One Hundred and Forty Nigerian peacekeepers serving with the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) were awarded the United Nations medal on 18 April 2019.

The Deputy Chief of the United Nations Police Component (UNPOL), Brigadier General Jean François VOILLOT, presided over the ceremony that was held in the historic city of Timbuktu. The medal recipients, including 40 women, were members of the Nigerian Formed Police Unit (FPU).

The UN medal rewards the courage and commitment of peacekeepers who have spent 90 days in MINUSMA, particularly in northern Mali, in the service of peace. Given the current context of the region, and in accordance with its mandate, this unit of the UN Police conducts daily, long and medium range patrols with the Malian Defense and Security Forces (FDSM), including the Police and the Gendarmerie, in the city of Timbuktu and the surrounding villages. It conducts escorts and security operations allowing people to go about their business in serenity.

UNPOL Deputy Chief Voillot congratulated the recipients for the professionalism that allowed them to honorably perform their missions with determination and integrity “You will receive the UN medal which is both a testimony and a mark of recognition of the international community for your participation in the efforts and work done for the stabilization and maintenance of peace in Mali,” he said.

The ceremony was held at the UN Mission Integrated Camp, in the presence of Acting Head of Office Mamane Sani Moussa, UN Force Commander for Sector West, UNPOL Regional Commander Colonel Chérif Sami, representatives of the local and administrative authorities of Timbuktu and Taoudeni, as well as the hierarchy of the Defence and Security Forces of Mali (FDSM).

The Country Head and Resident Representative, United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) Nigeria, Dr Larry Boms, has disclosed that UNITAR has opened partnership with other stakeholders in the implementation of ideas including plastic recycling which will help reduce plastic wastes and create other opportunities.

The Ambassador of Norway, H.E. Mr Jens-Petter Kjemprud, represented by the Deputy Chief of Mission, Ms Ingrid Skjolaas, stressed the need for a stronger global framework for action to combat marine litter.

UN Offers to Help Reduce Plastic Wastes in Nigeria
Braving the Waves to Reach Underserved Populations with Immunization Services in the Niger Delta.

“We had not seen vaccination teams in our community for a very long time. Sometimes we have to stay for months without vaccinating our children, if we don’t take our children to the mainland to get them vaccinated”, says Mr. Atebakuro Oton George, a fisherman and father of five, residing at Itohono-ama settlement of Minibie ward of Bayelsa State.

“Now on weekly basis, health workers brave the Seas and visit our communities to vaccinate our children”, an elated Mr. George continues.

In Bayelsa, a largely riverine State, accounting for over 60% of the delta mangrove of the oil-rich Southern part of Nigeria, known as the Niger Delta, many children continue to be ‘missed’ with life-saving vaccination. In 2018 a number of innovative strategies such as mid-sea immunization, community engagement through the traditional hierarchy and sensitization activities, supported by World Health Organization (WHO) through the Government of Bayelsa were introduced to address some of the identified challenges.

“The difficulty of accessing healthcare services is due to suboptimal and expensive coastal and waterway transportation from the distant communities to healthcare centers, hence, innovative strategies are being employed to reach the underserved and vulnerable population with vaccination and other health interventions especially during Supplemental Immunization Activities (SIAs)”, says Dr Edmund Egbe, WHO State Coordinator in Bayelsa. He further adds, “Healthcare service providers transiting from one settlement to another during such campaigns are always vigilant to ensure that no mother or eligible child is missed”.

In Bayelsa State, huge bodies of water traverse cluster of settlements ranging from streams, creeks, lakes, rivers and the Atlantic Ocean. Subsistence farming and fishing are the mainstay of the local population’s economy and source of sustenance of the largely indigent families, resident in these communities and fishing camps. Health care services are provided by the primary health care centers located within the island communities.

To address vaccine-hesitancy, community engagement activities to increase demand for immunization have been initiated to bolster willingness of caregivers to readily access the interventions even when in the middle of the river or the ocean. The successful implementation of the community engagement frame-work has culminated in a high-level patronage and acceptance of immunization services in the State. From April 2018 to April 2019 alone, over 169,836 children received vaccination.

