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MEAC Findings Report 4

# Social and Economic Life in and Around Maiduguri

Principle authors: Kato Van Broeckhoven, Dr Siobhan O'Neil, and Mohammed Bukar  
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MANAGING EXITS  
FROM ARMED CONFLICT

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## Key Findings

- Food insecurity is widespread in Maiduguri, with almost 75 per cent of respondents stating that they did not have enough to eat in the past week.
- 34 per cent of all adults indicated not having any source of income. For those working, common income activities included: trading, selling goods, tailoring, and cap making.
- Family units are large, and household assets such as land and savings are scarce.
- There is a significant gap between formal and religious education in the area, but it is closing with successive generations. Likewise, there is a persistent and significant gender gap between boys and girls accessing education, but its size is declining with time.

This Findings Report, and the research that supported it, were undertaken as part of UNU-CPR's Managing Exits from Armed Conflict (MEAC) project. MEAC is a multi-donor, multi-partner initiative to develop a unified, rigorous approach to examining how and why individuals exit armed conflict and evaluating the efficacy of interventions meant to support their transitions. While the Findings Report benefited from feedback from MEAC's donors and institutional partners, it does not necessarily represent their official policies or positions.

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# Background

## About MEAC

How and why do individuals exit armed groups, and how do they do so sustainably, without falling back into conflict cycles?

These questions are at the core of UNU-CPR's Managing Exits from Armed Conflict (MEAC) initiative. MEAC is a multi-year, multi-partner collaboration that aims to develop a unified, rigorous approach to examining how and why individuals exit armed conflict and evaluating the efficacy of interventions meant to support their transition to civilian life. MEAC seeks to inform evidence-based programme design and implementation in real time to improve efficacy. At the strategic level, the cross-programme, cross-agency lessons that will emerge from the growing MEAC evidence base will support more effective conflict resolution and peacebuilding efforts. MEAC is supported by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Switzerland's Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA), the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), Irish Aid, and the UN Development Programme (UNDP), and is being run in partnership with the UN Department of Peace Operations (DPO), UNICEF, the International Organization for Migration (IOM), and the World Bank.

## About this Series

The MEAC findings report series seeks to put evidence about conflict transitions and related programming into the hands of policymakers and practitioners in real time. The reports present short overviews of findings (or emerging findings) across a wide range of thematic areas and include analyses on their political or practical implications for the UN and its partners.

## About this Report

This report is based on data collected from December 2020 to January 2021, as part of a phone survey with a representative sample of 3,173 community members from key locations in and around the Maiduguri metropolitan area in Borno State, Nigeria.<sup>1</sup> The report presents descriptive statistics from some of the key demographic and socioeconomic information gathered as part of this survey. UNU-CPR is producing this overview of the data as a standalone brief, however, because it provides a broad picture on economic and social life in parts of Borno State today. Moreover, this robust data may be useful to UN and NGO partners working in the region to address urgent humanitarian crises and UNU-CPR wanted to ensure the information was made available quickly. The report ends with an examination of key policy and programmatic implications of these findings.

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<sup>1</sup> This research was conducted in partnership with several researchers, spearheaded by Dr Rebecca Littman, University of Illinois at Chicago, in partnership with Dr Zoe Marks, Harvard Kennedy School, and conducted and facilitated on the ground principally by Innovations for Poverty Action (IPA), with support from Mobukar Consultancy. More information on MEAC partners and donors is available [here](#).

# Socioeconomic Realities in Maiduguri

## Overview

Between December 2020 and January 2021, UNU-CPR and one of its local implementing partners in Nigeria – Innovations for Poverty Action (IPA) – conducted a 30-minute phone survey with 3,173 people from Maiduguri Metropolitan Council (MMC), Jere, and Konduga. This report will highlight some of the socioeconomic data collected during this survey, as well as a few data points from the much larger respondent recruitment campaign that UNU-CPR and its partner Mobukar Consultancy ran at the end of 2020, which generated a sample of over 12,000 respondents from the region. This recent data may help augment existing data sources and promote data sharing practice in support of humanitarian actors working to address the crisis in North East Nigeria.

