

*Patrick Fine:* Hello, listeners. Welcome back to *A Deeper Look* podcast. I'm Patrick Fine, CEO of FHI 360. And I'm here in Abuja, Nigeria, with Dr. Ayoade Alakija, Nigeria's Chief Humanitarian Coordinator and Head of the Emergency Coordination Center in Abuja. Dr. Alakija, welcome to the podcast.

*Dr. Ayoade Alakija:* Thank you very much, Patrick. And it's wonderful to have you with us in Nigeria. Welcome.

*Patrick Fine:* It's so good to be here.

*Dr. Ayoade Alakija:* Welcome.

*Patrick Fine:* Our returning listeners know that this year's theme of our podcast is Humanitarian Crises and Emergency Response. I'm in a country that is dealing with multiple, different types of complex emergencies, from the Boko Haram insurgency in northeast Nigeria to conflicts between herders and farmers in the middle belt of the country, to the long simmering conflicts that have occurred in the delta and the oil-producing regions of the country.

We're very fortunate to have Nigeria's emergency response coordinator, who has great insight into each of these different types of challenges facing the country and is one of the leaders who is mobilizing resources and ideas to address these challenges. Dr. Ayoade Alakija is also the Chief Executive Officer of AOA Global, an international development firm, and she has worked at the highest levels of government, of business, and of the international community to empower people to bring sustainable change to their own communities and to their nations, including through the Rebuild Borno and the Feed Borno initiatives, two of the central approaches to addressing the emergency in northeast Nigeria.

Her international career began with the United Nations, where she worked on reproductive and maternal health with the UNFPA, the United Nations Populations Fund, and health and development with UNICEF, the United Nations Children's Fund. Before her role as chief humanitarian coordinator, she also worked in the Asia-Pacific on humanitarian crisis in Aceh during the tsunami of 2004. She was one of the first responders on the ground after the Haitian earthquake in 2010, so she's a person who brings a health background and great experience dealing with complex

emergencies. So, it's a real pleasure and an honor to have you on the podcast.

Before I start the conversation, I'd like to thank our returning loyal listeners for subscribing to the podcast and invite new listeners to subscribe. It's a great place to hear leading thinkers in the international development community addressing the key challenges of our times. I'd also love to hear your comments and thoughts. Please post a comment and let us know what you think about the ideas that you're hearing on the podcast.

Let me start by asking you to give us some context about the challenges facing Nigeria today.

*Dr. Ayoade Alakija:* Thank you very much, Patrick. As you say, we have some complex emergencies, and it is not just the results of both Boko Haram and ISWA, the ISIS West Africa that we're dealing with. 'Cause of course, we forget that it is not just Boko Haram, that we are also dealing with ISIS West Africa in the northeast, in Nigeria. But indeed, we have, as you just said, several other things going on around the nation. Nigeria's a large, complex country, almost 200 million people at the last count. There are those who will tell you that those are recorded births only, and it is not even getting close to the true picture.

So, the situation we have and the context we have on the ground is one of, for the first time in at least my lifetime, the last major emergency and crisis was the Biafra War, which was in the late '60s, Nigeria's faced with a humanitarian, a large humanitarian situation. In the last three years, we sort of have come to the point as a people and as a nation where we suddenly were faced with the fact that, my goodness, we have 1.7, 1.8 million displaced people. We have, as of last year, 14 million people in acute need of humanitarian assistance.

*Patrick Fine:* That's a huge number.

*Dr. Ayoade Alakija:* Fourteen million, and we have 26 million affected. That was a wakeup moment for us as a nation, because, the northeast, as you know is, and you've just visited, I believe, is just quite far away. So, for many people, there's a disconnect. You know, you go to Lagos, which is a bustling, busy metropolis, which this has a skyline like New York. And then you go to Maiduguri and you all — could almost — you're not in the same country.

*Patrick Fine:* Right.

*Dr. Ayoade Alakija:* So the background of the crises is rooted right now in conflict in the most immediate term, but there are also serious developmental challenges in the past. You know, the root causes, poor poverty, deep entrenched poverty, a lack of education, gender inequality. Several of these things to my mind have played into where we find ourselves today.

*Patrick Fine:* Let's start with the conflict in northeast Nigeria. Thinking about the northeast, which has gotten so much attention, in part because of the kidnap of the Chibok girls and because it's been going on now for almost ten years. What do you see as the root causes of that, and what do you see as some of resolutions. How can that conflict be brought to an end so that people can reestablish their lives?

You mentioned that there's 1.7 million displaced people who are now living either in communities that they've fled to or in camps for displaced people. First, let's start with your view of what gave rise to that conflict.

8:45

*Dr. Ayoade Alakija:* I would say that really entrenched poverty, feelings of isolation, and a lack of inclusivity in many ways, education, a lack of education. Of course, Boko Haram, as you know, the colloquialism, the literal translation in Arabic is "White Western education is forbidden," and they of course went after Western education, largely because a lot of the people at the very beginning, to my understanding, felt isolated, they felt that the elite, who had been educated in a Western manner, were not caring for those who were poorer people within the society and felt very much disenfranchised. That region of the country sort of development indices have been incredibly poor for a long time.

