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Beyond Tweets and Screams: Action for Empowerment and Accountability in Nigeria – The Case of the #BBOG Movement

Tade Akin Aina, Martin Atela, Ayo Ojebode, Plangsat Dayil and Fatai Aremu

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Summary

This paper explores the nature, role and dynamics of new forms of social and political action as pathways to empowerment and accountability in fragile conflict- and violence-affected settings in Africa. Through an in-depth analysis of the case of the Bring Back Our Girls (#BBOG) movement in Nigeria and a multi-methods approach, the paper provides new knowledge that addresses evidence gaps in the following areas:

1. the multiple ways through which social and political action play out in fragile, conflict- and violence-affected settings;
2. whether the conditions in which new forms of social and political action applicable to fragile, conflict- and violence-affected settings – the settings most dominant in African countries – emerge as currently projected in the literature; and
3. whether these social and political actions necessarily produce accountability and empowerment in fragile, conflict- and violence-affected settings.

Although often expressed as contentious and/or unruly politics, experiences from the BBOG movement suggest that the new forms of social and political action possess a wide range of implications for citizen action and governance, including leading to multiple forms of empowerment in fragile settings. Instances of empowerment emerging from the BBOG movement include: direct training of #BBOG activists and stakeholders in political leadership; management and communications; linking the victims of abduction and their relatives to key and influential actors within and outside Nigeria; consistently making the case of the abducted girls irrepressibly visible both nationally and internationally; and providing a platform for members to voice their concerns and directly confront those in power, including using evidence to challenge perceived mistruths by those in authority. In these ways, the #BBOG empowered different actors who were part of the movement's protests in different ways.

On accountability, the #BBOG also contributed to making government responsive and accountable in a number of ways. Some of their actions can be said to have significantly led to some of the steps taken by government toward the rescue of the abducted girls.

The study also found that to effectively understand social and political actions in fragile conflict- and violence-affected settings, one must take into account the overall, often contradictory, and in many cases, specific complexities of such settings. Neither the settings nor the social and political actions are static or homogenous. Timing, and the specific ways actions are organised and deployed, matter. Furthermore, the ways actions are expressed often change over time and across geographies even in the same national contexts. Studies like this are therefore important efforts to explore and make sense of the intertwined complexities of contexts, actors, actions and methodologies. While acknowledging the multiple and diverse experiences that exist elsewhere, it notes the paucity of research on this phenomenon in Africa.

Keywords: social and political action; Bring Back Our Girls; BBOG; empowerment; accountability; fragile; conflict and violence-affected settings; Chibok community; Chibok girls.

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Responsibility for any errors is the authors' own.

Acronyms

APC	All Progressives Congress
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BBOG	Bring Back Our Girls
CNN	Cable News Network
COAS	Chief of Army Staff
CSOs	Civil Society Organisations
FBOs	Faith Based Organisations
FCVAS	Fragile, Conflict and Violence Affected Settings
FREE	Foundation for Refugee Economic Empowerment
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HUMANITEEDS	Hope, Unity, Motivation, Affability, Nationalism, Integrity, Transparency, Empathy, Equity, Discipline and Sacrifice.
IDPs	Internally Displaced Persons
ISIL	Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant
NEMA	National Emergency Management Agency
PPFN	Planned Parenthood Federation Nigeria
SARS	Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome
UN	United Nations
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund
UNIMAID	University of Maiduguri
VOA	Voice of America

Executive summary

What turns a one-off event into a sustained social movement and social mobilisation and protest effort that has survived for nearly five years? How did a spontaneous demonstration around the abduction of over two hundred secondary school girls in a relatively obscure location in North Eastern Nigeria become the focus of national and global attention and has remained so since 2014? This is the focus and concern of this study.

On 14 April 2014, Boko Haram insurgents abducted 276 schoolgirls from Chibok Secondary School, Borno State North East Nigeria. This event became a tipping point for the formation of the #Bring Back Our Girls movement, a group that began online on 23 April 2014, and appeared on the streets on 30 April 2014. Led largely by women, the #BBOG had one objective: a demand for the immediate rescue of the abducted schoolgirls. However, the initial protest, originally meant to be a one day march has lasted for more than four years and has recorded unprecedented global prominence and some local success. The #BBOG therefore provides an important opportunity for investigating how new forms of social and political actions emerge and are sustained, and whether social and political actions produce empowerment and accountability in fragile, conflict- and violence-affected settings (FCVAS).

This study consisted of participant observation: during 12 #BBOG marches; through 32 in-depth interviews with #BBOG leaders; with members and leaders of the Chibok community in Maiduguri and in Chibok (including an abducted girl's parent); and six months of participatory online tracking of the #BBOG.

The study finds that the #BBOG employed a series of strategies that explained its viability and resilience. This includes combining an unrelenting focus on the abducted Chibok girls while initiating an elastic circle of concerns often related to abductions, kidnapping and gender-based violence that kept generating fresh sets of stakeholders. The movement also adopted an approach of non-militancy or what is better termed as a rejection of the methods of unruly politics characterised by violent demonstrations and street protests. In contrast, the #BBOG protests and demonstrations were orderly and often well-choreographed. The movement resisted the temptations to turn violent or be provoked into unruliness and violence by counter-demonstrators. Finally, #BBOG utilised disciplined and near puritan principles about funding, particularly a clear definition of acceptable sources of the movement's funding. The movement employed multiple tools and channels of communications within (with activists and other stakeholders in Nigeria) as well as outside the country.

Using these multiple approaches and tactics, the movement succeeded in an unrelenting keeping of the global and national limelight, through a focused lens on the plight of the key affected stakeholders (the abducted girls, soldiers at the battle fronts, the Chibok community, and the internally displaced persons) of the Chibok abduction and Boko Haram conflict. In some instances, it was successful in exacting some form of accountability from the government and in recruiting and empowering activists and (future) social and political actors interested in and engaged with the issues. Like all such movements in similar contexts, the #BBOG movement faced and continue to face many challenges of both internal and external nature.

The key research question for this study was – does social and political action in fragile, conflict- and violence-affected settings produce empowerment and accountability outcomes? The findings suggest a cautious affirmative answer. There was evidence that pointed to empowerment and accountability outcomes, but the question remains about the extent and

depth of these outcomes particularly in regard to governance and development. Given the ongoing nature of the social and political actions of the #BBOG, the extent and significance of these outcomes are still very much work-in-progress. However, the conditions of fragility that necessitated the social and political action in the first instance also work to limit its impact. Therefore, to be effective, even minimally, what constitutes social and political action in fragile conflict- and violence-affected settings must be seen in relation to the overall often contradictory and in some cases, specific complexities and multiple internal contradictions of such settings.

1 Introduction

Under which conditions and in what ways do some forms of social and political action in fragile conflict-affected and violent settings provide pathways to the empowerment of citizens and the accountability of governments and rulers? Why do some protest movements endure and persist while others even when initiated with similar energy and significant collective sense of grievance and outrage soon fizzle out and are not sustained? These two questions constitute the core of the study of the #Bring Back Our Girls (#BBOG) movement reported in this working paper. In attempting to answer these questions, the study explores and analyses the emergence, patterns and dynamics, of new forms of social and political action in fragile conflict-affected and violent settings, such as in Nigeria. The study also explores the governance and other implications of current changes in the ways that protests and social and political action are organised, delivered and sustained in the often unpredictable conditions of fragile conflict- and violence-affected settings. Furthermore, it looks into the boundaries and dimensions of interventions by both internal and external actors and the multiplicity of strategies and instruments available to and deployed by them.

The literature on social and political actions, although predominantly coming from outside of Africa, suggest that social and political action is a pathway to the empowerment of citizens and the accountability of governments and rulers. Historical and other studies of the outcomes of the actions of social movements suggest that social and political actions expand the democratic space (Andrews 1997); shift government policy (Burstein and Linton 2002; Mottiar and Lodge 2017); expand social capital (Diani 1997); and generate resources for collective actions and interventions (Andrews 2001). A common feature of these studies and others like them is that they hinge the consequences or outcomes of social and political actions on a number of conditions either internal to the social movement or external, or both. The import of this is that one must be cautious about unproblematised and unpacked generalisations across movements, regions or settings. While we often see broad elements of citizen actions, pressures on governments and varying degrees of responsiveness, each case of social and political action is often determined by specific points in time and the contexts in which they are operating. Other important determinants include the nature and make-up of the individual and collective actors, the interactions between internal and external conditions and how these constrict, neutralise or expand the boundaries of action.

The above points (on determinants) necessitate an in-depth and nuanced analyses beyond the generalisations in the current literature. A focussed in-depth analysis is further reinforced by some other observations about the circumstances of this particular study. The first is that the literature on social and political actions is predominantly skewed towards studies coming from more politically stable settings and so called relatively advanced democracies. Although there are scattered studies focussing on social movements and collective action in Africa, social and political actions and their implications for empowerment and accountability in FCVAS – such as

Nigeria – have received limited attention. Yet, such settings are the terrains of a wide range of new social and political actions in contemporary times. Furthermore, the explosion in the information and communications technologies has had great impact on how groups mobilise and organise, and how issues get easily globalised. This in turn could influence accountability and empowerment outcomes of social movements.

The Bring Back Our Girls (#BBOG) movement provides a useful case for an in depth and serious examination and reflection of the outcomes of social and political actions in FCVAS, in the era of information and communications technologies. Following the abduction of 276 schoolgirls in Chibok, North East Nigeria, on 14 April 2014, the BBOG erupted online, earning the nomenclature #BBOG, and on the streets of a few Nigerian cities in the form of demonstrations, marches, sit-outs and protest meetings. It soon developed a somewhat discernible structure and a battery of strategies and tactics. Among these strategies was the massive use of online platforms, especially Twitter and Facebook.

This study focuses on the #BBOG movement in answering the questions: do social and political actions in fragile, conflict- and violence-affected settings produce empowerment and accountability? If so, under what conditions do these happen? To answer these questions, the emergence, operational strategies, challenges and impact of the BBOG in terms of empowerment and accountability were carefully examined. In doing this, we recognise that there are ambiguities in the ways different respondents described the nature, composition and even at times the operations of the movement. Activists and regular participants in the #BBOG utilise different words to describe or explain what the movement is engaged with, how it is structured, their participation and engagement with the movement. The ambiguity itself is related to the looseness of its organisation and structure. It is possible to consider this as part of the flaws in design or to see it as one of the strengths through which the #BBOG movement's broad mission is realised in unintended ways. The rest of this working paper deals with the different aspects of this issue and how it contributes to the key questions of this study.

2 Nigeria: a nation still in the making:

Nigeria has a long and complex political and social history which necessitates a thorough understanding and characterisation of the social and political state and other important situational dynamics. It is important that analysis and characterisation of the very complex total entity be subjected to carefully nuanced considerations that recognise, for instance, that in some instances and spaces, state capacities are lacking, and in others, particularly when it comes to some forms of citizen repression and elite rent seeking, the state can appear as immensely strong (Pierce 2006). The same nuancing applies to the notions of fragility and other elements of understanding the political economy, the plurality of national societies, and the political culture of this entity that remains an immense political and economic work-in-progress but yet lacks any identifiable and uncontested unilineal trajectory in its unfolding. It is therefore in many ways an evolving and at times contradictory political and economic entity and reality.

But several aspects of this reality remain significant to the ways Nigerians carry out their daily struggles of gaining livelihoods, making meanings of their lives and claiming their rights and entitlements within the limited boundaries of citizenship, economic and social inclusion and access to opportunities for the pursuit of their wellbeing. National cohesion and integration and any significant elite consensus on national vision and direction is still very much in early stages of formation. Social and political actions are often simultaneously bounded and expanded by the

complex structures and dynamics of this history and the economy and society in which citizens find themselves. This brief context provides indicative landmarks of the terrain in which the current interest of study the #Bring Back Our Girls movement has emerged.

As at 2016, Nigeria's population was estimated to be over 193 million, with an annual population growth rate of 3.2 per cent, and over 41 per cent of the population being under the age of 15 (National Bureau of Statistics 2018). As the most populous country in Africa, Nigeria accounts for 47 per cent of West Africa's population and one of the largest populations of youth in the world (World Bank 2019). Nigeria has more than 350 ethnic groups with a wide array of different customs, languages, and traditions (*ibid.*). The country also has large numbers of inhabitants across different religions. The diversity and plurality in Nigeria across ethnic and religious identities, and the often interlocking and overlapping nature of these identities, are important as they have been utilised by opportunistic political leaders as key platforms for cleavages, fractures and realignments in the country's politics. The diversity and plurality also remain one of the serious challenges to building effective and engaged citizenry (Falola 1999; Suberu 2001).

