

## **SHEIKH AHMAD GUMI'S MEDIATION STRATEGIES IN NORTHERN NIGERIA'S ABDUCTION CONFLICT**

**Adegoke Olusegun Steve & Umukoro, Omonigho Simon**

Department of Psychology  
Faculty of Social Sciences  
University of Lagos

### **ABSTRACT**

This study employs a qualitative research approach, to examine the mediatory role of Sheikh Gumi's Public Relations approach as a conflict management strategy in securing the release of abducted students from Greenfield University in Nigeria. The study extensively explores relevant sources, including books, journal articles, and newspapers, directly addressing the subject matter. The data extracted from these sources was subjected to meticulous analysis. Thematic analysis revealed several key themes, each shedding light on different aspects of Sheikh Gumi's mediation efforts in the context of the abduction crisis. These identified themes encompass the following: Sheikh Gumi's advocacy for amnesty, the role of an external 'contact person' in mediating with the abductors, information pertaining to the non-Fulani leadership within the abductors' group, Sheikh Gumi's pro-negotiation stance with terrorist groups, his perception of the government's commitment to negotiations, his knowledge of the whereabouts of the abductees, the positive outcomes resulting from Sheikh Gumi's interventions, the potential linkages between Boko Haram and the Bandits involved in the Greenfield abduction, and the fact that Sheikh Gumi's self-appointed mediation activities lack official government endorsement. These themes are thoroughly examined and discussed in the context of existing literature, providing valuable insights and a deeper understanding of Sheikh Gumi's role in mediating the release of the abducted students.

**Keywords:** *Abduction, Conflict, Northern Nigeria*

### **BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY**

For over a decade, the nation has been embroiled in a persistent cycle of conflicts, including disputes between farmers and

herders, religious clashes, and ethnic tensions. Additionally, there are notorious security challenges such as the Biafra issue, insurgency in the North East, and conflicts in the Niger

Delta region. More recently, there has been a disturbing increase in large-scale kidnappings, particularly the targeting of school children, which has added to the country's turmoil. This all contributes to a nation still reeling from the aftermath of a protest that shook the country. It's evident that the nation is currently facing internal strife, primarily related to banditry and kidnappings (Punch, 2020). Armed bandits are increasingly causing insecurity in the north-western part of the country. The Northwest region is feeling the devastating impact of these groups, which are determined to violate human rights and take human lives. While not widely known in Nigeria, banditry was reported during the pre-civil war era when the government's authority weakened in some areas of the country (Odinkalu, 2018). The situation has worsened due to the lack of effective security measures and the failure of local justice systems in the face of poorly staffed and coordinated border control, exacerbating the banditry crisis in North-West Nigeria.

These bandits engage in a range of atrocities, including kidnapping, robbery, murder, and sexual and gender-based violence

(SGBV), among other human rights violations. They act with impunity due to the weak security presence (ICG, 2020). The roots of banditry violence in northwest Nigeria can be traced back to conflicts between farmers and herders in the early 2010s, often linked to diminishing land and water resources. This violent conflict primarily involves the predominantly farming Hausa population and the prevalent Fulani herder population. Some view banditry as a struggle for control over resources (ICG, 2020). Despite significant investments in national security, joint task forces have been unable to overcome or contain these insecurity challenges. Various efforts and strategies, including those by traditional leaders, politicians, and scholars, have failed to yield meaningful progress. Recently, mediation strategies have shown promise in resolving conflicts, as mediation gains acceptance worldwide due to the shortcomings of today's judicial system.

Mediation can be described as a conflict management process that involves the assistance of an external party to change perceptions or behaviour without resorting to physical force or legal authority (Prokic, 2017).

International mediation is a complex interaction between mediators, protagonists, or their representatives (Bercovitch, 2009). Mediators employ three fundamental strategies, ranging from low to high intervention: communication facilitation, procedural strategies, and directive strategies. While communication facilitation is commonly used, directive strategies tend to be more successful, especially in high-intensity conflicts where active mediator involvement can motivate agreement (Bercovitch, 2009). Mediators become part of the conflict, and effective ones align with the interests, costs, and rewards of the conflicting parties (Johannes, 2015). The evaluation of mediation should ideally consider participants' goals, including fairness, satisfaction, and improved relationships. While not all conflicts can be mediated, the increasing number of ethnic and internal conflicts presents opportunities for expanding mediation for conflict resolution (Egwu, 2016). The choice of mediation strategy depends on various factors, including conflict intensity, issue type, parties' characteristics, mediator identity and rank, and the context of the mediation. Mediation strategies may range

from negotiation in low-intensity conflicts to more active approaches in high-intensity conflicts to prevent escalation.