Routine immunization coverages have improved remarkably the first quarter RI Lots Quality Assurance Survey (LQAS) conducted in April 2019 indicate that the State is second best in the country. Previously, Bayelsa was ranked amongst other States as poor-performing from the last National Immunization Coverage Survey (NICS) conducted in 2016; this led to the inauguration of an emergency response committee in March 2018. Regarding Supplemental Immunization Activities (SIAs), the State achieved a 94% coverage in the last round of IPDs, and 369,926 women of child bearing age were vaccinated against tetanus during the first round Maternal Neonatal Tetanus Elimination (MNTE) campaign.

In his remark during quarterly engagement meeting in April with the State Traditional Rulers Council, the Chairman, King Alfred Diete-Spiff, the ‘Amanayanbo’ of Town-Brass, commended the progress recorded by the State with support from WHO and other partners in improving access to immunization in very hard to reach communities in Bayelsa. He encouraged his counterparts in the Council to ensure parents in their domains cooperate with health officials to improve their overall wellbeing.

“Sustaining the innovative strategies of vaccinating vulnerable populations will undoubtedly increase immunity against vaccine preventable diseases and reduce the mortality and morbidity rate in difficult to access communities”, King Diete-Spiff said. He described the polio infrastructure in the Bayelsa, supported by WHO and partners, as the bedrock of driving successful healthcare intervention at the grassroots and underserved populations.

Presently across Nigeria, States are implementing activities to commemorate the 2019 Africa Vaccination Week to improve immunization delivery so that all children are protected from vaccine preventable diseases.

Support for Polio eradication and Routine Immunization to Nigeria through WHO, is made possible by funding from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Department for International Development (DFID – UK), European Union, Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, Government of Germany through KfW Bank, Global Affairs Canada, United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Rotary International and the World Bank.
Life in the camps can be challenging, especially when you do not know when the Non-State Armed group (NSAG) will strike next. These are the words of Rabbi Mamman, a mother of five, who lives in Bade in Yobe State, North East Nigeria. "I have children and am constantly worried about them.

According to UNOCHA, in North East Nigeria, pre-existing gender inequalities resulting from unequal access to opportunities have contributed to the limited access to resources and skills among women and girls, which have in turn increased their vulnerability and exposure to abuse, including sexual exploitation. Those in inaccessible areas lack access to food, supplies and services, are at high risk of experiencing abuse, and are not able to engage in their normal livelihood activities such as farming and trade due to restricted movements associated with insecurity.

"The attacks on our communities by the Non State Armed Groups have posed a huge challenge on our people. Farmlands have been destroyed leaving behind no seedlings that can be replanted. The burden now is on the shoulders of the traditional leaders to feed and cater for the greater percentage of the people, mostly women and children. In the past, the people donated farm proceeds to the traditional leaders, but that is no longer possible, due to the activities of the NSAG," said Abba Kawu Shehu Abubakar, District Head of Mafa LGA.

"I have experienced violence in my home, and I did not know I could report such matters to the police or even talk about it."

Through its project: Protection, Empowerment and Resilience Building of Women in North East Nigeria, funded by the Government of Japan, UN Women, in partnership with Search for Common Ground, established multi-sectorial Peace Architecture Dialogue (PAD) and Community Security Architecture Dialogue Observatory Platforms (CSAD-Obs) to improve women’s access to formal and informal judicial systems.

The PAD and CSAD are multi-sectorial platforms at the State and LGA level with representation from different sectors of Government Ministries, Departments and Agencies, Security Agencies, Religious and Traditional Leaders, Women Groups, Legal Practitioners, Health Professionals, and CSO’s to provide coordinated responses to identified threats facing women and girls in the communities. There are three CSAD platforms in Jere, Mafa and Bade LGAs. At the state capital level, a PAD platform was established in Damaturu.

"In our CSAD we have people from security agencies, and government workers. We hear cases of rape, child abuse. Now we know the channels of reporting gender-based violence cases. I know it’s our right to talk about it and that we can even report to the authorities. We are also encouraged to sensitize other women and school children on drugs, rape and forced marriages."

