



21 August 2014 - All public schools in Borno state in northeastern Nigeria have been closed since May due to Boko Haram's brutal attacks.

Boko Haram militants are fighting to create an Islamic state in Nigeria, and have gained worldwide attention for their violent tactics. Their kidnapping of more than 200 girls from a secondary school in Borno earlier this year furthermore exemplified the insecurity-driven education crisis in the area.

What formal education currently exists in Borno has been through a handful of private schools that have kept their doors open. One of these is [Future Prowess Islamic Foundation&nbsp;School](#) - a school that provides free primary education for orphans and vulnerable children in the town of Maiduguri. The school cares for children from families from both sides of the conflict: Boko Haram and government security forces.

The community is traumatized by violence - shootings, bombings and kidnappings by Boko Haram; retaliatory beatings, arrests and extra-judicial killings by the security forces. "We are serving as teachers and parents for the orphaned children," said Islamic teacher Hassan Sharif al-Hassan in an [interview](#) with IRIN News.

A local lawyer in Borno further [said](#) to IRIN that: "We are trying to avoid a catastrophe," We want the two sides of the divide to grow as friends, not a case of 'You killed my father, you killed my mother, I must have revenge'. No. They must learn together. We are providing that security."

More that [42 percent of children are stunted by malnutrition](#) in this region of Nigeria, compared to just 16 percent in the southeast. The school's response has been to set up a breakfast feeding programme for its 420 pupils.

The school has been supported by the community and by key local individuals. However, "international partners don't often come here because of the insecurity," the lawyer [said](#). "Individuals can't do what we need. We need institutions like the UN, UNICEF, to help."

### Protecting the community

Maiduguri has also seen young men take to the streets in an effort to protect the local population. Dubbed the Civilian Joint Task Force (Civilian JTF), these vigilantes are largely credited with pacifying the town for the past year.

The community-rooted volunteers - officially the Borno Youth Association for Peace and Justice - actually know who Boko Haram members are. They are the eyes and ears of the security forces watching for infiltration and, though the best of their weapons are antique single-shot guns, or the odd shotgun, they are often the first responders to trouble.

The state government was quick to embrace the Civilian JTF. It provided training to 1,700 volunteers last year through a Borno Youth Empowerment Scheme, delivered vehicles, and offered a monthly stipend of around US\$100. Aside from parade ground drilling, the state government also introduced civics lessons for the young men, previously noted for their

eagerness to lynch suspects.

Despite the general support and respect the vigilantes have won, there are also voices of caution. In an interview with IRIN, Abuja-based analyst Hussaini Abdu [raised concern](#) over how the Civilian JTF will be demobilized once the Boko Haram insurgency ends.

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