In conflicts involving emotional issues like identity and autonomy, building trust through communication is often the most effective mediation approach. For concrete issues such as security and resources, mediators can push for concessions. Parties with similar systems may be open to active mediation, while those with fewer similarities may require trust-building, negotiation skill development, and issue clarification. Mediators and NGOs may use different strategies, from communication-based approaches to leveraging official positions and resources (Bercovitch, 2009).

## **STUDY OBJECTIVES**

The primary aim of this study is to conduct a systematic review of Sheikh Ahmad Gumi's role as a mediator in the release of abducted students from Greenfield University in Nigeria. Sheikh Gumi, a former army captain and a prominent Muslim cleric, has garnered significant attention for his self-appointed role as a mediator in the ongoing kidnap-for-ransom crisis in northern Nigeria. This crisis has

witnessed the abduction of over 800 students in recent months. Notably, Sheikh Gumi was involved in the release of 27 students who were abducted in March from a forestry college in Kaduna state, Nigeria. Given his involvement in securing the release of these students, a key question that has arisen among the public and stakeholders is whether Sheikh Gumi is also playing a mediatory role in the case of the abducted students from Greenfield University. Addressing this question is of paramount importance in this study, which employs a systematic review approach to analyze and evaluate Sheikh Gumi's involvement in mediating the release of the Greenfield University abducted students.

#### PUBLIC RELATIONS APPROACH OF MEDIATION

Public Relations (PR) is a set of communication-oriented philosophical principles aimed at achieving individual or collective objectives. It goes beyond mere communication between an entity and its surroundings; it serves as a powerful tool for societal coordination, transformation, organization, reorganization, rehabilitation, restoration, resuscitation, and rejuvenation (Aliede, 2016). PR is notably

multifaceted, boasting various perspectives. Harlow (as cited by Black, 1989) presents nearly five hundred conceptualizations of PR, defining it as a distinctive management function that facilitates mutual communication, understanding, acceptance, and cooperation between an organization and its publics. It involves addressing issues and problems, keeping management informed about public opinion, emphasizing management's responsibility to serve the public interest, monitoring and utilizing changes effectively, and using research and ethical communication techniques as its primary tools.

This comprehensive definition underscores the significance and indispensability of PR in managing systems and sectors. Organizations that understand and embrace PR are better equipped to anticipate and identify potential sources of conflict or contention before they escalate and cause irreparable damage (Aliede, 2016). The Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) also highlights the importance of PR in making informed decisions and achieving optimal functionality in a diverse society, emphasizing its role in fostering mutualism among various entities. In a

nation like Nigeria, characterized by linguistic, religious, cultural, and political diversity, PR becomes crucial in addressing the myriad security challenges plaguing the country. PR is fundamentally rooted in communication, while insecurity often stems from negative attitudes, behaviors, viewpoints, and opinions (Aliede, 2012). PR, with its communication-driven approach, is thus a potential solution to the problem of banditry.

Effective communication is key to bringing about attitudinal and behavioral change (Ozoh, 2001). This requires well-conceived, planned, packaged, and implemented communication strategies, given the need to mobilize the populace effectively. Persuasive and motivational strategies can be employed to address social issues like banditry (Ozoh, 2001).

Dimitrov and Yankov (2020) highlight various PR activities, including communication to the media, communication with the media, crisis communication, and communication with all parties involved. They emphasize the importance of effective communication among bandits, the media, the government, and society. UNESCO (1980) defines communication as the exchange

of news and messages, encompassing all forms of idea, fact, and data transmission and sharing. Omale (2013) advocates for close communication between the government and other stakeholders to effectively address security-related matters. Achalonu (2012) suggests that the media engage in regular campaigns against banditry and insecurity to drive attitudinal and behavioral change, socialization, and mitigation of banditry. This underscores the importance of PR as a powerful tool with its associated communication principles, techniques, and strategies. Understanding the grievances, perspectives, and modus operandi of bandits is crucial for devising effective PR measures to address banditry. Additionally, studying relevant assumptions or theories that explain the subject is equally important in formulating strategies to combat this issue.