So, if you look at that, there are those who will tell you that climate change has contributed to it. I think that the climate issues have come and gone in a cyclical manner for generations, I'm told. So, you can't really tie it directly to climate change; you would just say that it was a perfect storm, that coalesced in Lake Chad shrinking, but also, you know, violent extremism on the rise really across the world.

*Patrick Fine:* Right.

*Dr. Ayoade Alakija:* And lots and lots of young, unemployed, unemployable people with no education, no skills, no prospects, no hope for the future. Birth rates that are just going out of the roof because, you know, we're not providing reproductive health services and because of religious and cultural reasons, we're unable to access many of these areas.

So, it was really if you look at it and if you do an analysis of the situation, we had to have almost looked into that crystal ball in the future and said, "Ooh, something's about to give here."

So, Boko Haram and ISWA, violent extremism, I don't see it necessarily purely in the religious sense, because Boko Haram and ISWA are killing as many Muslims as they are Christians. There was definitely a more radical group who wanted to win the hearts and minds, which is what they continued to do. For instance — we'll go to Dapchi in a minute — who wanted to win the hearts and mind, were more concerned with forming a state than just pure terror.

*Patrick Fine:* Right.

*Dr. Ayoade Alakija:* So, they recognize that an affiliation with ISIS, who in some parts of the world were against suicide bombings at some stage, et cetera.

*Patrick Fine:* Right. And providing health services and ...

*Dr. Ayoade Alakija:* And providing humanitarian, exactly.

*Patrick Fine:* Right.

*Dr. Ayoade Alakija:* Exactly, so that is the key difference. So, they then decided, "We will go with that model, whilst if you want to go on with suicide bombings you go ahead down that road. But we are going to win hearts and minds, which is why when we recently had the kidnap of girls at Dapchi, and you just mentioned Chibok, and we had the kidnap of girls at Dapchi, it was a dangerous moment for this nation, because they kidnapped those girls, they took them away, then they brought them back, except for the one lone Leah, that we're all campaigning to be brought back, and they spent an hour preaching in the community, free.

*Patrick Fine:* Who spent an hour?

*Dr. Ayoade Alakija:* ISWA.

*Patrick Fine:* The fighters.

*Dr. Ayoade Alakija:* Welcomed as heroes because they had brought the girls back. And probably brought some goodies along and had given each of the girls ...

*Patrick Fine:* Oh, so that was, uh ...

*Dr. Ayoade Alakija:* ... some clothing and, you know, sort of a goodie bag to come home with.

*Patrick Fine:* So that was a kind of public relations ...

*Dr. Ayoade Alakija:* It was. It was a coup.

*Patrick Fine:* ... coup.

*Dr. Ayoade Alakija:* It was a public relations coup. So, they are very much interested in hearts and minds. Recently in another area of Yobe state, there was a bit of a conflict, just in the last couple of weeks, because the markets were closed by the military for fear of invasion of ...

*Patrick Fine:* Right.

*Dr. Ayoade Alakija:* ... you know, fighters and ISWA. And the community told them quite clearly that well, "If you're going to close our markets we're actually going to pledge allegiance to ISWA, because they allow us to ...

*Patrick Fine:* To trade.

*Dr. Ayoade Alakija:* ... to trade."

*Patrick Fine:* Right. One of the things that I struggle with or wonder about is if you look at the actions of some extremist groups who do have effective campaigns to win the allegiance of local communities, and they're operating at a very local level, they have mobility, so they can go into the local communities. They talk with the elders and other leaders and influence-makers, and they're able to win the allegiance, or at least the sympathy or understanding.

What can the government and the legitimate authorities do to counter that?

*Dr. Ayoade Alakija:* Ensuring that basic social services are provided. Ensuring the people feel safe, secure and included within their own country, and that they feel cared for. I mean I think it's simple, you know, I just gave you the example of the markets and the military ... if you felt like you have schools, you have hospitals, you have opportunities, you can trade, you can fish, and you can, you know, you can build a better life for yourself, it's highly unlikely that you're going to go off with an extremist group.

So, what can the government do? The government can ensure peace and security for our citizens. We must ensure that we have the basics, just the basics of social services.

*Patrick Fine:* Right.

*Dr. Ayoade Alakija:* And we need to boost sort of our economy from that sort of small stakeholder farmer perspective, from the livelihood's perspective, we need to boost this nation's economy.

*Patrick Fine:* How do we create the conditions that attracts businessmen and businesswomen, whether they're at a large scale or a small scale, to go in and start those activities that then begin to generate employment opportunities and lead to the kind of environment that can stabilize the situation?