Another key element of Nigeria's political economy is its vast petroleum resources, which have helped to create a massive 'rentier' economy fuelling graft and corruption and insulating the elites from the accountability that a reliance on citizens' taxes tend to create. Nigeria is one of the leading petroleum oil exporters in Africa, and has the largest natural gas reserves on the continent (Oxford Business Group 2019). As of 2015, Nigeria was the world's 20th largest economy, worth more than \$500 billion and \$1 trillion in terms of nominal GDP and purchasing power parity respectively (*ibid.*). But all these appear to be under threat following the global shocks that affected the domestic price of petroleum products and the concurrent instability of the national currency, the Naira, against the US Dollar. Other serious threats to national stability and growth include the re-emergence of the separatist agitation for 'Biafra' in the South East; militancy in the Niger Delta; cattle rustling and rural banditry in parts of the Middle Belt and the Northern states; and the violent extremist Boko Haram insurgency in the North East, which has produced over two million Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). These threats are aggravated by the decline in petroleum revenue which reduces the capacity of the national *rentier state* and its dominant elites to continue to purchase the support of the different elite groups and factions through various forms of patronage as was the case during the eras of petroleum revenue boom and the first few years of return to democratic electoral politics in 1999.

It is important to also point out here the significance of insurgency and violent extremism in the understanding of the context of the #BBOG movement. Nigeria has been no stranger to insurgencies and extremist political movements. There was the Biafran war in the late 1960s, the Maitatsine uprisings in the 1980s and there have been violent political uprisings and suppressions in the Middle Belt and the Delta regions of Nigeria. Insurgency around religion, particularly Islam has also existed in waves in North Eastern and parts of North Central and North Western Nigeria. But nearly none has matched the Boko Haram phenomenon in terms of the range and intensity of violence, abductions and kidnappings, the use of suicide bombers and the duration, territorial and geographical spread of the violence and conflict (Amnesty International 2015). Matfess (2017) in her unusually sympathetic analysis and exploration of the movement has provided both a record of some of these atrocities while at the same time exploring what appears to be a mixed and complex ambivalent situation of women, gender and gender-based violence in the Boko Haram insurgency. The Boko Haram insurgency led to the abduction of women and girls and many more examples of kidnapping and gender-based violence in the North Eastern region of Nigeria. Between 2014 and Spring 2015, an Amnesty International Report estimated that Boko Haram had abducted more than 2,000 women (Amnesty International 2014). The Boko Haram insurgency and its atrocities was an ongoing

element in the contentions in Nigerian politics in terms of the state of security and citizen safety. However, with the abduction of the Chibok girls and the rise of #BBOG movement, it became a more important subject of national and international concern in Nigerian politics.

The above issues locate Nigeria at a critical juncture in her political development with her democracy relatively recent, and the uncertainty about her capacity to survive significant political and economic shocks. Following the fifth consecutive national elections (since the restoration of electoral politics in 1999), held in March and April 2015, the former Military Head of State; Gen. Muhammadu Buhari, of the opposition party All Progressives Congress (APC), emerged as the winner. The elections represented a significant shift in power transition between political parties as it occurred after 16 years of rule by one hitherto dominant party. It was also seen as a strong expression of social and political action and the call for a change of government as the culmination of about 16 years of frustration under the former ruling party. It is important to note that this was a relatively peaceful transition to a different era under a new President. Since the election however, the Buhari government has concentrated on combating corruption, while also managing a rapidly weakening economy as a result of declining global oil prices and unresolved conflicts in the North East region, the Niger Delta and in the Middle Belt. While many Nigerians remain convinced by the ascetic antecedents of President Buhari and his professed commitment to transform the socio-economic conditions of the country, there is increasing restlessness and disillusionment by many who face severe economic hardships and are little convinced of the effectiveness of the government's *war on corruption*.

There is also a sense that the Buhari government has been slow to act, often indecisive and has tended to be very closed in its approach, with little public consultation or access outside of the tight inner circle of the Presidency sometimes described as a *cabal*. As the Buhari administration's tenure comes to the close of its first term, the security situation in the North East has not improved in any significant manner. As pointed out above, the Boko Haram insurgency remains unresolved and the insurgents have splintered into different factions that have largely retained ferocious brutality and are not yet subdued. The splinter groups have also become more virulent with new connections to the international extremist group the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) and recurrent violent encounters with the Nigerian army and new abductions of peoples in the North Eastern region. As the 2019 elections draw nearer, and with much of the promises that brought President Buhari to power in 2015 still to be fulfilled, the situation has again grown more volatile. There is increasing tensions not only in the North Eastern region but in other parts of the country such as the Middle Belt and Delta areas.

The popular response to these dissatisfactions with government in recent times has been a rise in new forms of social action, especially through *flares* of intense social media campaigns and sporadic public protests and demonstrations such as the *enough is enough* and the *bring back our girls* campaigns. We are therefore seeing an intensification of contentious politics and unruly political expressions (Tarrow 2011; Khanna *et al.* 2013). In many ways, the end of military rule and the restoration of democratic electoral politics lifted the lid off overt formal repressive authoritarian rule and has enhanced the spaces for the growth of these varieties of political expression. There has also been autonomous grassroots mobilisation initially, ostensibly around *security* in communities, but leading more to new levels of local power such as neighbourhood associations, residents' groups and community development associations that mobilise their constituents and liaise with state agencies and politicians. An element of this *below-the-radar* organising is the formation of local vigilante groups which are often established by communities, residents' associations and even some faith-based organisations. These are often groups of young people and some older citizens organised to provide security and civil defence work in

their communities. They patrol the neighbourhoods day and night, some carry weapons, gather intelligence and often work for and/or liaise closely with government security agencies.

New forms of social and political actions are not limited to public dissatisfaction with deteriorating security conditions and lack of accountability among state officials and security agents. Economic and welfare discontent have spurred social and political actions. In the wake of the petroleum fuel price hike in late 2011, a coalition of civil society organisations, labour unions, student associations, popular artistes and random street groups mobilised mass protests that crystallised in the #OccupyNigeria movement and were marked by waves of *unruly politics* across major cities (see Hossain *et al.* 2018). It was the first major mass protest against an unpopular government policy decision in the Fourth Republic. The 2011 experience has since been repeated as the mode for public reaction and expression of discontent with unpopular policies and government actions. For instance, the widespread reactions to police brutality against innocent civilians by the specially constituted Police unit Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), leading to the widespread #End SARS and #ReformPoliceNG campaigns.

Another manifestation of new forms of social and political action with implications for empowerment and accountability is lodged in the organising and growth of faith-based organisations (FBOs). A recurring theme from the early scoping work by this research team is that FBOs, particularly the new Pentecostal churches, various grass roots organisations such as women's groups and community based organisations, have moved into the spaces vacated by government and politicians over the past few years (Aina *et al.* 2016). Although these FBOs are predominantly Pentecostal and Evangelical Christian groups, the conventional Christian denominations and emerging Moslem groups are also actors in these new forms of social and political action. In many ways, these groups expand, claim, reinvent or bubble up new civic spaces as the government strives to close the existing conventional civic spaces through repressive legislations, administrative actions and regulations that reduce citizens' access to information such as the imposition of higher taxes on internet and mobile data use. The resilience, versatility and inventiveness of grass roots and other social and political actors in relation to how they engage, manipulate and occupy *the civic space* is an area that requires further in-depth research in contexts like Nigeria. A concentration on formal and conventional civic spaces can lead to a failure to recognise the extent of social and political action deployed in relatively non-civic spaces and that repression in one sphere, can actually open up actions and expressions in other unexpected and unrelated spaces.

What this complex evolving context of Nigerian political economy and a rapidly changing political culture and society is showing is the emergence of new waves of social and political mobilisation in Nigeria or what Tarrow (2011) has characterised as cycles of collective action. Much more needs to be understood about the role and actions of these new groups, the waves of the cycles of collective actions, their organisation and their impact on politics and governance. This paper serves that purpose by providing new knowledge on these emerging forms of social and political action through the exploration and analyses of the BBOG movement.

3 Structural determinants of empowerment and accountability

As pointed out in the previous section, new forms of social and political actions are located within, bounded and determined by structures, actions and agency interacting within contexts that at times overlap and transcend geographical and territorial boundaries. A meaningful understanding and engagement with all of these require an interrogation of the concepts and notions that constitute the vehicles of the discourse around these issues. In this section, we attempt to clarify some of these notions and explore how they link and are interlinked with the various structural and other determinants of empowerment and accountability that are of interest to us in the study of the #BBOG movement.

Certain key notions connected to the key question of how we understand new forms of social and political actions in fragile and conflict-affected settings and their implications for empowerment and accountability informed this study. These notions determine and connect both the study and analyses of the #BBOG movement carried out here.

The first point that requires understanding is that although all of the notions of accountability, empowerment and FCVAS come together to characterise specific settings and actions, they are in no way the only mode of characterisation, neither is there a consensus on their definitions, use or application. Instead, they are contested notions and this study will benefit from an initial clarification of how they are used here.

Beginning with the context of the study, namely its fragile and conflict-affected setting, the notion of fragility as applied to polities and societies has evolved from a focus on the state to a wider context of settings that constitute the arena of state-society relations. The notion often connotes a set of characteristics: weak state capacity; a lack of legitimacy and trust in government; a breakdown of confidence in institutions; a pervasiveness of fear; insecurity; weak social cohesion; pessimism about the future; and disempowerment of citizens (Haider and Mcloughlin 2016). But fragility is neither homogenous nor monolithic. Neither is it static nor all pervasive. It is a condition and experience that is expressed in varying and diverse ways and degree within geo-political contexts. It is also manifested along a continuum in terms of intensity and presence. The World Bank defines fragility as 'a problem not only of state capacity, but also of dysfunctional relationships across groups in society, including the relationships of different groups in the state. Rather than a static condition, fragility is better conceptualised as a dynamic continuum along which societies can experience... The continuum need not imply a linear process...' (Marc *et al.* 2013: 13). Clarifying fragility here is important because it defines both the conditions and settings under which the Chibok girls were abducted by Boko Haram. It also defines the settings that gave rise to #BBOG and at the same time provided the opportunities and constraints for its operations. The findings of the study develop and explore these issues further.

Moving from the context to the phenomenon itself, the #BBOG has been the subject of a variety of descriptions that consider it as a campaign, a process of social mobilisation, a protest group and a movement (Mills 2015; Olutokunbo *et al.* 2015; Matfess 2017). A rich and broad literature exists in the areas of social movements, social activism and social mobilisation (see for instance Van Stekelenburg, Klandermans and Van Dijk 2009; Tarrow 2011). The African experience since the seminal work contained in the volume edited by Wamba dia Wamba and Mahmood Mamdani (1995) remains relatively undocumented. Without resorting to an African

exceptionalism, the core of the understanding of social movements refers to sustained collective actions and mobilisation around grievances and issues arising from the nature of state actions and policies or inactions. Social movements are in general sustained protest and/or demand and claims-making mobilisation and actions of citizens and peoples around social and political issues. They can be concerned with a single issue or a plurality of issues and are sustained by a wide range of resource mobilisation and networks. They also have distinct organisation and leadership and deploy a wide range of strategies. But as Mamdani and Wamba-dia-Wamba (1995), and Ellis and van Kessel (2009) have cautioned, we must be careful about how we impose Western categories of state-civil society analyses in our conceptualisation and definition of social movements in Africa.

Ellis and van Kessel (2009) raised six important points that have implications for the understanding of the phenomenon of #BBOG movement. The first was the need for a nuanced understanding of the concept and nature of social movements in Africa in terms of their composition, organisation, issues, strategies and resources. They draw attention to the hybrid and at times syncretistic nature of the movements. Secondly, they emphasised the role of the international context and external actors in terms of interactions and flows of ideas, ideologies, beliefs, funding, logistics and networks. This international dimension is no longer uniquely Western-centric. China, Asia, the Emirates and India are also sources of influence. A significant factor but relatively less considered is the role of Diasporas. They point out that today *remittances* go beyond money and include ideas, ideologies both secular and religious, technologies and strategies. These are reinforced by the growth of new communications technologies and the volume, rapidity and instant nature of travels and communications. Also, contemporary social movements in Africa possess a wider repertoire of relationships and interactions with the state that go beyond the conventional adversarial and oppositional types to the more collaborative, cooperative and accommodationist types (Aina and Moyo 2013).

Finally, there is the fact of the religious element as a recurring factor in several social movements and social mobilisation efforts in Africa. This introduces a syncretistic element and removes the strict dichotomy between secular social and political actions and collective actions embedded in religious garb or framed in religious idioms. The elements above to a great extent are reflected in the nature of the sustained collective action that #BBOG movement has become.