## **METHODS**

This study adopted primarily, qualitative method of research. In all, a research design is the guide from start to end of the research work. This research is a case study of banditry activities in northwest Nigeria. Geographically and temporally, however, the research is limited to

the Public Relations approaches to addressing banditry and/or in another clime and Nigeria within the last decade. Data for this study were obtained from respondents primarily through a qualitative method and in-depth interviews were carried out. This method is important for this study as it provides an insight into the problem and in essence helps to develop ideas with which to solve the problem. The instrument utilised is in-depth desk review. That is, the analysis in this work were complemented by information from desk review of secondary sources – newspapers, reports, academic literature, online journals, workshop papers as well as publications of non-governmental organizations. In essence, the data for the study were not obtained from one form of secondary sources. Moreover, this process ensured the triangulation of the information collected was ensured, as far as possible, so as to make sure the data and findings are reliable. Analysis of data consisting of words was done logically using content analysis to examine and analyse the narratives. Alterations in context and meaning were avoided by reviewing the data as many times as needed during the analysis. Then the emergent themes from the publications

were assessed in line with the objectives of the study. The information was then interpreted and summarized and the findings were explained with the support of literature and previous studies. The researchers acted in line with best ethical desk review standards.

### **EMERGENT THEMES AND DISCUSSION**

A number of themes emerged from the content analysis of archived publications gathered for the study. A summary of the emergent themes is highlighted in the Table 1. This table outlines various newspaper excerpts related to Sheikh Ahmad Gumi's stance and involvement in the Greenfield University abduction crisis. The excerpts cover his amnesty position for bandits, insights into the abductors' circle, information on non-Fulani leadership among the abductors, Gumi's pro-negotiation stance with terrorists, and his perception of the government's seriousness towards

negotiations.

Themes	Newspaper Excerpts
Gumi's amnesty position	<p>Reacting to the murdered students from Greenfield University abduction, murder, Islamic cleric, Sheik Ahmad Gumi, on Friday said the incident had underscored his position that bandits were now at war with the nation.</p> <p>He said the only way forward was for the government to take his advice and grant amnesty to the bandits for them to lay down their arms.</p> <p>Punch-24 April, 2021</p>
Mediation is with a 'contact person' outside the abductors' circle	<p>"Yes, really. When we tried to trace them and put some sense into them, the contact who is also a nomadic Fulani, they threatened him. They said if he insists on them they were going to catch him and he will have to pay a ransom before he gets out."</p> <p>Vanguard May 4, 2021</p>
Information of non-fulani leadership of the abductors' group	<p>"And the leader is from Jalingo. He is from Adamawa. He is not the local Fulani we have here. So this means that the Northeastern element is coming into this area and we have to move fast. We don't have that luxury of time."</p> <p>Vanguard- May 4, 2021</p>
Gumi's pro-negotiation stance with terrorists	<p>Gumi urged the government to negotiate with the abductors to avoid further loss of students' lives, stressing that no amount of money was worth the lives of the students. He said government could eventually track and recover the ransom paid.</p> <p>International Centre for Investigative Reporting-May 5, 2021</p> <p>He said, "The money they are asking for is too much;</p>

	<p>if I give you that money, you cannot run away with it. Nobody can run. So, why not give them the money, they release the boys and then we pursue them and get our money back and do what is necessary; it is simple logic. So, bring the money from the central bank. How can they move that money? We should not be stupid.</p> <p>Punch- 5 May 2021</p>
Gumi's perception of government's seriousness towards negotiations	<p>Speaking on the issue of bandits reneging on the terms of past negotiations, Gumi said that the bandits had no belief in the seriousness of the government.</p> <p>"They told us no government is serious and I can tell you, yes, no government is serious. Because after negotiating with them, leaving their weapons or given out some of their weapons, the reaction of the government is aloof. They leave them alone with nothing, no programme of rehabilitation, no programme to see into their welfare, nothing. And so they definitely have to go back there," he said</p> <p>International Centre for Investigative Reporting-May 5, 2021</p>
Gumi's knowledge of abductees' whereabouts	<p>The cleric noted that he had provided security agencies with the information he had on the whereabouts of the Greenfield students, and that their location was no more a secret.</p> <p>"Everybody knows where they are. The Security operatives and parents know where they are. But the lives of the students are in danger. We don't want to see 19 corpses</p>