*Dr. Ayoade Alakija:* There are several high-level CEOs of industry, heads of banks and what-have-you that we're bringing together today to basically say exactly what you just said, "How can we create this enabling environment? How do we attract you to this region?" I mean, look, you went and I went. Most people think those of us who go up there are crazy, I mean including those who are from that region, based in Abuja. So, how do you attract a businessman from Lagos, which is where the center of commerce is?

*Patrick Fine:* Right.

*Dr. Ayoade Alakija:* How do you attract that person? One of the examples I give is that solar energy. Goodness me, I mean we could be generating enough power in and around the Maiduguri, Yobe, Adamawa axis to serve the whole nation with renewable energy.

*Patrick Fine:* Right.

*Dr. Ayoade Alakija:* You know? But who's going to go there? You know? Because peace and security.

*Patrick Fine:* What about the local business community? It's in their interest, direct interest, to see stability returned to the region so that they can prosper as businesses. Are there efforts ongoing to organize the local business community together with the different humanitarian actors? Is there a coordination that goes on, that tries to bring those groups together? And if so, is it working?

*Dr. Ayoade Alakija:* I would say not at this stage. I mean we have to date been dealing with an acute crisis, in the middle of conflict, still. You know, if anything, actually, we have somewhat of a conflict economy up there, which is really quite unfortunate. Because of course, you know since the end of 2016, we've gone to about 2,000 to 3,000, international aid workers in Maiduguri from zero at the beginning of 2016.

*Patrick Fine:* Oh yeah.

*Dr. Ayoade Alakija:* There's now about two ...

*Patrick Fine:* That many?

*Dr. Ayoade Alakija:* Oh yes, there's about 2,000 and 3,000 sort of flying in and out on any given day, most of them actually based there. So now, you know, this is one of the complaints that we hear regularly from the state authorities, you know, rents have gone through the roof.

*Patrick Fine:* I couldn't believe how high rents were ...

*Dr. Ayoade Alakija:* Yes.

*Patrick Fine:* ... when I was up there.

*Dr. Ayoade Alakija:* Exactly. So, rents have gone through the roof. Hotels; you can't get a hotel for love nor money. The prices are really high. So, there's another incentive, if you like, in that we now have this booming conflict town, ...

*Patrick Fine:* Right.

*Dr. Ayoade Alakija:* ... where we have people who are earning hard currency, who are living within this community.

So, are we thinking about the enhancing local business for investment towards development in the future? No. I'm thinking there are people who are renting out houses who are thinking of cashing in now on the moment.

*Patrick Fine:* Right. Right. And that's created a backlash ...

*Dr. Ayoade Alakija:* A total backlash.

*Patrick Fine:* ... against the international workers and some of the international organizations.

*Dr. Ayoade Alakija:* When we say a backlash, I think almost a lack of understanding. So, it may be a backlash, yes, but coming at it from a place of a lack of understanding and coming from a place of, "Oh my goodness, we've been invaded." [*Laughs*]

*Patrick Fine:* Yeah, I mean I'm sure it feels like that to people, 'cause they're seeing something they haven't seen before.

*Dr. Ayoade Alakija:* Yes. So, and this is a very conservative community, where we have people from all over the world. And for the aid workers as well, it's a very difficult circumstance, because, you know, it's a mainly predominantly Muslim area. So, if you want to go down the road and buy a bottle of wine it's not ... you can't immediately do that.

*Patrick Fine:* Right. Right.

*Dr. Ayoade Alakija:* You know, you can't have parties till 3:00 in the morning, because there's a curfew. So, there's a lot going on there. There is a need for building of trust between the international community and the local NGOs, to be honest. And authorities on the ground, both state and national authorities.

*Patrick Fine:* Yeah, I'm glad you mentioned the issue of trust, because I think that that's fundamental to any kind of development work. I think there is a responsibility on the side of the international community when we go into situations like that, to have respect for local customs, for local ways of doing things. I think it can be very disruptive and counterproductive if you have aid workers who



want to pursue a lifestyle that doesn't correspond with the conservative values of the community where they're living.

And my own view is that it's a responsibility on the international organizations to make sure that the way they behave respects the values of the communities where they're working. And that often means being thoughtful about who you send to that place.

*Dr. Ayoade Alakija:* Humanitarian actors typically come into countries into situations where there's totally chaos, where the government has broken down, where the government is in active warfare with an occupying army. Not into countries where there is a stable, strong government; not into a country like Nigeria, where there are capable, competent people. We are saying that we are competent, we are capable, we are Nigerians. This is Nigeria; this is not, you know, not to disrespect any other nation, but this is not some of the other trouble spots of the world, where there is total collapse and you can come in and you can pretty much do what you want.

*Patrick Fine:* Right. Right.

*Dr. Ayoade Alakija:* You can create your own little enclaves, you can create your own little cities and you can live your own lives and do what you want. But we have a country with strong institutions. Yes, we have our problems, like every other one, but you need to respect our own laws and you need to respect those institutions.