## Findings

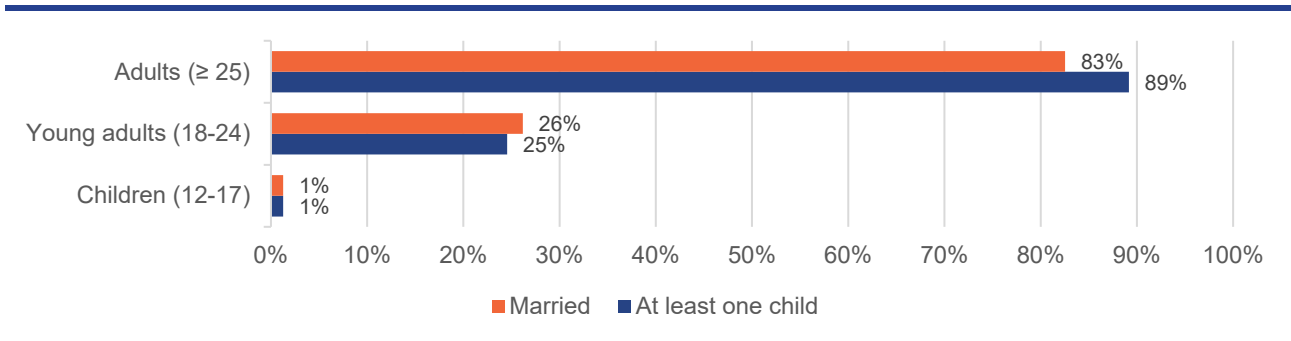
The following findings provide insights into daily life in and around Maiduguri, the size and structure of family units, trends in education and livelihoods, and current struggles with food insecurity.

When it comes to marriage and household composition, the data show that the overwhelming majority of adults above 25 are married and have children. When looking at the data for children (12-17), only a few children indicated that they were married (one per cent) and small number said that they themselves have children (one per cent).<sup>2</sup> Of those respondents (children and adults) who have children, on average, male respondents report having eight children, and female respondents have six children, a differential likely explained by some male respondents having multiple wives. When asked specifically how many people respondents are financially responsible for, the average number is seven, which is similar to family size.

In the area, families tend to be large due to the prevalence of multiple marriages and high birth rates. A quarter of male respondents registered having two wives and a smaller percentage had three wives (only four per cent). Relatedly, respondents report having financial obligations to large numbers of kin.

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<sup>2</sup> 11 per cent of the sample was between the age of 12-17 years old. Parental/caregiver consent was obtained – along with the child respondent's assent to participate – prior to administering the survey.

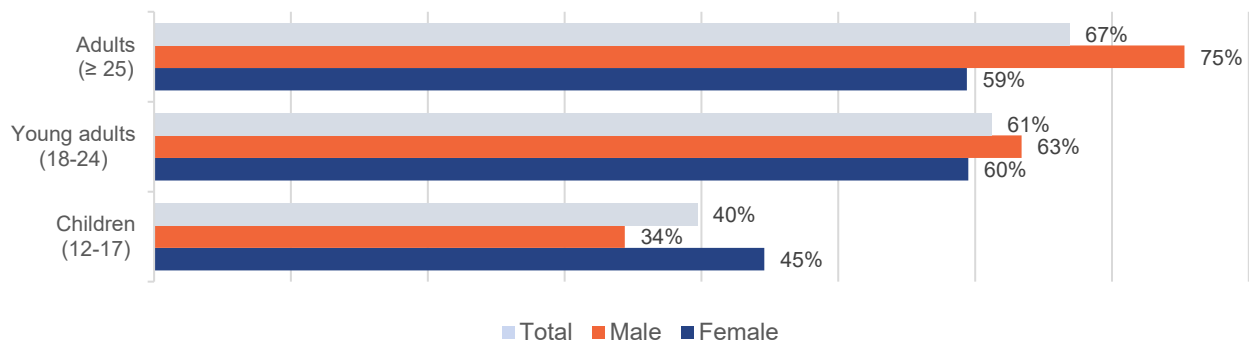
**Figure 1: Family life: marriage and children**

These financial responsibilities seem daunting when juxtaposed with the livelihoods data collected by the survey. Only 66 per cent of all adult respondents indicated they generated income from at least one livelihood activity. The economic situation – while certainly aggravated by the COVID-19 pandemic, worsening security situation, and the intersecting humanitarian crises of displacement, climatic shifts, and food insecurity – has long been poor in the area. A similar survey question was asked in late 2018, in a partially overlapping area, as part of a survey by Mercy Corps. In that report, 45 per cent of the adult sample reported having no income-generating activities, compared to 34 per cent in this survey.<sup>3</sup> The differential in these figures may be due to differences in the particular neighbourhoods where the two surveys were administered. The most recent data collected as part of the MEAC project makes clear that the numbers of people without income-generating activities remain high in the area.<sup>4</sup>