	<p>of our students,” he said.</p> <p>International Centre for Investigative Reporting-May 5, 2021</p>		<p>so that he can achieve his goals.” Hassan said.</p> <p>Sahara Reporters-April 22, 2021</p>
<p>Positive outcomes of Gumi’s interventions</p>	<p>“The talk with the Greenfield University students’ abductors is also going on because we are. You know they threatened to kill all of them after a particular deadline, but after talking to them, they are now lowering their bar. ....So, we are thankful they have stopped killing. And we are still negotiating with them.”</p> <p>Vanguard- May 8, 2021</p>		
<p>Linkages between Boko-Haram and Bandits in Greenfield abduction</p>	<p>“The Greenfield abduction is unique because for the first time we saw a cooperation between some bandits and Boko Haram elements which confirm that Boko Haram are encroaching into the field, which is a bad situation,” Mr Gumi said.</p> <p>But the Greenfield abduction is proving difficult because of the linkage between the bandits and Boko Haram, Mr Gumi said.</p> <p>Premium Times-May 16, 2021</p>		
<p>Gumi’s self-appointed mediation activities is not backed by government</p>	<p>Gumi’s media aide, Malam Salisu Hassan, told SaharaReporters in an interview on Thursday that the cleric halted his plans because the state government was not interested in negotiations.</p> <p>“No, it is not that Sheikh is busy. The problem is that since the government is not interested in reconciling with those people, so Sheikh just tried to have some other way</p>		

The Table further highlight’s themes of Gumi’s amnesty advocacy for bandits and emphasizes the need for the government to negotiate with them. He shares information about the abductors' circle, including a nomadic Fulani contact person, and notes the non-Fulani leadership of the abductors' group. Gumi stresses the importance of negotiation to prevent further loss of students' lives and criticizes the government's perceived lack of seriousness in past negotiations. Gumi claims to have provided security agencies with information on the abducted students' whereabouts, expressing concern for their safety. Positive outcomes of his interventions include a reduction in threats to kill the students. The table also highlights the unique cooperation between bandits and Boko Haram in the Greenfield abduction, signalling a concerning development. Notably, Gumi's



self-appointed mediation activities lack official government backing, with his aide citing the government's disinterest in negotiations as a reason for Gumi's independent efforts

### **Discussion of Themes**

At the onset, when Gumi started his rapprochement with the murderous forest militias in February of 2021, his intervention seemed acceptable. He appeared to mean well, and may well do. Except that his utterances now undermine his goals and endanger the collective security of Nigerians, upending the security set-up in ways that should be repugnant to all supporters of order and justice. He offers a rather romantic and generally sympathetic account and justification of the activities of the criminals. One could mistake these beastly terrorists who have murdered hundreds of Nigerians in cold blood and received ransoms running into hundreds of millions of naira from both the state and traumatised relations of kidnap victims- one would be excused to take these terrorists' activities for mere circus shows by listening to Gumi. For him, the deadly criminalities of the terrorists are like childish pranks that could simply be excused

away as some form of youthful delinquency. While Gumi has been a person of interest in narratives of banditry, kidnapping and book haram negotiations in Nigeria, the thematic analysis of this study is based on Gumi's interventions as reported in the pages of the dailies as regards the Greenfield University abductions which occurred in Kaduna state, Nigeria around April of 2021. Significant themes obtained from the analyses are highlighted and discussed in the following paragraphs.

### **Gumi's Amnesty Position**

In the wake of the Greenfield University abductions, Sheik Gumi's position on granting amnesty for the kidnappers and bandits in Northern Nigeria was reiterated by the Sheik himself. Granting amnesty for outlaws in Nigeria is not a new phenomenon as witnessed with the Niger-Delta militants in 2007 after initially dismissing MEND as criminals. The Nigerian state began to recognize the adverse impact of growing insecurity in the form of huge losses in oil production and revenues, and the strong reverberations of the insurgent attacks on the global oil prices (in the context of a global war on terror). The regime therefore began to consider an alternative to

the military approach that had largely failed to halt MEND's attacks on oil infrastructure in the Niger Delta. This culminated in the inauguration of the Presidential Niger Delta Peace and Conflict Resolution Committee (NDPCRC) in July 2007, with the following terms of reference: recommend to the federal government how to adequately address issues of the Niger Delta; liaise with the groups in the Niger Delta region, security agencies and report to the federal government (Nigeriafirst.org 2007 cited in Obi 2014, p.255).

