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Occupation of Sambisa Forest and Boko Haram Insurgency in Northeastern Nigeria as Security Threat and Challenges to Sustainable Forest Management

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I. Introduction

Nigeria is today bedeviled by many security challenges. From the South-south geo-political zone comes the militancy challenge, from the North-east is the issue of Boko Haram insurgency while the North-central, South-east and South-south is being ravaged by the herdsmen - farmer conflicts. Kidnapping and cultism though originally concentrated within the South-south and South-east geopolitical zones is now widespread all over the country. More often than not, most of the criminal elements involved in these nefarious activities find refuge inside forests from where they usually carry out their criminal activities and or hide their loots. The kidnappers for instance often hide their human cargos inside thick forests from where they demand for ransom from the government, oil companies or victim's families. The Niger Delta militants find refuge in the creeks and swamp forests within the Niger Delta region. In the Northeast region of the country, the Boko Haram insurgents who since 2009 have waged a relentless war against the Nigerian state and have been involved in series of killings and maiming of innocent lives as well as the destruction of property worth billions of naira has found safe haven within the confines of the Sambisa forest. Since 5th February, 2013 when the insurgent group found a safe haven in this forest, it has known no peace ever since. It remained the stronghold of the insurgents from where they launched their attacks on civilian and other targets and they always ran back to its safe refuge to escape capture. Not only did the insurgents establish their head-quarters inside the forest, but they also established various camps within its confines. All their captives including over 200 Chibok school girls they took away from their school in Chibok in Bornu State are believed to be kept in their hideouts within the Sambisa forest.

Although the socio-political, socio-economic and socio-cultural consequences of these security problems have been widely reported by many writers and is therefore in the public domain, their environmental consequences however has only received cursory attention. Outside the wide coverage Sambisa forest occupation by the Boko Haram insurgents has received in the mass media, the consequences of such occupation on Sambisa forest itself has never been given any serious consideration. Sambisa forest occupation by the Boko Haram insurgents and indeed the use of forests in general as hide outs for criminal elements in the society is throwing up a new challenge for sustainable forest management in Nigeria. The question that begs for answer is "how has the existence of forests aided

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criminality in our land and how has such criminal activities affected sustainable forest management in the country. Answers to such questions will no doubt help authorities concerned with forest management to device new means of confronting such a new menace. Therefore, using Sambisa forest and its occupation by the Boko Haran insurgents as a case study, the present paper looks at the impacts security challenges have or will have on sustainable forest resources management in the country. The ultimate aim of the study being to raise the consciousness of government, policy makers and natural resource managers particularly forest managers to this new menace with a view to finding a way out before it becomes a major obstacle to sustainable forest management in the country.

We will start the discussion by examining the driving factors that link forests with conflicts, as well as look at how armed conflicts in other parts of the world have impacted on forest resources and how forest itself has impacted on past conflicts.

II. Forests and Conflicts

Within the last 30 years, many countries have witnessed several armed conflicts that have taken place in forested regions. Among these countries include Angola, Bangladesh, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cambodia, Central African Republic, Colombia, the Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Guatemala, India, Indonesia, Liberia, Mexico, Mozambique, Myanmar, Nepal, Nicaragua, Pakistan, Peru, the Philippines, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone and the Solomon Islands (FAO, 2005). As CIFOR (2003), has noted, countries experiencing violent conflict in their forests account for about 40 percent of the world's tropical forests and over half of all tropical forests outside Brazil. In many of these countries, insurgents used forested regions to hide from government troops. In Sierra Leone, for example, forests enabled the Revolutionary United Front to regroup, recruit, and indoctrinate child soldiers (USAID, 2005).

Many factorslink forests with conflicts, central being the very important role forests play at different levels of the society. Forests (and the land beneath them) are critical to local livelihoods, especially to the most vulnerable: women and the rural poor. According to the World Bank, forests contribute to the livelihoods of most of the world's poorest 1.2 billion people (Schroeder-Wildberg and Carius, 2003). Forests also play valuable roles to national and global economies, providing important function to the national and international markets not only for timber and other forest products but also for global public goods such as biodiversity (useful for ecosystem function and for genetic material) and carbon. These multiple and often competing constituencies frequently make forests the center of struggles over control of access, use, and benefit streams (Harwell, 2010).

