. According a civil society man interviewed in Gusau, “There are cases where women have chosen to join. In one community, two girls chose to join bandits on their own and this is known by the community and nobody will talk to them when they come back. People think they have come to the community to look for information.” On the other hand, Hausa women respondents spoke about how they greatly encouraged their husbands and sons to participate in community militias. Men faced intense pressure from women around them to act. Women stressed the threat they were under and the need for men, as protectors, to take up arms. Sexual violence was not only a powerful incentive for women to want decisive action but also for men to act. Women also cheered and supported actions of community militia men, including through selling their own belongings and livestock to buy men guns. According to a woman’s rights activist interviewed in Gusau, “Women provided [the community militias] with food and encouraged them. For example, if their child or husband killed a Fulani, they will be happy and encourage them to do more, particularly if their own child had been killed or kidnapped.”

As dynamics developed, some women started changing their stance and engaging in peacebuilding. They saw actions of ‘their’ group as worsening the violence and leading to reprisals. This was particularly true with Hausa women. According to a Hausa woman interviewed in Zurmi, “Most of the women do not like their men to join this group as [AOGs] will attack and kill. Women only advise men not to join – or to leave - by advising them of the consequences, that they do not have the same weapons, that their weapons are not as good as [the AOGs] own. Some of them listen but others don’t.” Women have also engaged in early warning and peacebuilding activities. According to a woman’s rights activist interviewed in Gusau, “Women across divides reach out to each other. They give alarms on anything that provokes or escalates violence... They bring children closer to them to prevent involvement in conflict and further escalation of violence... Women are the ones building back relationships.”

However, women’s exclusion from formal decision-making processes, including those around peace, restricts the impact they can make. Women are not part of peace and security committees at local and state level. They are not present on emirate councils. There are no women recognised as community or religious leaders. According to women’s rights activists, there are no women LGA councillors, no women in the State House of Assembly (SHOA), no women representing Zamfara at the National Assembly and the only woman commissioner is in charge of the Ministry of Women’s Affairs, a ministry often sidelined and seen as unimportant and in that position by virtue of her father (the Emir of Gummi). Indeed, any women in positions of influence within formal structures have male relatives or godfathers. There was reportedly no woman on state committees looking at solutions to banditry or focusing on demobilisation and disarmament of AOG fighters.

As a result of these patriarchal gender norms, the potential of women in Zamfara to contribute to peace not only remains largely untapped but women can continue to act and speak in ways that deepen and entrench conflict dynamics further. For example, efforts to disarm have focused on male fighters and, despite women continuing to question the wisdom of giving up arms in a context of high insecurity, there has been no outreach to women on issues of disarmament and demobilisation let alone reintegration and rehabilitation.

WHAT ARE THE FACTORS (INCLUDING GOVERNMENT, SECURITY FORCE AND COMMUNITY ACTION) BRINGING PEOPLE TOGETHER AND/ OR PROMOTING PEACE AND STABILITY?

Violence has severely ruptured the social fabric and reduced social cohesion within and between ethnic and occupational groups. Yet, some areas see persisting good relations while others do not. While an exhaustive study was not possible, current dynamics seem contingent on the level, nature and quality of pre-conflict social interactions, provision of support and government action. In many remote areas, people live in mono-ethnic communities so interactions between people of different ethnic groups were less than in peri-urban areas which are more multi-ethnic or had Fulbe and Sullubawa hamlets neighbouring Hausa ones. However, levels of interaction alone do not necessarily lead to positive relationships as their nature and quality are key. Conversely, areas where interactions were frequent, of a positive nature and with sufficient depth show the greatest social cohesion. In some places, dynamics are partly due to factors escalating tensions elsewhere being missing, for example with community militias members drawn from a diversity of ethnic groups which not only made it less likely for the cycle of vengeance to take root but also deepened, solidified and reinforced links with common defence of communities proving an intensely bonding experience. A key indicator of strong social cohesion is the continued practice of intermarriage between Fulbe and Hausa individuals. Provision of support across ethnic, occupational and geographical lines also deepens social cohesion. Civil society actors warned of limits to generosity and that relations may deteriorate if displacement and additional strain on the incomes and living space of host communities seems as it will continue without end. Successive state governments have tried to promote peace but while these efforts are promising, they tend to be at the LGA level, are not inclusive and do not have wide reach.