A similar body was also inaugurated by the then Bayelsa state governor, Timipre Sylvia, to replicate the same peace-building process in the state (Obi 2014: 255). In June 2009, due to the exigencies of implementing peace in the region, Yar'Adua announced an offer of unconditional amnesty to all militants in the Delta. In addition, the Presidential Committee on Amnesty and Disarmament for Militants under the Minister of the Interior, Major General Godwin Abbe (rtd), was established to execute a post-amnesty programme of socio-economic development in the Niger Delta worth about 50

billion Naira (Adeyeri 2012, Ketefe 2009). The training that former militants received in the Obubra Camp88 was the first step at transforming the erstwhile militants, and deconstructing their past characterised by militancy. This is expected to give them new orientation about peaceful coexistence and prepare them to become members of civil society.

The Niger-Delta militants' amnesty approach is a similar position which Sheik Gumi advocated for the abductors of the Greenfield University students. *"The Federal government should give them blanket amnesty, then if somebody continues, then we will deal with them,"* Sheik Gumi said while giving updates on the demands of the kidnappers. As part of his rhetoric of appeasement, he compared the terrorists, who he claims lack a voice, to coup plotters and demanded the state pardons them as it did coup plotters during the military era. He described the devastating onslaught of the terrorists on farming communities and the attendant conflict as ethnic wars. Gumi further made the outstanding claim that the northern terrorists learned their art from Niger-Delta militants. Just as he demanded that an amnesty programme in the manner of the

one President Umar Yar'Adua emplaced for Niger-Delta militias should be instituted for the terror-bandits of the North.

### **Mediation with a 'contact person' outside the abductors' circle**

In conflict negotiations, no party is forced to participate in a negotiation. The parties are free to accept or reject the outcome of negotiations and can withdraw at any point during the process. Parties may participate directly in the negotiations or they may choose to be represented by someone else. One important deduction that can be made from some of Gumi's interviews with members of the press concerning the Greenfield abductions was that the abductors were not in direct contact with Gumi. Instead, contact was made through a representative of the group who was not part of the group's circle. Mediation, as a concept, is a process where the parties in a dispute come together to discuss their matter with the assistance an independent mediator. It is a process of negotiation which assists the parties to identify and explore options for the resolution of their dispute. The mediator will not hand down a decision, but rather help the parties to reach their own agreement. The

mediator is supposed to have direct access to either party directly or through the party representatives.

The latter situation is what played out in Gumi's mediation with a neutral representative of the abductors. Excerpts from his interview as reported by the Vanguard (May 4, 2021) suggested that Gumi was able to maintain contact with the abductors through a nomadic Fulani man. Further narratives showed that the Fulani contact was also under threat from the abductors if their messages and responses obtained were not in tandem with their position. It should however be pointed out that Sheik Gumi, while acting as an impartial arbiter, was never appointed by the government nor the abductors. The first time he took what looked like an extremely dangerous journey to the forest to meet the terrorists, his justification was that the entire process needed an impartial arbiter, noting that the state had serially violated previous agreements with the terrorists.

### **Non-Fulani Leadership of Greenfield Abductors**

The Fulani have often been in the forefront of banditry and kidnapping narratives, such that a

stereotypic association of Fulani with banditry and kidnapping has begun to brew within the Nigerian society. However, within the context of Gumi's interventions in the Greenfield abductions, Gumi was able to establish that the leadership of the Greenfield University abductors was of non-Fulani descent. Gumi informed the public through the news media that the leader of the Greenfield abduction was a non-Fulani from Jalingo in Adamawa. This however does not rule out the fact that other members of the group may have been Fulani. Either way, as observed from Gumi's mediatory interventions, not all of the atrocities of kidnapping and banditry are led by Fulani entities. For instance, the Greenfield abductions was perpetrated by north-eastern element with linkages to Boko Haram.

“The Greenfield abduction is unique because for the first time we saw a cooperation between some bandits and Boko Haram elements which confirm that Boko Haram are encroaching into the field, which is a

bad situation. But the Greenfield abduction is proving difficult because of the linkage between the bandits and Boko Haram”

### **Gumi's pro-negotiation stance with terrorists**

The American ideology of not negotiating with terrorists has been adopted by several governments across various nations. In the wake of the Boko Haram insurgencies and other terrorists' attacks, the Nigerian government, amongst other strategies, adopted negotiation positions with these criminal elements. On March 25 2018, Nigeria's Information Minister Lai Mohammed announced that the government is negotiating with Boko Haram about a possible ceasefire and ultimately a permanent end to the conflict. He said the talks have been underway for "some time," though his was the first public reference to them. However, the irregularities obtained from some of these negotiations culminating in eventual killing of hostages and non-release of kidnapped victims has dampened the effectiveness of negotiating

with terrorists in Nigeria. However, there are still some persons who believe that secret negotiations with some terrorists have continually been adopted by the Nigerian Government.