Empowerment and accountability are two other important notions that frame this study. At the superficial level, empowerment seems to be a term that is easy to define, particularly as it has become a common word in Nigeria's national political parlance. In its simplest sense, it is the process of giving power to someone else or to citizens. However, it is more complex. It is seen in the literature as a product of institutional transformation with an emphasis on inclusiveness, the enabling of others to act on their own behalf, responsiveness and accountability. The transformation that occurs is visible in situations of dominance and power relations, when erstwhile subjects and passive actors are enabled to reclaim their rights and voices and are *empowered* as active citizens who make demands, claim their rights and perform their duties and obligations (Grandvoinnet, Aslan and Raha 2015). Conceiving empowerment as what happens when institutional transformation occurs is inadequate in FVCAS where institutions are impervious and/or resistant to reforms or transformation.

Green (2016) in his illuminating book that brings together activist insights with social and political theory and analysis in the understanding of *how change happens*, points us at an often unrecognised aspect of empowerment that is born of direct and concrete participation and is reported by some of the respondents of this study in their reflections. Narrating the experience of one of the subjects of his book, Green (*ibid.*: 28) noted thus: '...empowerment in real time... [is]

when light bulbs go on in the heads of people who had previously felt helpless or shackled by their lot, and they begin to take action to change it. Such small personal events often lie at the heart of the tides of social and political change...'

This and other forms of empowerment however occur in fragile conflict- and violence-affected settings and these can be completely missed or not recognised. The different and often contested narratives of alternative notions of empowerment are also lucidly captured by Matfess in her book on Women and the War on Boko Haram (2017: see 56-64). It is therefore, both a contested, sometimes ambivalent and transformative notion. In social and political theory, empowerment embodies the expression, engagement, bargaining with and contestation of power relations located in individual and collective interactions, actions and relations. Analytically, empowerment takes us into the world of power and systems analysis; an important framework along with others for understanding the dynamics of change in societies. As Green points out : 'empowerment is not so much a single event as a process taking place in a complex replete with multiple feedback loops rather than linear chains of cause and effect' (2016: 37).

For some in the literature, empowerment is the ability of ordinary citizens to assess the performance and determine the political trajectory of their rulers. This has been linked to uprisings when rulers have been seen to have failed (Krastev 2014). Examples include contemporary experiences such as the uprisings and protests in Tahrir Square in Cairo, Independence Square in Kyiv, Taksim Square in Istanbul, Zuccotti Park in Lower Manhattan, and Altamira Square in Caracas. This understanding of the notion of empowerment remains questionable because it overlooks not only the place of individual empowerment but also the fact that effective assessment of government performance and collective action in demand-making themselves, constitute acts of empowered citizens in the first instance.

Navigating the complex contours of the understanding of the notion as described above, this study applied an approach that attempts to embody structural determinants and individual and collective agency and perceptions. First, we understand empowerment as the ability to exercise volitional control over one's affairs. Thus, empowerment entails individual determination over one's life that leads to increased control over their own lives and a psychological sense of personal control and influence (Eyben 2011; Green 2016). Whether at the individual, community or organisational level, it is measured by the qualitative control, awareness and participation in social, economic and political spheres of life, accruing to citizens and individuals in any setting.

Second, empowerment can be both an objective and subjective process or state. Cornwall defines it as 'gaining a sense of power to shape the lives we live' (2017: 5), and Eyben (2011: 2) defines it as a process through which 'individuals or organised groups increase their power to achieve certain outcomes they need or desire'. Certain manifestations of empowerment are observable; other aspects depend on the individual who sees themselves as empowered or not. The subjective aspects of empowerment have implications for the manner in which empowerment is studied and call attention to contexts, feelings and perceptions.

Third, empowerment is a process that applies in particular to the disadvantaged, all those groups who are seen to lack or are denied the power to articulate or act on their own individual or collective volitions and interests. These in our common patriarchal societies primarily include women and other conventionally dominated, socially excluded and marginalised groups (Eyben 2011; Balamoune-Lutz 2013). To scholars such as Combaz and Mcloughlin (2014), empowerment is not inclusive until women are protected against violence, supported to be active political players and allowed capacity to empower themselves.

Fourth, empowerment is found across various spheres of life: economic, cultural, social and the different forms reinforce each other leading to increased capacity, confidence, active presence and participation across different sectors. Especially in fragile, conflict- and violence-affected settings, the ability to express oneself, that is, freedom of speech is an important sign that the person is empowered. Freedom of speech and expression can lead to claims making to freedom of movement and association that could lead to presence, participation and activity in public spaces in the economic, cultural, social and political arenas. It must however not be forgotten that expressions and manifestations of empowerment do not occur simultaneously in equal weight and intensity across all spheres for groups and individuals. A stronger manifestation of empowerment can occur in economic or occupational spheres while the family, religious or political spheres are relatively weaker and this weighting can change not only across spheres but also over time and in different conditions. In fact, situations of conflict can at times empower women to take on roles abdicated by men at war or because there are not enough men to play what usually would have been conceived as masculine roles (Matfess 2017). A useful way to conceive of the notion and its practical expressions is to see it as operating on a continuum of intensity and depth across different spheres over time.

Accountability is another difficult notion to capture because of its complexity. Yet, due to its importance for monitoring service delivery and the duties and responsibilities of government, influential global institutions such as the World Bank have attempted various schemas for its understanding and the operational use of its various dimensions. The World Bank has further provided what it calls both short and long routes to accountability based on a conception of the nature of political systems, service delivery, responsiveness and answerability (World Bank 2004; Devarajan, Khamani and Walton 2011; Green 2016).

Accountability, therefore, broadly refers to the *processes, norms and structures that require (power-holders) to answer for their actions to another actor, and/or suffer some sanction if the performance is judged to be below the relevant standard*. Especially typifying the relationship between the state and citizens, it specifies whom is in control of power and whom is customarily and legally empowered to hold those in power responsible for their actions (Nixon *et al.* 2017). Grandvoinet *et al.*, quoting the World Bank (2012), defined social accountability as ‘the extent and capability of citizens to hold the state accountable and make it responsive to their needs’ (2015: 2). In stable settings there are formal vertical and horizontal accountability mechanisms. In fragile, conflict- and violence-affected settings, social accountability is either considerably weak or absent. The ability of citizens to caution and question government officials and agencies is weak in such settings. As a result, external actors often have a role to play (Nixon *et al.* 2017).

The relationship between empowerment and accountability is not straightforward and direct. The tendency, as found in parts of the literature, is that accountability is ineffective where empowerment is not present, enabled or guaranteed since individuals, communities or groups will lack the capacity to challenge poor service delivery; lack of inclusive growth and participation; and ineffective economic and social environments. There is the further position that accountability is meaningful when *voice, participation and transparency* are conceived of as its essential fundamentals, with a significant focus on various opportunities and capabilities granted to the poor to influence what goes on in the public sphere (Grandvoinet *et al.* 2015). Although, as we found in this study, a campaign focussed on pressuring the government to be accountable created some *empowerment* by-products. In the case of the #BBOG movement, the push for accountability came first, albeit with actors leading the movement already empowered by the fact of their education, socio-economic status and their activists’ credentials. However, in the collective struggles for accountability and government responsiveness, participants claimed they were *empowered*.

The Bring Back Our Girls movement set out to hold the Federal Government of Nigeria to its statutory pledge of protecting the security and safety of Nigerian citizens. Their demand was that the government should rescue the 276 abducted girls and return them safely to their families. In this study, we concerned ourselves with how successful the movement was in this regard and the strategies it employed. We are also interested in understanding the nature of empowerment that resulted from the activities of the group, and whose empowerment that was.

4 Shaping and doing the study: research approach and methods

The study adopted a multi-method concurrent interpretive design. This approach was useful in assessing the context in which #BBOG as a form of social and political action occurred, in describing the form and nature of the movement, and in identifying the specific pathways through which #BBOG led to and/or resulted in empowerment and accountability. A mixed-methods approach was utilised particularly to obtain data critical for building deeper and broader information bases to allow for thick analyses (Mason 2006) into how the #BBOG movement works, how and when (if at all), it contributed to empowerment and accountability in the Nigerian setting. The multi-method approach enabled the research to probe aspects of motivation and impact of a unique movement and to deal with issues too personal and unpleasant to quantify. It was also useful in overcoming mutual suspicion and building trust with key research participants. Below, we detail the research process and the data collection methods used.

4.1 Stakeholder mapping and engagement

To lay the groundwork for the study, elaborate key stakeholder engagement exercises were conducted through in-country research scoping and stakeholder mapping in June and July 2016 (see Aina *et al.* 2016). These began with initial in-country scoping visits (two in total) to Nigeria to assess the contextual appropriateness of Nigeria as a location for operationally relevant, robust and contemporary research on: the role of social and political action in fostering effective empowerment and accountability; the role of external actors in supporting these change processes; and the opportunities for research communication and uptake. The scoping visits enabled the research team to capture the perspectives of local activists, academics, funders, policy actors and practitioners on the actors, modalities and outcomes of social and political actions in the country. In addition to these, the perceptions of external actors and the interventions they support were also studied. Secondly, a political economy analysis was conducted and the key stakeholders (with power, interest, motivation and capacity to influence policy and programme uptake) on empowerment and accountability issues in Nigeria were identified. Through this exercise, an initial exploration and picture of the policy environment and communications channels and networks in Nigeria was obtained and this information was used to develop a research uptake strategy applied throughout the research process.

4.2 Inception workshop and review of study design

Given the complex nature of the study and the difficult research context (of fragility and conflict) within which it was undertaken, the study adopted innovative design and methods to collect data that incorporated empowerment of the women and other policy actors involved in the #BBOG movement. A two-and-a-half-day design workshop was held in July 2017 in Abuja. At this workshop, the stakeholders identified at the mapping stage above and the research team

discussed the research questions, identified the most appropriate methods for the study and the physical and other risks the research entailed. Participants, guided by experienced and knowledgeable facilitators, examined and discussed the most appropriate methodology to generate the data needed to answer the questions while ensuring they were context appropriate. Participants also reviewed ethical issues, and agreed on an appropriate research-to-policy plan. Stakeholders were accorded the opportunity to interact with the research team who explained the study focus and rationale. Participants asked questions that opened up discussions alerting researchers to divergent, yet critical, views on the study topic. In the end, the interest of stakeholders in the study was elicited, trust was built with stakeholders and their commitment to support the project and consider using the outcomes was assured. Finally, engaging the #BBOG leadership at these early stages of the research enabled the research team to develop rapport with the core leadership and to use this to gain acceptance that proved useful for obtaining interviews in subsequent data gathering.

4.3 Participant observation

An ethnographic approach that involved two researchers participating in and observing BBOG advocacy marches and sit-outs in Abuja and Lagos in December 2017 was adopted. These were done to carefully and systematically observe and document the operations, strategies and approaches of the movement in its campaign. Activities included participation in a three-day Advocacy March to the Presidential Villa from 11–13 December 2017 which attracted 25–30 participants daily. In total, the researchers participated in twelve sessions of observations of #BBOG protests and sit-outs. Attention was paid to the settings of the marches and sit-outs, actions taken, and the actors involved. These observations along with in-depth interviews contributed immensely to the understanding and description of the movement.

4.4 Online media tracking

Five months of online media tracking of the activities of the #BBOG was mapped to trace the various actors driving the media discourse on the abducted girls. The tracking also documented the media platforms most used by the activists, where they were most visible, and which actors attracted high level of reactions in social media and the implications of the patterns found for empowerment and accountability in the Nigerian context. The activities of the #BBOG on Facebook and Twitter were tracked through Facebook and Twitter searches, and through Google Alerts. Non-participant observation method was combined with quantitative content analysis to collect relevant data. Facebook pages and Twitter accounts of the #BBOG were followed and the activities that took place in them were tracked daily. Google Alerts was created with the name 'Bring Back Our Girls'. The analysis was based on alerts received from 1 January to 31 May 2018. Twitter and Facebook tracking and searches were also done over the same period. At the end of the tracking period, all posts on the Facebook page of the group and all tweets on its Twitter timeline were extracted and subjected to content analysis. Search on the two platforms was conducted using the search terms Bring Back Our Girls, BBOG, Chibok Girls and Dapchi Girls, all with and without the hashtag symbol. The Google Alerts received over the period were also subjected to content analysis.