LEVEL, NATURE AND QUALITY OF SOCIAL INTERACTIONS

In many remote areas, people live in mono-ethnic communities so interactions between people of different ethnic groups were less than in peri-urban areas which are more multi-ethnic or had Fulbe and Sullubawa hamlets neighbouring Hausa ones. Not surprisingly, more mixed areas where people live directly next door have greater levels of cohesion than areas with mono-ethnic hamlets neighbouring each other. In Zamfara, Fulbe groups are not only settled but also can be migratory, moving across the state, into neighbouring states and across national borders. Migratory Fulbe and settled Hausa people were more likely to interact as Fulbe people migrated through Fulbe, Hausa, Sullubawa, Busaye and other towns and settlements compared to the Hausa and Busaye (another pastoralist group) as Busaye people tend to be settled in remote rural areas and rarely mix with other groups unless they happen to be in the vicinity. Busaye people interviewed, particularly women, said their first real experience of meeting people from other ethnic groups was when they were displaced.

However, levels of interaction alone do not necessarily lead to positive relationships as their nature and quality are key. If interactions were conflictual, groups and individuals are more likely to have negative social relations than those who had not interacted at all. In this way, a gradual decline in farmer-pastoralist interactions shows how relations between migratory Fulbe in particular and sedentary farmers, particularly Hausa ones, became more conflictual over time as populations grew, farming encroached on grazing routes, criminality rose, community militias acted and weapons moved across national borders. Alternatively, where Hausa and Fulbe communities were both settled in the same area but in conflict with each other over natural resources and had grievances around perceived unjust resolution of conflict, these tensions worsened over time. Even where interactions were positive, if their quality was low and of a fleeting nature for example with migratory pastoralists and farmers working their fields greeting each other, they proved not to be sufficiently robust to resist wider societal changes.

Conversely, areas where interactions were frequent, of a positive nature and with sufficient depth show the greatest social cohesion. These areas often had high rates of intermarriage, economic interactions and dependence, common socialising, different groups living side by side and influential people of all ages and genders purposefully not perpetuating but rather counteracting divisive conflict narratives that emphasised the role of ethnicity. A Fulbe woman interviewed in a Fulbe settlement in Zurmi LGA said, “We live peacefully within us. There are no problems here. There has been no retaliation against us because they know it is not us who are attacking them. We are here neutral so that is why there is no problem between us.” A Fulbe man interviewed in a village in Bakura LGA said, “Everything is peaceful here. We are more like relatives here so everything is fine and nobody accuses us. We grew up together so they know us. We have intermarriage and it is still happening now.”

In some places, dynamics are partly due to factors escalating tensions elsewhere being missing. For example, most community militias across the state consisted only of Hausa men or, if they were mixed, Fulbe men in pre-existing groups were viewed with suspicion and sidelined. Yet in areas where there were strong, positive and frequent interactions between Hausa and Fulbe people, members of both ethnic groups came together to protect their town. According to a Fulbe man in Bakura talking about different community militias, “The yan banga here include Hausa, Fulani and Busaye. It’s the same with the yan sakai. It is mixed here as we grew up together and are very close.” Coming together across lines of division elsewhere make it less likely to set off the cycle of vengeance where all Hausa people were seen as causing them harm by Fulbe dominated AOGs who attacked Hausa communities, all Fulbe people seen as ‘bandits’ by Hausa militias who killed and harassed all Fulbe people and each group committed acts of violence against the other in revenge of what was done to their group. It also deepened, solidified and reinforced links between these groups with common defence of communities proving an intensely bonding experience. A key indicator of strong social cohesion is the continued practice of intermarriage between Fulbe and Hausa individuals.

PROVISION OF (MUTUAL) SUPPORT

Provision of support across ethnic, occupational and geographical lines also deepens social cohesion. Many IDPs said people in places they had fled to safety had been welcoming. A Sullubawa woman interviewed in a hamlet in Gusau LGA spoke about how her community had fled to Mada multiple times, each time to be housed and taken care of by their hosts. She said the people of Mada had also taken steps to talk with soldiers about their hamlet and tell them they are not associated with AOGs and should not be killed them even though “their orders are to attack anyone in the bush not knowing there are innocents among us.” Elsewhere, this welcome has not always been consistent for Fulbe IDPs, particularly when they go to Hausa dominated areas where they are not known and are viewed with suspicion. This lack of support deepens grievances and increases frustration.

Civil society actors warned of limits to generosity and that relations may deteriorate if displacement and additional strain on the incomes and living space of host communities seems as it will continue without end. One man who works with IDPs said, “When you have food to take care of people, it is okay but the challenge is much when you cannot take care of your own families and also have IDPs - then you have challenges.” Already, LGA officials indicate some host community members felt IDPs were informants to AOGs and complicit in attacks.²¹

GOVERNMENT ACTIONS

Successive state governments have tried to promote peace but while these efforts are promising, they tend to be at the LGA level, are not inclusive and do not have wide reach.