While the Nigerian Government is now becoming vehemently against negotiating with terrorists, Sheik Gumi's mediatory approach is geared towards reaching a mutually acceptable ransom payment for both parties (i.e., the government and the kidnappers). This is highlighted in narratives of Gumi's negotiations with representatives of the Greenfield abductors where he was virtually coaxing the Nigerian government to give into the demands of the terrorists; as this was the only possible solution to saving the lives of the Greenfield students who were abducted. According to Gumi, he was of the opinion that not negotiating with the terrorists and paying the ransom being demanded was a stupid stance by the Government; stressing that no amount of money was worth the lives of the students. In his words 'why not give them the money, they release the boys and then we pursue them and get our money back and do what is necessary; it is simple logic. So, bring the money from the central bank. How can

they move that money? We should not be stupid'. The Kaduna state government, and indeed the federal government were however unwilling to negotiate with the Greenfield abductors

A further assertion that can be deduced from Gumi's utterances above is the element of being a partial arbitrator. His suggestion for the government to negotiate with the terrorists would seem welcome from the abductors' perspective. But his further statement of how the government can then track down the terrorists and reclaim the ransom money would certainly not be welcome from the abductors' perspective. The literature suggests that an arbitrator must perform his or her duties impartially, without bias or prejudice, and must not, in performing these duties, by words or conduct manifest partiality, bias, or prejudice, including but not limited to partiality, bias, or prejudice based upon race, sex, religion, national origin, disability, age, sexual etc. So, one begins to wonder how impartial or otherwise Gumi's mediation is as a self-appointed arbitrator.

**Gumi's knowledge of abductees' whereabouts**

One of the issues that limit the activities of security agencies in rescuing kidnapped victims in Nigeria is their claim not to know the exact whereabouts of the kidnappers' den where the victims are supposedly being held. On the contrary, Gumi's mediation talks with the Greenfield abductors show that the whereabouts of the abductees and their kidnappers is public knowledge; so, one would have felt that securing the release of the victims by Nigerian security agents would have been possible. However, the novel challenge lies in getting back these victims alive. This is because, Gumi's narratives suggest that the abductors are ready to execute every hostage in their custody at the slightest provocation. In one of the newspaper excerpts, "The cleric noted that he had provided security agencies with the information he had on the whereabouts of the Greenfield students, and that their location was no more a secret". In his words, "Everybody knows where they are. The parents know where they are. But the lives of the students are in danger. We don't want to see 19 corpses of our students," he said

### **Outcomes of Gumi's Mediation**

While Gumi's mediation tactics

may not be laudable amongst many stakeholders, there are some categories of persons who believe that his efforts yield positives in securing the release of kidnappers. For instance, it is believed that Sheik Gumi and former president Olusegun Obasanjo were instrumental in the release of the 27 Afaka students who were kidnapped prior to the Greenfield abductions. There are also narratives in the front pages of the dailies of how parents of kidnapped victims are quick to liaise with Sheik Gumi to assist them in negotiating the release of their children and wards. Moreover, these same parents also come back to show gratitude for Gumi's input whenever their children/wards are released. This may suggest that while Gumi's efforts may not be too popular, his efforts may have positive outcomes in securing the release of kidnapped victims. Within the context of the Greenfield abductions, the abductors killed about three students during the initial phase of the abduction. These killings may have been a show of how seriously their actions should be taken. There are however insinuations by Gumi himself that the killing of the students being held hostage had stopped due to his interventions and that the abductors were now

ready to negotiate.

“The talk with the Greenfield University students’ abductors is also going on because we are. You know they threatened to kill all of them after a particular deadline, but after talking to them, they are now lowering their bar. ....So, we are thankful they have stopped killing. And we are still negotiating with them.”

In the long run, students of Greenfield University were released. It may not be entirely ideal to disregard the efforts of Gumi while considering all the factors that led to the final release of the students. The Kaduna State Government confirmed the release of abducted Greenfield University students, who had been in captivity since April, 2021. Samuel Aruwan, Commissioner, Ministry of Internal Security and Home Affairs in Kaduna State, disclosed this in a statement.

### **Gumi’s Mediation Styles**

Gumi’s mediation strategies are quite informal in nature because there are not based on a designed structure. He is also a self-imposed mediator in the negotiations between the government and the Greenfield abductors. Moreover, there is no information on Gumi’s knowledge, skills, abilities and certifications in the art of mediation, arbitration and negotiation. While Gumi’s mediation style is informal in nature, there are elements of established mediation styles embedded in Gumi’s approach. Some of these mediation styles will be highlighted within the context of Gumi’s approach.