The project has further supported training for legal service providers on how to improve women and girls’ safety through community-based actions to mitigate risks, prevent and respond to incidents of gender-based violence. These legal service providers have worked on a total of six cases which were reported to CSAD in Bade, and three cases reported in Mafa LGA in March.

"We have equipped the formal and informal legal service providers and also strengthened institutional capacities in Yobe and Borno to be able to network and mobilize for effective, efficient and coordinated responses to cases of GBV, drawing on contributions of traditional/religious leaders, women groups, security agencies, CSOs, and Government Stakeholders’ said Tamwakat Golit, Search for Common Ground Project Manager.

"I am really thankful, as I am able to attend the CSAD monthly meetings to make it safe for our young children," said Rabbi Mamman.

"The platforms are safe spaces for documentation, tracking and responding to cases of violence against women and girls", said Lilian Ngusuur Unaegbu, UN Women Programme Coordinator on Gender and Humanitarian Action. "It is aimed at contributing to prevention and responding to violence against women and girls and increasing influential participation of key stakeholders and women through the implementation of identified and prioritized activities."
UN Mine Action Actors, Partners Committed to Reducing Explosive Hazards Impacts

For more than 20 years, the United Nations Mine Action Service (UNMAS) provides technical assistance to Member States for the mitigation and clearance of explosive hazards. This year, on the fourth of April, the International Day for Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action, the United Nations Secretary-General, António Guterres, launched a new five-year campaign -- “Safe Ground” -- with the objective to ensure that no one, no state, and no war zone is left behind. Specifically, this new global campaign aims at turning areas contaminated areas into playing fields, and to raise resources for victims and survivors.

UNMAS in Nigeria is committed to mitigating the risks associated with explosive hazards and assisting the victims. In areas impacted by the conflict, that were largely vacated by the civilian communities, high volumes of contamination by explosive hazards are suspected as up to 20 per cent of the ammunitions fired during clashes do not explode on impact. As a result, those living and those returning to those areas are at risk of being severely injured or killed by explosive hazards. Indeed, explosive hazards indiscriminately injure, maim, kill civilians, including children and can be the source of long-term socio-economic issues further hampering the development of a peaceful environment.

In this context, Mine Action actors in Nigeria are heavily engaged in reducing the impact of explosive hazards in close relationship with Nigerian partners. This is primarily done through conducting risk education sessions for the civilian communities and humanitarian actors in the region. In the absence of a large-scale decontamination campaign because of the ongoing conflict, risk education sessions are proving to be critical to adopt safe behaviours mitigating the risk of injury. Where possible, surveys are conducted in order to assess the contamination and plan future actions.

However, the progresses made so far are not sufficient and more needs to be achieved to ensure sustainable and long-term results. For instance, the return of IDPs and the delivery of humanitarian assistance could be rendered safer and more sustainable in the long-run, through activities such as the clearance of agricultural land, roads and village. It is those type of Mine Action activities that can play a critical role in contributing to the path towards peace as they effectively contribute to protection of civilian communities and the creation of an environment conducive to early recovery and development and freedom of movement.

UN Humanitarian Coordinator Urged Government to Provide Aid to and Protect 10,000 Civilians Forced to Relocate from Borno State Town

The United Nations Humanitarian Coordinator in Nigeria, Mr. Edward Kallon called on the Government of Nigeria to provide humanitarian assistance to and protect up to 10,000 women, men and children who were forced to relocate to Maiduguri, the capital of Borno State, from a town 40 kilometers away.

On the evening of 8 April 2019, the Nigerian military ordered the immediate departure of and forced the relocation of up to 10,000 civilians in the middle of the night, without prior warning, from Jakana town, transporting them by bus or truck to Bakassi camp for internally displaced people. According to the military the civilians were relocated for security reasons ahead of planned operations in the area.

“The entire town of Jakana was emptied, and people were forced to move to Maiduguri with very little time to collect personal belongings. Some people said they arrived in Maiduguri with nothing, not even with shoes on their feet,” said Mr. Kallon in a statement.