On the other hand, a number of studies on armed conflicts point to the fact that areas within countries that are most likely to experience armed conflicts tend to be those with characteristics that provide the means or motives for war. Such areas include secluded places where insurgents can hide and exploit valuable natural resources to finance military activities. In addition, such areas also tend to be remote and inaccessible and are capable of providing refuge, funds and food for combatants (FAO, 2005). It is not surprising therefore that several research findings dealing with conflicts show that many violent conflicts often occur in forested regions particularly in poor countries. Apart from being often located in secluded, remote and inaccessible areas, forests often have valuable timber, petroleum, land, ivory, diamonds, gold and other minerals, the demand for which can lead to competition and hence conflicts. Timber for instance is in great demand in today's global markets. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) estimates forest-product trade at more than $150 billion per year. While demand fuels competition for control and exploitation of timber, its accessibility, ease of transportation, myriad uses, and other qualities also make it attractive as a conflict commodity (USAID, 2005). Because a conflict's duration depends partly on the financial viability of armed groups, timber as a conflict commodity often heightens or prolongs existing crises. This is because it is often possible for combatants to quickly accumulate a significant amount of capital for war from conflict timber (Price, 2003). For example, estimated revenues from the trade of conflict timber in Liberia, Cambodia, and Burma exceeded US$100 million per year (Renner, 2002). In Angola, Colombia, Cambodia and Sudan, such pillaging of forest resources allowed violent conflicts that were initially driven by grievances or secessionist and ideological struggles to continue (Renner, 2002). Forests can also be a major factor in the perpetuation of conflict and instability. They may, for example, be the location for rebel militia bases or provide shelter and a protected pathway for movement for rebels, which may prolong conflicts, and drive the government into accommodations with loggers in order to drive insurgencies out (Harwell, 2010; OECD, 2005).

Another very important driving factor linking forests and conflicts is the tendency of central governments to view forested regions as peripheral places containing few people and being of little political importance or economic value. More often than not, the only interest governments have on such regions is to extract timber or minerals. As a result, forested regions have traditionally been poorly integrated into national political processes and only receive few public services. Many violent outbreaks of conflicts in such regions are

therefore the result of such long-standing government neglect or a weak and ineffective presence of central authorities. This is because, such situations leave room for political activists or insurgents and other groups to fill the void (FAO, 2005). This is the lot of many Spanish-speaking agricultural frontier areas in tropical Latin America who have witnessed widespread social violence, including the Chapare in Bolivia, southeast Pará in Brazil, the Petén in Guatemala, the Peruvian Amazon and regions of Colombia. In several cases also, governments have often taken insurgents for granted or only made perfunctory efforts to control them as long as they remained in remote forested regions, believing that sustained military campaigns in areas of little strategic importance are too costly. It was however under such situation as this, that insurgent group in countries such as Colombia, Nepal and the Philippines were able gradually to build up military capacity (FAO, 2005). Conflicts also occur when governments decide unilaterally to protect forests from logging or other uses by relocating forest dwellers outside park boundaries or by restricting access rights of traditional users. Some Conflicts that have arisen in Africa, Asia and Latin America are due to loss of such traditional forest access and rights (USAID, 2005).

III. The Impact Of Armed Conflicts On Forests

According to McNeely (2003), while conflict is almost always devastating for people, it has both negative and positive effects on forests. Impact on forests can vary greatly depending on prevailing circumstances of the conflict and change over the course of the conflict. However, significant influences of conflicts on forests are exerted by the strategic role of forests as shelter or as obstructions to access to territory by combatants, the tide of displacement of civilians toward or away from forests, and the reliance on forests for fuel, timber, and protein during the crisis or wartime. In the absence of any other economic and livelihood alternatives, forests serve as very important sources of emergency subsistence and revenue to both combatants and vulnerable civilians. This makes forests a field of either competition or collaboration—and therefore a significant variable in conflict resolution or further exacerbation (Harwell, 2010).