²¹UNHCR, Joint Protection Assessment Mission to Northwest Nigeria, 25 July – 4 August 2019.

Under the previous administration, Fulbe and Hausa committees were connected and charged with self-policing any violence or misbehaviour. The current administration is trying to reach out to different actors, area by area. People are encouraged to meet to discuss differences such as the destruction of crops by livestock before things escalate with conversations facilitated by the local police chief and military commander. However, these mechanisms do not include everyone. These discussions have also largely left out women, people with disabilities, other groups often marginalised but most affected by violence and those outside LGA headquarters. This lack of involvement not only further entrenches exclusion but means decisions are not influenced by their experiences and perspectives and do not have wide ownership.

WHO ARE THE KEY ACTORS WITH INFLUENCE, MEANS AND MOTIVATIONS TO MOBILISE GROUPS AND RESOURCES INTO COLLECTIVE ACTION FOR PEACE OR FOR VIOLENCE AND WHAT ARE LINKS BETWEEN THEM?

It is unclear how many AOGs currently exist but there were said to be 25 major groups and up to 150 different camps each with their own leader. Although many are Fulbe, a significant proportion come from other ethnic groups. A common narrative of 'foreigners destabilising Nigeria' is rebutted by those who engage with AOGs. While there have been attempts by AOGs in northeast Nigeria (commonly known as Boko Haram) to come to Zamfara, no evidence of sustained presence or links was found. The peace process has led to increased inter and intra group violence due to different attitudes as to whether to put down weapons, increasing factionalism and power tussles. The military launched Operation Sharan Daji in early 2016. The Nigerian police force has been instrumental in facilitating peace dialogue. Members of security agencies, the military in particular, were said to be benefitting from violence. There are three main community militia groups with some mutual membership and interaction: yan banga (which existed beforehand); yan sakai (the name given to those who decided to act in response to violence); and CJTF (set up by the previous state government in response to human rights violations committed by the yan sakai and disbanded by the present administration). The committee for finding solutions to armed banditry in Zamfara state listed the names of community leaders, security agents and politicians suspected to be linked to AOGs and recommended their removal from office and/or court martial. This recommendation has yet to be implemented. Zamfara is rich in natural resources and many respondents believed the mining sector is a significant contributor of insecurity through payment of protection money to forestall AOG attacks. There is no one clear group that speaks for all Fulbe in the state due to perceptions of politicisation, corruption and factionalism. The state government works with Fulbe people and groups to reach out to AOGs and call them for dialogue and, although they are able to reach out to leaders, their level of influence over them is unclear. The current administration emphasises the work done to bring about peace. The Ministry of Budget and Economic Planning under the Deputy Governor is the contact point for development partners. The Ministry of Security and Home Affairs is a newly created ministry. The Office of the Secretary to the State Government coordinates grazing reserves. Respondents from civil society and government alike spoke about the need for capacity strengthening of individuals working in MDAs and the institutions themselves. Zamfara has a long history of intra and inter party conflict and shifting party alliances and allegiances. Insecurity has been used by politicians in campaigning and it is perceived that, while most politicians with influence currently see peace as in their interests, there remain a few significant political actors who could be potential spoilers.

ARMED OPPOSITION GROUPS

There is fluidity of motivations and perspectives among people associated with AOGs. While some who initially engaged in criminality may be also now motivated by revenge, others who experienced attacks and wanted vengeance have come to commit theft. Those interviewed

who were part of groups distinguished themselves from those more financially motivated. They stressed they were acting in defence of their ethnic group as opposed to others who engage in criminality but also admitted that the difference between these purportedly two separate types of groups was unclear to most people and also sometimes to those involved themselves.

It was not possible to get a clear understanding of how many groups currently exist.

According to a senior military commander, there are approximately 25 different groups of varying size with their own leader and territory who come together for operations then disperse. However, other accounts including that of a senior police commander put the number of AOG camps at 150 with each camp having hundreds of members and their own leader.

Although many AOG fighters are Fulbe, a significant proportion of the group come from other ethnic groups.

Fulbe respondents who survived attacks were more likely to say they did not know who their attackers were compared to Hausa respondents who insisted they were Fulbe but could not always substantiate this with evidence. This difference could be because those who attack Hausa communities, motivated by reasons including revenge for attacks on them, are more likely to be groups with more Fulbe members whereas those who attack Fulbe communities may do so to take away cattle and be more mixed. Alternatively, Hausa people may be more likely to stereotype attackers as Fulbe whereas Fulbe people resist believing they are from their own ethnic group. Notwithstanding, a clear consensus emerged across respondents that some AOG members, particularly those who provided intelligence, are not Fulbe. As a senior military commander said, “This cuts across Fulani and Hausa... If emirs are collaborating, are they Fulani?”