And so, I think there is that issue coming in, the, "Oh well, you know, I've just been in be it South Sudan or I've been in Somalia; I'm coming to Nigeria and I'm going to treat it exactly the same.

*Patrick Fine:* Right.

*Dr. Ayoade Alakija:* Well, some of those spots would fit into a corner of Maiduguri.

*Patrick Fine:* Right.

*Dr. Ayoade Alakija:* For starters, not the wider nation.

*Patrick Fine:* Right.

*Dr. Ayoade Alakija:* The other issue we have going on is this is a federal system, Nigeria is a federal nation with state governors with executive power.

*Patrick Fine:* Right.

*Dr. Ayoade Alakija:* So, there are those were flying directly to Maiduguri and bypassing the central system. It's a lack of understanding on both sides.

I mean FHI 360 has been in Nigeria for many, many, many years.

*Patrick Fine:* That's right.

*Dr. Ayoade Alakija:* So, you're one of the more established ones. But, you know, it's understood that while they're doing some good work, that's fantastic, we'll support them in that. But we've had this rash of registrations over the last two years, with many people just flying directly who haven't, as you said, they haven't read the history. So, I don't think they realize that Abuja exists as a central government.

*Patrick Fine:* Right. Or understand the federal system.

*Dr. Ayoade Alakija:* And you know, they fly directly and they go into Maiduguri and think they can pretty much just deal directly with state authorities. So, there needs to be an information flow on both sides, and this is what we have tried to foster. You know, that there's an information flow that we're able to accept within the Office of National Security Advisors; I regularly do, and say that, "Look, you know, this is what is going on. This is the mandate of the INGOs and they're not here to rip us off of \$1 billion HRP dollars."

*Patrick Fine:* Right.

*Dr. Ayoade Alakija:* And similarly to the INGOs, that you need to communicate, especially at a local community level. You know, you need to communicate.

When we had an invasion of the Red Roof compound, the military went in there last year to ... because they had been told that the Boko Haram leader was in there.

*Patrick Fine:* I heard that, yes.

*Dr. Ayoade Alakija:* You know, and I had the UN deputy humanitarian coordinator on the phone to me in a panic at 5:00 a.m. And he was saying, "Well, Yodi, this is terrible. In international human rights law and international, this, that and the other, and principles, and we're not

going to have it." And I said to him, I said, "Look," I said, "before you have a conviction, what we need to ensure is that they don't burn that place down ...

*Patrick Fine:* Right.

*Dr. Ayoade Alakija:* ... with all of you in it." Because, if they've been told that Shekau is there, then what they want to do — not just the military; the military was just checking. But what was gathering around them was a crowd of young people. *[Laughs]* So I said, "We need to tone down the rhetoric, understand how this country works." So, in the meantime, phone calls were going around, and by noon we had it sorted. The governor had intervened, he had had people speak to the crowds gathering around them, because they said, "Well, the place has satellite dishes and, you know, there are helicopters flying in and out."

*Patrick Fine:* Yeah.

*Dr. Ayoade Alakija:* You know, we don't know who they are. Perhaps they're the ones who are helping fund this.

*Patrick Fine:* That's such a good point. One, you're in an inherently volatile situation. But two, that point that you just made about we don't know who they are ...

*Dr. Ayoade Alakija:* That's right.

*Patrick Fine:* ... and I think that's the crux of the matter, that when the international community is working in an environment that is already under tremendous stress because of conflict or because of emergency conditions, because of the lack of services, because now in a place like Maiduguri or Banki or any of the district capitals, they're dealing with thousands of displaced people, so it puts tremendous stress on the population, that if you don't establish who you are, why you're there, and build a relationship with your local counterparts so that they understand that you actually have a reason to be there and that you're adding some value, that there's a good reason to welcome you, then you have a combustible situation.

*Dr. Ayoade Alakija:* Oh, but, you know, Patrick, I think that goes for anything. I mean just now, even when we met and I got to know who you were, we've exchanged e-mails why you're here, who am I, what am I

doing. In any sort of relationship or any sort of partnership, you have to establish those things. And this sort of helicoptering in and helicoptering out literally or metaphorically, it doesn't work.

*Patrick Fine:* Yeah, it does not work.

*Dr. Ayoade Alakija:* You know, it does not work. Development is very different and of course, it's longer term, so you know the whole, you know, community-based approach and the whole involving the community and the planet and what-have-you.

*Patrick Fine:* Right.

*Dr. Ayoade Alakija:* Yes, it can't happen in a humanitarian situation because it is humanitarian, but there is, are ways to involve the community.

The other thing: the international organizations and community also have to learn to bring their A-game to Nigeria?

*Patrick Fine:* Do you think they are?

*Dr. Ayoade Alakija:* No.

*Patrick Fine:* What game are they bringing right now?

*Dr. Ayoade Alakija:* Maybe C.

*Patrick Fine:* Really? Yeah.

*Dr. Ayoade Alakija:* *[Laughs]* Some maybe D.

