

Local Integration of Refugees in Cameroon

Local Integration of Refugees in Cameroon:

*A Contemporary Diplomacy of
Sustainable Autonomisation*

By

Nkatow Mafany Christian

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To my Parents and to the World of Science

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FOREWORD

This book, for which we are privileged to write this foreword for, has surfaced at the right time, when the world is faced with geometric humanitarian crises as a result of wars and other natural calamities. For the past ten decades, Cameroon has been a peaceful country with the exception of the Anglophone-Cameroonian crisis which broke out in 2017, resulting in an untold humanitarian crisis in Cameroon and in Nigeria as a result of spill-over effects. The contribution made by this book has proven clearly that: the effects of armed conflicts go beyond international boundaries. This has been proven clearly with the presence of Nigerians and citizens from the Central African Republic, in Cameroon as refugees. Above all, Dr. NKATOW MAFANY Christian in this book contributes that: since the effects of wars go beyond boundaries, causing humanitarian crises in host communities, leaders or Heads of State should engage in genuine, inclusive and transparent government in order to avoid situations that may generate into armed conflicts.

Equally, this book insists on the importance of rendering refugees autonomous in order to insert refugees' time line programmes into the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This book outlines some of the legal canons in refugee protection which so many countries in the world today, especially in Africa, are still to ratify. The rich and varied chapters of this book, which have been thoroughly visited, have handled key issues surrounding forced migration and humanitarian studies. All the brainstormed facts in this book will attract scholars and leaders who are keen on matters which affect their lives, directly and indirectly. After thorough checks in our state universities, I discovered that issues (courses) relating to forced migrations and humanitarian studies have not been integrated into the programmes of our state universities. I therefore, have no doubt that this book will be a wonderful companion for whoever owns a copy, and not forgetting the state, in integrating issues relating to forced

migrations and humanitarian issues within the programmes of higher education.

Professor W. Dze-Ngwa
The University of Yaounde 1,
Cameroon

PREFACE

The History of Humanitarian Action (HHA) is fast gaining ground on media platforms and in topical themes in most international higher institutions. The accession of Cameroon to international legal instruments governing the status of humanitarian migrants has added a lot to the general interest of most developmental discourses evolving around this notion. Unfortunately, books which treat humanitarian assistance and humanitarian laws in Africa, and in Cameroon in particular, are very scarce, especially with cases relating to the actions taken in response to the presence of refugees in the Far North Region of Cameroon from the Federal Republic of Nigeria, as a result of violent extremisms orchestrated by the Nigeria Islamic Sect, “Boko Haram”. The purpose of this historic chronicle was to spur all universities, international relations institutions, historians, diplomats and governments to develop a keen interest in issues concerning refugees, laws governing their status and the peremptory protocols dictating their integration, as a means of rolling back the old notion of “refugees’ dependency on humanitarian provisions”. These have also taken into account that “Nobody chooses to be a refugee” and as a result the plight of refugees has to be a matter of concern to all individuals and governments.

This book handles the practical measures which were taken by the humanitarian institutions in promoting local integration of Nigerian refugees, who had been fleeing into the Far Region of Cameroon since 2010, as a means of autonomisation. As a result, this book is divided into five chapters. The first takes a look at the background, the genesis of the situation which resulted in the drastic migration of Nigerians into the Far North Region of Cameroon. The second, looks at the peremptory norm, called the *Non-refoulement (Jus Cogens)* codified in all legal instruments, governing the legal integration of refugees. It ends by looking at the international instruments governing the legal status of refugees. Chapter Four of this book looks at the challenges faced by the refugees in local

integration and at the same time, the problems faced by the humanitarian institutions within the Far North and the East Regions of Cameroon in within the humanitarian world. The book concludes with some recommendations.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Fervently, it is very difficult to produce an academic work, of this magnitude, without immense assistance from some renowned scholars. The contents and form of this work owe incredibly to Prof. Willibroad DZE-NGWA of the University of Yaounde 1; Prof. Henry KAM KAH of the History Department, The University of Buea; Prof. Walters NKWI of the History Department of The University of Buea; Prof. HANS Gilbert MBENG-DANG of the History Department of the University of Douala; Dr. Kaze Narcisse of the History Department of the University of Yaounde 1 and finally Dr. NJINGTI BUDI Raymond of the History/Archaeology Department of the University of Bamenda. Without their excellent academic contributions and intellectual honesty, I would not have succeeded in producing this historic chronicle.

