

## The other side of GPAC2



When organizing or participating in a dual career PhD programme, we all meet in Maastricht, having research in mind. During year one of the programme, we shortly inform each other on our “daily life activities”, and of course over lunch or drinks we generally share some of our experiences with our co-fellows. But still, on average the general life of the GPAC<sup>2</sup> fellows is far away with exception of a few weeks a year. This is a pity, for two reasons. Firstly, GPAC<sup>2</sup> fellows all have jobs that our full time PhD fellows dream off (which is why they work so hard to get their PhD), and information on the daily activities of GPAC<sup>2</sup> fellows is simply interesting. Secondly, GPAC<sup>2</sup> fellow’s daily work very often is located in the centre of global activities, and reaches us at the 8 o’clock news in any country in the world. This also means a GPAC<sup>2</sup> fellow is often better informed than even the best journalist we rely on for our information. So, I intend to share some information from “the other side of GPAC2” with you, using our Blog, on a monthly basis.

Greetings

Mindel van de Laar

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## The other side of GPAC<sup>2</sup>

***What is actually going on in Nigeria right now? We read that the situation is bad, there are attacks, fuel prices are up and the situation is worse than the civil war in the 1960s. But in the end, Syria hits our news daily, and Nigeria is not in the picture in the west too much. Can you inform us a bit more?***

The main problem is that a radical Islamic sect with suspected links to Al Qaeda is attacking mainly government establishments and security agencies. This stems from extra judicial killings allegedly perpetrated by the Nigerian government against their religious leaders in the past. Their unofficial name “Boko Haram” stands for “Western Education is Sinful” but their main purpose does not appear to be clear. They have been attacking police stations, prisons where their members are held and military formations, rather than schools. They attacked the UN building in Abuja last year and did not advance any reasons. It is believed they did it just to get worldwide publicity. They have attacked Christians and bombed some churches but they have killed more fellow Muslims than Christians. People therefore believe that there is more of a political element than a religious one. Over the last year or so, they have developed a capacity to make and detonate bombs and the Nigerian security forces don’t appear at the moment to have an answer to the situation. The government, displaying amazing insensitivity, announced the removal of oil subsidies (which trebled the cost of petrol) within a week of Boko Haram bombing a church on Christmas day and killing 50 worshipers. Many people felt that the fuel subsidy protests will open up the space to debate governance issues more widely, including the wasteful spending of many government agencies and their lack of focus on citizens. However, as is usual in Nigeria, a deal was done with the labour unions and the strikes were called off. The situation is bad and the security forces are cracking down on the sect and allegedly carrying

out unspeakable breaches of human rights, including extra judicial killings. However, Nigeria has been described as a country that is constantly “dancing on the brink”. Most Nigerians believe that a political solution will soon be found.

***Given the massive unrest, this must affect your working life. What do you do for a living, and does the situation cause difficulties?***

I lead DFID’s largest governance programme in Nigeria worth about 60 million Euros. I work on governance reforms and the link between bad governance and poverty and insecurity. The unrest does affect my working life, as consultants refuse to travel to the north of Nigeria. However, the situation is the more reason why my work is important, so pulling out is out of the question. Additionally, DFID works in Iraq, Afghanistan and South Sudan and the situation in those places are worse. Apart from increased security measures, we are finding innovative ways to carry on working, including bringing state officials out to more secure venues for the work we do with them.

***You are about to finish your dissertation, on Good performing institutions in weak states. In your research, Nigeria is the example of the weak state. The research includes case studies of institutions, in pairs selected. Can you relate your findings in your research – the good functioning institutions and bad ones in the bigger not too well functioning environment – to the unrest right now?***

There is a clear link: bad governance leads to poverty and weak human development, which leads to insecurity. The current theatre of violence (Northern Nigeria) is the poorest part of the country. That poverty has mainly arisen out of bad governance, rather than a lack of resources, and the few states that are well-governed do not appear to suffer unrest. With regards to organizations, there are a few pockets of excellence but these are few and far between. My main finding is that it is the combination of demand (pressure such as from the fuel strikes), power (such as the Presidents recent resolve to make the oil sector more transparent) and passion (such as the recent appointment of the former head of EFCC – the anti-corruption body – to clean up the oil sector) that results in improvement. The more of these convergences that happen, the greater the chance of wider reforms. The better services citizens receive (Health, Education, Infrastructure, etc) , the less likely that they will engage in terrorist activities and suicide bombings for which their families reputedly receive about 20,000 Euros after their deaths. Boko Haram sources most of their funds from bank robberies, although a few politicians that lost out in the last elections are also suspected to be funding them. Most of the suicide bombers are recruited from Chad and Niger (neighboring countries).

***Lastly, the plan was to finish the research this month.... This would make you the fastest GPAC2 fellow to finish so far. Does the situation affect the research plans?***

Of course, the situation makes things difficult as I have to spend a lot of time ensuring the security of staff and consultants, in addition to the normal work. I also get called into all sorts of security meetings at all sorts of hours. However, the main difficulty I am experiencing is that one of the case study organizations (the Nigerian Customs Service) is one of the organizations targeted by the Boko Haram sect. Therefore, their minds are currently elsewhere and I have not been able to finish the interviews that I have started doing there because people have simply not been available. However, the case study on that

organization is about Revenue Administration and I have already received the revenue performance figures and interviewed the head of revenue and officers in that department. Interestingly, they have recently started to exceed their targets by adopting some of the practices of the better-performing comparator organization, the Federal Inland Revenue Service. These include performance management and the cascading of revenue targets right down the organization. However, my hypothesis is that this effort will be brief and unsustainable because of the absence of demand. It is still one of the most corrupt organizations in Nigeria. My latest effort on finishing the interviews (talking to HR, ICT, Training, the chief executive, etc) has been to send them questions in writing and I am waiting to see if I can get a response that way. If not, I may would have to rely on what secondary data I can find and accept the incomplete interviews as a limitation to the study, given that I have been trying to arrange the interviews for one year now and it is not clear how soon the situation will improve. Changing the choice of organization to study at this late stage is not a viable option.