Conflicts can adversely affect forests under the following conditions. For many civilians especially those who do not flee conflict to organized camps either due to illness, tradition or lack of information, forests usually serve as critical place of refuge and subsistence. In a like manner, forests can also play a role in providing either shelter or blocking access to strategic territory for combatants. Serving as a very important place of refuge for insurgents or separatist forces in particular, forests are often seen as sites that need to be destroyed by states interested in the neutralization of this source of refuge (Harwell, 2010). Hence, intentional clearing or destruction of forests is a warfare tactic often used to deprive enemies of cover (Taylor, 2004). Armies often burn or clear forested areas to enable them spot the enemy more readily (Hart and Mwinyihali, 2001; SAMFU, 2002). Under this situation, forests might be napalmed, defoliated, logged, or simply become the site of heavy militarized presence, especially along borders or areas of key strategic value (Harwell, 2010). During the Vietnam wars the U.S. Operation Ranch Hand sprayed defoliant on some 6 million acres, and by so doing destroying both forests and crops, and creating persistent dioxin pollution problem that would have long-lasting health effects (Biggs, 2005; Buckingham, 1982).Studies of the impacts of the defoliants estimated that 10% of trees sprayed were not only defoliated but killed by one application of Agent Orange, with a particularly strong effect on sensitive and ecologically important mangrove forests along the Mekong Delta (Orians and Pfeiffer, 1970; Westing, 1971). Similarly, the Indonesian military repeatedly bombed and napalmed forested areas in East Timor where independence guerillas took shelter, with devastating impacts to the environment (Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation in East Timor, 2005).In Darfur, Sudan, trees were deliberately destroyed by militia in an attempt to sever community ties and reduce possibilities for resettlement in the area (UNEP, 2007).

In conflict situation as well, State or donor-supported forest protection and conservation efforts are suspended or impeded; illegal logging and hunting can proceed unchecked, especially where governmental and regulatory authorities are absent or ineffective (USAID, 2005). In the Democratic Republic of the Congo for example, a series of civil wars in the 1990s created a power vacuum and broke down conventional forest management regimes, fostering illegal logging and other resource conflicts (Renner, 2002). Loggers and farmers also often take advantage of roads built for military purposes to exploit resources that run through forested areas. Military power is often strengthened by conflicts, making it difficult for civilian authorities to render army personnel accountable for their actions (FAO, 2005). Some governments have even encouraged their forces to engage in economic activities such as logging rather than fund operations from the central budget. In countries where the military is involved in logging or is closely associated with private logging companies, or where the government allows private forestry companies to establish their own militia for protection purposes, it becomes much more difficult to enforce forestry and conservation laws (Carle, 1998).

To make the situation worse, post-conflict, weakened political institutions may lack the authority, ability, funding, or urgency to restart derailed conservation efforts (USAID, 2005). Governments on

their own part may promise former combatants land, training and credit but be unable to keep or sustain these commitments over time (Plumptre, 2003). Such category of people often move into new areas to hunt, fish, collect fuelwood and cut trees to build houses and by so doing can rapidly deplete local resources (FAO, 2005). As well, forest concessions may be granted to appease former foes or reward supporters. For example, when a corrupt administration came to power in Liberia after years of civil war, it authorized a few companies to harvest timber in many parts of the country without adequate regulation, and authorized them to recruit private militias to protect their operations. In exchange, the firms provided the government with timber used as barter for weapons (Thomson and Kanaan, 2003).

On the other hand, the return of peace after conflicts also enables forest exploitation, since the goals of national reconstruction and development require timber, and the need to obtain foreign currency reduces political will to embark on sustainable forest management (Oglethorpe 2002; Halle et al., 2002). As well, following a war, governments and international aid agencies are often too preoccupied with other concerns to focus on longer-term issues such as forest management or conservation. They are rather under tremendous pressure to restore the economy, and logging is often the only option in many low-income countries. Harvesting activities therefore frequently expand much more rapidly than the public sector's capacity to regulate them, as was the case in Cambodia (FAO, 2005). After the recent war in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the government allocated concessions for over one-third of its forest area, without due attention to silvicultural safeguards in contractual agreements (Taylor, 2004).