#### **- Co-mediation**

Co-mediation is a process in which *two mediators* try to help the parties resolve their differences. One mediator works with each party, thereby eliminating any concerns about fairness or objectivity sometimes associated with traditional mediation. Other than that, the process is no different than traditional mediation. Each mediator helps the parties try to reach consensus by creating an environment where they can

- (i) pinpoint the source of the grievances

- (ii) develop potential solutions
- (iii) consider other options

As in traditional mediation, co-mediators cannot give the parties advice about the merits of the dispute or make any decisions about the result. However, they can offer advice about the mediation process. They can also decide which mediation techniques to use to promote resolution. The use of co-mediation can be observed in Gumi's mediation approach during the Greenfield abductions when he disclosed that his contact with the abductors was through a representative who was not part of the group, but acted on behalf of the group. While not much evidence on the exact role of abductors' representative is known, there are statements that suggest that the abductors passed and received messages from their representative via interactions with Gumi. This is a clear element of co-mediation.

#### **- Shuttle mediation**

Shuttle mediation is a technique in which one mediator works with both disputants. But instead of engaging everyone as a group, the parties are separated. Sometimes the disputants will have meetings with the mediator on different days, or at different times. The

mediator speaks with each party separately to convey proposals, terms or concerns. This means that the mediator shuttles between both parties involved in negotiations and conflict resolutions. Within the context of the Greenfield abductions, Gumi's role in shuttle mediation is highlighted in his to and from movement between the abductors and the government to deliver and receive messages from each party. In as much as Gumi's mediatory role is not in an official capacity, the government and the abductors were able to reach out to each other through Gumi's mediatory interventions.

#### **- Evaluative Mediation**

Evaluative mediation is the style of mediation where the mediator exerts control over the mediation process by being the most vocal about the position of the parties and their offers. An evaluative mediator will offer opinions on the strengths and weaknesses of the parties and usually is in control of how and when the parties interact. This style tends to work well if there is an uneven power dynamic in the mediation, and allows the mediator to drive the conversation to focus on important issues and what the parties need. In line with the



tenets of evaluative mediation, some of its basic elements can be observed in Gumi's style of mediation. Firstly, Gumi was the most vocal entity during the Greenfield abductions. It was through Gumi that the position of the abductors (in terms of demands and ransoms) was known by the government and the public at large.

*They are demanding for money..... So, why not give them the money, then they release the boys .... It is simple logic.*

Gumi was also very vocal in describing the position of the government towards the negotiation process. For instance, in one of his numerous media interviews, Gumi describes the government as being unserious and unwilling to negotiate with the abductors. Another notable feature that fosters the use of evaluative mediation is the imbalance in power between both parties. In the case of the Greenfield abductions, a clear power imbalance existed between the abductors and the government. While the government has the advantage of more ammunition to stage an attack and overpower the abductors, the hostages in the

abductors' custody are an ace which gives the abductors their own measure of power in the process. Thus, evaluative mediation style used by Gumi is appropriate within this context of power imbalances. Gumi as an evaluative mediator points out the strengths and weaknesses of both parties in several of his media interviews when he noted that he had provided security agencies with the information he had on the whereabouts of the Greenfield students, and that their location was no more a secret.

*"Everybody knows where they are. The security operatives and parents know where they are. But the lives of the students are in danger. We don't want to see 19 corpses of our students,"* he said.

In evaluative mediation, the mediator also presents recommendations for settlement. This can be informal suggestions after the initial evaluation or it can be formal suggestions in written formats which are presented to the parties as an opening option. This can encourage the parties to consider a settlement based on the strengths of their case. This is clearly exhibited in Gumi's mediation style as he is initially

proffering an amnesty solution for the crisis. Reacting to the murdered students from Greenfield University abduction, murder, Islamic cleric, Sheik Ahmad Gumi, on Friday said the incident had underscored his position that bandits were now at war with the nation. He said the only way forward was for the government to take his advice and grant amnesty to the bandits for them to lay down their arms.