4.5 Survey

Attempts at conducting online and face-to-face survey among #BBOG activists and participants at its events did not succeed. The interviewees, beyond specific actors openly identified as being in the strategic teams of #BBOG, did not respond to questionnaires sent by the research team. This low response rate can be attributed to an atmosphere of fear of state authorities who were ever present at #BBOG rallies and meetings and were perceived by participants and

activists to be watching the activities of the movement. Moreover, respondents did appear not to trust questionnaires sent by email or distributed in hard copies in spite of the research team's repeated assurances of the anonymity of respondents.

4.6 Key informant interviews

Thirty-two key informant interviews were conducted with three groups of key informants directly involved or affected by the #BBOG movement between November 2017 and March 2018. These included 11 key informant interviews with leaders of the #BBOG, known as the Strategic Team; nine interviews in Maiduguri, the capital of Borno State (Chibok is in Borno State);¹ and 11 interviews in Chibok with people including an abducted girl's parent, abducted girls' relatives and community leaders.

The interviews provided an opportunity to get in-depth perspectives from the key stakeholders on the place of #BBOG and its role in empowerment and accountability processes. The interviews also allowed the research team to establish rapport/trust with community leaders who had not attended the initial research inception engagement meetings described above and to solidify the trust and rapport developed with the #BBOG leadership. In some cases, where conversations had started with the #BBOG leaders, these in-depth interviews were used to further seek clarity of ideas and information emanating from ongoing data analysis. Individual interviews with the community leaders in Maiduguri and with Chibok parents provided an opportunity to obtain insights on the reach and depth of the movement and its perceived contribution to empowerment and accountability at the local levels.

Interviews were conducted in Hausa (the dominant language in the study area) or English depending on the interviewee's preference, audio recorded and transcribed by the research team. The interviews were led by one of the core technical research team members with support from research assistants. Full consent and permission to record the interviews were obtained before the interviews were conducted following full disclosure from the researchers on the purpose and objectives of the study and how the data collected would be processed/stored and used.

4.7 Data analysis

The research adopted a flexible and evolving research process that allowed for continuous data gathering, analysis and revision. This reiterative process allowed for incremental data gathering as trust grew between the researchers and the researched. For instance, during the study period, the research team held two full day engagement meetings with key stakeholders including #BBOG leadership (the inception meeting described above and a feedback session following completion of data collection and preliminary analyses in June 2018). These engagement forums enabled a reflection process and trust building that also facilitated important stakeholder feedback thus enhancing the validity of the findings.

In all of these, the researchers sought to understand the emergence and structure of the #BBOG, its operational strategies, challenges and impact regarding accountability and empowerment. These themes informed the creation of the codes, concepts and categories in research analyses supplemented by stakeholder feedback and other data sources described above.

¹ Many of the people in the rural areas, including Chibok, had relocated to Maiduguri where the heavy military presence presents some measure of security.

5 The Bring Back Our Girls movement

5.1 Emergence of the #BBOG

The Bring Back Our Girls movement emerged from the context of a violent and extremist insurgency in North East Nigeria. The movement was a direct reaction to the failure of the Nigerian state to deliver on its duty of providing the safety and security of its citizens. It was also a response to the intensification of the conflicts by the insurrectionary group through its targeted attacks of schools and educational institutions in the conflict zones where they carried out atrocities such as killings, abductions, kidnappings and laying communities and settlements to waste.

The abduction of 276 schoolgirls from Chibok Secondary School on 14 April 2014 was the tipping point for the formation of the Bring Back Our Girls (#BBOG) movement. That sad event followed a series of violent attacks and the display of extreme ruthlessness by the Boko Haram terrorists. For instance, the group attacked a boys' only school in Buni Yadi in February 2014 killing 59 boarding schoolboys, abducted schoolgirls in Chibok in April and the following day, at the Nyaya motor park in Abuja, detonated an explosive device killing dozens of people. Each of these was followed by either silence or a lack of any decisive action from the then government.

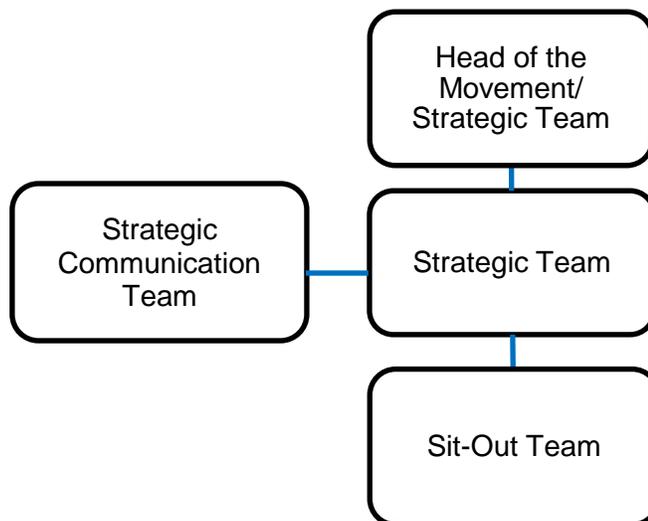
On 23 April 2014, at a World Book Capital conference in Port Harcourt, Nigeria, former World Bank Vice President and former Minister of Education in Nigeria, Dr Oby Ezekwesili spoke about the abducted schoolgirls followed by some comments from Professor Wole Soyinka. A lawyer, Ibrahim Abdullahi, tweeted Dr Ezekwesili's words, *#BringBackOurDaughters*, and *#BringBackOurGirls*. By May 2014, Twitter analytics showed that over three million people had used the second hashtag. Despite the war in Syria, the missing Malaysian airline, the crisis in Ukraine, and other trending global issues, the *#BringBackOurGirls* spread to 69 countries and dwarfed many other global issues for a while (Ibeh 2014).

Hadiza Bala Usman, an influential Nigerian political activist and women's leader sent emails to individuals and civil society organisations to solicit a march in Abuja. On 30 April 2014, the Bring Back Our Girls (BBOG) movement appeared on the streets of Abuja and ended its march at the Unity Fountain. As the final speeches were being read, a man from Chibok, an abducted girl's relative, knelt and begged the crowd: 'don't leave us; if you do, they (the government) will forget us'. On the spur of the moment, Dr Oby Ezekwesili announced: 'we will stand with you until your kids come back!'. To date, the *#BBOG* has met every day at the Unity Fountain in Abuja. It has also staged some 250 protests within and outside Nigeria. This dramatic start to the movement captures some of the key foundational elements of this social and political action and factors that has contributed to its continued existence. These include: an ongoing violent conflict situation, an ineffective state response, immense outrage by citizens and others over an incident that involved the abduction of a large number of innocent young girls from a school, mobilisation of protest via social media and demonstrations. It also reflects social and political activists' spontaneous response of to a seemingly helpless citizen and representative of an affected community's appeal for help. The rest is about organisational design; generating and building consensus around operational and moral principles; and sustaining motivation, interest and resources for a campaign unique in Nigeria's history. Additionally, both the leadership of the movement and the overwhelming international attention and response also mattered.

5.2 Structure of the #BBOG

The movement initially organised itself around five parallel arms: Mobilisation Team; Media and Communication Team; Resource Team; Legal Team; and the Sit-Out Team, but these were later subsumed into a three-layer structure. A member of the strategic communication explained why the movement needed some form of structure; ‘...we are growing and we’ve stayed here for long [sic]; we needed some form of structure’. At the top is the Head of the movement, who is the head of the Strategic Team and spokesperson of the movement. At the centre is the Strategic Team which set goals and objectives, and planned activities and events. This is followed by the Sit-Out Team which is made up of all other members who observe the daily sit-outs at Unity Fountain in Abuja. The Strategic Team reports to the Sit-Out team; they are not to execute any programme unless approved by the Sit-Out team. The Strategic Communication Team is a strong subset of the Strategic Team, and consists of persons with expertise in media and communications, responsible for managing all media platforms, disseminating information and keeping members informed.

Figure 5.1 BBOG organisational structure



Source: Authors' own, developed from interviews.

The exact size of the BBOG membership remains unclear due to its free entry, free exit policy. The exact membership cannot be estimated as the movement's presence is more amplified by the existence of a strong media team. This loose structure is deliberate and intentional and is a reflection of the new social movements' phenomenon. Interviews with the leadership pointed to the existence of a list of members and their contacts but the overall external atmosphere of fear created by endless government surveillance and acrimonious relationships with the military and the state created a very cautious approach by the team which did not allow the sharing of any members' list. As the movement grew and engaged in a range of activities, some structure emerged and most of the key actors remained in the movement over the past four years, maintaining strong links.

5.3 Gendered nature of BBOG movement

The gender composition of the BBOG marks it out as a unique group among social movements in Nigeria. The movement has continuously been led by women, alongside the active involvement of men. Men served as members of the strategic team and the head of strategic communication team is also male. Table 5.1 below shows the sex distribution of BBOG leaders to date.

Table 5.1 Sex of BBOG leaders

Leadership sequence	Head of Movement/ Strategic Team	Sex	Sit-Out Team	Sex	Media/communication	Sex
1st	Dr Obi Ezekwesili	F	Hadiza Bala Usman	F	Olawole deputised by Tunji ²	M
2nd	Aisha Yusuf	F	Florence Ozo ³	F	Sesugh Akume	M
3rd	Florence Obi	F	Bukky Shonibare	F	Olufemi Olufade	M
4th	Edith Yasin	F	Aisha Yusuf	F	Jeff Okoroafor	M
5th	-	-	Abubakar Malunfashi	M	-	-
6th	-	-	Gapani Yanga	M	-	-

Source: Authors' own. Interviews with BBOG leadership.

It is not clear what accounts for the female dominance in the leadership of the BBOG. It might be that women connected with the issues around the abduction of young schoolgirls more easily than men. There has also been speculation that the #BBOG created a space for the adoption of women's issues around gender-based violence in conflict zones and making schools safe and secure for girls, issues that the state-captured, conventional dominant women's organisations, were unwilling or unable to adopt. It has been argued that rather than open up the civic space for women's activism, electoral politics through the women's wings of the dominant political parties and the different variants of state feminism, constricted the space. The #BBOG movement represented an example of bubbling up, improvising and recovering the civic space for these kinds of issues. Another reason put forward for the strong presence of women leaders in the movement is that it may also have been that the strategy and policy of non-militancy was not attractive to many men who then had to leave after initially participating in the protests. Men in leadership would probably have altered somewhat the commitment to non-militancy and decorous confrontation that was one of the hall marks of the protests and activities of the #BBOG movement.

The exit of some predominantly male early members could also be related to their perceptions or feelings around the strong personalities of pioneer female leaders of the movement and their speculation that the movement was contributing to the political profiles and prospects of some of the leaders. Another important point to note about the initial leaders of the movement is that they were made up of women who were either professionals or had independent means as business persons. Some of them were also seasoned political activists with track records of activism and engagement in other social issues. These were therefore not *disempowered women*. Whatever the reason for the gendered nature of the movement's leadership and posture, it is clear that in a society as patriarchal as the Nigerian society, significant underlying gender dynamics were present both within the movement and the way it was perceived by those outside it. It is also notable that although there are more men than women in the media team, IT and journalism skills seemed to have been given ascendancy in the selection of these team members. The two women in the media team as at the time of this study were journalists, and the men were information technology professionals. This profile of the members of the media team may have contributed to the success of the #BBOG in the use of social media.

² The Media and Communication Team also consisted of two female journalists.

³ Florence Ozor and Bukky Shonibare led the sit-out team in brief quick successions.

The #BBOG composition and leadership is gendered in a functional way. If there was a quest for gender balance, it was not an open quest and it was not fulfilled at the expense of quality of contribution and engagement along with the need to populate the teams with those whose skills and professional experiences were requisite to the successful functioning of their specific teams. Another interesting element of the gender dimensions in the movement was the distance of other women's groups from the movement. This might be because participation in the #BBOG was individual and women activists engaged and participated as individuals not as members or representatives of women and feminist groups. Another possible reason for the silence of other women's groups might be related to the state capture of the conventional women's groups whose activities were now predominantly channelled through the dominant political parties or other state-dominated or sponsored outlets.

6 Operational strategies of the BBOG movement

The #BBOG movement like many social movements around the world was birthed as a reaction to a key social and political issue, in this case the kidnap of 276 schoolgirls from government secondary school Chibok, in Borno State. The movement held its first public protest on 30 April 2014, which was meant to be a one-off event. Neither the participants nor the observers could have thought that four years later, BBOG would still be staging sit-outs daily, organising protests sporadically, and mounting online pressure consistently.