*Patrick Fine:* What would be your critique? What are the weaknesses that you see in terms of the way some organizations are operating there?

*Dr. Ayoade Alakija:* Look, this is across the board; this is not just NGOs, we're talking UN. Part of it is the fact that Nigeria is a difficult duty station.

*Patrick Fine:* I love it here, but ... *[laughs]*

*Dr. Ayoade Alakija:* Well, so do I. You and me both. *[Laughs]* So, it's a difficult duty station, so perhaps, some don't want to come. But I say to people all the time, in 2016, when all the emergency directors of the UN agencies: UNICEF, WFP, NFPA, all of them, from New York, Rome, et cetera, gathered here in Abuja, I told them, I said, "Bring

me your A-game. As we scale up this response, Nigeria deserves an A-game.

*Patrick Fine:* Right.

*Dr. Ayoade Alakija:* The Nigerian people deserve an A-game. And I said to them, I said, "You see this right here? This is the A-game. You bring me ... you match the A-game. Because we have brought our best to the table. We have poured ourselves into this thing, so you cannot bring me somebody who wants to come on holiday and sit by a pool at the Hilton every five hours ...

*Patrick Fine:* Right.

*Dr. Ayoade Alakija:* ... to come and work in this environment. Because Nigeria's intense. And if you want to do that, you go to Fiji. I left it to come here.

*Patrick Fine:* Yeah.

*[Laughter]*

*Dr. Ayoade Alakija:* But if that's what you want to do, you go to Fiji.

*Patrick Fine:* Right. Right.

*Dr. Ayoade Alakija:* Don't come to Nigeria.

I mean and we're hearing also some of these registration and bureaucratic impediments mean that some NGOs are bringing in people just from the West African region because it's easy for them to get into the country. Now that also is a horrendous mistake, because West Africans inherently consider us the big brother and the bully.

*Patrick Fine:* Right.

*Dr. Ayoade Alakija:* They don't necessarily like us.

*Patrick Fine:* Yeah. I'm, I appreciate the candor.

*Dr. Ayoade Alakija:* Oh, you always get that from me.

*Patrick Fine:* Yeah. Because if you work in this region, well, then you know that that attitude exists.

*Dr. Ayoade Alakija:* Yeah.

*Patrick Fine:* And taking account of that in terms of how you program, especially in these kinds of conditions, is important.

*Dr. Ayoade Alakija:* For me, in my coordination role, I get phone calls from people all the time saying, "Why are they sending somebody from this country or that country at our weakest moment to be in charge? Because they essentially now have a chance to lord it over us."

*Patrick Fine:* Yeah.

*Dr. Ayoade Alakija:* So, if you have worked in this region you understand that, and you understand that you do not send, the worst thing you can do, actually, is send West Africans to head up things in Nigeria. It's like Australians in the Pacific. *[Laughs]* It's like Americans in North America.

*Patrick Fine:* *[Laughs]* Right. Right.

*Dr. Ayoade Alakija:* Frankly, we're the Americans of West Africa. You know, and the Australians are the Americans of the Pacific.

*Patrick Fine:* Right.

*Dr. Ayoade Alakija:* We all have the same general gregarious outlook and what-have-you, and then you're the big country, you're the country with perceived money and influence.

*Patrick Fine:* And influence, yeah.

*Dr. Ayoade Alakija:* This is not across the board, But the general thing we're seeing now is that NGOs are bringing in West Africans because of ECOWAS visas. It's not going to help.

*Patrick Fine:* In your role as coordinator, can you help to mitigate that by smoothing the way for access for the people who would bring the A-game?

*Dr. Ayoade Alakija:* Absolutely. Well, and this is what I try to do with all of the organizations. I think we've managed to clear some.

*Patrick Fine:* Actually, ours are, you know, we haven't faced a problem. And I think it's because we've been in the country for over 20 years, we have deep relationships in all the states and with the federal government. And, I think we're a trusted actor in the country.

*Dr. Ayoade Alakija:* Yes, you are. Yes, FHI 360 is. But then the conflict and the crisis and the response is beginning to skew the picture, because now everybody is thrown into the same basket.

*Patrick Fine:* Right.

*Dr. Ayoade Alakija:* So, those at high level know that no, no, no, these people have been here. You put them aside and you deal with this.

It's skewing salaries. So, you know, there's somebody who's coming in who has half the qualifications perhaps of a Nigerian, but has come in as an international and is paid five times.

*Patrick Fine:* Yeah.

*Dr. Ayoade Alakija:* It's the whole thing is creating a mess.

*Patrick Fine:* Yeah, it creates these tremendous inequities ...

*Dr. Ayoade Alakija:* Yes.

*Patrick Fine:* ... that then create long-term ...

*Dr. Ayoade Alakija:* Resentments.

*Patrick Fine:* Well, resentments and sort of structural problems that are difficult to untangle once they start.