Sometimes also, forests are cleared for settlement and rehabilitation for ex-combatants (Kaimowitz 2003). For instance, post-war governments in Colombia, Guatemala and Nicaragua relied on forested areas to settle demobilized soldiers and displaced people, as those were the only large areas of sparsely populated lands (Kaimowitz, 2002). In addition, conflicts often lead to the displacement of large populations from their homes into neighbouring regions and countries and forests provide a place of refuge for such new entrants. Such refugees and internally displaced people, whether housed in formal refugee camps or fending for themselves, experience a radical and life-threatening loss or disruption of livelihood, shelter, social networks, and saved assets. Under such precarious situations, short-term survival becomes a priority over long-term investments or sustainable practices. The demand for construction materials and fuelwood for hundreds of thousands if not millions of people concentrated over short periods of time in small areas are devastating to the local environment and vegetation regeneration capacity (UNHCR, 1998, 2005). Likewise, the sale of fuelwood to meet this boom in demand is often one of the only income generating opportunities available in refugee and IDP camps (Harwell, 2005).As a result, the increased burden on forests in the receiving areas to supply food, shelter and fuel can be overwhelming, and this primary needs usually override goals of sustainable resource management (Taylor, 2004). In 1994, for example, almost 2 million refugees fled the genocide in Rwanda into the Congolese forests where they consumed 1 000 tonnes of fuelwood daily, thus denuding large forest areas (Renner, 2002). A similar situation occurred with the influx of Afghan refugees in border areas of Pakistan (Taylor, 2004).

In addition to civilians pushed to subsistence crisis during the conflict, both state or non-state combatants are often camped in remote sites without provisions and rely on what they can hunt and loot from civilians. The proliferation of weapons in and near the forest makes hunting by combatants very efficient. As well, hunting by civilians increases due to displacement to the forest (or nearby refugee camps where there are insufficient food rations), and the loss of other livelihoods such as farming and livestock due to looting. In Tanzania for example, TRAFFIC (2007), has documented how numerous protected areas rich in wildlife were heavily impacted by the influx of some 800,000 refugees in the mid-1990s. In Mozambique, Gorongosa National Park and Morromeu Reserve reportedly suffered massive declines in large mammal populations from hunting by combatants stationed in the area for long periods of time (Hatton et al, 2001).Surveys in 1994 (two years after the end of the war) showed that in Gorogosa, there was decline in elephant population to some 100 individuals from some 3000 prior to the conflict. Populations of buffalo (some 14,000), hippo (some 4800), and wildebeest (some 5500) were virtually wiped out while only 129 waterbuck remained of a previous count of 3500 (Cumming et al, 1994).

IV. The Sambisa Forest

The Sambisa forest is located at the northeastern tip of the west Sudanian Savanna and the southern boundary of the Sahel Savanna about 60 km south east of Maiduguri, Bornu State capital (Bodunrin, 2014a). It occupies parts of the states of Borno, Yobe, Gombe, and Bauchi along the corridor Darazo, Jigawa, and some parts of Kano State in the far north (Bodunrin, 2014a & b). It is administered by the Local government areas of Askira/Uba in the south, by Damboa in the southwest, and by Konduga and Jere in the west (Bodunrin, 2014a).The forest got its name from a village called Sambisa which is on the border with Gwoza in the East. The Gwoza hills with heights of about 1,300 meters above sea level provides scenery and is made up of

mountains known as Mandara Mountains (Bodunrin, 2014b). These Mountains form a natural barrier between Nigeria and Republic of the Cameroun, starting from Pulka. They overlook the game reserves by meandering towards Mubi and beyond in Adamawa State. They equally have a connection with the Mambilla Mountain which is also home to the Gashaka Game Reserve at its foot, which is also a corridor connected to the Sambisa Game Reserve. The forest is drained by seasonal streams into the Yedseram and the Ngadda Rivers (Mbaya and Malgwi, 2010; Omondi P. et al, 2006). During the colonial period, the Sambisa game reserve was said to have covered an area of 2,258 km^2 in the eastern part of the forest (Olugbade, 2014), but today the area of the reserve has been greatly reduced and now measures approximately 518km^2.

By 1963, Sambisa forest comprised of a combination of two native authority forests known as northern and southern Sambisa Forest Reserve, and was gazetted in 1974 by the North-eastern region and inherited by Borno State (Olugbade, 2014). It was Muhammed Buba Marwa who as military administrator of Borno State that commissioned the Sambisa forest as a Game Reserve. While commissioning the Game Reserve, Marwa stated that the primary objectives of its establishment was to identify and harness the numerous untapped wild flora and fauna of the forest and their natural environment and to use them to contribute to the overall socio-economic development of the state. He further stated that the Game Reserve was established to promote tourism, conservation, and scientific research, as well as to perpetuate the species' diversity and genetic potentials of nature's flora and fauna (Olugbade, 2014). In 1991, the Borno State government incorporated the reserve as the national park of the Lake Chad Basin.