There were reasons to expect the BBOG movement to be short-lived. Chief among these is the context in which it exists. The Nigerian context is a fragile, conflict- and violence-affected one. The Boko Haram insurgency in the North East was making terrifying and daring incursions southwards with the bombing of places in Abuja such as the UN House and the Nyanya Motor Park – the latter being bombed a few weeks before the first BBOG protest. The national and state security systems were overstretched. Mounting a visible and enduring social and political action, led by identifiable actors was therefore dangerous; a flash mob approach would have been safer.

Second, the Nigerian economy was going through difficulties and incidents of poverty were on the rise. For the citizens who were contending with the pressures of daily survival and uncertainties, participating in prolonged protests for a social cause was not a primary concern. Mobilising such citizens can be a hard task.

Another reason to expect the BBOG movement to be a flash in the pan is that its focus was not a recurrent issue but a specific one-off incident: pressure the government to rescue the abducted schoolgirls and bring them back alive and safe. Diarised issues, such as climate change, press freedom and the like, have days in a year earmarked for them drawing interested actors globally. The longevity of social and political actions around such issues is more certain than around specific one-off issues such as the abduction of a group of schoolgirls in an obscure rural part of North East Nigeria.

Fourth, the BBOG is women-led. Although there is a long history of women-led social and political actions in Nigeria, it is difficult to ignore the history of attrition of such movements in a predominantly patriarchal Nigeria. While women have led a number of historical protests such as the Egba women's riots of 1947 (see Byfield 2003) or the Aba women's riots of 1929 (see Afigbo 1966) among many others, these seem to have been short-lived. None had certainly lasted for four years, but were nonetheless reactive, sharply focused and characterised by 'purposive

commitment' (Taylor 1989: 765). Another important difference with the iconic women protests is that there was no way the #BBOG phenomenon could be described as a *riot* or any form of an unruly protest. Its presence on the streets and in public was always disciplined, peaceful and orderly. The founders and leaders insisted on this position.

Moreover, there is the presence of a group of vociferous defenders of government online and offline. Right from its inception, the #BBOG has had to contend with an army of those defending the government and attacking #BBOG activists more often in online forums but also offline during protests. In spite of these difficulties, the #BBOG trudged on using a diversity of methods and means to press their demand, that is, 'bring back the abducted schoolgirls alive'. The reasons for this resilience and durability can be traced to strong alliances formed by #BBOG activists and participants thus creating both a virtual and actual community of activists along with the operational strategies of the #BBOG movement.

6.1 The unique nature of the cause: the abduction of the Chibok girls

The #BBOG movement emerged in response to an incident unique in the history of popular protests in Nigeria and at an important moment in global politics and advocacy. Previous protest issues in Nigeria have not received the kind of attention that the abduction of the Chibok girls received – apart from the international support for the victims of the Biafran war based on the spread of horrific images of starving children. During an era with a backdrop of seemingly endless conflicts of violent extremist groups such as Al Qaeda and the ISIL militants victimising women and abducting them to be used as weapons, the incident with the Chibok girls drew global attention. It fitted the pattern of gender-based violence in conflict situations in Africa and beyond. There had been several cases of kidnappings and abductions along with rape, forced marriages and conscriptions as child soldiers in the conflicts in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Eastern Congo, the Lord's Resistance Army in Uganda, Somalia, Syria and Afghanistan. This unfortunate trend has provoked strong international reactions among advocacy groups on gender-based violence and the exploitation of children and girls in conflict situations. These advocacy groups were strong external and internal voices along with #BBOG over the case of the Chibok girls. Also the Chibok girls were symbols that signified different meanings to different stakeholders (Matfess 2017). They were daughters and girls, Christian girls, young schoolgirls and the abduction fuelled different reactions from strong Muslim believers who felt the abductions have no place in Islam, to fundamentalist political Christian groups who saw this as a justification for their Islamophobia. The Boko Haram also dramatised the event by posting videos twice in May 2014 with all kinds of claims and threats to sell the girls, marry them off and/or forcibly convert them to Islam.

There was also the fact that all the abducted girls were *Christian* girls from the Christian enclave of Chibok in the predominantly Muslim population of North Eastern Nigeria. Christian groups outside of Nigeria, particularly US evangelicals used this situation to further their campaign on the issue of the persecution and discrimination against Christians around the world. However, the #BBOG remained a non-faith based movement. Its activists come from across all faiths and there were efforts to sustain an inter faith posture through the composition of the leadership that included both Christians and Muslims. In the context of Nigerian politics, the abducted girls also became pawns in high stakes political disputations, bargains, electoral campaigns and negotiations.

The very nature of the Boko Haram insurgency, its connections to international terrorist groups, its unorthodox methods of self-publicity and fear-provoking videos and media releases made this phenomenon an incredibly newsworthy material for the international media. There was coverage

on CNN, BBC, Al Jazeera, Reuters and a large number of global and international media networks. The inept handling of the incident and the overall conflict in the North East of Nigeria by the then government of President Goodluck Jonathan also did not help matters much. The denials, aggressive behaviour by government officials and the growing toll of casualties and human rights abuse in the conflict zone all became issues that rights advocacy groups campaigned against. In short the #BBOG movement was campaigning for an issue that all the context and the circumstances around it managed to place in endless public limelight.

6.2 Elastic circle of concern

Although the clear aim of the #BBOG movement was to pressure the government to confront Boko Haram and bring the abducted Chibok girls back home safely, it kept redefining and extending what this really means. When some women were abducted in Bassa, the #BBOG printed their photos on large placards and staged a protest – *bring back our girls and the women*. When lecturers of the University of Maiduguri (UNIMAID) were abducted while on fieldwork, the #BBOG staged a protest: *bring back our girls and the UNIMAID lecturers*. When Boko Haram allegedly killed a large number of soldiers, #BBOG staged a march, *bring back our girls and don't bury our soldiers secretly in mass graves*. The Movement then extended its concern to include demands for good governance, school safety, welfare of IDPs and soldiers' welfare. They even visited the dreaded Sambisa forest⁴ to interact with and encourage the soldiers. What must be remembered though is that most or all of their other adopted issues were related to the violent conflicts in North Eastern Nigeria, the abductions and kidnappings of helpless children and citizens and the escalation of gender-based violence in the conflict zones.

In Nigeria and indeed in most fragile, conflict- and violence-affected settings, most of those who protest about a social and political issue are those who have personal stakes: an abducted person's relative, owner of a threatened roadside business, residents of a neighbourhood marked for demolition among others. An abstract or political commitment to larger social causes is expressed mainly by a small number of activists found in the civil society, activists among the human rights community or university students. The #BBOG generated support and interest beyond the usual activist circles and included civil servants, office workers, business people and traders, many of whom participated in their sit-outs, protest marches and demonstrations whenever they could. It did this by keeping the cause alive in the media and the physical daily presence of protesters in Abuja. By constantly redefining the circumference of their focus, #BBOG movement increased the number of those who had personal stakes and, therefore, would willingly join marches or protests. Yet, by keeping the Chibok girl's abduction at the centre of their discourse, while weaving other contiguous issues around it, and around good governance, #BBOG movement demonstrated a single-mindedness and doggedness that endeared them to both local and foreign supporters.

6.3 A disciplined posture, beliefs and cohesive tactics

The BBOG aimed to stay above potentially distracting engagements such as national, state or local partisan politics, or controversies that could arise over the management of funders' contributions. First, it declared a principle of funding purity: they were never to receive money from politicians or even external actors. Survival was to be based on members' donations – cash

⁴ Sambisa Forest is located in Borno State in northeast Nigeria. Covering about 518 km² of landscape on a flatland and drained by the Ngadda and Yedseram Rivers. The British colonial administration had gazetted the Sambisa Forest as a reserve in 1958, making it one of the conservation legacies bequeathed to the Nigerian state by the colonial power. In 1977, the area was re-gazetted as a National Game Reserve for the preservation of rare animals and also as a way of generating funds from tourism. The forest has since become synonymous with Boko Haram terrorism. Boko Haram has waged a bloody war against the Nigerian state in a bid to foist its own brand of religious order on the secular state.

or kind. One of the founders and leaders of the movement stated that they refused money offered by the Borno State government. She emphasised that:

Most of what we do that involves money comes voluntarily including media publications and coverage... so people come in to contribute according to their capacity, like t-shirt[s] and the wristband[s] were printed long ago in accordance to our individual financial capacities. We met participants at marches who had trekked long distances because they could not afford transport fares. We also observed members who had brought water and biscuits in their cars to share with other members... (Interviewee 001)

When asked about financial assistance received from foreign governments and Nigerians in Diaspora, #BBOG activists said that monetary offers from foreign governments were turned down. However, the government of Argentina had awarded the #BringBackOurGirls movement the International Human Rights Prize *Emilio F. Mignone* for work in advocacy towards respect for human rights worldwide. The award came with a cash prize and the movement received it and committed it wholly to the education and welfare of released abducted girls. A bank account was opened for it. It was not, in their reckoning, meant for the #BBOG and could not be used by the group. The principle of refusing any sort of external donations was meant to protect the movement from: (a) alignment with the agendas of funders whether they are foreign donors, government or private wealthy individuals who are not active in the movement; (b) insulate the movement from the common wrangles that often surround the management of donated funds in Nigeria; and (c) to avoid perceptions or/and accusations of the movement having been captured by a funder's agenda or interests.

Second, the #BBOG movement declared a principle of total distance from partisan politics. At its inception, critics of the #BBOG accused it of working for the opposition party. This was understandably due to the fact that many of the politicians in opposition at that time spoke in favour of the movement. Even when the ruling party lost re-election, those who were hitherto in opposition and were *friends* of the #BBOG soon became estranged to the movement. The reason for total abstinence from partisan politics was to preserve the claim to neutrality. As a result of this commitment, each member of the #BBOG that had accepted political appointments or had decided to go into partisan politics had to relinquish their leadership role in the #BBOG movement. These included the most prominent member of the group, Dr Oby Ezekwesili, who decided to contest for the presidency of Nigeria, and Hajia Adiza Bala Usman who was once among the leading members of the #BBOG. When Dr Ezekwesili decided to contest for the presidency, the leaders of the #BBOG who chose to support her in her campaigns had to relinquish their leadership role in the movement. Further, during the last quarter of 2018, four other members of the strategic team also resigned to enable them support fully the political candidature of Dr Oby Ezekwesili.

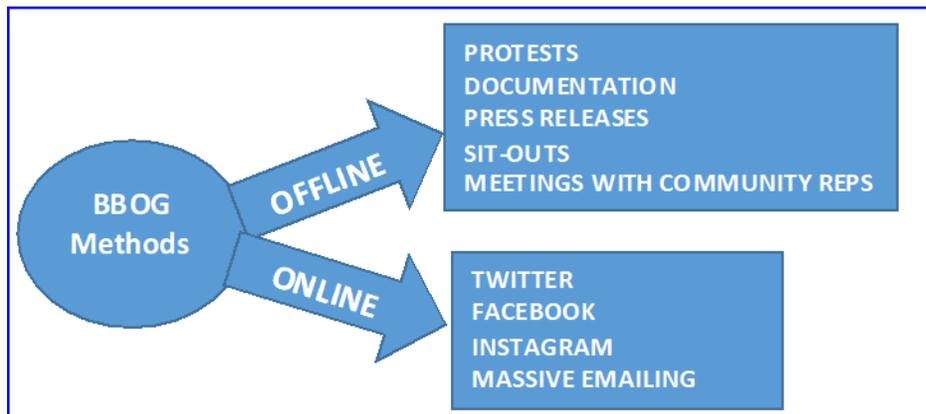
Third, the #BBOG adopted a number of tactics that helped build internal cohesion among activists and participants at its protests. It codified its aims, objectives and guiding principles into an acronym and a chant that not only guided the members but also united them and fired their zeal at meetings. The guiding principles were summed up in the expression: HUMANITEEDS (Hope, Unity, Motivation, Affability, Nationalism, Integrity, Transparency, Empathy, Equity, Discipline, and Sacrifice). The movement also composed a responsorial chant which they recited many times during meetings or marches (see the Annexe for the BBOG mobilisation chant). The chant performed the dual role of putting the demands of the movement on the foreground and, being a chant, energising members during protests. Tokens of membership such as red-colour clothing by members during meetings, red branded t-shirts, and branded wristbands also served cohesive purposes.

Closely connected to HUMANITEEDS, especially affability and discipline, is the principle of non-militancy. Members were not allowed to insult anyone verbally or attack anyone physically. Blocking of the road during marches, the throwing of stones and forcing vehicles to display green leaves as sign of solidarity are common practices of marchers in Nigeria. However, these were not permitted in #BBOG events and protests. The movement therefore imposed a discipline that limited the chances of her being associated with riots and unruly politics. The immediate impact of this approach might be respect earned from non-members and government officials. A much more important impact is that non-militancy and overt non-violent actions make high-handed response or use of force by the police unnecessary. This explains the rarity of injury among members during marches. Although their politics was oppositional and demand-making, it exercised scarcely any features of what is known in the literature as *unruly politics* (see Khanna *et al.* 2013; Hossain *et al.* 2018).