*Dr. Ayoade Alakija:* Yeah, absolutely. You know, this is why I'm sort of pushing the whole thing of the new way of working. We, as a government, are very keen about that, because as local as possible, as international as necessary needs to be the way we go. If you're going to bring people from neighboring countries, who maybe have had crises, be it in Liberia or Sierra Leone or what-have-you in their countries, you know, those countries would fit in a pocket of Abuja. The complexity — they have no idea that the experience doesn't translate. So, let's use those who understand the complexity of the nation, be they from south of Nigeria, north of Nigeria, it doesn't

matter; every Nigerian is a Nigerian. And let's get this new way of working, let's get it going here.

*Patrick Fine:* In your role as coordinator, how do you see right now the interaction between community-based organizations, the state government institutions? For example, I visited with the commissioner of health in Maiduguri. And, I was super-impressed by the dedication of health workers there and by the quality of the people that they had.

As you pointed out, you've got some strong local institutions, you've got real expertise in the country, you now have an influx, particularly into the northeast, where there's the crisis and insecurity, of international actors. You're the coordinator; how are you seeing getting these groups to work together and to address some of the challenges that we've outlined around respecting local values, adhering by local norms, learning about the history of places so you understand the environment you're operating in? What are some of the challenges that you're facing in coordinating these groups and getting people to work together?

*Dr. Ayoade Alakija:* You have two days?

*Patrick Fine:* Yeah. *[Laughs]*

*Dr. Ayoade Alakija:* *[Laughs]* Challenges in coordination, a PhD topic.

*Patrick Fine:* It is.

*Dr. Ayoade Alakija:* Oh wow. Well, I like to see an opportunity in every crisis, and the challenges have been beyond belief. The first phrase that comes to mind is herding cats. When you said, "How do you get all these people together and how do you get them to work together?" and then I would add water to that; I would say herding cats in a shower.

*[Laughter]*

*Dr. Ayoade Alakija:* Because then they're spitting and they're scratching and, you know, and you're trying to get them together and they're scratching each other and then they're scratching you. That's the general picture. Because, as I said, there's state autonomy as well. Relative state autonomy within our federal system; the governor has executive authority.



*Patrick Fine:* Right.

*Dr. Ayoade Alakija:* So the commissioner you met, he works with the Federal Ministry of Health. But we actually watched an interesting exchange between him and the director from the Ministry of Health.

There is those levels of coordination, which is why I said interlocker between federal and state. There's also the international and the local dynamic. There's even within the federal dynamic there's different commissions who feel that they need to be in charge. Because the bottom line is we're human beings and we're dealing with power and control.

*Patrick Fine:* Yeah. You know, I'm glad you mentioned that, because in my experience with trying to herd cats or trying to coordinate many different organizations, I've found that it often comes down to personalities.

*Dr. Ayoade Alakija:* Yeah.

*Patrick Fine:* And that one of the things, that as a coordinator, I've had to do in some cases is to demand that leaders or staff be changed because they're not collaborative.

*Dr. Ayoade Alakija:* Yeah.

*Patrick Fine:* And that when you get people who have a collaborative mindset, even though they may be coming from different perspectives and have some legitimate different points of view, if they've got a collaborative mindset you can get people to work together.

*Dr. Ayoade Alakija:* It is down to personalities. You've talked about herding cats. Throw into this the fact that I'm a woman [*laughs*] in a patriarchal culture.

*Patrick Fine:* But, however, there is that phenomenon of powerful African women ...

*Dr. Ayoade Alakija:* Yes.

*Patrick Fine:* ... who have a special quality to make things happen.

*Dr. Ayoade Alakija:* On a sort of practical day-to-day level the challenges have been in phases. So, the first phase, when the emergency response was being scaled up in September 2016 and I was asked to do this, the challenge at that time was getting my government to fully understand the scale of the crisis, because the government, it was just — it was incredulity; people were like, "Surely not. Oh, come on, Yodi, no, we do not have that" — I mean I had people at the very top of this country say this to me, ...

*Patrick Fine:* Right.

*Dr. Ayoade Alakija:* ... "We do not have people dying on that scale over there."

*Patrick Fine:* Right.

*Dr. Ayoade Alakija:* That was the first challenge. Because to coordinate you need to have understanding. I was supposed to be coordinating the inter-ministerial taskforce and all the ministers: minister of health, minister of education, minister of, you know, water resources. All of that group, to pull them together to basically say, "This is what you're going to do from the Nigerian end and this is who we're going to talk to on the international end to get humanitarian funding."

*Patrick Fine:* And you have to do that at both the federal level and at the state level?

*Dr. Ayoade Alakija:* At the state level, I did deal with the executive.

*Patrick Fine:* And with the governor.

*Dr. Ayoade Alakija:* At the state level and deal with the governor, yeah.

*Patrick Fine:* I see.