My appreciation also goes to the entire staff of the History Department of the University of Yaounde 1, the Humanitarian Department of the Cameroon Higher Institute of International Relations and the University of Bamenda for nurturing me, academically and professionally. I also appreciate my elder brother, Mr. NKATOW Bernard, my mother and my sisters for their material and psychological supports. I also appreciate my wife (NYANGA Viviane) for always being one of my pillars. I am solely responsible for whatever errors and misinterpretations found in this book.

LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

<i>ADES</i>	<i>Agence pour le Développement Economique et Sociale</i>
AHA	African Humanitarian Agency
<i>AIRD</i>	African Initiatives for Relief and Development
AQIM	Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb
CEMAC	<i>Communauté Economique et Monétaire D’Afrique Centrale</i>
CEVW	Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Violence against Women
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
ETAPES	<i>Espaces Temporelles D’apprentissages Pour Les Enfants</i>
FAO	Food and Agricultural Organization
GRC	Government of the Republic of Cameroon
IDPs	Internally Displaced Persons
IDPs	Internationally Displaced Persons
IHL	International Humanitarian Law
IMC	International Medical Corps
IRD	International Relief and Development
IRO	International Refugee Organization
KP	<i>Kits Pedagogique</i>
LWF	Lutheran World Federation
MDP	Millennium Development Programme
MINADER	Ministry of Social Affairs, Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development
MINDUC	Ministries of Education
MINEFOP	Ministry of Employment and Vocational Training
MINEPIA	Ministry of Livestock, Fishery and Animal Husbandry
MINPROFF	Ministry of Family and Women Empowerment
MINREX	Ministry of External Relations
MINSANTE	Ministry of Public Health
MSF	<i>Medicins Sans Frontiers</i>

NGOs	Non-Governmental Organizations
OAU	Organization of African Unity
SDF	Social Democratic Front
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
UDHRs	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UN	United Nations
UNESC	United Nations Economic and Social Council
UNHCR	United Nations High Commission for Refugees
UNHRC	United Nations Human Rights Committee
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
UNOCHA	Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
UNRRA	United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration
UPC	<i>Union des Population du Cameroun</i>
WFP	World Food Programme
WWI	World War One
WWII	Second World War

CHAPTER ONE

CONCEPTUAL PROTOCOLS: THE HISTORICAL AND LEGAL CONTEXT OF ARMED CONFLICTS TO THE HUMANITARIAN CRISES IN CAMEROON

Introduction

Over the past six decades, Cameroon has remained a beacon in Sub Saharan Africa as “an oasis to yearning refugees in a stormy desert”. In 2014, Cameroon had an estimated 44,000 refugees from Nigeria. By 2017, Cameroon hosted a total population of refugees and asylum seekers of approximately 97,400. Of these, 49,300 were from the Central African Republic, 41,600 from Chad, and 2,900 from Nigeria. By 2019, the Far North Region of Cameroon sheltered more than 95,000 Nigerian refugees, who had been fleeing violence in the North East of Nigeria because of the violent extremisms orchestrated by the Nigerian Islamic sect, called “Boko Haram”, since 2013. Sixty-five per cent of Nigerian refugees live in the Minawao camp, the only official refugee site, opened in July 2013.

Since the Republic of Cameroon is state party to most international and regional conventions relating to the status of refugees (the UN 1951 Convention, its 1967 Protocol and the 1969 OAU Convention) through ratification, as a peremptory un-refutable norm, she had to offer expensive sanctuary to the Internationally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in Cameroon as a whole, and specifically to the Nigerian refugees in the Far North Region of Cameroon. The provision of a safe haven resulted in the provision of humanitarian assistance led by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) through her implementing field partners. Our preoccupation is to look at the circumstances which resulted to the presence of Nigerians, as refugees, in the Far North Region of Cameroon

and Central Africans as refugees within the Kadey Division of the East Region of Cameroon. We will also look at international institutions and conventions relating to the local integration and protection of refugees. Since the protection of refugees is part of international law, emphasis will also be laid on international humanitarian law. Measures at enforcing local integration of Nigerian refugees, as durable solutions towards self-reliance within the Far North and the Kadey Division of the East Region of Cameroon, will be considered. Without leaving some main stones unturned, we are going to examine the challenges faced by the Nigerian and the Central African refugees and the humanitarian stakeholders in the Far North and in the Kadey Division of the East Regions of Cameroon. Policy recommendations will also be made in alleviating or mitigating the impasse to local integration of the refugees, as durable solutions towards self-reliance within the Far North and within the Kadey Division of the East Region of Cameroon.