6.4 Multiple tools; multiple channels

The #BBOG movement was unique for its use of social media. Its Twitter handle and Facebook accounts had thousands of followers, likers and unlikers. However, the movement combines that with physical and visible presence especially in Abuja and Lagos. It deployed multiple channels (see Figure 6.1): mass media press releases, street protests, documentation projects and others in an attempt to make its voice heard by policy makers. In the process, these tools also ensured that it reached its members.

Figure 6.1 BBOG methods



Source: Authors' own.

If the movement had adopted only one of these two broad groups of channels, it would have been unable to reach as many followers it reached. Adopting multiple channels also meant that members had the freedom to choose which channel worked for them the best, and that information from a channel got reinforced by information from other channels.

6.5 A tactic for a quick outcome but a plan for the long haul

The #BBOG was intended to be a one day project or at most a project lasting for a few days. It was believed that a loud outcry would snap the government into action and lead to eventual procurement of the release of the schoolgirls. It would also further halt or significantly reduce the violence in the Northeast. Yet, even right from the start, the leaders had set a tough objective for themselves: continue the advocacy until the last of the abducted schoolgirls gets back home safe and alive. While they wished that this would happen soon, they were prepared for the long haul just in case the objective was not quickly achieved. Regular meetings, regular marches and

a consistent engagement with government are all part of the tactics for the long haul. The foregoing strategies appeared to be responsible for the resilience and durability of the BBOG. What follows is the impact of the activities of the group.

6.6 BBOG’s partnerships and collaborations

Across Nigeria, the #BBOG movement gained sympathy and membership due to long term neglect of important social and political issues by government. With the group’s operational strategy of non-violent and persistent demands through peaceful protest, intelligence⁵ and coordination, many government, local and international organisations and individuals have sought partnership with #BBOG to carry out one activity or the other. The #BBOG movement on its part had called on the international community and well-meaning individuals to seek support and public visibility for the Chibok girls.

Beyond protests, rallies and campaigns in the media and social media, #BBOG worked with interested public, private and civil society institutions on activities and projects that addressed some of the problems of management of the abducted persons. They worked on the creation of a national missing persons’ register to support data and record keeping of persons missing in disasters and conflicts. They also campaigned against corruption which was a major factor that contributed to government effectiveness across the board and they helped provide relief and support for internally displaced persons that were victims of many of Nigeria’s conflicts and violence. As part of their connections with the abducted girls, they helped to raise funds for scholarships for those freed and returned. The activities carried out by #BBOG in partnership with other groups, supports the assertion that social movements have the capacity to bring about change and transformation. Table 6.1 below presents some of activities done through partnership.

Table 6.1 Selected #BBOG partnerships

BBOG	Organisation/individual/groups	Activity
1	Human Rights Commission	National Missing Persons Register
2	National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA)	Emergency Management (Internally Displaced Persons)
3	Ministry of Women Affairs	Chibok Desk
4	Nigerian Air Force	Air Surveillance of Sambisa Forest
5	Economic and Financial Crimes Commission	March Against Corruption
6	New York City Congresswoman Carolyn B. Maloney	Holding rallies on Capitol Hill, Issuing Press Releases,
7	Planned Parenthood Federation Nigeria (PPFN), Foundation for Refugee Economic Empowerment (FREE), Victims of Violence, CyberLogik Foundation	Provided specific relief items to pregnant women, babies and general basic necessities to men and young people in IDPs
8	CyberLogik Foundation	Scholarships for school children

Source: Authors’ own. Interview data.

⁵ BBOG developed a Verification, Authentication, Reunification System (VARS) and gave it to the government to use in verifying the identity of missing persons.

7 Impact of the #BBOG: Empowerment and accountability?

Of the 276 girls that were abducted in 2014, 107 have been rescued or released. The #BBOG leadership attributes the release of these girls to its relentless advocacy, noting that this forced the government to secure the release or effect the rescue of these girls. As one of the leaders noted: 'we succeeded in securing the release of 113 girls... the fact is [if] BBOG never existed, these guys may not have been rescued' (Interviewee 001).

The government has not denied that the #BBOG pressure was a factor in its effort to rescue the girls. In addition to this important achievement, the movement has had impact in three major ways: keeping the issue alive nationally and globally; exacting responses from government; and emboldening or equipping social and political actors.

7.1 Keeping the plight of the girls in relentless global and national limelight

One of the major successes of the #BBOG movement cited by the majority of interviewees is the ability to keep the plight of the abducted girls in the limelight, both in Nigeria and internationally for over four years. The movement has done this by sustaining the conversation about the missing girls through a combination of tactics including social media activism, protests, rallies and daily sit outs at the Unity Fountain (Abuja). As a consequence, the movement has attracted many other people who joined in putting pressure on the government to secure the release of the girls. The following comment from one of the leading lights of the movement is illustrative:

More and more Nigerians are now adding their voices to the call for the return of the Chibok girls, since BBOG is not relenting [n]or giving up, it has moved a lot of people to joining the call on government to act for the release of the girls. (Interviewee 002)

The effectiveness of each of the #BBOG's tactics in achieving impact by keeping the abduction in the limelight differ. Of interest is the use of online platforms to sustain action. Our media tracking showed that whereas the #BBOG media platforms set the pace for online discussion of the Chibok abduction in 2014 and 2015, by May 2018, the most influential posts were from groups other than the #BBOG. In fact, 60.6 per cent of posts on the abduction were from people and groups outside the #BBOG. As shown in Table 7.1, only three out of the ten most popular posts originated from the #BBOG movement. The remaining seven posts were shared by the #BBOG movement on its Facebook page. Two of the shared posts originated from Nigerian media houses with strong international online reach – Sahara Reporters and Premium Times. Five were stories originally published by foreign media – BBC, New York Times, and VOA. The focus of all ten posts is consistent with the objective of the group.

Table 7.1 Interaction statistics of posts on #BBOG_Nigeria Facebook page

Primary source	Focus	Date	Likes	Comments	Share	Total
BBOG	Thoughts about mothers of #ChibokGirls on Mothers' Day	13/05/18	528	16	147	691
Sahara Reporters	Boko Haram Returns Kidnapped School Girls in Dapchi, Five Dead	21/03/18	378	15	90	483
New York Times	Kidnapped as schoolgirls by Boko Haram	11/04/18	216	9	87	312
BBC	Many #ChibokGirls are dead	15/04/18	227	2	75	304
BBC News	On claims that many Chibok girls are dead	15/04/18	227	2	75	304
VOA	Nigeria's Dapchi Girls Go Back to School	21/05/18	229	3	58	290
Premium Times	How 14-year-old girl helped Chibok girl escape Boko Haram	13/01/18	234	6	39	279
New York Times	Interviews with rescued Chibok girls	15/04/18	150	15	70	235
BBOG	Police harassment	24/04/18	142	15	45	202
BBOG	4th year commemoration in New York	09/04/18	130	5	56	191

Source: Authors' own.

The statistics from Twitter is even more instructive. Table 7.2 shows that the tweets with the highest interaction statistics was not from the BBOG but from CNN.

Table 7.2 Interaction statistics of Tweets on @BBOG_Nigeria Twitter timeline

Primary source	Focus	Date	Comments	Retweets	Likes	Total
CNN International	Leah Sharibu's refusal to convert to Islam	15/05/18	42	662	428	1,132
BBOG_Nigeria	Leah Sharibu's birthday	13/05/18	92	421	399	912
Florence Ozor™	Leah Sharibu's birthday	13/05/18	31	184	264	479
Ms Maureen Kabrik	Leah Sharibu's birthday	12/05/18	14	233	216	463
Ahmad Salkida	Proof of life of Chibok girls in captivity	13/05/18	12	205	149	366
Rep Frederica Wilson	Message of hope on Leah Sharibu	19/05/18	12	98	246	356
Bukky Shonibare	Leah Sharibu's birthday	14/05/18	6	222	123	351
Premium Times	Leah Sharibu's birthday	14/05/18	20	195	130	345
Aisha Yesufu	No one contacts Leah Sharibu's family	07/05/18	18	147	163	328
Rep Frederica Wilson	Fear still grips Dapchi Girls' School in Nigeria	21/05/18	13	81	178	272

Source: Authors' own.

Two tweets by Rep Frederica Wilson, a member of the United States House of Representatives, also feature in the top ten. Even though only one tweet with high level of reactions originated from @BBOG_Nigeria, four other tweets originated from members of #BBOG – Florence Ozor, Ms Maureen Kabrik, Bukky Shonibare, and Aisha Yesufu. Thus, 50 per cent of the tweets originated from the #BBOG group. Of the remaining two tweets, one originated from the foremost Nigerian journalist on reporting Boko Haram related issues, Ahmad Salkida, and one from a national online news channel, Premium Times. All ten tweets are consistent with the focus of #BBOG advocacy.

This internationalisation of the Chibok abductions illustrates how an otherwise national issue can attract international attention if properly fuelled by social and political actions along with strong international support. It also shows that the initial issue advocates can attract followers whose energy and consistency will sooner or later overtake those of the initial advocates, thus giving the social and political action a life of its own. It further illustrates the success of the #BBOG is priming the abduction issue to a point that the issue took on a life of its own almost independent of the #BBOG movement.

Interviews with the #BBOG activists show a link between the plight of the abducted girls and the significant attention to this issue paid by major global political actors such as the United Nations; the European Union; the United States Embassy in Nigeria; the British High Commission in Nigeria; the German and Italian governments; and some other European countries. Representatives of these countries actively participated in online advocacy in support of efforts to rescue the abducted girls. Some individuals such as Congresswoman Theresa Wilson of the United States advocated support within the American parliament towards the rescue and return of the girls. Michelle Obama, Malala Yousafzai and others are among global figures that tweeted, spoke and held signs in support of the BBOG movement and its course (Matfess 2017).

Some members of the BBOG leadership team suggested that some financial and military aid that came to the Nigerian government in the effort to end insurgency in the North East was given in response to #BBOG-led advocacy about the missing Chibok girls. Thus, #BBOG's advocacy had the dual effect of not only bringing the plight of the missing girls to national and global attention, but also spotlighting the general condition and the atrocities of the embattled North Eastern region.

A member of the BBOG strategic team added:

... the support that the Nigerian government is getting stems from the campaign as the international community's now realised the need to support Nigeria to end the insurgency... the situation in the North East was not being reported but we brought light into the real situation in the North East to the whole world... (Interviewee 003)

The impact of globally and nationally priming the abduction issue can be appreciated from two angles. First, is that it most likely pushed government to take action. By creating a national and international public relations discomfort for the government, the #BBOG pressured the government to a point where it had to act. The government of President Goodluck Jonathan was generally considered as inept, unwilling and slow to respond to the abduction issue. Mired in corruption allegations and globally perceived as insufficiently proactive on many issues, the government needed to respond to this international public relations embarrassment in order to redeem its image. Some of the actions taken by the government as a result of the strong push by #BBOG included: setting up a probe panel, goading the military towards being more active in the North East, and sending a government delegation to Chibok Secondary School for on-the-

spot assessment. President Jonathan also attempted to visit the North East but was prevented by the security chiefs. The electoral victory of President Muhammadu Buhari was in good part the result of his promise to end the insurgency in the North East by leading the military from the front. It was only logical for him to attempt to do this and in that way, acceded to the demands of the #BBOG movement.

The second indication that the national and global priming of the Chibok abduction was not without impact becomes obvious when the aftermath of the Chibok abduction is compared with the aftermaths of other abductions and attacks. The murder of scores of schoolboys in the town of Buni Yadi, the abduction of several hundred women in different villages in Borno, Adamawa and Yobe States, the bombing in Nyaya, Abuja, the attack of the UN House in Abuja among numerous others at best attracted condemnation from government and a promise to *bring the perpetrators to book*. None attracted the kind of response that the Chibok abduction attracted. We will consider this point further in the following section.

7.2 Exacting responses from government

It is important to note that on the average, there are about 100 protests and marches in Nigeria every year, most of which happen in Abuja and around the premises of the National Assembly. However, only few of these get the attention of government. The #BBOG action not only got the attention of government but also exacted a response from government. Below we highlight instances where the movement was able to hold the government accountable for its actions towards rescuing the abducted girls.

First is the verbal response. From time to time, the #BBOG made claims and accusations, and government responded often with rebuttals. On the other hand, when government made claims, #BBOG refuted it with evidence, which would then force the government to retract.