The data show that all age groups, including children, contribute to the household income, with 40 per cent of children indicating that they are making money. Interestingly, compared to boys, girls are 10 per cent more likely to be engaging in income generating activities. According to the MEAC field research team, this gap may be partly explained by gender expectations. The type of activities that are available to children are often considered appropriate for girls only (e.g., cap making, cooking), whereas the activities that are deemed appropriate for boys require more experience and resources (e.g., farming, trading, working for the government). This trend may also be related to differences in school attendance between boys and girls. This changes in older age categories and, perhaps unsurprisingly, adult men are much more likely to have income-generating activities than adult women. Once married, girls and women take care of domestic duties that, in combination with gender expectations, can prevent them from continuing income-generating occupations.

<sup>3</sup> Mercy Corp, *Radio for Reconciliation: How Messages from Boko Haram Returnees and Religious Leaders Shape Community Acceptance*, (Portland: Mercy Corps, 2021).

<sup>4</sup> Recent data by the National Bureau of Statistics placed the national unemployment at 33 per cent, and underemployment at 23 per cent, with a higher rate in Borno State of 43 per cent unemployment and 24 per cent underemployment. Data source: Nigeria National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), *Labor Force Statistics: Unemployment and Underemployment Report (Q4 2020)* (Abuja: NBS, 2021).

**Figure 2: Are you doing something that is getting you money?**

When asked what respondents do to get money, the following general income-generating categories stand out. A large minority of respondents (35 per cent) indicate trading or selling goods as a source of income (e.g., selling nuts, drinks, soap, charcoal). The next largest category is cap making (18 per cent in total). When broken out by age and gender, however, it becomes clear that cap making is almost exclusively a female occupation, and particularly amongst young women and girls. Of female respondents who reported income-generating activities, 35 per cent identified cap making as the source. Other notable income-generating activities in the area include tailoring (12 per cent), farming (8 per cent), cooking food (5 per cent), and working for the government (5 per cent).

Recognizing income generation and employment may not fully capture an individual's – particularly a woman's – or a family's economic wellbeing, the phone survey also asked about two kinds of household assets: land ownership and household savings. Only 20 per cent of respondents indicated that their household owns land, and only 25 per cent of respondents said that their household has any savings in the bank or at home. The relatively low prevalence of savings and/or land suggests that families who are already struggling financially and dealing with food insecurity are unlikely to have the option of liquidating assets in an emergency.

Traditionally, to understand the economic opportunities available to the local population, it is useful to examine access to education. This is not so straightforward in the north of Nigeria given the history of and perceptions around education options. Survey respondents were asked if they ever had religious education, and if they ever attended a school for formal education.<sup>5</sup> Across age groups, access to religious education was consistently high. Almost all respondents (over 96 per cent) stated they received some religious education, without much variation for female and male respondents.

When it comes to formal education<sup>6</sup>, however, there is more variation based on age and gender. For the purpose of allowing a nuanced overview based on age and gender, the following age groups are broken out in Figure 3: children (12-17), young adults (18-24), and adults older than 25. Even though this breakout shows that, overall, younger generations are more likely to access formal education, female respondents consistently indicated lower access to formal education. Compared to adults,

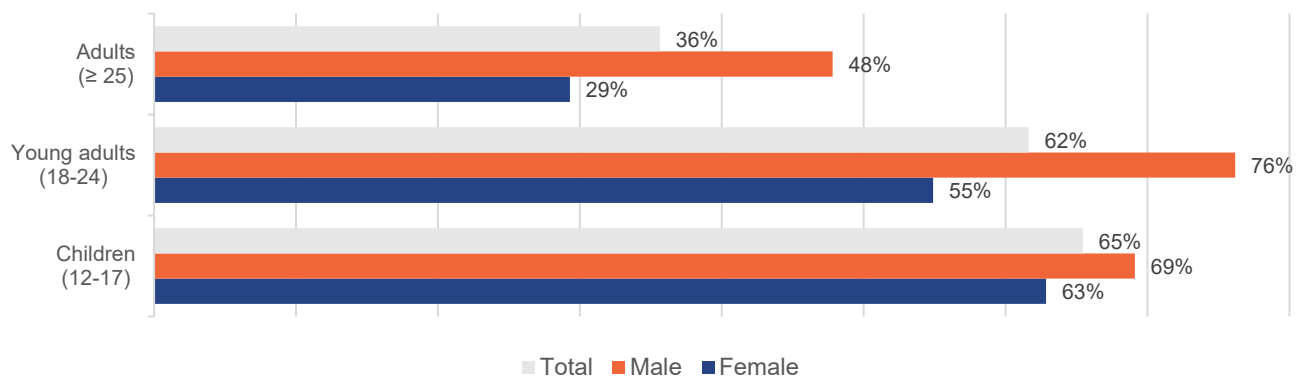
<sup>5</sup> This question was asked to a much larger sample (N: 10,878) as part of the participant recruitment campaign conducted between October 2020 and February 2021 that generated the sample for the phone survey detailed in this report.

