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Boko Haram: Madagali returnees count losses, make demands

By Kabiru R. Anwar, Yola | Publish Date: Apr 30 2017 2:00AM

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A dance group at the celebration of peace

Despite pockets of attacks by remnants of insurgents lurking in the surrounding bushes, peace has largely returned to Madagali Local Government Area of Adamawa State.

Last week, soldiers repelled a daylight attack on Madagali town, reportedly killing dozens of Boko Haram fighters who thronged the town in two trucks.

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The attack came as local authorities organised a cultural show to celebrate the return of peace in the area, liberated from Boko Haram two years ago.

Various groups showcased their dancing talents while a durbar was staged in Gulak, the headquarters of the local government. Madagali, which is located on the border with Borno State, the epicenter and birthplace of Boko Haram insurgency, also shares border with Cameroon Republic, making it vulnerable for cross border attacks.

Boko Haram occupied the area for more than six months before they were pushed out by Nigerian soldiers and local hunters in 2015. Since then, the insurgents have launched several attacks, including suicide bombings, which led to the loss of several lives. In December 2016, suicide bombers killed dozens of people at a local market in Madagali town, while the military and vigilantes succeeded in intercepting others in January, gunning them down and preventing them from reaching their target.

Despite efforts by the Federal Government and some non-governmental organisations to fix destroyed buildings, roads and bridges in the area, the state of infrastructure remains bad.

The Federal Government has so far renovated some schools and police stations, but many more remain in dilapidated conditions.

Although services resumed at the cottage hospital in Madagali, the facility still needs more manpower and equipment. In some schools, pupils sit on the ground to take lessons under the trees.

The chairman of Madagali Local Government Area, Yusuf Muhammad told Daily Trust on Sunday that more than 90per cent of displaced residents had since returned to their homes. However, they live in difficult conditions as only a fraction of the destroyed infrastructure has been fixed. He decried lack of health and educational facilities, saying sick people often travel to Michika and Mubi to access medical services.

While the chairman thanked Adamawa State and the Federal Government for sending relief materials, he noted the need for sustained supply to satisfy the need of the residents, many of whom were forced to abandon their farms.

"Although some schools have been renovated by the Presidential Initiative on the North-East (PINE), most of our schools, which were destroyed by the insurgents, have not been fixed. Government rehabilitated 10 dispensary clinics, but the cottage hospital lacks personnel and equipment. The PINE asked me to do an assessment of the hospital, which I already sent to them. As it is now, sick people are taken to Michika and Mubi for treatment," he stated.



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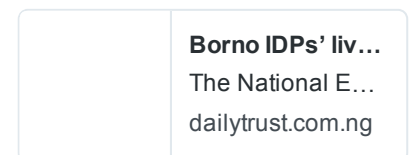
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Extolling the decisiveness, with which President Buhari executed the war against insurgency, Muhammad called on members of the public to support the security agencies and the state government in their efforts to maintain peace in the area.

It was observed that farming activities have started along major roads and in various towns and villages. Men and women were seen clearing their farms in preparation for the rainy season. However, remote farmlands remain abandoned for fear of possible attacks.

Some farmers who spoke with Daily Trust on Sunday said they were afraid to work on their farms for fear of attacks by remnants of Boko Haram, who may have infiltrated the surrounding bushes, having been dislodged from Sambisa Forest.

Ibrahim Ira, a farmer in Gulak, the headquarters of Madagali, called on the Federal Government to deploy soldiers to some strategic locations in the bush connecting the area with Sambisa. According to him, this will help in protecting farmers and preventing Boko Haram fighters from infiltrating the area.

"I used to produce several bags of maize and beans before the advent of Boko Haram, but I cannot go to my farm now because there is the fear that the insurgents can attack us. Just last week, they attacked Bitiku, where they shot a hunter in his leg and hit an elderly person," he said.

A resident who witnessed the recent attack on Madagali town said the insurgents arrived the area in the afternoon and engaged the military in a shootout before they were overpowered and repelled.

"We heard gunshots in the afternoon and ran for safety. But soldiers told us to stay calm as they were in control of the situation. I saw more than 20 corpses of the assailants," he said.

The council chairman confirmed the attack, saying there was no civilian casualty as the military repelled the attackers, killing many of them.

Madagali is still grappling with a large population of women who escaped or were rescued from the insurgents, as well as widows and orphans. Boko Haram fighters have killed hundreds of men and abducted women.

Zainab Musa, a 19-year-old girl who escaped from Boko Haram camp in Sambisa in 2015 after she got pregnant for one of them, said she barely fed herself and could not afford medical bills for her baby.

Zainab, who faced stigmatisation in the community, called on the government to help women rebuild their lives.

Speaking with our correspondent, Ayuba Muhammad, a lawyer, stressed the need for urgent intervention to prevent famine and deaths due to lack



of access to proper health care. He called for intervention from the government and non-governmental groups to support widows and educate orphans in the liberated communities.

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