While the narrative of ‘foreigners’ destabilising Nigeria is common, it is rebutted by those who engage with AOGs who insist the majority are from the country.

Given the nature of Fulbe migrations, this distinction can be a false one. Some respondents believed it was these ‘foreigners’ who were leading attacks as ‘Nigerian Fulbe’ could not commit the levels of violence witnessed. Yet, other respondents stressed this narrative is not true. For example, a senior military commander said, “It is a lie when they say they are not Nigerians... The people we are fighting are Nigerians like us.” He believed this narrative was linked to political contestation with opponents spreading rumours that President Buhari, a Fulbe man himself, “is empowering the Fulani and allowing his brothers from outside the country – note, Nigerians are not his brothers but Fulani from Niger and Chad are his brothers - to come in and take over Nigeria.”

While there have been attempts by northeast Nigeria AOGs (commonly known as Boko Haram) to come to Zamfara, no evidence of sustained presence or links was found.

In 2014, a senior Jama’atu Ahl al-Sunna li-l-Da’wa wa-l-Jihad (JASDJ) commander was arrested near Gusau and JASDJ had a camp in Bakura. The military went to the location, destroyed the camp and killed fighters. In late 2018, according to a senior civil servant, there was migration of a small group from the northeast to Zamfara who joined with local AOGs to kidnap people for ransom and loot food mostly around Shinkafi. In early to mid 2019, a group of approximately 10 people in Dutsun Kura in Tsafe LGA reportedly arrived and started preaching about what Islam does and does not allow and promising local AOGs they would help them fight. There are rumours too that in Sokoto, preachers presumably linked to Islamic State West African Province (ISWAP) arrived and started preaching. Analysts considered an attack in September 2019 may have been committed by ISWAP as only soldiers were killed and weapons and vehicles taken away which fits ISWAP patterns but not necessarily those of local AOGs but this analysis is highly speculative. As of January 2020, despite some claims that Ansaru (another AOG from the northeast) was active in the region, all respondents agreed there was no definite evidence that northeast AOGs currently had significant presence in the northwest, strong links with local AOGs and/or aimed to have presence across a contiguous territory in northern Nigeria. Indeed, people evinced some suspicion as to the reason for these narratives. They looked at results such claims may rationalise, pointing out action judged permissible against ‘terrorists’ was more difficult to justify against people engaging in

criminality. Yet, while this analysis found no evidence showing current links between AOGs in the northeast and northwest, this does not mean that none exist or could develop in the future.

Presently, there is significant conflict on whether to stop fighting. Not all have agreed to the peace process. Civil servants say the majority are on board with only small factions resisting, but those associated with AOGs and community militias say the breakdown is more even. There is significant discussion within and between groups. (Former) fighters, tired of violence, want peace but are starting to get impatient waiting for government promises to be fulfilled and struggle to control those who now want to leave the peace process due to what they see as failed promises. Moreover, some major leaders, such as Dan Karami who operates within Birnin Magaji, Tsafe and part of Gusau LGA in Zamfara as well as Tsafana and Kankara LGAs in Katsina, have yet to accept the peace deal.

The peace process has led to increased inter and intra group violence due to different attitudes as to whether to put down weapons, increasing factionalism and power tussles.

A Hausa man interviewed in Badarawa who had been abducted described witnessing arguments that escalated and led to exchange of fire. Indeed, these groups see high infighting and violence. According to senior security officials, increasing factionalism make peace more difficult: “The impediment we are facing is that in the forest, [fighters] have differences and power tussles. They want to be recognised and lead which has led them to start killing themselves. Before, they were facing militia groups but now [those groups have] stopped activities – so issues of who am I and differences started once they no longer had a common enemy.” Other respondents linked dynamics to desire for government recognition with some wanting to be seen as leaders to be part of negotiations and the recipients of money and other resources believed to flow from this.

NIGERIAN SECURITY AGENCIES

The military launched Operation Sharan Daji in early 2016 to fight cattle rustling and banditry in the northwest. The eighth division of the Nigerian armed forces headquartered in Sokoto covers Sokoto, Zamfara, Kebbi and Katsina while its 1 Brigade with two battalions and one garrison is responsible for Zamfara and Kebbi. The soldiers of eighth division are stationed in the area with their families remaining in towns even if they happen to be deployed to fighting in more rural areas. Additional troops from elsewhere in the country have been deployed to the theatre.

There is some tension between desired military strategy and state government dialogue.