<sup>6</sup> Formal education refers to the state-run Nigerian education system which is regulated by the Federal Ministry of Education and encompasses 9 years of basic education, 3 years of post-basic/secondary education, and tertiary (university and college) education.

the gender gap narrows significantly for children, and compared to young adults, the numbers drop roughly 7 per cent for boys, while at the same time increasing 8 per cent for girls.

Although these numbers provide a preliminary overview of access to education, more detailed analyses are needed to further ascertain the degree to which age groups are educated. In addition to Boko Haram's stance against formal education<sup>7</sup> and attacks on schools, there are political and economic dynamics to school choice. In the North East, Boko Haram's founder Mohammed Yusuf capitalized on – and furthered – resentment over the country's educational system that was seen as poorly aligned with local values, insufficient in creating economic opportunities for young people, dashing the expectations of students who accessed it,<sup>8</sup> and – according to MEAC's local team – even the feeling that it can lead people astray from their religious beliefs. Further research is needed to see if perceptions are shifting in the region and ascertain why some people choose to access formal education or religious education, and to understand the perceived benefits and risks associated with each.<sup>9</sup> Future MEAC surveys will gather more detailed information about how long respondents attended school, as well as objective literacy checks, and will further analyse if and how education levels relate to other experiences and opinions.

**Figure 3: Did you ever attend a school for formal education?**



In line with the challenges faced when it comes to generating income and assets, the data show that people in North East Nigeria struggle with extreme levels of food insecurity. The ongoing conflict and insecurity resulted in mass displacement,<sup>10</sup> and has disrupted the access of many to their farmlands, which combined have disrupted the harvesting and transport of food. This has likely disrupted income generating activities for some - and subsistence farming - and thus potentially contributed to food insecurity.

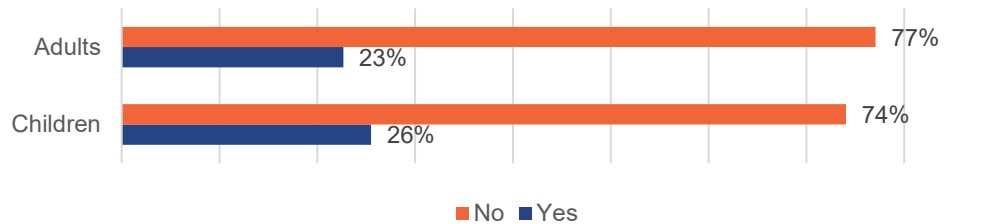
<sup>7</sup> Madiha Afzal, *From "Western Education is Forbidden" to the World's Deadliest Terrorist Group: Education and Boko Haram in Nigeria*. (Washington DC: Brookings Institution, 2020).

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> This data can augment some of the existing data on education trends in the region. For example, see: Education in Emergencies Working Group (EiEWG), *Joint Education Needs Assessment: North-East Nigeria* (Maiduguri: EiEWG 2019).

<sup>10</sup> For more detailed data on displacement, see IOM, "DTM Nigeria," *Displacement Report 31* (2020), <https://displacement.iom.int/reports/nigeria—displacement-report-31-february-2020>.

**Figure 4: Over the last week, did you get enough food to eat?**



Beyond the phone survey, a much larger sample of over 10,000 community members was asked a general question about food consumption.<sup>11</sup> About 77 per cent of adults, and 74 per cent of children, responded “no” when asked if they had enough food to eat over the last week. Unfortunately, this comes as no surprise, as North East Nigeria is currently facing a severe food security emergency and 3.4 million people in Borno, Yobe and Adamawa states are experiencing acute hunger.<sup>12</sup>

## Policy and Programmatic Implications

The findings detailed above will be used in subsequent MEAC data analyses on conflict dynamics and reintegration after armed group association. On their own, however, the findings highlight a combination of humanitarian needs and human capital challenges in North East Nigeria and have policy and programmatic implications.