Conceptualisation of the Study

The notion of “local integration” is frequently used in the refugee context, and yet it lacks any formal definition in international refugee law. The lack of clarity surrounding the concept is reinforced by its frequent confusion with a related but different concept, relating to the notion of “local settlement”. Crisp (1997) defines local integration as a process composed of three intertwined dimensions, namely legal, economic and socio-cultural. First, local integration is a legal process, whereby refugees attain a wider range of rights in the host state. Second, it is an economic process of establishing sustainable livelihoods and a standard of living comparable to that of the host community. Thirdly, it is a social and cultural process of adaptation and acceptance that enables refugees to contribute to the social life of the host country and live without fear of discrimination. Crucially, it is possible for a refugee to acquire and exercise a wide range of rights, to become self-reliant and to develop close social ties with the host country and community, in other words to integrate in the country of asylum, without necessarily becoming a naturalised citizen of the asylum state. Local integration is a complex process in which legal, economic and socio-cultural dimensions are inextricably interlinked. This study

specifically zooms in on economic integration, encompassing broader socio-cultural, legal and material dynamics.

Crisp (1997) sees local integration as a process which leads to a durable solution for refugees. It is a process with three interrelated dimensions. First, it is a legal process, whereby refugees are granted a progressively wider range of rights and entitlements by the host state. Under the terms of the 1951 Refugee Convention, these include, for example, the right to seek employment, to engage in other income-generating activities, to own and dispose of property, to enjoy freedom of movement and to have access to public services such as education. The process whereby refugees gain and accumulate rights may lead to the acquisition of permanent residence rights and, ultimately, to the acquisition of citizenship in the country of asylum. In accordance with these indicators, refugees who are prevented or deterred from participating in the local economy, and whose standard of living is consistently lower than the poorest members of the host community, cannot be considered to be locally integrated and self-reliant. Also, local integration is a social process, enabling refugees to live amongst, or alongside, the host population without fear of systematic discrimination, intimidation or exploitation by the authorities or people of the asylum country.

The concept of local integration does not imply the assimilation of refugees into the society where they have found asylum. While the concept of assimilation is to be found in the 1951 Refugee Convention, the international community has always rejected the notion that refugees should be required, or expected to abandon their own culture, so as to become indistinguishable from members of the host community. As one scholar has pointed out, integration is a more useful term than assimilation, suggesting as it does that refugees “maintain their own identity, yet become part of the host society to the extent that the host population and the refugees can live together in an acceptable way”. This study thus defines refugees’ integration in the Far North Region of Cameroon as positive when: refugees become self-reliant, rather than relying on assistance from humanitarian actors or the host, and when they are able to pursue sustainable livelihoods. This study also stands on the grounds that: the integration of refugees is noticed when refugees are

having positive interactions with local communities. It is also noticed when refugees are able to enjoy their rights and other entitlements without facing any discrimination based on their legal status.

A sustainable society is one that has learned to live within the boundaries established by ecological limits. It can be maintained as a collective and ongoing entity because practices that imposed excessive burdens upon the environment have been reformed or abolished. Sustainability is most often defined as meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet theirs. It has three main pillars: economic, environmental and social. These three pillars are informally referred to as people, planet and profits.