According to a senior military commander, “It is good to talk but also frustrating as we are fighting with one hand tied behind our back.” The military also faces difficulties given opponents’ knowledge of terrain, physical presence in communities and wide networks of informants who pass on knowledge of security presence and movements. The quality of civil military relations is variable, particularly with Fulbe communities and people forced to flee homes due to operations and threats of reprisals. Yet, many respondents said there was improvement in military behaviour with better response time to distress calls and fewer complaints. This change was partly attributed to the peace process which had reduced numbers of active AOG fighters soldiers were trying to combat with inadequate personnel and other resources. As a result, the military was seen as better able to focus capacity on the fewer number of areas that still see violence.

The Nigerian police force has been instrumental in facilitating the peace dialogue. Usman Nagogo, the Commissioner of Police held meetings inviting leaders of Fulbe communities and (Hausa) community militias to discuss ways forward. Nagogo, speaking at a press briefing in January 2020, outlined his priorities for 2020 to build on progress achieved as follows:

- 1) Improve personnel efficiency by training to confront new trends including through emphasis on weapons handling and the need to protect human dignity and constitutional rights.
- 2) Full implementation of community policing and creation of peace committees in all LGAs.

- 3) Enhancement of operational base via provision of logistics and increased numbers of personnel who have greater morale and are trained and guided to respect the rule of law.
- 4) Upgrading of specialized operating units.²²

The National Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC) has not played a significant role in the violent conflict to date but has potential for positive peacebuilding contributions in the future. Their alternative dispute resolution department, agro-rangers squad which aims to mediate and reconcile conflicting parties and peace, and conflict resolution department, if strengthened in capacity, can mitigate violence and consolidate peace moving forwards.

Some members of security agencies, the military in particular, were said to be benefitting from violence. The state government committee for finding solutions to armed banditry in Zamfara state found soldiers, police officers and SSS personnel had colluded with and supported AOGs. Military commanders were believed to be diverting expenditure into personal finances while soldiers on the ground were seen as engaging in economic activities including farming and livestock rearing. It is unclear whether this cattle include those confiscated during operations which Fulbe communities complain are not released back to rightful owners. While a thorough investigation into military human rights violations was not possible, respondents spoke of sexual violence, lack of distinction between AOGs and others, particularly of Fulbe ethnicity, targeted during military operations and extra-judicial killings committed by soldiers.

COMMUNITY MILITIAS

There are three main community militia groups in Zamfara with some mutual membership and interaction. As elsewhere in northern Nigeria, many areas had yan banga (vigilante) groups beforehand. When communities decided to respond to criminality, many men not part of these groups undertook activities aimed at community protection and became known as the yan sakai (volunteers). A N500 a month allowance paid to yan banga members by the LGA was increased to N5,000. This sum was available to 500 yan banga members in each of the 17 emirates in the state. Respondents said the difference between these two groups was monthly payment of state government allowances to yan banga members and greater commission of human rights violations by yan sakai members. In 2018, in response to allegations of human rights abuses committed by the yan sakai, the state government created a new group called the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF). Committees set up at emirate level consisting of representatives of the police, State Security Service (SSS) and NSCDC and the emir screened potential members to ensure recruits were of good behaviour. Members were given uniforms, vehicles and monthly stipends of N15,000. These groups worked together with security agents and provided useful information and guidance to them due to their knowledge of local terrain. The present state administration has disbanded the CJTF and given orders they are no longer to attack. Yan banga groups still exist but have been renamed as yan banga for peace. There is some unhappiness in Hausa communities who feel they now have no protection against future violence.

EMIRS AND POLITICIANS WITH LINKS TO AOGS

The committee for finding solutions to armed banditry in Zamfara state listed five emirs and 33 district heads suspected to be linked to AOGs as well as 10 soldiers, four police officers and some politicians and recommended their removal from office and/ or court martial.²³ Respondents were unclear as to why those listed had not faced consequences.

²²Author's notes from press conference, verified by copies of his speech distributed to those present.

²³Shehu Umar, 'Banditry: Report Indicts 5 Zamfara Emirs, 33 District Heads,' *Daily Trust*, 12 October 2019.

FULBE GROUPS

There is no one clear group that speaks for all Fulbe in the state due to perceptions of politicisation, corruption and factionalism. At present, there are between 10 and 14 separate associations. New groups arise due to unhappiness at existing groups which are seen to not represent Fulbe interests, be too close to government and/ or receive resources that are not passed along. There are current attempts at conflict resolution and plans to form an umbrella organisation that speaks with one unified Fulbe voice. As of the time of data collection in January 2020, all Fulbe groups had decided to join this umbrella except for Miyetti Allah which others were hoping would come on board soon.