One of the interviewees, a member of the BBOG Strategic Team said,

Any time we come out to protest, the government will come out to speak... Okay, for example, look at our last outing; it is because of it they went to Chibok. They went and held a meeting with parents who their children are still in the forest. (Interviewee 010)

She claimed that even if it was to publish false information, (including claims that the girls had been rescued), the government often responded to claims and allegations made by the #BBOG. In some instances, the government would release information about the welfare and status of the girls following a push from the #BBOG, while in others, there would be exchanges of letters between the government and #BBOG regarding the latter's request to visit the North East for inspection. This was so that the #BBOG could verify claims that the government was making progress in the war against the Boko Haram insurgents (*Independent* 2017).

However, verbal responses from government were not always pleasant. For instance, the Director of Defence Information, Major-General Chris Olukolade, in a lengthy article accused the #BBOG of sabotaging the efforts of the military, and alerted them to the presence of an individual among them who was determined, for personal reasons, to tarnish his (Olukolade's) image and ruin his career (Olukolade 2015). Many instances of these unpleasant verbal exchanges abound. The important point, however, is that government did in fact respond in an attempt to be answerable for its actions and that this response was elicited by women-led social and political actions in a largely patriarchal society.

The second kind of response exacted from government was practical action. In response to pressure from the #BBOG, the government created a desk at the Ministry of Women Affairs for the Chibok girls, known as the Chibok Desk. The role of the Desk was to source for, and make available to the public, information about Chibok and the abducted girls. The #BBOG was invited to join this Desk by the Vice-President, Professor Yemi Osinbajo, but they refused, claiming that such partnership with government could be damaging to their public image.

Thirdly and lastly, President Muhammadu Buhari agreed to meet parents of the abducted girls from Chibok. Although the event ended on a sad note with the President declaring that he did not know where the abducted girls were, and walking out on the parents and members of the #BBOG, it was significant. Only consistent and biting advocacy can draw out a Nigerian president to meet with protesters or victims at their instance. The normal practice is to send an official to speak on behalf of government.

7.3 Raising social and political actors

The #BBOG movement went beyond online activism and street protests and sit-outs and began to train its members on life skills such as public speaking, public conduct, management and basic economics. Importantly, activists of the movement described instances where they felt empowered and gained their voice to speak out on issues that challenge power. A strategic team member, noted, 'BBOG is a school, personally, for someone like me, I never knew I had a voice. I actually found my voice here, I found my voice at the fountain' (Interviewee 004). She also noted that BBOG meetings had been educational for members as they learn more about governance, public policy, economy and management.

As a result of this, some activists have left the #BBOG to set up non-governmental and welfare organisations and advocacy groups of their own. Some of these are operational in the embattled North Eastern part of the country. One example of such spill over group that was mentioned is the *Mind Project*. In this way, the #BBOG movement serves as a training ground for individuals who are interested in going further into welfare work and advocacy.

7.4 Providing a space for the hurt

Connected to raising and strengthening current and future activists, is also the fact that the #BBOG movement had become a space where those who are hurting could go to obtain information or just vent their pain and anger. The protests and rallies of the group appear to have become a platform for the families of other abducted persons to speak out about the plight of their loved ones and demand urgent action from the government. At one of the protests, a representative of the families of the University of Maiduguri lecturers that were abducted was observed as having an opportunity to speak up. He was able to share the grief of the affected families at the loss of their sons and to exhort the government not to relent in their efforts to retrieve the missing lecturers. A mother of one of the missing Lassa women in the Middle Belt was also at the protest and was given the platform to speak about the sufferings that the families of the abducted have experienced since the women were taken. Families of the abducted persons were also able to find comfort in the knowledge that someone was speaking up for their missing family members. Speaking about this, Aisha Yesufu referenced the mother of one of the University of Maiduguri lecturers who came to the group desolate, but was encouraged after finding hope in the idea that she was not alone in carrying the burden of the loss.

However, while the #BBOG movement has branches in Abuja, Lagos and other places outside the country, some members of the Chibok community from which the girls were abducted, claim ignorance of their activities. The leader of an organisation for the mothers of the kidnapped girls

explained that they have only had one instance of contact with the #BBOG. Before any of the girls were rescued, they were invited to meet at Abuja.

We had to sell our farm produce to go to Abuja to meet with them. I know as at then, they paid our hotel bills. Then they gave us food stuffs like Semovita and gave us soup ingredients to cook for ourselves. (Interviewee 001-Chibok)

The impact of the #BBOG gains clarity when the events following the Chibok abduction are compared with the silence that followed similar abductions or attacks. Abduction of women and children is a major tactic of the Boko Haram. In 2018, UNICEF estimated that Boko Haram had kidnapped over 1,000 children, and killed more than 2,000 teachers (Busari 2018). Women were abducted in Gwoza, Bama and in other places. Schoolboys numbering about 60 (some say 29) were killed in Buni Yadi (Yusuff 2018). Amnesty International estimated that in 2014, over 2,000 women and girls were abducted. These abductions were usually followed by government's promise of immediate action and then silence. Sad as all these were, the government did not pick out any set of abductions for special intervention – such as erecting a garrison or embarking on special rescue or negotiation – as they did with the Chibok case. The only difference between these other cases and Chibok was the involvement of the #BBOG and the tremendous internationalisation of the issue. One could therefore infer that but for the #BBOG, the Chibok case would not have received special interventions and would have been forgotten like the others.

8 Challenges the #BBOG faced

The BBOG experienced a number of challenges. We discuss these in two categories: external and internal challenges.

8.1 External challenges

A good part of the external difficulties faced by the #BBOG could be linked to the activities of a number of counter-movements created to oppose or neutralise its efforts such as *the Return Our Girls Movement* rally which insisted that the heat of social and political action should be directed at the insurgents rather than at the government. *The Return Our Girls Movement* which was populated by the supporters of the then President, Mr Goodluck Jonathan, regarded the #BBOG movement as anti-government tools in the hands of opposition politicians and devoted its energy to subverting the activities of the #BBOG (Mills 2015).

The Buhari Administration, which succeeded the Jonathan administration, has its own *army of loyalists* that respond online especially (but also offline) to every criticism of the government. An example is the 'WithBuhariwestand' movement which described the #BBOG as 'socio-advocacy terrorists' and accused them of 'politicising the rescue of the girls... [and] distracting the government and the Army' (*The Whistler* 2017: np). Another group is the Global Excellence Foundation which was rather unsparing in condemning the #BBOG for asking that the president resign if he would not bring back the abducted schoolgirls as he promised during his campaign for office (Adaoyichie 2016). The outcomes of the activities of these countermovement and loyalists were diverse and negative.

Physical harassment from government security agencies and *hired thugs* and members of the countermovement constituted another instance of external challenges. During a march on 28 March 2014, the #BBOG activists were attacked and beaten up, and their cameras were broken.

Some activists and participants sustained minor injuries in the attack and one member got his arm broken. Participants and activists noted that all this happened in the presence of policemen who did nothing to protect the #BBOG members.

There were also physical encounters with security officials. The #BBOG was at times prevented from holding rallies or from marching in particular directions such as the Presidential Villa. This often involved pushes and shoves from hired thugs and security agents. On a number of occasions, some of the leaders of the #BBOG movement were arrested and detained.

After disrupting one of such protest marches in August 2016, the Inspector General of Police stated that:

The BringBackOurGirls group in Abuja, the nation's capital recently, is becoming worrisome and a threat to public peace and order... and must not trample on other peoples' rights through over-dramatisation of emotions, self-serving propaganda and disrespect of public (office) holders (Bada 2016).

Government's silence and refusal to give information also wearied the enthusiasm of the members. A three day march that we observed drew no response from the government. And persistent request for information from Chibok also met with helplessness on the part of the #BBOG activists. This altogether created a feeling of despair and fatigue among members. Even at the Chibok desk at the Ministry for Women affairs, the officials in charge claimed that they had no information. The same applies to some of the other causes that the #BBOG movement had taken on, such as the missing Rann women, the abducted University of Maiduguri lecturers and the missing Lassa women. Until the #BBOG in collaboration with the National Human Rights Commission, created a missing persons' database, there had been no comprehensive record of missing and abducted people.

Another instance of externally induced challenges was severe online attacks on the movement, especially on Twitter and Facebook. Most online critics of the movement accused them of being used by politicians in opposition, and of exploiting the Chibok abduction for personal political and financial gains. Aimu Foni, a member of the Maiduguri house of assembly expressed a similar sentiment during his interview, amidst claims that he has attended #BBOG meetings more than two times, he stated, 'they have changed totally; they have become money conscious and politically-minded people' (interviewee 006).

Pressure and misgivings from the parents of the abducted girls was also a problem that the movement encountered. A member of the strategic team explained that some parents of the abducted girls who had not yet been rescued felt that the #BBOG's engagement with the government was confrontational and antagonistic and was contributing to the delay in the rescue of the girls. Some others believed that the continued spotlight on the missing girls made them (the girls) invaluable to Boko Haram. He stated:

The parents are grateful, but those that their kids are not yet back, feel that we are not engaging more with the government. So they believe we should change strategy by being friendly with the government instead of the normal/usual animosity. They believe we have paid so much attention to the children – that is why Boko Haram groups are still holding on to them. (Interviewee 006)

The movement appeared to have a fractured relationship with the parents of the missing girls and the rest of the Chibok community. Mallam Yakubu Kikeyi, the leader of the parents of the

abducted girls also made a number of allegations about the #BBOG in his interview. He claimed that the movement has an account opened on behalf of the missing girls into which international bodies have been remitting funds. He explained that these funds were to be passed along to the girls and their parents, but that they had not been given any information about the money:

They do not allow us to present our own grievances our own way. So as time goes by, you discover their movement has political undertone... as we continued on the journey, we discovered that bit by bit, they drifted to having political undertone, so we cut off with them, knowing what they are up to. (Interviewee 007- Chibok)

8.2 Internal challenges

Internally, the movement has grappled with numerous challenges. First, the movement had to deal with the migration of some its members from activism to government and the ripple effects of that online and offline. Those who had accused the group of being a tool in the hands of the opposition felt justified as some of them picked up appointment with the government of President Buhari who was in opposition as at the time of the abduction.

Second, the movement had to resolve recurring disagreements over its strategies. While some activists wanted militancy; disruptive and unruly confrontation, others wanted a continuation of the pacifist and disciplined approach. When the pacifists won, some more militant activists left the movement.

Third, the movement had to deal with the waning commitment of activists and low turnout at meetings, marches and protests. The #BBOG was meant to be a one day protest march. As it dragged on for years, activists' commitment began to wane. In Lagos, there were, for several weeks, only two people at the sit-out. What must have been tiring was not just the physical stress of attending the daily sit-outs or regular marches but also the gruesome stories that were told at these meetings all the time. One of the movements' Strategic team members noted that the constant conversation about Boko Haram and the situation in the North East has been:

really a difficult thing to handle at times, because the stories are not really, really nice to hear... whenever we come, we hear stories of communities being attacked... numbers of people being killed, and number of women being abducted, the whole community being raised by fire you know, all these, it could be really drowning when we get such news. (Interviewee 008)

Despite all these challenges, the #BBOG activists constantly reaffirmed their determination to attend the daily sit-outs, until every last one of the abducted Chibok girls had been brought home safely.

9 Role of external actors

The findings above showed that although #BBOG was internally formed, supported and driven by Nigerians, it benefited significantly from the support, approval and the moral and other legitimacy provided by external actors. The first point to be noted here is that external actors comprise of a wide array of players that include international donors, the international human rights community and civil society organisations, international media, faith based groups, foreign embassies located in Nigeria, international champions of the cause such as Michelle Obama,

the Nobel laureate, Malala who visited Nigeria, the House of Congress member, Representative Frederica Wilson and an intensely vocal Nigerian and African diaspora.

Because the movement had made it clear that it was not receiving cash or money grants and donations from both governments and funders, external actors had to be more creative and innovative in their support of the cause. The strong global media presence through the CNN, BBC and Al Jazeera was an important element and the relentless support by media pundits such as Fareed Zakariah and Aisha Seesay put the movement and its cause into the global arena. Also, the several behind the scenes conversations between the Nigerian government, foreign embassies and foreign security and intelligence communities around the North East conflict must have had some elements of spin offs from the global amplification of the Chibok girls' plight.