Local Integration as a Durable Solution to the Self-Reliance of Refugees

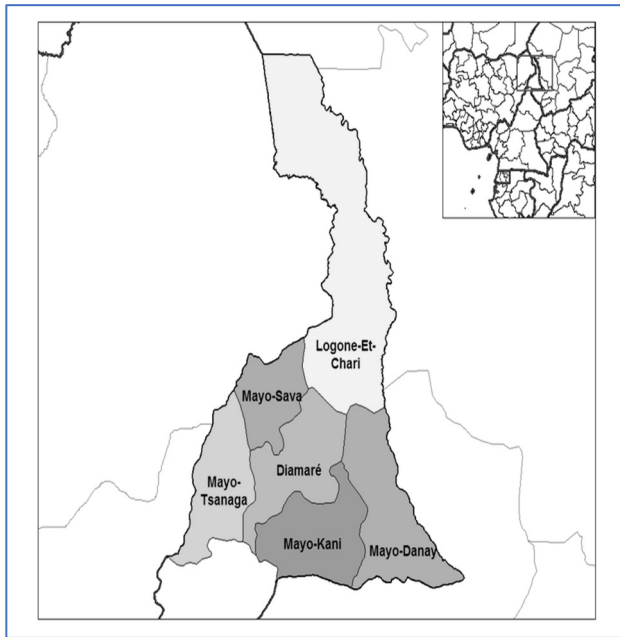
Local integration is commonly referred to as one of the three “durable solutions” to refugees, the others being voluntary repatriation to the country of origin and resettlement in a third country. Strictly speaking, it can be argued that the process of local integration of refugees becomes a durable solution only at the point when a refugee becomes a naturalised citizen of his or her asylum country, and consequently, is no longer in need of international protection. The definition used in this book, however, which emphasises the multidimensional nature of local integration, casts some doubt upon such a restrictive interpretation of the concept. It is quite possible for a refugee to acquire and exercise a wide range of rights, to become entirely self-reliant and to develop close social ties with the host community, without becoming a naturalised citizen of the asylum state. In such circumstances, it would be pedantic to suggest that such a person had not attained a very real degree of local integration. For the purposes of this book, the notion of local integration of the Nigerian refugees in the Far North Region of Cameroon is based on the assumption that “the Nigerian refugees will remain indefinitely in the Far North Region of Cameroon and find a solution to their plight in that state”. Ideally, but not necessarily, that will involve the acquisition of legal identification papers.

Background of the Far North Region of Cameroon

The Far North Region of Cameroon is also known as the Extreme North Region. It is the northernmost constituent Region of the Republic of Cameroon. It borders the North Region to the South, Chad to the east and Nigeria to the west. The capital is Maroua. The Region is one of Cameroon's most culturally diverse with over 50 different ethnic groups populating the area, including the Shuwa Arabs, Fulani, and Kapsiki.

The Location of the Far North Region of Cameroon





Source: Adopted by the Author from the Administrative map of Cameroon

Most inhabitants of the Far North Region of Cameroon speak the Fulani language, Fulfulde and French, The Far North is very much divided between Muslim and non-Muslim. This manifests in the form of prejudice against non-Muslims, especially in rural areas. The Far North Region of Cameroon is divided into six Divisions, namely: Diamaré, with its capital at Maroua; Logone and Chari, with its capital at Kousséri; Mayo-Danay, with its capital at Yagoua; Mayo-Kani, with its capital at Kaelé; Mayo-Sava, with its capital at Mora and Mayo-Tsanaga, with its capital at Mokolo. As of 30 October 2013, there were 8,128 Nigerian refugees in Cameroon's Far North Region, but only 5,289 were registered by UNHCR. Many of the Nigerians who fled into Cameroon preferred to stay with friends and family near the Cameroon-Nigerian borders of the Far North Region of Cameroon.

The Historical and Legal Context of Boko Haram in North Nigeria

“Boko Haram” is an Islamic sectarian movement, founded in 2002 by Muhammed Yusuf in North Eastern Nigeria. Since 2009, it has carried out assassinations and large-scale acts of violence in North Eastern Nigeria. The group’s initial proclaimed intention was to uproot the corruption and injustice in Nigeria, which it blamed on Western influences, and to impose *Sharīah*, or Islamic law. Later, the group vowed to avenge the deaths of Yusuf and other group members, who were killed by security forces in 2009. In 2015, the group pledged allegiance to the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and took the name Islamic State of West African Province.

Muhammed Yusuf first established the strong hood of the sect in Maiduguri, the capital of the North Eastern State of Borno in Nigeria. Although the original name of the group is *Jamā‘at Ahl al-Sunnah li-l-Da‘awah wa al-Jihād*, translated into English as “Association of the People of the Sunnah for Preaching and Al Qaeda” or “People Committed to the Prophet’s teaching for Propagation and Jihad”, the name “Boko Haram”, which means “Westernisation is sacrilege”, was given to the group by neighbours based on how they viewed its lifestyle and teachings. This, in turn, was popularly interpreted as “Western education is a sin” or “Western education is forbidden”. Ideologically, Boko Haram was, and is, against Westernisation which it viewed, and still views, as negatively impacting on Islamic values. The group blames Western influences for Nigeria’s culture of corruption, which has contributed to a wide gap between the few rich and the many poor.