The state government works with Fulbe people and groups to reach out to AOGs and call them for dialogue. However, the level of influence of Fulbe leaders and groups over AOG leaders and members is unclear. On the one hand, some Fulbe see them as corrupted and extractive but on the other hand, they have kinship and other bonds. Moreover, the position of Fulbe groups vis à vis violence can vary.

THE ROLE OF MINING AND RESOURCE EXTRACTION

Zamfara is rich in natural resources and many respondents believed mining was a significant contributor to insecurity. A respondent from the industry said some companies stopped operations as people working in mines had been kidnapped for ransom. In larger sites run by mining companies, activities continue despite the government having officially banned mining. Here, respondents spoke of how there have been no AOG attacks despite money to be made and believed AOGs were paid money to keep away. Respondents also spoke of how, in some locations, AOG members fetch water from boreholes at mining sites. One man working for civil society said he believed “politicians are instigating insecurity so investors do not come here as they will disturb them from their mining.” A journalist detailed how mines only exist with the permission of AOG fighters who control the resources stemming from them. He believes AOG hideouts have been strategically placed in areas with high levels of natural resources and that they have acted to stop people engaging in artisanal mining in these places. Respondents involved in artisanal mining spoke of being chased away from areas by AOGs who warn them to leave.

STATE GOVERNMENT INSTITUTIONS

The current state government emphasises the work they have done to bring about peace, with some respondents claiming that other areas such as healthcare, education and sustainable livelihoods have been neglected as a result of this focus. There are several state government structures in place aimed at addressing the conflict and humanitarian situation but respondents from civil society and government alike spoke about the need for capacity strengthening of individuals working in MDAs and the institutions themselves:

- **The Ministry of Budget and Economic Planning under the Deputy Governor is the contact point for development partners operational in the state.**
- **The Ministry of Security and Home Affairs, previously a government department, is a newly created ministry.** It has a linked Special Adviser on Conflict Resolution and Reconciliation and two relevant two directorates. The Director General of the Conflict Resolution and Reconciliation Directorate, a former army colonel who commanded a battalion in Sokoto to fight AOGs, assumed office in mid-January 2020. Its scope of work is unknown but seems focused on addressing structural and cultural causes of conflict and developing effective security architecture and early warning and early response mechanisms. Meanwhile, the Directorate of Humanitarian Affairs, Disaster Management and Social Development includes the Zamfara State Emergency Management Agency (SEMA).

- **The Office of the Secretary to the State Government coordinates the grazing reserves the state government plans to build in each senatorial zone.** At present, work on the grazing reserve in Maradun has commenced with further grazing reserves planned in Zurmi and Maru. A visit to the Maradun grazing reserve found building work was progressing with houses being built for 210 households with space adjacent to each house where up to 100 cattle could be kept overnight. In addition, a stadium, mosque, primary healthcare facility and Islamiyya, primary and secondary schools were being constructed and a nearby canal would be used as a water source. However, revocation of land allocations to farmers has not been accompanied by any allocation of land elsewhere. Moreover, the selection criteria and process for those who would live in this grazing area has not been developed and is unclear. There is an urgent need for improved conflict sensitivity of this project.

MAPPING OF POLITICAL ACTORS

Zamfara has a long history of intra and inter party conflict and shifting party alliances and allegiances. Respondents identified a history of political contestation, particularly around the 2011 elections, as causing the increased criminality in the state which created the enabling environment for the sharp increase in violence.

WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL TRAJECTORIES, BOTH POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE, AROUND PEACE AND SECURITY?

Zamfara currently experiences relative peace compared to a year ago but theft, sexual violence and fear of attack continue. Although most respondents were appreciative of government actions for peace, some were sceptical about effectiveness. A perception that the government is on the side of the Fulbe is common among Hausa communities. AOGs are reluctant to disarm because they do not trust the current state of affairs will last. Many of those displaced, who hear AOG fighters are committing criminality and sexual violence in their areas, do not wish to return home. Cross border dynamics and the lack of unified approach is a key challenge. Moreover, there is a lack of joined up approaches between federal and state governments. Civilians are forced to choose sides which puts them at harm. Years of violence has created high levels of mistrust and decreased social cohesion. Yet, there is a strong desire for peace among many people on all sides. There are three potential future trajectories of the conflict:

- 1. A slow return to peace*
- 2. Criminality and banditry persist in rural areas and increasing fragmentation and factionalisation of AOGs*
- 3. A total collapse of peace deal and return to high levels of violence, proliferation of groups and, potentially, attempts by AOGs in northeast Nigeria to link with AOGs in the northwest.*