*Dr. Ayoade Alakija:* I deal with the governor. At the federal level I deal with the inter-ministerial taskforce and all that that comprises. And that was the first challenge. And, we sort of managed to do that by a huge amount of advocacy. Actually, quite amusingly, the commissioner of health for Borno State that, you know, "If there is one person that got the federal government's attention and started coordination of this response in this country, we have to say that it is Dr. Alakija. Because she made so much noise, she made so much noise." He repeated it about four times.

*Patrick Fine:* [Laughs]

*Dr. Ayoade Alakija:* That the president mandated action. [Laughs] And that was exactly what it was.

*Patrick Fine:* But that's a great insight about the need to first get the national institutions to have a common vision about the way forward.

*Dr. Ayoade Alakija:* I'm not saying we succeeded in our common vision, but at least we got it not looking in 15 different directions. And building trust within the country was also a major issue.

*Patrick Fine:* Right.

*Dr. Ayoade Alakija:* People see it about money.

*Patrick Fine:* Right.

*Dr. Ayoade Alakija:* So, the fact that we have a \$1 billion HRP to raise funds, the understanding was that, well, there are some organizations who just want to make money out of this.

*Patrick Fine:* Right.

*Dr. Ayoade Alakija:* So, there was building that understanding within and then there was building the coalition sort of on the outside, with donors, with people not just in Nigeria. So, my donor base now is across the capitals of the world, because I needed them to build those coalitions so that we had a strength to what we were trying to do here. That is how we were able to scale up from 157,000 people in September 2016 to 1.1 million in December.

*Patrick Fine:* When I was in Maiduguri I visited Bakassi IDP Camp. There are 35,000 people in that camp, 17,000 children and two schools. Two schools for 17,000 children. My immediate takeaway is there's a huge need, a crying lack of education services for these kids. You could just see hundreds of kids wandering around in the middle of the day who should be in school. How do we raise the resources to meet that kind of a need?

*Dr. Ayoade Alakija:* Education: Education is really for me, it's an absolute passion. I can't tell you what it does to my heart to see all those kids who can't go to school. I was in Barma about a year-and-a-half ago and

there was a soldier in Barma IDP Camp who had started a school because he missed his own kids so much. So, he had started a school under a tent.

*Patrick Fine:* That's terrific.

*Dr. Ayoade Alakija:* And it was wonderful. And there's this photo on the front of an Education Emergencies booklet, which is of that of a soldier with a gun on his back, sitting in this tent with dozens of girls around him, teaching them. But that was the reality. There were only about 2,000, I think, of the kids within the camp, even though he had then started a rotational system for the school, about 2,000 could go and about another 3,000 or 4,000 couldn't. And it was heartbreaking watching them sort of skip around the edges and being told to keep away so you don't distract the others ...

*Patrick Fine:* Exactly.

*Dr. Ayoade Alakija:* ... and having no facilities. We must do more about education. We must do more. We owe it to the generation to come, to make sure that we make every provision for their education. For me, it is as important as WASH, it is as important as food. I mean if we want to prevent in the future this violent extremism we must ensure that these kids are educated.

We have a captive audience right now; they are all in camps. If anything, we see it as an opportunity. Let us provide them what they need. Every year they come with the humanitarian response plan, the UN and the partners, and they say to me they don't have enough partner uptake on the education side, so the people in need are only about one-point-something million. I'm saying, "How can you tell me there are only 1.7 million people in need of education when you have 14 million people in need, of whom we know that at least 60-percent are under the age of 18?"

*Patrick Fine:* That's right, they're kids.

*Dr. Ayoade Alakija:* So therefore, as far as I'm concerned, half of that number are in need.

*Patrick Fine:* Right.

*Dr. Ayoade Alakija:* It is not 1.7, but then they're saying, "Well, the uptake number of partners and the capacity that we have, it's a matter of capacity versus need."

*Patrick Fine:* But think how shortsighted that is. Because as you point out, you've got children who you can educate in attitudes and values ...

*Dr. Ayoade Alakija:* Exactly.

*Patrick Fine:* ... that embrace peace and ...

*Dr. Ayoade Alakija:* Exactly.

*Patrick Fine:* ... community.

*Dr. Ayoade Alakija:* Exactly.

*Patrick Fine:* And to let that opportunity slip away and really to be providing now a pipeline ...

*Dr. Ayoade Alakija:* Absolutely.

*Patrick Fine:* ... of potential recruits to the extremists ...

*Dr. Ayoade Alakija:* It's dangerous.

*Patrick Fine:* ... is dangerous. It's criminal.

*Dr. Ayoade Alakija:* It's dangerous. You know, you were asking earlier about the A-game, et cetera. We need strategic thinkers. The complexity of a country like Nigeria, we need bold, audacious, courageous strategic thinkers in this country. We need those who are willing to work in sync and to work collaboratively. We're also willing to meet those who are willing to say, "Look, this is different from anything I've ever seen before. Tell me what to do if I need help." That is what is needed.