Early Violent Extremism of Boko Haram in North Nigeria

From July 2009, the Islamic sect gained exposure, after an incident during which group members were allegedly subjected to the excessive use of force by police and then were unable to get an official investigation into the matter. This radicalised the group and pushed them to launch attacks on police posts and other government installations, killing scores of police officers in North East Nigeria. The ensuing Joint Military Task Force operation left more than 700 Boko Haram members dead. This also

resulted in the destruction of a famous mosque used by the Islamic group as their headquarters. This resulted in the arrest of Muhammed Yusuf and other leaders. The incident made the group inactive from early 2010, until the end of 2010, when a video was made public in which Muhammed Yusuf's deputy, Aboubakar Shekau, declared that he was the group's new leader and vowed to avenge the deaths of Mohammed Yusuf and the others.

Onslaught of Attacks in the North Eastern States of Nigeria

From 2010, it began with mass assassinations of individuals, who in majority were police officers, and also attacked larger targets in Maiduguri, Boma, Yola, Adamawa states etc. One early operation that garnered widespread attention occurred in September 2010, when the group attacked a prison in the city of Bauchi, in Bauchi State, and released more than 700 inmates, including some 100 Boko Haram members. Later that year, on Christmas Eve, the group attacked two Christian churches in Maiduguri and detonated explosives in Christian neighbourhoods in Jos, and in Plateau State, the latter attacked, killing more than 30 people. This attack cost the destruction of over twelve cars in Jos, as portrayed by the plate below.

**Plates showing some effects of the Dreadful Attacks
on Jos State in Nigeria**



Source: Author's collection during field work, 2019

The majority of the suicide and motorised attacks occurred, primarily, in Nigeria's North East, North-Central, and Central States and typically focused on police, military, and government targets, as well as Christian churches and schools and Muslim individuals who were critical of the group. On August 28, 2011 the group struck its first high-profile international target within Nigeria when a suicide bomber crashed a car into the United Nations building in Abuja and detonated an explosive, which killed at least 23 people and injured more than 100 others. One of Boko Haram's deadliest attacks occurred on January 20th, 2012 when more than 185 people lost their lives after group members launched coordinated attacks in the city of Kano, in Kano State, targeting police stations and government offices. After its 2010 resurrection, Boko Haram's membership and organisational structure were not clear. The group, reportedly, had begun splintering into multiple factions sometime after Yusuf's death, with the main faction being led by Shekau. Security reports indicated that Boko Haram had links with other terrorist networks, such as Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghrib (AQIM) and Al-Shabaab in Somalia.

In February 2013, some Boko Haram members reportedly began operating in neighbouring Cameroon. The shadowy nature of Boko Haram, as well as its resilience, made it difficult to craft an effective strategy to end the group's campaign of terror. The Nigerian government initially responded by pursuing a strategy of military confrontation. This did little to end the attacks, though government forces were eventually somehow successful in driving the group from larger cities. In 2013, it was apparent that Boko Haram had taken over many rural local government areas in North Eastern States, where they were able to gain strength. Also troubling, was the manner in which government security forces pursued the group, a manner that was often rife with extrajudicial violence and killings, and troops did not always discriminate between group members and civilians. Such methods heightened tensions in a country already on edge from Boko Haram's attacks and elicited widespread condemnation from human rights groups.

By April 2013, Shekau dismissed a proposal from Nigerian President, His Excellency Goodluck Jonathan to grant amnesty to Boko Haram militants if they disarmed; Shekau declared that Boko Haram members had done

nothing for which they needed amnesty. By May 2013, Boko Haram launched a series of coordinated military-style attacks in the town of Bama, in Borno State. The attacks left more than 50 people dead and destroyed numerous police, military, and government buildings. The group also released more than 100 inmates from a prison in the town. In response, the government launched its largest-scale military offensive against Boko Haram to date, employing thousands of troops on the ground as well as a campaign of air strikes to combat the group. In spite of the military's actions, Boko Haram continued with its horrific orchestration of violent extremism on schools, resulting in more than 1,200 deaths by the end of 2013.

On the heels of the military offensive, in June 2013, President Goodluck Jonathan had officially declared Boko Haram a terrorist group and banned it under Nigerian law, which meant that group members and anyone caught aiding them were to be prosecuted under the country's Terrorism Prevention Act. The new legal designation was expected to make it easier for the authorities to prosecute members of the group legally. Boko Haram's attacks persisted into 2014, particularly in the North East, as the group raided villages, terrorised and murdered civilians with increasing frequency. The group also killed hundreds of people by detonating bombs in large towns and cities, including Abuja. Boko Haram continued to target schools, such as in the February 2013 attack on a college in Yobe State where some 50 male students were killed and the college was virtually destroyed. The group drew worldwide condemnation after it perpetrated a mass kidnapping of more than 275 girls from a boarding school in Chibok in Borno State in April 2013, which generated an increase in offers of international assistance to Nigeria as the country attempted to quell Boko Haram's acts of terror.