Zamfara currently experiences relative peace compared to a year ago but theft, sexual violence and fear of attack continue. Not only are predominantly Hausa community militias no longer harming Fulbe people but in some locations, AOG fighters are protecting areas. Respondents spoke about feeling increased security but while killings have reduced, encroachment of livestock onto farms, theft and sexual violence continue. Although the main plank of the peace agreement was about predominantly Hausa community militias and AOG fights giving up weapons, only limited progress has been made in this regard. The government and security agencies point to the weapons handed over to them as a marker of success but their number is, at present, a small fraction of that present in the state. The idea is for disarmament to happen in phases with each group giving up some arms after the other one has done so. According to a male journalist, “The yan sakai admit they have lots of weapons and will not give up their weapons until they are completely sure the Fulani will give up weapons.” However, weaponry held by different groups is imbalanced with AOGs having higher quality weapons as community

militias rely on locally manufactured guns. Civilians complained AOG fighters, although they no longer kill, move around communities with their weapons instilling fear.

Although most respondents were appreciative of government actions for peace, some were sceptical about effectiveness. According to a Hausa man who was abducted and held in captivity, “The only solution is to fight them. The peace process is rubbish as they will still attack you and collect your phone and money.” Some yan sakai members were unhappy and in readiness to resume fighting. They pointed to cases where people had been lured back to villages by promises of safety only to find attacks persisted. A yan sakai man interviewed in Zurmi recounted what had happened recently when a yan banga man told fighters they would not take his daughter only for them to shoot and kill him and take away the girl. He went on to say, “Peace has even dropped out” and that fighters released from prison had gone back to join their groups.

A perception that the government is on the side of the Fulbe is common among Hausa communities, particularly members of community militias. According to one civil society respondent, “There is a perception among yan sakai that government are backing the Fulani more and, at any moment, conflict can escalate. They feel attacks are happening now for example in Zurmi because [AOGs] know they are not armed. Also, they see the ruga but not similar intervention targeting farmers.”

“The yan sakai are respecting the position of no hostility and weapons. There is at least a façade that they are no longer belligerent whereas the [AOGs] move around to wreak havoc... The locals are stationary within the community and local vigilante are from that community. It is easier to fish out the yan sakai if they commit an offence but it is difficult to fish out the [AOGs] as they strike and move. Due to that, the government’s hand is forced to pamper and appeal to the [AOGs] more whereas with Hausa, they will get you if you commit anything.” – senior male military commander

AOGs are reluctant to disarm because they do not trust the current state of affairs will last. Fulbe leaders gave four reasons why AOG members do not want to disarm. First, they are holding onto weapons for self-defence, reluctant to surrender them until everyone else has done so. Second, AOG fighters need weapons not only to defend themselves from outsiders but due to conflict and fighting within and between groups. Third, fighters having bought weapons require compensation before giving them up. Fourth, some are not willing to stop fighting as they make significant money. Some Fulbe leaders questioned the government’s, pointing out that even though the committee for finding solutions to armed banditry in Zamfara state undertook extensive investigations, its report has not been published nor its recommendations implemented. They complained the government was paying no attention to those who sold and transported weapons or to those buying cows at low prices that had been stolen by AOG fighters.

Many of those displaced, who hear AOG fighters are committing criminality and sexual violence in their areas, do not wish to return home. Some respondents predicted encroachment onto farmlands and increased tensions during the rainy season and that these dynamics would be heightened if people returned to communities and started farming once more.

“If they had given up their weapons, we could have gone back. We have contacts and are communicating with people who say [AOGs] are still there with their dangerous weapons – nothing has been happening for peace [in rural areas]... Things are becoming worse especially in the bush since they have stopped the yan banga and yan sakai from operating as [AOGs] are just doing what they feel like doing. They enter houses where there are teenage girls. They tell her father that they are taking her for marriage and give money. Sometimes, they do not even give money but just take and go. They are still doing this in the bush.” - displaced Hausa woman interviewed in Zurmi

Cross border dynamics and the lack of unified approach is a key challenge. Zamfara has borders with Katsina, Kaduna, Niger, Sokoto and Kebbi as well as with Niger Republic. Previous peace dialogue in Zamfara is believed to have led AOGs to move to Katsina²⁴ and the collapse of the peace deal in Katsina has increased the frequency of attacks, abductions, sexual violence and killings on and of civilians there. While the Zamfara state government is trying to negotiate peace, others are not. As a result, fighters from across the border come to Zamfara. According to a civil society man, “[In Sokoto they] were attacked by security forces causing lots of casualties so they have grievances and hunger [and come to Zamfara and] take it out on civilian populations.” Alternatively, due to the peace process in Zamfara, AOGs are seen as using the state to regroup and launch attacks on neighbouring states. As Usman Nagogo, Commissioner of Police, said in a press briefing in January 2020, “If we solve the problem of Zamfara but not [of] other states, we will still be on it as they will settle in Zamfara and attack other states or be in other states and attack Zamfara.”²⁵ All heads of security agencies interviewed agreed on the need for discussion and a common approach between neighbouring states and between Nigeria and Niger. There have been meetings aiming at fostering this cooperation bringing together political and security actors but their effectiveness is unclear.