In the area of education, we are lagging so far behind, both on the demand and the supply side. We are lagging so far behind. I mean, you know, of course from a political angle, people are building beautiful schools. I keep telling people, "Don't build me a school. Build people, not buildings."

*Patrick Fine:* Right.

*Dr. Ayoade Alakija:* Build people, not buildings.

*Patrick Fine:* I say the same thing.

*Dr. Ayoade Alakija:* Well, there you go. Build people and then the people will build the buildings.

Education is terribly underserved across, well, all of Nigeria really, so not just the Northeast and not just within the crisis response. It is terribly underserved and we need to get really, really clever about the way in which we go about that.

*Patrick Fine:* So, Dr. Alakija, we've been having a fascinating conversation. I'd like to end by asking you, looking at the challenges that you're dealing with today, where do you see things going in the future? And in terms of your role as coordinator, what are your priorities? You've just mentioned education as a priority. What other priorities do you have, looking forward?

*Dr. Ayoade Alakija:* Thank you, Patrick. What do I see in the future is a very difficult question. You know, that crystal ball, don't we all wish we could look into it? We're still in a situation where peace and security is still unclear and unsure.

You referred at the beginning to Chibok girls and the kidnap of the girls that brought global attention to this crisis. We lost an opportunity in that moment of the Chibok girls, I believe, as a nation and as an international community and as humanitarians. We lost an opportunity to take that moment and turn it into a cause for all girls, victims and women of violence. We unfortunately turned those girls into high-valued assets by utilizing them.

*Patrick Fine:* Right.

*Dr. Ayoade Alakija:* That's what we did. We essentially, as a global community we destroyed their lives. There's the stories coming out now saying, you know, some were essentially almost trafficked in the U.S. and treated badly, the ones who escaped, who managed to get to the U.S., et cetera. But we all did that, because we focused on the symptom rather than on the syndrome.

So, we need to focus on empowering women. We need to focus on education across the board, but also for the girl child. We need to

look at models like what happened in Rwanda. And I worked in Rwanda also, you know, with President Kagame's cabinet for a few years as they were coming out of that post-conflict phase. The young, incredible women that you see now from Rwanda, heading tourism or heading health or what-have-you ...

*Patrick Fine:* Right.

*Dr. Ayoade Alakija:* ... they all came out of that period where Rwanda said, "Look, most of our men of a certain age were killed. We need to educate and empower these women." So, the gender dimension of this conflict is something that as we — we really need to look into very strongly going forward.

The move into linkages between the humanitarian and the development, the underscoring of it, of peace. You know, we've been doing each in silos; we need to pull it all together. We need to pull it all into the same room so that the sustainable financing also can be found for the work that you and others are trying to do. FHI 360 is one of the organizations rarely that does both. You know, you're both as strong in humanitarian as you are in development.

*Patrick Fine:* Right.

*Dr. Ayoade Alakija:* You talked about trust earlier. Your organization in the very early days, when I first went up to Maiduguri in 2015, one of the first people and only organizations I could speak to — this was before I had this formal role in Nigeria — was FHI 360.

*Patrick Fine:* Yeah, we never left.

*Dr. Ayoade Alakija:* Yeah. No, you never left. Exactly. In many ways, FHI 360 in Nigeria and some others have been actually doing the nexus. It's not a reinvention of the wheel; we just need to articulate it better. We need to articulate, we need to strategize around how we operationalize it. But I think some are already doing that. So, for me, that is what I see as the next phase, as we come out of this acute phase of crisis and pray that security-wise we stay fine ...

*Patrick Fine:* Right.

*Dr. Ayoade Alakija:* ... through the elections, through, 'cause we have a rocky year coming up.

*Patrick Fine:* You do. You have elections in February next year.

*Dr. Ayoade Alakija:* In February. But we have primaries and we have everything leading up from about September onwards.

*Patrick Fine:* Right. Let me end with this thought: You have said that what Nigeria needs to confront these complex crises is bold, audacious, strategic voices and thinkers. And, I've had the honor today to talk to a strong Nigerian woman who is a bold, audacious strategic thinker who's bringing a strategic view to how to address these crises, who is helping to bring together all of the different actors from the international community, from the national level, at the state level, from civil society and the community level.

I can say that, listening to your perspective on this, that Nigeria is very fortunate to have somebody with your vision and with your gumption, with your grit to be the emergency coordinator. And, I want to thank you very much for spending this time.

*Dr. Ayoade Alakija:* Thank you, Patrick. It's been an absolute honor. Thanks.

*Patrick Fine:* So, listeners, you've heard from a bold, audacious, strategic thinker today. We've covered a gamut of issues relating to humanitarian response and complex emergencies. I'd like you to share this episode on social media using the hashtag #ADeeperLook. I'd also love to hear your thoughts on today's conversation with Dr. Alakija. So, leave us a comment, catch up on previous episodes wherever you get your podcasts, such as iTunes, Google Play, Stitcher or Soundcloud. And stay tuned for more conversations on humanitarian crises and emergency response. Thank you, listeners.