Nigeria Country Briefing

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Purpose: The country briefings are designed to provide an initial overview of Dallaire Institute countries of focus – drawing on emerging trends related to peace and security, gender, children's rights, and recruitment and use. Paired with the Policy Alignment Tool and the Capacity Building Assessment Tool, the purpose of the country briefings is to support Dallaire Institute staff in understanding and assessing the situation on the ground, particularly as it relates to children, to inform research, advocacy and programmatic work. This report on Nigeria will allow the Dallaire Institute to remain informed when advocating for the implementation of the Vancouver Principles as part of the *Advancing the Vancouver Principles in Africa* project in seven sub-Saharan African countries.

This briefing is divided into the following sections:

1. Country and Operational Context
2. Security Sector Approach
3. Children, Peace and Security Context
4. Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers Context
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Country Context

Nigeria is often referred to as the "Giant of Africa," a key player in the west African political landscape, and home to the fastest growing economy and largest population on the continent. Despite the country's relative stability, economic strife and conflict threaten Nigeria as Boko Haram attempts to extend its deep roots in their northwestern region across the country and amongst its neighbours. Corruption is pervasive in government, police and the oil industry, leading to civilian distrust.

Political/Social context

- Nigeria is home is over 250 ethnic groups, with most of the population identifying as Igbo Christinas (though 12,000-15,000 self-identify as Jewish), Hausa-Fulani Muslims or Yoruba (half Christian, half Muslim). This high degree of diversity is an outcome of the British colonial tactic of divide and conquer and has a lasting effect of ethnic conflict.
- Up until 1999, which marked the beginning of the fourth republic, Nigeria suffered from tumultuous swings between military and democratic rule.
- Modelled after the U.S.'s federal republic, Nigeria has enjoyed democracy for decades with a relatively high degree of political participation

    - The political system of Nigeria is deeply patrimonial, with powerful "godfathers" using political connections and wealth to skew election results in their favour. (BBC, 2019)
- Bola Tinubu of the All-Progressives Congress (APC), elected in February of 2023 is the sitting president of Nigeria. He will serve a 4-year term.
    - By convention, presidential candidates typically choose a vice president running mate who is both ethnically and religiously the opposite of themselves, as to represent the two main groups of the country, Christian and Muslim. Tinubu, who is Muslim, did not follow this custom in the last election, choosing Kashim Shettima who is also Muslim to be his vice president. (Africa News, 2022)
    - Tinubu's election was contested, marred by significant irregularities, including violence at a number of polling locations and technological and procedural errors that delayed the official pronouncement of the results.
- According to Freedom House, Nigeria enjoys partly free and fair elections, though electoral violence, voter intimidation and interference is commonplace. (Freedom House, 2024)
- Corruption is pervasive in Nigerian government, with the oil and security sector being the most at risk. (Freedom House, 2024)
- Conflict between Nigeria's three main ethnic groups is a lasting problem in Nigeria
    - The main conflict affecting Christians involves nomadic pastoralists of Fulani ethnicity, who are Muslims. Among Muslims, violent conflict rather had a weak positive effect on outgroup hostility that was not robust to alternative operationalizations of outgroup hostility. The null effect might be because the main conflict affecting Muslims—the Boko Haram insurgency—does not involve Christians. (Tuki D., 2024)
- For decades, Nigeria was considered a "political heavyweight" on the continent and the west African region, however in the past 15 years, the continent's influence has diminished as have its contributions to West African peace and security efforts. (Crisis Group, 2024)

Economic context

- Nigeria is oil rich, and oil dependent, though corruption and mismanagement on the governmental level have led to wealth disparities.
    - Crude oil is Nigeria's main export but production, and revenue, has been dwindling for years because of thieves, authorities say. Oil production fell from 2.5 million barrels per day in 2011 to just over a million in July 2022, according to the regulator. (BBC, 2022)
    - Nigeria's military and security forces have been blamed for collaborating with oil thieves.

- 80 per cent Nigeria's 200 million people live in poverty. (BTI 2024)
    - Nigeria is currently in their "worst cost of living crisis in almost 30 years", following the COVID-19 Pandemic.
- Nigeria lacks a comprehensive rights-aligned social security system that provides income support for people throughout their lives. In times of specific crisis, cash roll outs are employed, however these initiatives are often insufficient, temporary and reach only a tiny fraction of people. (BTI, 2024)
    - Protests against the government's inaction have been met with excessive force and judicial overreach by Nigerian security forces.

Conflicts

Nigeria currently faces four major conflicts: the lasting Boko Haram insurgency in the northeast, long-running militancy in the oil-rich Niger Delta, increasing ethnic and criminal violence between herders and farming communities spreading from the central belt southward, and separatist Biafra agitation in the Igbo southeast.