Sambisa Game Reserve has often been referred to as one of the best endowed habitat in the Northern Guinea/Sudan Savannah zone. The dominant vegetation in the Reserve is Sudan–Guinea Savanna but, as a result of human activities, areas of the reserve have taken on a more Sahelian aspect. Dominant tree species include *Detariummacrocarpum, Ficus spp., Vitexdoniana, Anogeissusleiocarpus, Balanitesaegyptiaca, Prosopisafricana, Acacia spp., Piliostigmathonningii, Combretum spp., Adansoniadigitata, Diospyrosmespiliformis, Tamarindusindicaand Terminalia spp.* As reported by Bird Life International (2015), about 62 species of birds have been recorded in the Sambisa Game Reserve including the Guinea fowl, Francolin, Village weaver, Abysinian ground hornbill, Arabian bustard, Savile's bustard, African collared dove,black scrub-robin and the Sudan golden sparrow. The forest was also thought to be the last remaining site of the ostrich in Nigeria. Approximately 17 species of mammals were reported in the Game Reserve in 2010 (Mbaya and Malgwi, 2010), including, baboon, patas monkey, tantalus monkey, Grimm's duiker,red-fronted gazelle, African bush elephant, roan entelope, hartebeest, and African leopard.The forest also served as a dry season home-range for over 509 Elephants that are permanently situated in the southern part of Borno State. The unique combination of Guinea and Sudan vegetation made Sambisa Game Reserve a tourism attraction.

V. Sambisa Forest Occupation By The Boko Haram Insurgents

The Boko Haram insurgents captured and took hold of Sambisa Forest Reserve in 2013. Prior to the capture and occupation of the reserve, the Boko Haram insurgents were using a place called *Bulabulin Ganaram* within Maiduguri, Borno State capital as their stronghold and main base to launch their attacks on civilian targets. But, very early in 2013, the Nigerian military and volunteer youth group popularly called *Civilian Joint Task Force*(JTF) uprooted them from that base forcing them to disperse initially only to congregate later in the Sambisa forest. Finding the forest as a safe refuge for themselves, the insurgents decided to take control of it and subsequently launched an attack on the base station inside the forest on February 5, 2013 killing two rangers in the process thus forcing other staff to flee (Olugbade, 2014). Sambisa forest subsequently fell into the hands of the insurgents who then turned it into their fortress and used it as their main base to launch attacks on civilian targets. Prior to the occupation of the Sambisa forest, there existed so many routes, both official and unofficial that led into the Sambisa Game Reserve. While there were three official routes, there existed more than 10 unofficial routes, leading to the three local governments of Konduga, Bama and Gwoza that border the place and Maiduguri, and through Damboa to Gujba in Yobe State. There was also an unofficial route that leads through Izge village to Madagali in Adamawa state. But, the most dangerous of the routes to the reserve was said to be the one that passed through Buladiauma due to the thickness of its vegetation which made it extremely difficult to be easily spotted aerially (Olugbade, 2014).

In order to take full control of Sambisa forest, the insurgents began a tactical attack and takeover of all the routes leading to the forest and by so doing made it difficult for any other force to penetrate them. All the surrounding villages to the reserve were also attacked and taken over. Malari closest to Maiduguri from the reserve was the first to be attacked followed by Konduga, a big town next on the route to Sambisa from Maiduguri. In a like manner, all the other villages that surrounded the Sambisa forest were attached one after the other and taken over after the inhabitants have fled. The insurgents thereafter made the forest *"impregnable"* to the military and from there they began to launch most

of their attacks. The terrorists were believed to live in a protected enclave, within the reserve known as Barguma waterhole while their headquarters was said to be located at Kagum Zairo waterholes, said to be the heart of the Reserve (Olugbade, 2014).

