

NEWS



MARKING 2022 WORLD KIDNEY DAY...

L-R: Chief Executive Officer, Adam and Eve/Chief Host, Mrs. Dupe Ogunlesi; Chairman, BOT Kidney for Africa, Prof. Gabriel Olufemi Sowemimo; representative of First Lady of Lagos, Dr. Ibironke Sodeinde; CEO, Kidney Foundation for Africa, Mr. Clinton Peter; and Consultant Nephrologists, St. Nicholas Hospital, Dr. Egun Bamgboye at the 2022 World Kidney Day, held Saturday

Two Weeks After Attack, Terrorists Release Video of Abducted Train Passengers, Demand Ransom

●Kaduna Govt awaits information on trending video of neutralised terrorists loaded on vehicle
●166 still unaccounted for as FG vows to leave no stone unturned, says security agencies working on releasing kidnapped victims ●Troops crush 30 ISWAP fighters as air strikes hit insurgents in Niger who infiltrated Lake Chad ●17 terrorists reportedly killed in Kaduna Community

Kingsley Nwezeh in Abuja, John Shiklam in Kaduna and Peter Uzoho in Lagos

Terrorists responsible for the bombing of an Abuja-Kaduna bound train yesterday released a video in which over 30 victims were seen pleading with the federal government to meet the demands of their abductors.

In a related development, the Kaduna State government yesterday said it was awaiting operational feedback from security agencies on a trending video showing soldiers 'dragging' suspected criminals into an open boot of a military pickup truck.

This comes exactly two weeks after the Abuja - Kaduna train was bombed by terrorists, an ugly incident that left eight persons dead, with several others injured and scores whisked away even as some family members of those abducted recently protested in Abuja, appealing for the federal government to intervene and help them rescue their relatives.

However, the federal government yesterday assured that it would do everything necessary to see to the release of those still being held hostage by the terrorists.

The assurance from the federal government came as it emerged that troops of the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) at the weekend eliminated 18 fighters of Boko Haram and Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) in a massive joint clearance operation in the fringes of the Lake Chad.

Similarly, about 17 terrorists were said to have met their Waterloo in Kaduna community, Chikam Local Government Area of Kaduna state when residents engaged them in a fierce battle.

So far, only the Managing Director/Chief Executive of the Bank of Agriculture (BoA), Mr. Aliwan Ali Hassan, who was among those kidnapped during the terrorists attack on the Abuja - Kaduna train, has been released, with 166 still unaccounted for. Before his release, Hassan was last week seen in a video, standing among the terrorists wearing orange jallabiyas.

Terrorists had on March 26 blown up rail tracks on the Abuja-Kaduna rail. It was gathered that an

expectant mother and her husband, a couple and two sisters were among those being held by the terrorists.

In the video seen by THISDAY, a female student of Kaduna State University, pleaded with government to kindly meet the demands of the terrorists.

"Am talking on behalf of the students, government should please come to our aid," one of the female students said while surrounded by about eight gun-wielding terrorists.

Some of the victims' families last week staged a peaceful protest at the Radio House in Abuja, with placards appealing to the federal government to do more in ensuring that they are released.

"I have my sister who is seven months pregnant with her husband. Words cannot explain what they are going through and what we are going through. Please, the government should do the needful and let this come to an end as soon as possible.

"They should try as much as possible to reach out to the perpetrators and rescue our loved ones. There are children there, pregnant women, the sick, the aged and only God knows what they are going through. They have been in captivity for ten days, so you can only imagine what they are going through and how it is affecting us.

"Whatever we do, we think of them. When we eat, we think of them. When we sleep, anything we do, we think of them. We are pleading with the government to please do the needful so that this situation will come to an end as soon as possible," Aliyu Mahmud, a relative of the seven-month pregnant woman had said.

On his part, another protester, Aminu Uthman, said: "My immediate younger brother and his wife are amongst the victims. It is a nightmare and the most difficult ten days I have in my life. I cannot sleep or eat. A lot of things are going wrong.

"The bandits called only once and they gave him the phone to speak to us. They are yet to make any request but they called and he is with them. We voted for this government because of insecurity.

We had the trust that they would address insecurity. This protest is not for the family members alone; it is for Nigerians generally. This thing can happen to anybody."

But speaking with THISDAY yesterday, the Minister of Information and Culture, Alhaji Lai Mohammed, said the federal government, "would leave no stone unturned to ensure that those that were abducted are released."