“The United Nations is urging the Government to urgently provide safety, shelter, food, water and medical care to the displaced civilians, in addition to information about when they will be allowed to return home.”

Mr. Edward Kallon called on the Government of Nigeria to take “all possible practical measures to ensure the protection of civilians and full respect of the rights of individuals in accordance with its obligations under international humanitarian law and international human rights law as well as the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement”.

The Humanitarian Coordinator further reaffirmed the UN’s continued support to national and local efforts to ensure that civilians affected by the conflict in Borno, Adamawa and Yobe states in north-east Nigeria can access the humanitarian assistance and protection services they require.

In mid-April, the Government of Nigeria commenced the movement of people from Bakasi Camp back to Jakana town.
North-East Nigeria: Access to Water Paves Way for a Brighter Future

ONGOING hostilities in north-east Nigeria has caused the displacement of 1.8 million women, men and children, hampering their access to vital resources including water.

In addition to the displaced population, 1.56 million individuals have returned to their communities since August 2015, due to the expanded presence of security forces. However, the infrastructure in these areas is still severely damaged or destroyed and essential services have yet to be fully restored. People in Gwoza town, Borno State for example, spend several hours a day under the scorching sun searching for water, often in unsafe, hand-dug wells. The lack of infrastructure leaves no other option as the limited available resources are overstretched by the needs of displaced and returnee populations.

That is beginning to change

Last week, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) completed the rehabilitation of two boreholes in Gwoza and Kunduga as part of a project funded by the Republic of Korea. The initiative aims to revitalize these communities by ensuring that people affected by conflict are returning to safe and dignified living conditions.

“We used to travel for about 12 kilometres to fetch water from an unprotected well before the new borehole was reopened,” said Bakin, one of the beneficiaries.

According to the Humanitarian Response Strategy for Nigeria 2019-2021, an estimated 7.1 million people affected by the conflict are in acute need of protection and life-saving assistance in the region.

On the occasion of the reopening of these water facilities, Lee In-tae, Ambassador of the Republic of Korea to Nigeria, stated that in 2018, Korea donated USD 7.5 million to support women and girls in Borno State while joining multilateral efforts to tackle humanitarian needs via IOM and other agencies.

“The Korean Government will continue to strengthen efforts by providing support to vulnerable people, especially women and girls, continuing capacity-building of government officials, and promoting education and health of Nigerian youth,” he added.

The rehabilitation project has improved the access to water for 13,500 individuals voluntarily returning to their communities of origin. Access to clean water in these areas of return has been achieved through the drilling, installation, maintenance and rehabilitation of boreholes, all of which are powered by solar energy.

“Our aim is to improve access to community infrastructure and basic services and to ensure that these rehabilitation activities are sustainable,” said Dave Bercasio, IOM Nigeria Head of Sub-office. “That is why we are engaging the beneficiaries by forming community-based water, sanitation and hygiene committees,” he added.

These committees, comprising local elders, women, men and youth, will be tasked to conduct regular water quality monitoring activities, provide maintenance of the boreholes and conduct sensitization activities to raise awareness about the rehabilitated facilities and how to use them.

IOM has completed the drilling of an additional borehole in Damboa, as well the rehabilitation of a community market in Konduga and two primary schools in Mandarari and Pulka benefiting approximately 6,000 individuals.

The project approach is guided by the IOM Progressive Resolution of Displacement Situation (PRDS) framework. Starting on 1 November 2018, the project has a duration of seven months with the objective to promote pre-conditions for safe, dignified and voluntary return in identified areas of return.

Trainers Build Capacity to Monitor and Evaluate Voluntary Return and Reintegration Programme in Nigeria

The International Organization for Migration (IOM), on 8 - 10 April 2019, organized a workshop in Benin City, Edo State, to build the capacity of trainers to monitor and evaluate the impact of the voluntary return and reintegration of Nigerian migrants. 54 trainees from governmental agencies and civil society organizations attended the event.

As of 8 April 2019, over 12,000 persons have returned to Nigeria under the EU-IOM Joint Initiative for Migrant Protection and Reintegration. These returnees are eligible for either individual, collective or community-based reintegration.

Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) helps in measuring the sustainability of reintegration. M&E tools help to determine whether returnees have reached economic self-sufficiency, social stability and psychosocial wellbeing, and aim to promote migration that occurs as a matter of choice rather than by force.

“After this training, I have a better knowledge of monitoring and evaluation, and I am also aware of the various phases of monitoring, the IOM approach and the need to respect the rights of migrants,” said one participant at the three-day event.

The aim of the training is to establish a monitoring and evaluation expert team (MET) that can be deployed to monitor the progress of beneficiaries.
Volunteers make polio eradication a reality

UNICEF Nigeria is working with volunteers to pioneer new models of community infrastructure that are delivering remarkable results.

Nigeria is Africa’s largest country, rife with opportunity but also beset by challenges of high growth and demand for services that often goes unmet. Polio still exists; a quarter of the population still practises open defecation and millions don’t have access to clean water. Against this backdrop, UNICEF Nigeria is rethinking, testing and evaluating how communities support themselves. UNICEF Nigeria is working with volunteers to pioneer new models of community infrastructure that are delivering remarkable results. The office has found that the influence and trust volunteers possess are as important as direct services. UNICEF Nigeria is applying this learning in the WASH and polio eradication programmes in the northern regions of the country. The programmes have invested in volunteers spread through different networks across communities.

Nearly 200,000 volunteers are working with UNICEF Nigeria. The Volunteers, are helping to end polio and get other lifesaving vaccinations to children. They’re also tracking births, deaths and other vital statistics while opening up access to basic health care. UNICEF launched a new global campaign on 24 April to emphasize the power and safety of vaccines among parents and wider social media users.

UNICEF launched a new global campaign on 24 April to emphasize the power and safety of vaccines among parents and wider social media users. The #VaccinesWork campaign, which kicked off during World Immunization Week (24 to 30 April), was initiated to spread the message that together communities, including parents, can protect everyone through vaccines. #VaccinesWork has long been used to bring together immunization advocates online. This year, UNICEF is partnering with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the World Health Organization (WHO), and Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance to encourage even greater reach. The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation will contribute USD$ 1 to UNICEF for every like or share of social media posts using the hashtag #VaccinesWork in April, up to USD$1 million, to ensure all children get the life-saving vaccines they need.

The campaign is part of a global, week-long celebration under the theme, Protected Together: Vaccines Work, to honour Vaccine Heroes – from parents and community members to health workers and innovators.

"More children than ever before are being reached with vaccines today," said Violaine Mitchell, Interim Director of Vaccine Delivery at the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

VCMs work alongside teams who perform vaccinations. Community access and influence make VCMs the key to delivering polio vaccinations and other health guidance. “Being a local lady, she has leverage,” Dr. Siddique told us. “She introduces the vaccination team to the household, keeps records of who’s there, who’s missing and who refuses vaccination for any reason. She’s also the one who takes refusals and other concerns up with community leaders.”

UN Launches #VaccinesWork Campaign, Inspires Support for Vaccines

Nearly 200,000 volunteers are working with UNICEF Nigeria. The Volunteers, are helping to end polio and get other lifesaving vaccinations to children. They’re also tracking births, deaths and other vital statistics while opening up access to basic health care. Volunteers are also helping communities install and maintain clean water supplies and household sanitation, including indoor latrines. These are services that rely on personal relationships. People are more likely to open up their homes to health and sanitation assessments when they know who’s at the door.

Approximately 18,000 Volunteer Community Mobilisers (VCMs), typically adult women in the community, are at the center of Nigeria’s polio eradication programme. They have built relationships and become influential in the community. One VCM forms a team to support them while going house to house during campaigns. To date 4.4 million children under the age of 5 have been vaccinated.

“Trust and influence in the community is definitely a factor in recruiting and selecting people for the VCM role,” UNICEF Chief of Polio & CAD Dr. Anis Siddique says of volunteers working with the polio eradication programme. “Each VCM is responsible for 350-500 households in her community.” During national immunization days, a VCM visits every household in her zone.