- Boko Haram, an extremist group located in the northeast has been active in the Sahel region and Nigeria since 2002, beginning their insurgency in 2009 with varying degrees of activity over the years. The group has several splinter groups including JAS and ISWAP, the most prevalent in Nigeria.
    - Violent tactics are used by Boko Haram including suicide bombing, the kidnapping of women and girls and the murder of civilians. These activities have displaced over 2,000,000 civilians and killed thousands. (
    - In June and August 2011, Boko Haram resurfaced, indicating its more expansive and aggressive strategy by launching suicide attacks on police and the UN headquarters in Abuja, Nigeria. (CFR, 2024)
    - In 2014, Boko Haram infamously kidnapped 276 girls from the town of Chibok, Nigeria, giving rise to the global Bring Back Our Girls movement. (CFR, 2024)
    - In 2015, Boko Haram pledged allegiance to the self-proclaimed Islamic State and rebranded as the Islamic State in the West African Province (ISWAP). (CFR, 2024)
    - In more recent years, Boko Haram/ISWAP has been targeting farmers and fisherman around the Lake Chad, establishing control over much of Nigeria's north. (Amnesty, 2025)
- Since the finding of oil in 1960s, conflict in the Niger Delta between petroleum multinationals, private security companies, state and federal authorities and militias has occurred. (Mateos, 2021)

- As farming and herding communities across Nigeria are threatened by changing climates, land dispossession, violence from Boko Haram and theft, conflict between Muslim Fulani herders and predominantly Christian non-Fulani farmers has arisen. (Africa Centre for Security Studies, 2021)
    - Since 2010, there have been over 15,000 deaths linked to farmer-herder violence. Half of those have occurred since 2018.
    - Boko Haram has exacerbated this conflict, often influencing herders to join their ranks.
- The Biafra separatist/nationalist movement, reinvigorated in 2012 by the newly formed Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) is a separatist movement in Nigeria that aims to restore the defunct Republic of Biafra, a country which seceded from Nigeria in 1967 prior to the Nigerian Civil War and was subsequently dissolved following its defeat in 1970.
    - The group is made up of ethnic Igbos who claim marginalization from the government, this was exacerbated with President Tinubu's appointment of a Muslim vice president.
    - Increased conflict has mainly occurred as a result of harassment, surveillance, bans, arrests, torture and mass killing by government agents and/or affiliates on separatists, who have now responded with increased violence. (Nwangwu, 2022)
        - In 2020, the IPOB founded its paramilitary wing, known as the Eastern Security Network.

Security Sector Approach

Nigerian Armed Forces

The Nigerian Armed Forces have been instrumental in the fight against Boko Haram, however, allegations of the targeting of civilians, misfires of airstrikes, extrajudicial killings and the mistreatment of refugees -- which the Nigerian government denies -- have led to increasing civilian mistrust. In dealing with the multiple conflicts in the country, Nigerian state forces like the Police, Army, Nigerian Security and Civil Defense Corps (NSCDC) and the Department of State Services (DSS) have been strained.

- The Nigerian Army took over the fight against Boko Haram from a task force of security agencies in 2013.
    - As the wealthiest member Multinational Joint Task Force, the Nigerian Armed Forces have taken on a leadership role against Boko Haram.
    - Nigeria has invested tremendously in regional peacekeeping missions under the auspices of the AU and Economic Commission of West African States (ECOWAS) military wing, ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG),

contributing about 75% of its troops and spending more than US$10 billion on ECOMOG's peacekeeping activities in Liberia and Sierra Leone. (Akinola, 2024)

- The U.S. military and Nigeria have close ties, often training together with significant U.S. funding.
- Errant attacks on civilian villages are commonplace in fighting Boko Haram. (Amnesty International, 2020)
    - In February of 2020, Amnesty International reported that "the Nigerian military has burned and forcibly displaced entire villages in response to a recent escalation in attacks by the armed group Boko Haram".
    - Osai Ojigho, Director of Amnesty International Nigeria said that these accts should be investigated as possible war crimes.
- Misfires of airstrikes have accidentally killed hundreds of Nigerian civilians; these mistakes are often left uninvestigated.
    - The Nigerian military often relies on airstrikes to target Boko Haram aligned groups, who typically hide out in villages, using civilians as human shields.
    - The frequent mistakes resulting in civilian deaths can be also attributed to loopholes in intelligence gathering as well as insufficient coordination between ground troops, air assets, and stakeholders, said Senator Iroegbu, an Abuja-based security analyst. (Africa News, 2025)
    - In 2024, the Nigerian military took a rare measure to prosecute two of its personnel over an accidental airstrike that killed over 80 civilians in Kaduna State. (Africa News, 2025)
- Extrajudicial killing and unlawful detention are also common practices.
- Death due to mistreatment and murder as well as torture have been reported in detainment camps and refugee camps organized by the Nigerian military.
    - In January 2016 at least 149 people, including eleven children under the age of six, died following their detention in Giwa barracks military detention center. (Amnesty International, 2016)
- The Nigerian military's horrific treatment of women who they see as connected to Boko haram (often forcibly taken as wives) in these detainment camps has been reported on by Reuters and Amnesty International.
        - Forced abortions, rape and dangerous living conditions have all been reported. (Reuters, 2022)
- The Nigerian military had denied many of these claims, after Amnesty's 2018 publication, the accused the rights watchdog of "cooking reports from time to time to demoralise the entire military system and the nation as a whole." (Reuters, 2022)
- The need for civilian centric security and local consultation has been called for by several international institutions including CSIS. (CSIS, 2025)