### **CONCLUSION**

Gumi's mediation strategies are quite informal in nature because there are not based on a designed structure. He is also a self-imposed mediator in the negotiations between the government and the Greenfield abductors. Moreover, there is no information on Gumi's knowledge, skills, abilities and certifications in the art of mediation, arbitration and negotiation. Meanwhile, this study has found and concluded that Gumi's mediation style is informal in nature but it contains some elements of established mediation styles. Also, this study determined the effectiveness of Sheikh Gumi's mediatory role in the release of abducted students by the Bandits in the Northern Nigeria and in the process

discovered that Gumi's mediation tactics may not be laudable amongst many stakeholders, there are some categories of persons who believe that his efforts yield positives in securing the release of kidnappers. For instance, it is believed that Sheik Gumi and former president Olusegun Obasanjo were instrumental in the release of the 27 Afaka students who were kidnapped prior to the Greenfield abductions. There are also narratives in the front pages of the dailies of how parents of kidnapped victims are quick to liaise with Sheik Gumi to assist them in negotiating the release of their children and wards. Moreover, these same parents also come back to show gratitude for Gumi's input whenever their children/wards are released. This suggests that Sheikh Gumi's mediatory role in the release of abducted students was effective as interventions and that the abductors were ready to negotiate and at the end, the abducted students were released.

However, the findings revealed that there are other ways of addressing the phenomenon of banditry in Nigeria based on the evaluative mediation as observed in this study. This can be informal suggestions after the initial evaluation or it can be formal

suggestions in written formats which are presented to the parties as an opening option. This can encourage the parties to consider a settlement based on the strengths of their case. This is clearly exhibited in Gumi's mediation style as he is initially proffering an amnesty solution for the crisis. Therefore, government should always consider other public relations negotiation methods, and avoid using force whenever similar cases of kidnapping occur in our society to save the victims from their abductors. However, alternative approaches can be helpful during crisis management and interventions to restore peace through settlement.

### **Recommendations**

The current study has contributed so much to knowledge in the area of crises and conflict management and proffer solution to the release of abducted victims regardless of region or ethnic diversities. Therefore, the role of mediation strategies cannot be underestimated in promoting peace and crisis intervention management in Nigeria. However, the following recommendations are highlighted:

- Government should not ignore non-governmental

interventions during crisis especially when individuals or organizations volunteer to assist or support government agency to strengthen national security so as to reduce the level of insecurity in the country. For example, this study has revealed the effectiveness of Gumi's mediatory role in the release of abducted students, and also the interventions made by former President Olusegun Obasanjo, just to mention but few.

- Also, there can be inaugurations of several NGOs for local security report and support to improve on the conventional structure of security outfit in existence currently in the country to make Nigerian border a better place to live for all.
- Further studies should investigate autonomous agencies for promoting national security to reduce the rate of kidnapping and banditry in the country across regions.

## REFERENCES

- Aliede, J. E. (2012). "Communication Approach to Finding Solution to the Quagmire of Vital Statistics and Civil Data Acquisition/Management for Nigeria's Development." In Aliede, J. E. (Ed.), *Today's Readings in Mass Communication: Issues, Insights and Perspectives*. Enugu: Prime Targets Ltd.
- Aliede, J. E. (2016). "Public Relations, Quest for Sustainable Peace and Security: *A Reflection on the Boko Haram Impasse in Nigeria.*" Vol. 6, No. 19, 2016.
- Bercovitch, J. (2009). "Mediation and Conflict Resolution." In *The SAGE Handbook of Conflict Resolution*. SAGE, London, pp. 340-354.
- Egwu, S. (2016). "The political economy of rural banditry in Contemporary Nigeria." In M.J. Kuna and J. Ibrahim (Eds.), *Rural Banditry and Conflicts in Northern Nigeria*, Abuja: Centre for Democracy and Development.
- ICG, (2020). "Violence in Nigeria's North West: Rolling Back the Mayhem." International Crisis Group Report. Retrieved from <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/west-africa/nigeria/288-violence-nigerias-north-west-rolling-back-mayhem>
- Johannes, W. (2015). *Mediation in the Conflict Resolution Process*. Munich, GRIN Verlag.
- Odinkalu, 2018. "Banditry in Nigeria: A brief history of a long war," *The Punch*. Retrieved from <https://punchng.com/banditry-in-nigeria-a-brief-history-of-a-long-war/>
- Ozoh, H. C. (2001). "Knowledge, Attitude, Practice and Behaviour (KAPB), Studies in Public Relations for Community Development." *Journal of Public Relations Management*, 1(2).
- Prokic, A. (2017). "The Link between Organized Crime and Terrorism." *FACTA UNIVERSITATIS-Law and Politics*, 15(1), 85–94.