A child receives a vaccine against polio in Borno State. UNICEF Nigeria/2018/Naftalin
Recognising that curbing the further spread of cholera requires a multi-sectoral approach, UNICEF has intensified its response in both cholera-affected and -prone areas in the north-east of Nigeria.

The response includes hygiene promotion, disinfection of households, latrine dislodgement, water chlorination and water trucking. Key messages on cholera transmission, prevention and where to seek treatment are being passed through traditional and religious leaders and door-to-door, in outreach activities.

“Clean water, basic toilets and good hygiene practices are essential for the survival and development of children. Without these basic needs, the lives of millions of children are at risk. For children under five, water- and sanitation-related diseases are one of the leading causes of death,” says UNICEF Borno Chief of Field Office Geoffrey Ijumba.

Cholera is a result of poor hygiene, accessing unsafe water and poor sanitation, including open defecation. Faeces left in the open eventually contaminate food, water and the living environment. This presents a high risk to young children ingesting the faeces in small and invisible doses, resulting in cholera and other water-borne diseases. Currently, 1 in 4 Nigerians practice open defecation.

The UNICEF Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Programme is accelerating efforts with rural water supply agencies and partners, including CIDAR and the Danish Refugee Council, to improve access to safe water in the States, including repair of non-functional hand pumps and faulty boreholes, and installation of water points. With schools currently in session, UNICEF is working with the States to organise hygiene and sanitation activities in schools and child-friendly spaces, to provide learners with appropriate messages on prevention of the disease.

Borno State declared a cholera outbreak on 5 September 2018, with cases being reported in nine Local Government Areas (LGAs). As of 27 September 2018, 3,173 cases had been reported with 58 associated deaths in Borno State. On average, 109 new cases are being reported daily in Borno. In Yobe, the total number of suspected cholera cases reported is 1,147, with 61 associated deaths.

Towards inspiring girls and young women to engage in careers in the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) sector, the Director United Nations Information Centre (UNIC) in Nigeria, Mr. Ronald Kayanja, has called on girls to put technology at the heart of their career ambitions to close the digital gender gap. He made this call in his opening remarks at the observance of the International Girls in ICT Day 2019, organised by UNIC in collaboration with UN Women and Women’s Technology Empowerment Centre (W.TEC).

Held at the UNIC Library Auditorium Lagos, the event featured exhibition of coding by girls and a panel discussion by women in ICT titled, “Think Equal: Women Rising in Technology”. The highlight of the discussion was to inspire and engage students on how to leverage technology for a better future and choose careers in the technology sector. It was an interactive session on how to balance being a woman and doing well in the tech space.

Mr Kayanja noted that the Day was commemorated to encourage more girls to participate in the digital revolution to achieve the Sustainable development Goals and consider careers in the technology world.

Contributing, the Country Representative of UN Women Nigeria and the ECOWAS, Ms. Comfort Lampetey, represented by Ms. Nannma Agbim stated that the International Girls in ICT Day was not just a global effort to bridge the digital gap, but an opportunity to encourage young women and girls to pursue studies and careers in Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) ‘because in today’s world, requisite skills in ICT are paramount to provide young girls with a competitive edge in the job market.’

International Girls in ICT Day is celebrated on the 4th Thursday in April every year. Digital Skills give girls an edge in a competitive job market and enhance career mobility in today’s increasingly Digital Economy.

On this #GirlsinICT Day, we must encourage the next generation of #womeninTech to change their futures and the world around them.
Captions, from left to right and top to bottom:

1. Members of the Nigerian Formed Police Unit (FPU) serving with the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA). They, including 40 women were awarded UN Medals on 18 April or their professionalism and integrity.

2. In Bayelsa State, a woman of child-bearing age receives vaccination against tetanus from a WHO-supported health official.

3. Girls in ICT discusses “Think Equal: Women Rising in Technology” as the UN Information Centre (UNIC) Nigeria in collaboration with UN Women Nigeria and the ECOWAS and Women’s Technology Empowerment Centre (W.TEC), commemorate the International Girls in ICT Day held on 25 April, 2019 in Lagos.