First, the data suggest staggering rates of food insecurity in the area. The figures highlighted herein echo the bleak picture of UN projections that up to 5.1 million people will need food assistance during the upcoming lean season (June – August) in Borno, Adamawa and Yobe states.<sup>13</sup> Food insecurity – particularly for children – is likely exacerbated by the size of the households of which they are a part. Several studies in different contexts have highlighted the apparent impact of larger household size on increasing food insecurity for children.<sup>14</sup> Future MEAC research will provide more nuanced analyses on the relationship between a lack of basic needs – including food – and recruitment and use by armed groups in the area – a trend seen in several other conflict contexts.

Second, while nearly all respondents report having had religious education, the numbers for formal education remain low. Generationally, there seems to be an overall positive trend with the younger generation increasingly accessing formal education, although a gender gap persists. This survey was conducted in and around Maiduguri and data from UNICEF suggest that access to education

<sup>11</sup> This question was asked to a much larger sample as part of the participant recruitment campaign (N:10,878).

<sup>12</sup> The World Food Programme, “North Eastern Nigeria emergency,” last accessed 24 February 2021, <https://www.wfp.org/emergencies/nigeria-emergency>.

<sup>13</sup> UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, “Nigeria Situation Report: 4 February 2021 Update,” last accessed 24 February 2021, <https://reports.unocha.org/en/country/nigeria>.

<sup>14</sup> See for example Nkechi S. Owoo, “Demographic Considerations and Food Security in Nigeria”, *Journal of Social and Economic Development* (2020); K.O. Ajao et al., “Influence of Family Size, Household Food Security Status, and Child Care Practices on the Nutritional Status of Under-five Children in Ile-Ife, Nigeria”, *African Journal of Reproductive Health* 14, 4 (2010).



outside of an urban center like Maiduguri is even lower.<sup>15</sup> Boko Haram's campaign against formal education and its attacks on all types of schools, broader public perceptions regarding the usefulness of education, and the specific vulnerabilities faced by children in the Almajiri system,<sup>16</sup> all need to be taken into account when trying to understand the experiences of children who are associated with, or exit, armed groups in Nigeria. The impact of education on armed group recruitment, as well as its impact on reintegration is often debated<sup>17</sup> and will be further examined by MEAC.

Third, the precarious economic wellbeing of individuals in the region presents clear challenges in and of itself, with a sizeable minority reporting no income-generating activities and a high rate of children working to support themselves or to contribute to their household. This already difficult economic situation is exacerbated by the unprecedented challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, and the ongoing pressure conflict and climate change<sup>18</sup> put on food production, distribution, and access. The impact of these complex and multidimensional dynamics on socioeconomic realities has to be taken into account when analysing the conflict in North East Nigeria. Although this brief presents limited and descriptive data, it is worth considering that the scale and gravity of the implications outlined above challenge any description of the conflict in North East Nigeria as predominantly ideological. Most importantly, considering the focus of the MEAC project, any efforts aimed at preventing armed group recruitment or supporting sustainable reintegration (as well as any impact assessments of such programmes), should take into account these socioeconomic realities.

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<sup>15</sup> UNICEF, "Nigeria: Education," last accessed on 24 February 2021, <https://www.unicef.org/nigeria/education>

<sup>16</sup> UNICEF, "Children adjust to life outside the Almajiri system," last accessed 24 February 2021, <https://www.unicef.org/nigeria/stories/children-adjust-life-outside-nigerias-almajiri-system>.

<sup>17</sup> Siobhan O'Neil, "Trajectories of Children Into and Out of Non-State Armed Groups," and Kato Van Broeckhoven, "A Complex Programming Landscape: The Prevention of and Response to Child Association with Non-State Armed Groups," *Cradled by Conflict: Child Involvement with Armed Groups in Contemporary Conflict* eds. Siobhan O'Neil and Kato Van Broeckhoven (New York: United Nations University, 2018): 59-62, 85-87.

<sup>18</sup> Jessica Caus, "Climate-driven Recruitment into Armed Groups in Nigeria," *MEAC Findings Report 1* (New York: United Nations University, 2021).

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