Muhammed, said work was ongoing; insisting that the government would not relent, "and we are not giving up at all," to make sure that all those abducted

are released alive.

However, he declined to comment on specific efforts being made by the government to ensure the release of those affected.

"I may not be in a position to tell you the level of progress being made, but what I can tell you is that I am fully in touch with the authorities and I know that a lot of work is going on," he said.

When asked about what efforts were being made to ensure that the incident doesn't repeat again, Muhammed said: "You know, when things like this happen, what you do is to ask yourself about efforts

that had been made in the past to forestall this kind of thing, what effort are you making today to ensure that it doesn't happen again. And if you followed my press conference, I have been able to draw out the various steps the federal government has taken to ensure better security platform, and all security agencies.

"The federal government would accelerate the procurement of the necessary surveillance and security equipment not just on the Abuja-Kaduna railway; but also the Wami-Ikpe as well as other railways."

Responding to a question that a lot of Nigerians and the families of those still being held hostage by the terrorists feel the government was not doing enough to get them released, Mohammed said: "It is very unfortunate that Nigeria is in the current situation. But anybody who is familiar with terrorism would know that it is an unconventional war.

"Over the past one week, I have drawn out efforts being made by the federal government to ensure that militancy, cultism and others

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FAO Unveils New Phase of Agric Policy Initiative for Nigeria, Seven Others

●Gets \$11m grant from Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation

Ndubuisi Francis in Abuja

The Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) over the weekend launched a new phase of its key agricultural policy monitoring and analysis initiative, focused on supporting reforms in eight Sub-Saharan African countries, as they face an array of global challenges.

Covering Nigeria, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Mozambique, Rwanda and Uganda, Phase 3 of the Monitoring and Analysing Food and Agricultural Policies (MAFAP) programme would continue working to support the countries in making more informed, evidence-based policy and investment decisions.

The global agency had already secured an \$11 million grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

Among its key goals are identifying priority areas for scaling up investment, achieving more transparent markets and trade, inclusive rural transformation and more nutritious agrifood systems.

The programme has become even more crucial as governments

grapple with tighter budgets in the wake of COVID-19 and the impact of the war in Ukraine and seek data-driven ways to guide their reforms towards inclusive agricultural transformation and economic recovery.

"Global agricultural markets are becoming increasingly disrupted, leading to price spikes in food, energy, and increasing fertiliser prices, that not only hurt farmers and producers but also consumers and families, because of the lack of capacity to access food," FAO Chief Economist, Máximo Torero Cullen said in remarks at the launch.

To avoid a food crisis, he said: "We must monitor what is happening and react with timely policies. We need double-dimension action: short-term to respond to these shocks, and medium- to long-term to achieve the 2030 United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). MAFAP is a highly effective tool to help countries to do that."

The MAFAP programme has run for more than a decade, helping to bring about over 20 important policy reforms across sub-Saharan Africa. The latest five-year phase is

being launched with the support of an \$11 million grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, which has been a longtime donor to MAFAP alongside previous donors the United States Agency for International Development, and the Governments of the Germany and the Netherlands.

The FAO Chief Economist noted that the launch comes amid growing focus on policy monitoring and repurposing, meaning the redirection of support for agricultural producers which in many cases hinders the transformation towards healthier, more sustainable and equitable agrifood systems. This follows on from last year's UN Food Systems Summit and a landmark report by FAO, UNEP and UNDP on repurposing agricultural support for food systems transformation.

To support the new phase, FAO has developed new policy tools and advanced economic modelling to help governments.

These include determining if budgets on food and agriculture are optimally spent to ensure food security and nutrition, boost economic growth and speed up

inclusive agricultural transformation, as well as better understanding how national policies affect the prices of commodities or products along the value chain.

Others are to prioritise the policies and investments that have the largest positive effects on poverty reduction, employment, agricultural growth and the affordability of healthy diets, identify and assess policy options for reform, and successfully implement policy changes.

This new phase of the programme relies on state-of-the-art policy modelling tools that FAO has developed and are well documented in highly reputed international journals to ensure quality control, transparency and replicability," said FAO Deputy Director of Agrifood Economics Marco V. Sánchez.

MAFAP engages and partners with governments and stakeholders such as farmers and agribusiness representatives,

research organisations, civil society and development partners throughout the policy cycle - from agenda setting, through analysis of policy options, to policy adoption.