Other evidence of the role of external actors included awards such as the International Human Rights Prize, the Emilio F. Mignone award for advocacy, the several invitations of its spokespersons to international meetings and the joint projects that were initiated in Nigeria around the documentation of missing persons. There were other efforts some of them not so benign by international ultra-right Christian groups particularly in the United States that campaigned and raised both funds and awareness around the abduction of Christian girls by *Muslim terror groups*. A significant set of external actors not often acceptable to the Nigerian authorities but who nevertheless kept the North East conflict and the plight of the Chibok girls alive were rights advocacy groups such as International Alert, Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International. The latter through its annual country reports, regular alerts and a physical presence in the country kept the Nigerian authorities particularly the military often uncomfortable through their revelations of atrocities and human rights abuse by all the parties in the conflict in the North East (Adebayo and Adeoye, CNN, 18 December 2018). International Aid agencies such as the Red Cross (ICRC) and the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) were also active in the region particularly through their work with the internally displaced persons (IDPs) and the camps set up for me. These provided more than mere relief support but also significant advocacy voices both within and outside Nigeria.

The role of the Nigerian and African Diaspora in Europe and North America must also be recognised. In North America, there were champions such as Mojubaola Okome, Professor of Political Science at Brooklyn College, New York and prominent Diaspora rights activist who not only organised regular meetings and protests in New York but also actively contributed to the lobbying of supportive legislators in the US. Professor Okome's social media handles, Twitter, Facebook and YouTube relentlessly kept the count of the days since the Chibok girls were abducted and also the count of the number still in captivity.

What one learns from the #BBOG movement campaign is that first, there are a large number of external actors made up of: funders; the global and international media; international rights advocacy groups; international bilateral development agencies; international private development and relief agencies; the UN system; eminent individuals and advocates; and the African diaspora. Some of these overlap and they often operate in a wide range of ways that go beyond direct funding of local social and political actions. They can be champions for the social and political action speaking for it and taking it to significant and privileged spaces such as the UN, the parliaments of powerful and important world forums. They can also strengthen and reinforce the voice and visibility of the movements and social and political actions through a wider range of conventional media and social media interventions. They can support capacity building of advocacy skills and technologies as well as enable more grounded empowerment processes in country. They can also work with a vocal diaspora whose remittances are not only

monetary but also cultural, educational, technological and political. The #Bring Back Our Girls movement showed the many possibilities that are open to external actors in fragile, conflict- and violence-affected settings beyond their own direct presence, funding and the reliance on their own generated metrics of impact.

10 Empowerment and accountability in FCVAS: lessons from the #BBOG

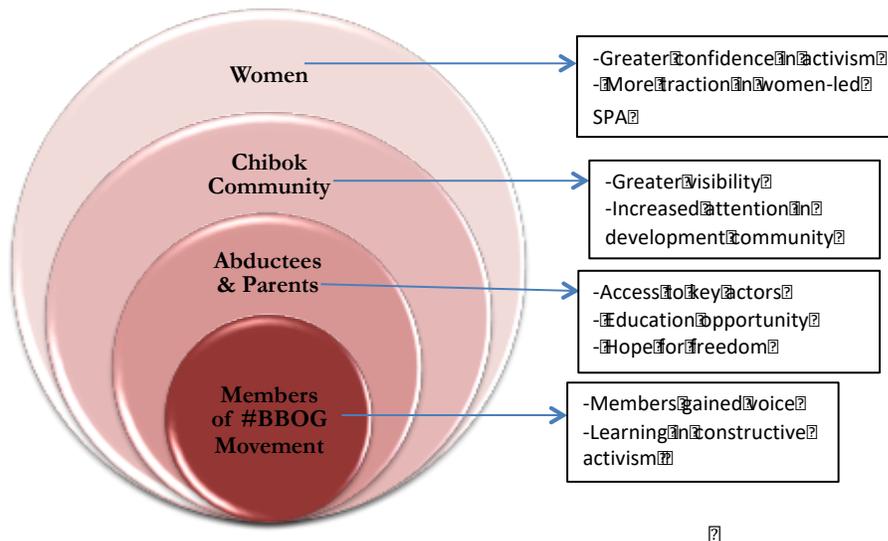
To what extent do the activities and impact of the BBOG constitute empowerment and accountability? Whose empowerment? And what role does the setting and context play in all of these?

The #Bring Back Our Girls movement, given its emergence, structure and purpose is a social movement that engaged in a battery of social and political actions. It is social in the sense of its emphasis on the collective, the relational and the interactive in the social arena. It is political in its presence in the public sphere where it engages the power relations inherent in the social contract that binds the state to the citizens and the governance norms of accountability and responsibility that go with these.

Initially, the action expected of government was the use of any means to rescue and return the abducted schoolgirls. As time went on, this extended to provision of social good, good governance, and the adoption of policies that protect women and children in difficult parts of the country. In a deeper sense, the movement addressed the issues of gender-based violence in conflict settings, the issues of girls' education and the imperative of making schools safe and secure for girls and boys. All of these were important elements of contemporary international human rights discourse and conditions of inclusive and just governance. From an initial singular focus on accountability demand-making, #BBOG entered into key issues of governance and gender justice.

In what ways and to what extent has this action produced empowerment? Empowerment has been examined in the early part of this paper. The position here is one that recognises its nuanced complexity, its location in the individual and collective, its expression in both structure and agency along a continuum that can be weighted in terms of intensity and amplification and its presence in different spheres as varying and differentiated. Empowerment is therefore neither singular, monolithic nor unilineal. We see that the different stakeholders involved in the #BBOG expressed their experience of empowerment in different ways and to different extents. Figure 10.1 below illustrates this.

Figure 10.1 BBOG stakeholders and levels of empowerment



Source: Authors' own.

In settings of conflict and violence, it is easier to neutralise the action and even existence of a lone-ranging activist, than that of a collective body. The coming together of a group of women and men in the #BBOG is in itself an expression of a kind of empowerment. Coming together empowered them to talk and be listened to. There are influential individuals among them – a former cabinet minister, for instance – yet there is little doubt that working together had accomplished much more than working alone could have. The movement brought together an inter-generational, inter-class, inter-religious and multi-ethnic group of members and activists. This is unique in recent Nigerian social mobilisation history. Often, in FCVAS, collective action increases visibility and synergy; more than that it provides security from possible vicious individualised attacks.

The #BBOG's social and political action empowered the activists involved in the movement. Through training and interaction, members gained skills and voice in management and activism. The abducted girls and their parents gained visibility that could have been impossible without the #BBOG movement. Those who have been rescued have been sponsored in schools within and outside Nigeria. BBOG linked them with key actors both nationally and internationally, including governments, civil society groups, business and international organisations.

The Chibok community, through #BBOG movement, got local, national and global visibility. Empowering people, in FVCAS, may often involve registering them and their plight on the radar of public consciousness and providing a much needed public visibility. And if that is the only thing social and political action achieves, even that is worth recognition as peoples and communities that were invisibilised through marginalisation and exclusion are made visible through demand-making.

This study leads us to understand that accountability, like empowerment, has different dimensions. There is social accountability which is what the #BBOG movement's actions are focussed on. For the #BBOG movement to ensure legitimacy in holding the government and rulers accountable for the return of the Chibok girls and consequently delivering on its mandate of security and safety of Nigerian citizens, it also established a core set of values and discipline

for which collectively they held themselves accountable. These core values were central to the movement's legitimacy and helped it retain a focus on its larger mission and goals.

The study found that the movement had significant success with making government and important government institutions such as the military, accountable along different dimensions. The first was increasing attention and scrutiny on the government and its agencies. In its various engagements, the #BBOG movement ensured the issue of the abducted Chibok girls was not swept under the carpet as in previous cases of abduction and the broader reign of threats to security of lives and property had been. Indeed, issues of security of life and property, as a sacred obligation of the state to the citizen, was kept constantly on the radar and government operatives were persistently reminded of their obligations. Viewed from this angle, #BBOG movement could be seen as a success. Keeping the government on its toes and ensuring no hiding place is one thing, eliciting desired outcome and results is a different matter. The #BBOG movement did both but along a continuum of varying intensity.

The second element of social accountability here deals with the nature and extent of state response to the campaign's demand-making and whether as a result of the daily sit-outs, protests, rallies, face-to-face meetings with government officials and online activism, there were indications of government's adequate responsiveness to meet the demand of #BBOG group and secure the release of the remaining girls in captivity.

Although it is difficult to adduce unilineal causality between #BBOG movement's actions and government's immediate responses, there are nevertheless instances where tangible results were recorded in terms of responsiveness and reactions. On 8 September 2015, President Muhammadu Buhari granted an interview with the BBC where he stated that the girls were scattered and being held in different locations while on 30 December 2015. The President contradicted his earlier statement by saying that the government had no credible intelligence on the location of the girls. This prompted the movement to request for a meeting with the President in State House with the parents of the girls in attendance. The request was granted. Apparently, the President was not pleased with the hot exchange that ensued at the meeting for which he was not fully prepared. He was reported to have abandoned the meeting abruptly in anger.

Another major incident happened when the Chief of Army Staff (COAS) at a press conference reeled out inaccurate statistics on the number of girls so far rescued from the Boko Haram insurgents. The following day, the #BBOG group addressed the press and challenged the submission of the COAS with another set of data in respect of the rescued girls. Subsequently, the office of the COAS redacted its earlier data and, in a rare display of humility the military apologised for the misinformation.

The third major accountability outcome from the movement is the creation of a national missing persons' register in collaboration with the Nigeria national human rights commission to support data and record keeping of persons missing in disasters and conflicts. The movement has also been instrumental in campaigns against corruption.

Although communications lines between government officials and agents and #BBOG movement were not regular, it is clear that there is little evidence of proactive actions on the part of the government to the demands of the movement. It is not clear whether there were special sessions of the Federal Executive Council meeting, inter-agency deliberations or even designated desk officer in the Presidency to handle the demands of the movement. At another level, there is no record that lapses in the military or negligence by security agents that led to the abduction in the first place and palpable failure to secure the release of the girls was either investigated nor was there record of any officer held to account on the account of negligence or

incompetence around these issues. Of course, all of these are shrouded behind security matters and are not in the public domain.

11 Conclusion

The case of the #Bring Back Our Girls movement shows that empowerment and accountability can be connected in interesting ways. The #BBOG movement did not set out to empower people; it set out to make government accountable and responsive. In the process, empowerment happened. In this case, empowerment is a by-product of the demand and mobilisation for accountability.

Does social and political action in fragile, conflict- and violence-affected settings produce empowerment and accountability? Our findings suggests a cautious affirmative answer so far. Giving the time frame of our study and the ongoing nature of the #BBOG movement phenomenon, the jury on impact is not yet out. Firm conclusions on ongoing actions, possibly more unintended consequences and outcomes, and the spiralling multiplier effect of new organising and lessons learned by activists from their engagement in the #BBOG movement demand that we are cautious about indelible affirmations on outcomes. Also, the conditions of fragility that necessitated the social and political actions in the first instance are what restrict the impact of that actions. There is a circular determination as the condition produces the cause for action, circumvents the spaces for action while simultaneously generating opportunities for creative and innovative responses and initiatives. As we have noted, oftentimes, since we are studying an ongoing phenomenon, we are unable to make conclusive determinations. We are in the terrain of unintended consequences and unprecedented actions.

Yet, whether or not it was their original intention, the action of #BBOG movement has so far produced empowerment, and a variety of accountability. Some of these were unintended consequences of action. The way they acted and their stance with regards to the support of external actors particularly as regarding direct monetary support expressed unprecedented actions in the Nigerian context. The weighty lesson here is that each setting dictates what works and under what condition. For the Nigerian setting, militancy and unruly politics would have spelt doom for the movement. It would have given justifiable excuse for increased repressive action against the activists given the fact of ongoing military action and the factor of *terrorism*. The condition of non-militancy and internationalisation, a clear line between social-political action and partisan politics, internal group discipline, and a combination of old and new tools of protests are what it took the #BBOG movement to remain in activism and record its ongoing successes.

In summarising the lessons learnt from this study, it is important to note that investment in social and political action in FCVAS is worthwhile as social and political actions do indeed produce intended and sometimes unintended (and as the case is in #BBOG movement, positive) outcomes. The terrain of social and political action remains dynamic and fertile with unrecognised and unpredictable opportunities and outcomes in building active citizens; passing on traditions and values of political engagements; and reinforcing the will to question and engage power, and thereby build more accountable polities and societies. It is important to also emphasise in closing, that the role of external actors is undeniably important – external meaning those not living in the location of the actions. However, this role must leave the setting of the agenda for actions with the national and local actors embedded in the context and at the front lines of the actions. This ensures that the agenda of the social and political actions is legitimate, effective, owned and relevant to the local situation. In the final analysis, the sustainability of any social transformation depends on its ownership and grounding in its context of origin.

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