- Some states in Nigeria affected by violence have turned towards hiring mercenaries (mostly from South Africa or the U.K.) to quell insurgencies.
    - In 2015, the previous president Goodluck Jonathan imported "hundreds of mercenaries from South Africa" to help quell the Boko Haram insurgency.
    - Kaduna State Governor Nasir El-Rufai has threatened to import mercenaries. (cfr, 2022)

Nigerian Police Force

The Nigerian Police (NPF) are similarly distrusted by civilians because of their overuse of force, role in vote rigging and reliance on bribery.

- Police in Nigeria are found to incite brutality in day-to-day life and during elections, through "vote rigging and complicity in electoral violence" (Human Rights Watch, 2003)
    - Amnesty International reported in 2009 that the NPF is "responsible for hundreds of extrajudicial executions, other unlawful killings and enforced disappearances every year. The majority of cases go uninvestigated and unpunished. The families of the victims usually have no recourse to justice or redress." (Amnesty, 2009)
- Nigerian Police Force has been widely criticized by citizens and international human rights organizations for "eroding the liberty, freedom, security, human rights, and welfare of the citizens" (Hills, 2008)
- The Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), created in 1992 has been notorious for extra-judicial killings, rape and robbery against citizens.
    - The #EndSARS movement, a nationwide protest against SARS peaked in 2020 and was met with brutality from police forces. Youth and women played a pivotal role in these protests. (Peace Agency, 2020)
    - Feeling pressure from the protests, President Muhammadu Buhari announced in October of 2020 that the unit would be disbanded. This did not quell the protests as young people continue to occupy the streets in large numbers demanding the immediate release of arrested protesters, justice for victims of police brutality, the prosecution of accused officers. (Al Jazerra, 2020)

Private Security Forces

Typical to countries that experience low trust in state law and order institutions, civilian reliance on private security forces has ballooned in Nigeria.

- In February of 2019, there were about 1110 licensed private guard companies operating in Nigeria, and about 740 unregistered private guard companies under processing and yet to start operations. (Private Security Observatory, 2019)
- As previously mentioned, the use of mercenary forces by the government is common.

Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF)

- The CJTF is a state supported armed group made up of local villagers. Formed in 2013 to support the Nigerian security forces in the fight against Boko Haram and protect their communities, the CJTF have expanded over the years to support security operations.
- They have played a key role in the conflict, protecting civilians from a range of threats including attacks, abduction, sexual and gender-based violence, and extortion. However, these same groups have also been responsible for harm against civilians – increasingly so as the conflict has worn on. (CIVIC, 2020)
- Some of their approaches include:
    - Civilian-led initiatives for information and intelligence gathering to bolster security efforts.
    - Empowerment and inclusion of youth in community safeguarding activities to promote active participation in security measures.
    - Surveillance in local communities: implementation of joint patrols involving civilians and state security forces to enhance community security.
    - Utilization of stipends to legitimize and formalize civilian vigilante roles, fostering a sense of legitimacy and structure within the community security framework. (Madueke, Nigeria Centre for Conflict Management and Peace Studies, 2024)

Boko Haram/ISWAP/JAS

- Amnesty International has repeatedly documented crimes under international law and other serious violations of international human rights and humanitarian law committed by Boko Haram groups. (amnesty international, 2025)
    - Civilians and especially women and girls are targeted, often murdered or taken captive.
- In January of 2025, Boko Haram fighters executed over 40 farmers and fishermen at Dumba community near Baga Borno state northeast. (amnesty international, 2025)
- ISWAP has gained ground in the intra-jihadist fighting in north-eastern Nigeria, becoming the most dominant Boko haram affiliated group. (crisisgroup, 2024)

Biafra Separatist Movement

- The addition of the IPOB's armed wing, the Eastern Security Network has brought increased violence.
    - Many who joined the armed wing are youth.
- IPOB were labeled a "terrorist organization" by the Nigerian Government in 2017. (Georgetown Foreign Affairs, 2021)