VI. Military Operation To Stamp Out Boko Haram Insurgents From The Sambisa Forest

The Boko Haram insurgents having found a comfortable home in the Sambisa forest intensified their attacks on innocent citizens. They indulged in the acts of killing, arson, bombing and shooting targeting important national events and public institutions like markets, churches, mosques, schools, police stations and government, private and public owned facilities with a kind of guerilla warfare tactics. In 2014 alone, the group killed an estimated 10,000 people. In addition to such killing raids, the group regularly organized mass kidnappings. One of such kidnapping incidence that drew the attention of the international community was the kidnap of 276 school girls from Chibok Government Secondary School, Borno State in April 14, 2014. Towards the end of that year, the group began to seize territory aggressively, declaring northeastern part of the country to be a caliphate under their control. By the end of 2014, Boko Haram controlled 14 districts, an area that was roughly the size of Belgium (Ardo, 2015; Ewokor, 2015). They became the most dangerous insurgent group that Nigerians ever had.

It therefore became pertinent that a drastic action needed to be taken in order to contain the rampaging group hence the military expedition. The Nigerian army began their military operation to retake a swath of territory in the Northeast seized by the terror group by late January, 2015. An agreement to provide 7,500 African Union Troops from Chad, Cameroon, Benin and Niger for the operation was tentatively reached on 7th February, 2015. Starting early in the same month, the Nigerian and Chadian warplanes aided by the ground troops and the French military which provided reconnaissance flights forced Boko Haram forces to abandon about a dozen towns and villages they had earlier occupied including Monguno, Bama and Gwoza (*Al Jazeera AFP, 2015)*. By April 2015, the Nigerian military was reported to have retaken most of the areas previously controlled by Boko Haram, with the exception of the Sambisa forest (Corones, 2015).

The push into the Sambisa forest by the Nigerian army commenced on April 22, 2014, but they were forced to retreat after encountering landmines and booby traps that killed three vigilantes working with the military. The army began a fresh push into Sambisa forest by 27th April and consequently started destroying Boko Haram camps and freeing a large number of women and children held as hostages by the terrorist group. For instance, no fewer than 17 Boko Haram camps in the Sambisa forest were overrun by the Nigerian military between 28th April, 2015 and very early in 2016 in which more than 1,500 persons predominantly women were freed (Searcey*, 2016;* Enyiangho, 2017). The overwhelming success recorded by the Nigerian military against the group made the President, Mohammadu Buhari to declare on 24 December 2015, that Boko Haram had been ousted from their last stronghold in the Sambisa forest, effectively reducing Boko Haram to an insurgent force (BBC News, 24 December, 2016*)*.

In order to ensure that the Boko Haram insurgents do not have control of the Sambisa forest any longer, the Nigerian army came up with a plan to be holding her annual *Small Arms Championship* in the Sambisa forest effective from 2017. The first of such championships was held between 27th and 31st March, 2017. The President, Mohammadu Buhari, while declaring open the championship noted that "holding the championship in the forest was an affirmation of the Federal Government's resolve to stamp out all activities and operations of the Boko Haram insurgency from our territory". He further noted that the championship was a showcase of the clear effect and degradation of the Boko Haram terrorist group with the destruction of Camp Zairo in the heart of the famous Sambisa forest. Speaking on the same vain, Lt.-Gen. Tukur Buratai, the Chief of Army Staff noted that the championship was held in the heart of the Sambisa forest as part of Nigerian Army's plans to effectively dominate all hostile territories in the north east. And as part of the ways to control the forest, Buratai directed that the army should henceforth be holding exercises, including final exercises of passing out of cadets from the Nigerian Defence Academy (NDA) and other trainings in the forest. He noted that the army had also established a shooting range in the forest known as "*Lt.-Col. Abu Ali Shooting Range"* while it also set up "*Forward Operation Base*" all in a bid to dominate and make Sambisa forest safe. This according to him is to ensure that all entry and exit points to the forest are adequately controlled to prevent re-infiltration by the terrorists and other criminal minded elements. He further noted that for the forest to be accessible to all and not be dreaded again after the fall of the terrorists, the army had embarked on a limited removal of mines from Sambisa forest. He solicited the assistance of the United Nations (UN), relevant non-governmental organizations and development partners as such project requires much resources and effort that the country alone might not be able to finance Eniangho (2017).