Moreover, there is a lack of joined up approaches between federal and state governments. Sometimes, there are contradictory statements from the state and federal government which hinders progress. For example, when the state government was conducting peace dialogue with AOGs, President Buhari stated that all fighters should be eradicated. President Buhari has also announced the withdrawal of military personnel and handover of security responsibilities to the police. Most senior civil servants interviewed were not involved in discussions before this decision was made. A senior civil servant covering issues of security said, “I am sceptical about [troop withdrawal] as security is so fragile even with military presence and the police do not have capacity to control the situation. We cannot have a vacuum.” Even military personnel did not think the time was right. According to a senior military commander, “Zamfara is not yet ready for this. We still need some major offensives to be carried out to silence [AOGs] to a particular level.”

Civilians are forced to choose sides which puts them at harm. They are attacked by AOGs if they are suspected of collusion or do not pass on information about security force movements but face severe pressure from security forces to provide intelligence who also automatically tend to view those remaining in rural areas as affiliated with AOGs.

Years of violence has created high levels of mistrust and decreased social cohesion. Currently, even though the situation is calmer, recriminations persist. According to a Fulbe woman in Shinkafi, “The Hausa talk bad against us... They can see that the Fulbe are also being affected but they do not care even if they can see not all of us are like [the AOGs].” A displaced Hausa man who had become disabled due to violence interviewed in Birnin Magaji said, “They are all the same. There are no innocent Fulbe. In Zamfara, there is no Fulbe who is not a thief.” It is not only relations between Fulbe and Hausa that have been affected but also within ethnic groups. Hausa people suspect neighbours of being informers and passing on intelligence used to attack. Fulbe respondents said relationships between different Fulbe individuals and groups have been affected as levels of mutual support are no longer possible due to depressed livelihoods and capital. Moreover, that people of Fulbe background have attacked Fulbe hamlets, killed Fulbe people of all ages and genders, stolen their livestock, forced young men into joining them and committed sexual violence against women and girls has greatly reduced this strong ethnic bond.

Yet, there is a strong desire for peace among many people on all sides. A Fulbe man who had

²⁴UNHCR, Assessment Report on the State of Insecurity in Sokoto, Zamfara and Katsina States, Northwest Region of Nigeria from 25 July – 4 August 2019, 6 August 2019, shared with author.

²⁵Author’s notes from press conference, verified by copies of his speech distributed to those present.

committed violence in the past spoke of how his group did not seek revenge for a recent attack on their hamlet, despite believing attackers to be the same people who killed older family members in the past, the incident that prompted him to join the group to seek revenge. This time, people from the nearby Hausa town with whom his group had previously been in conflict come to condole them and those who had been attacked refused the offer of those who wanted to work with them in solidarity to take revenge.

There are three potential future trajectories of the conflict.

1. A slow return to peace but high levels of food insecurity due to interrupted livelihoods and impacts of violence

2. Criminality and banditry persist in rural areas as some actors refuse to disarm and in response to high food insecurity and low livelihood prospects and increasing fragmentation and factionalisation of AOGs

3. A total collapse of peace deal and return to high levels of violence, proliferation of groups and, potentially, attempts by AOGs in northeast Nigeria who have been gaining in strength there to link with AOGs in the northwest

CONCLUSIONS

There is great potential for continued peace consolidation in Zamfara but also significant risk of the collapse of the peace process and a return to high levels of violence. Much will depend on the actions of the state government and their ability to persuade conflicting parties that the pursuance of peace is in their interests. Already, there is unhappiness about the slow pace of implementation of the government's undertakings in the peace deal and frustration about a perceived lack of even-handedness to different groups. These attitudes risk calcifying against the backdrop of persisting insecurity, particularly for women and girls, that appears to be rising. That there is a new government in place is an opportunity as many people appear to have hope of change. However, many civil servants and senior politicians themselves are self-reflective of the lack of individual and institutional capacity around peacebuilding and conflict mitigation. Many policies are being designed and implemented in conflict insensitive ways. Little regard has been paid to promoting social cohesion and mutual coexistence of those who were recently committing violence against each other. Government interventions rather than being gender transformational tend to overlook the importance of gender in this conflict, exclude women from decision making, disregard high GBV levels and further entrench patriarchal gender norms. At the same time there is a willingness to engage outside actors to an extent not always seen in conflict affected states.