In May 2013, the United Nations Security Council imposed sanctions on individuals in Boko Haram, freezing assets and issuing travel bans and an arms embargo. However, given the group's informal structure, the sanctions had no discernible effect on Boko Haram's operations. The group continued its attacks and expanded the territory it occupied. In August 2014, Boko Haram declared the area under its control to be an Islamic state. The orchestration of violence by the Nigerian Islamic Sect

resulted in the migration of over 100,000 Nigerians into the Far North Region of Cameroon for safety reasons.

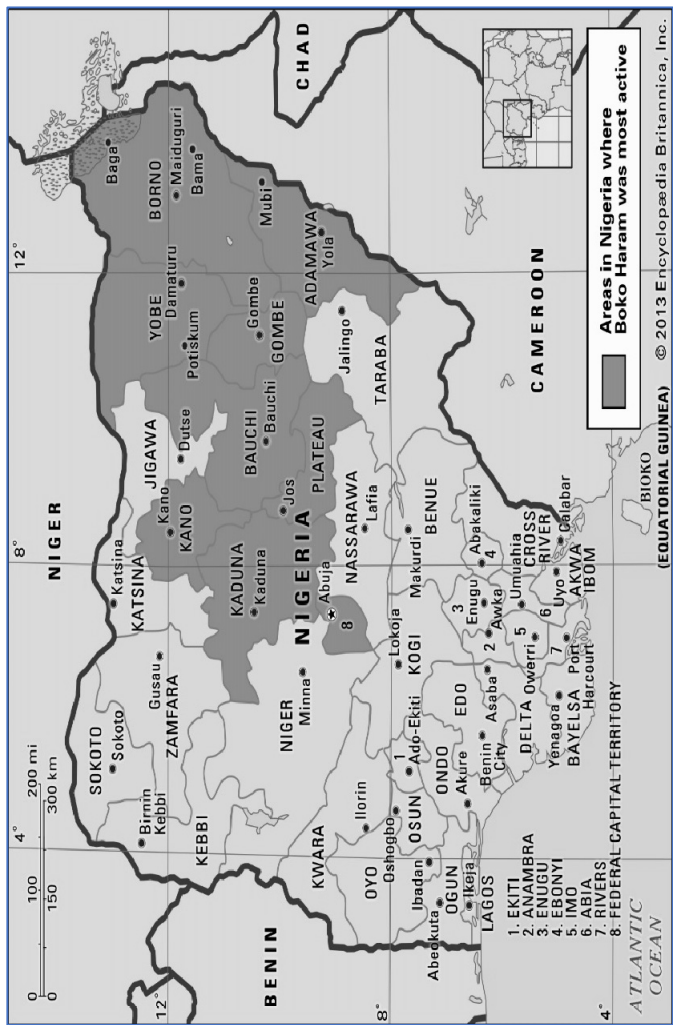
Factors for the Presence of Nigerians in the Far North Region of Cameroon

In developmental discourses concerning migration, either national or across international boundaries, it has been ascertained by theories that: the main triggers are both push and pull in nature. This assertion holds tenable with the presence of over 350,000 Nigerians in the Far North Region of Cameroon by 2017, seeking sanctuary. The reasons for their presence in the area were mostly involuntary. The main motivation behind their presence in the Far North Region of Cameroon was as a result of the violent extremist activities, orchestrated by the Nigerian Boko Haram Islamic group in the North East States in Nigeria. Apart from this main motivation, other reasons like: the hospitable nature and welcoming habits of the natives of the Far North Region, the presence of humanitarian institutions, and the relative peace and security in Cameroon for the past ten decades etc. These reasons will be discussed in the following paragraphs.

Common Historical Borders

The Republic of Cameroon shares common borders with the Federal Republic of Nigeria. These common borders extend from Lake Chad in the Far North, cutting across the Adamawa to the Atlantic Ocean in the South. The wide-range border that covers thousands of kilometres facilitated the massive migration of Nigerians who were refugees as a result of violent extremisms orchestrated by the Boko Haram Sect in the Far East of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. The Far North Region of Cameroon covers a border range of 50,000 square kilometres, characterised with more than 25 entry points, intersecting Nigeria and the Far North Region.

Map Indicating Common Border and Areas with Intense Boko Haram Violent Extremism in North Eastern Nigeria



Source: Adapted from *Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc.* 2013.