But as reported by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) however, and confirmed by the Nigerian Airforce, members of a faction of Boko Haram were said to be regrouping, re-arming and returning to the Sambisa forest area. The

United Nations further claimed that at least three local government areas in Borno State are still under the control of the Boko Haram fighters. It insisted that some locations in Borno state, including the three local government areas, remained inaccessible as a result of the threat posed by the Boko Haram sect. A report by the United Nations' Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Activities (OCHA) warned that Boko Haram attacks that slowed down due to the rainy season might increase in the coming months (Daily Post, July 28, 2017). All these gave an indication that the elimination of Boko Haram insurgents from their Sambisa forest strong hold is not yet a done deal.

The Nigerian Airforce therefore in an effort to ensure complete elimination of the terrorist group from the Sambisa forest carried out air surveillances as well as several bombardments of Boko Haram positions in the forest. As disclosed by the Air Component Commander of Operation Lafiya Dole, the military operation in the North-East, Air Commodore Tajudeen Yusuf, Airforce fighter jets and attack helicopters, had bombed the terrorists' hideouts 108 times between April and July, 2017. Making the disclosure while briefing newsmen in Yola, Adamawa State, Air Commodore Yusuf said that the air interdiction missions were carried out with the ultimate aim of neutralizing the Boko Haram terrorist targets within the Sambisa forest (Daily Post, 28, July, 2017).

VII. The Consequences Of Sambisa Forest Occupation By The Boko Haram Insurgents And Subsequent Military Expedition To Reclaim The Forest

No information as yet exists of any deliberate attempt to assess the effects of Sambisa forest occupation by the Boko Haram insurgents and the subsequent military expedition to root out the terrorist group from the forest on the forest resources itself and there may never be at list for some time in the future due to the incomplete dislodgement of the group and the presence of land mines in the forest. It is obvious however that most of the negative consequences of armed conflicts on forests as earlier highlighted are already playing out in the case of Sambisa forest occupation. For one, since it's take-over by the insurgent group, the game reserve has been under no kind of any management. Whereas the insurgents on the one hand have maintained their physical presence in Sambisa forest since 2013, a period of five years, the Nigerian army on the other hand has also maintained their physical presence in the forest since 2015, a period of three years. These two opposing forces no doubt must have done an incalculable harm to the forest.

With the insurgents making Sambisa forest their main strong hold and with several of their camps located within the forest where they are living with members of their families as well as many of their hostages being kept inside the forest, there is no doubt that a large swath of the forest must have been denuded to create space for their living quarters, to farm and to provide wood for fuel and other non-wood forest products. As well, a large percentage of the wildlife within the game reserve must have been hunted for meat either by the insurgents themselves or by the military forces operating in the Sambisa forest. Those that may have escaped their capture might have been killed by the large swaths of landmines the insurgents have buried all over the forest as well as by the series of bombings that have taken place there by the Nigerian Airforce in her bid to route the Boko Haram out from the forest.

The decision of the Nigerian army to be holding some of her sporting activities and other trainings in the Sambisa forest means that yet a large expanse of the forest is going to be cleared to create enough space for these activities. It is also becoming clearer that the army is going to maintain her physical presence in the Sambisa forest for a long time to come since their primary objective is to ensure that Boko Haram or any other insurgent group cannot at any point in the future find a safe haven in the forest again. This therefore is going to adversely affect the management of the Sambisa forest as a game reserve.

At the moment, there are over two million internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Northeastern Nigeria resulting from the Boko haram insurgency and many of these people are living in the "Internally Displaced Persons" (IDP) camps. Building camps to accommodate this large number of refugees means that very large expanses of forest lands elsewhere other than the Sambisa forest have been cleared thus adding to the ongoing onslaught on the forest resources in the northeastern parts of the country. And these IDPs themselves left with no other means of survival must have also done an incalculable harm on surrounding forests within their vicinities.

VIII. Conclusion

From the fore going exposition, it's obvious that the on-going war in the Northeastern parts of the country by the Boko Haram insurgents is not just a war on the socio-political, socio-economic and socio-cultural life of the people but also an environmental war. Since the start of the war, Sambisa forest has never been the same and it's obvious that the forest will never remain the same again even if Boko Haram insurgents are completely rooted out from the forest. There is therefore a call for action by the government and forest resource

managers to forestall similar incursions by other insurgent groups in other forest reserves in the country.

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