Herder/Farmer conflict

- Armed groups and gangs, including so-called "bandits," have formed out of both Fulani Herders and Christian farmer groups. For years these armed groups have perpetrated atrocities, including murder, rape, kidnapping, organized cattle-rustling and plunder. (globalr2p, 2025)
- The government has intensified its military operations in affected areas since late 2021, including through indiscriminate airstrikes that have resulted in hundreds of civilian casualties. (Globalr2p, 2025)

Table Two: Overview of Security Actors in Nigeria

Key Questions	Yes/ No	Additional Details
Is there an active peace support mission (i.e., UN or AU)?	No	
Are there other countries presently engaged in the conflict?	Yes	In the fight against Boko Haram, several West African countries (Cameroon, Chad, Niger) have joined forces with Nigeria creating the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF)

Children, Peace and Security Context

Children, especially girls are increasingly at risk due to the many conflicts in Nigeria.

- From January 2022 to December 2023, the UN Country Task Force on Monitoring and Reporting verified 2,519 grave violations against 1,250 children. The number of grave violations increased significantly compared to the previous reporting period, most of these were attributed to Boko Haram (647) and splinter groups, like JAS (1,795), followed by Nigerian Security Forces (35) and the Civilian Joint Task Force, CJTF (4). 38 violations were attributed to unidentified perpetrators. (UN, 2024)
    - 1,105 children we abducted, the highest recorded since 2014.
    - 821 children were recruited by armed forced and used
    - 439 children were victims of sexual violence
- Children's education has been severely affected by the activities of Boko Haram. As schools are targeted by the group, many were forced to close. (UN, 2024)
    - In north-east Nigeria, 12 attacks on schools (6) and hospitals (6) were verified and attributed to ISWAP (12) in Borno (10) and Yobe (2) States from 2022-2023. (UN, 2024)
- In 2022, the Government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria signed an agreement with the United Nations on a handover protocol for children encountered during armed

conflict in Nigeria and the Lake Chad Basin Region, aimed at preventing the detention of children. (UN, 2024)

- Since the signing of the handover protocol, 181 children have been released from military custody.

Table Two: Child Protection Mechanisms in Nigeria

What is the status of the following child protection mechanisms in-country?	Supported by the state (Y/N/ NA)	Additional Details
UN Monitoring and Reporting Mechanism (MRM) on the six grave violations against children	Yes	
Paris Principles		
OPAC	Yes	Signed in September 2000, ratified in September 2012
Convention on the Rights of the Child	Yes	Signed in January 1990, ratified in April 1991 Nigeria's Child's Right Act (2003), guarantees the rights of all children in Nigeria. There are 12 states in Nigeria that are yet to adopt the CRA in their laws of the 36 states of the federation.
Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of	Yes	Signed in 2000, Ratified in 2012

children in armed conflict		
Vancouver Principles	No	
Safe Schools Declaration	Yes	Signed 2015

Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers Context

Children have been used by both state and non-state armed groups as soldiers or as support to fetch water or firewood, deliver messages, and clean.

- From January 2022 to December 2023, 821 child soldiers were recruited by JAS (628), ISWAP (187), Nigerian Security Forces (3) and CJTF (3), both of which used children in domestic roles as porters and cleaners.
    - Children were used for sexual purposes (438), in combat roles (50) and in supporting roles (338). Violations occurred in the northern Borno (724) and Adamawa (97) States.
    - Most of the children (801) were released or escaped during the reporting period, and 20 remained associated with JAS or ISWAP at the time of reporting.
- JAS and ISWAP have used children as suicide bombers.
    - Between April 2011 and June 2017, they deployed 434 bombers, with more than 50% being females. 81 of them were children and teenagers. (Osasona, 2022)
- The CJTF has been notorious for recruiting children, some as young as twelve to conduct patrols, search for and arrest insurgents, guard camps for internally displaced people, and collect intelligence, at times in collaboration with Nigerian armed forces.
    - At its height, an estimated 3,737 children were affiliated with the CJTF. (Stimson, 2024)
- In the fight against Boko Haram, the Nigerian Armed Forces have been reported to use children to identify members of the group.
    - The Nigerian Armed Forces have also detained child soldiers affiliated with Boko Haram, this practices has offically stopped since the handover protocol was signed in 2022. (Human Rights Watch, 2022)
- In 2017, the Action Plan to end and prevent the recruitment and use of children by the CJTF was implemented by the Nigerian government. (UN children and armed conflict, 2022)

- After this plan was implemented, there were no verified reports of child soldier use or recruitment by the Nigerian government or the CJTF between April 2018 and March 2019.
- The progress made by the action plan seems to have dwindled as per the UN's most recent MRM numbers.

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