REINTEGRATION AND RECONCILLIATION:
AN ASSESSMENT OF NIGERIA's POST-BOKO HARAM CONTEXT

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Abstract

This study examines the challenges and opportunities of reintegration and reconciliation efforts in the post-Boko Haram context in Nigeria, analysing its origins, ideology, and impact. Boko Haram has exacerbated existing socio-economic challenges, including poverty and inequality, creating a fertile ground for radicalization. While military operations are crucial, the increasing number of Boko Haram defections presents both challenges and opportunities, highlighting the critical need for effective reintegration programs to prevent recidivism and ensure the sustainable reintegration of former fighters into society. The study emphasizes the need for a comprehensive approach that addresses the root causes of the conflict. This includes de-radicalization, rehabilitation, and community-based reintegration programs, recognizing the limitations of purely military solutions.This qualitative study, employing primary and secondary methods, explores significant challenges, including community stigma, psychological trauma, and limited community engagement in reintegration programmes. The study highlights the potential of community-based approaches, including increased community ownership and dialogue, in fostering successful reintegration. Addressing the psychological needs of the affected population through mental health support and trauma-informed care is crucial. The study emphasizes the need for a comprehensive approach that combines military efforts with robust de-radicalisation, rehabilitation, and reintegration programmes while addressing the underlying socio-economic factors that contribute to the spread of extremism.

Keywords: Conflicts, Post-Boko-Haram, Reconciliation and Reintegration

Introduction

Sub-Saharan Africa has been plagued by conflict, with violence affecting 30% of its countries in 2019 (Xiangming et al., 2020). These conflicts, characterised by diverse non-state armed groups with shifting alliances and significant military capabilities, have resulted in widespread human suffering and devastating economic consequences (Nascimento, 2019).Nigeria is experiencing a severe security crisis due to the Boko Haram insurgency and the rise of ISWAP. These groups, through factors including limited domestic capability, weapon proliferation, a thriving criminal economy, and decreased international aid (Steenken & Langholtz 2017), have significantly increased their capabilities. Since 2009, these groups have committed numerous atrocities, including bombings, kidnappings, and armed attacks, resulting in tragic losses of life and property (UNPS, 2021).

Reintegration and reconciliation are crucial in post-conflict environments. They assist combatants in reintegrating into society, reduce the risk of recurrent violence, and promote social cohesiveness and trust. These procedures break the cycle of violence and lay the groundwork for social and economic advancement. Despite surrenders and peace-building programmes, significant challenges remain in north-eastern Nigeria due to on-going violence from splinter groups and a hostile security environment impede recovery and reconstruction efforts. Concerns also aroused from the increase in Boko Haram defections, and the effectiveness of the reintegration initiative in preventing recidivism and ensuring sustainable reintegration.

In this regard, this qualitative through a primary and secondary sources aims to increase understanding of reconciliation and reintegration initiatives in post-conflict contexts. By examining the opportunities and challenges of Boko Haram combatants' reintegration and reconciliation in impacted communities, with aims to assess how well these efforts are meeting the needs of the affected population and ensuring that peace-building initiatives are efficient, sustainable, and responsive.

Overview of the Nature, Ideology and Tactics of Boko Haram

The Lake Chad region, plagued by security challenges including political unrest, banditry, kidnappings, and armed attacks, is characterized by various non-state armed organisations with diverse motives and shifting alliances, demonstrating significant military capabilities and transnational links (Nascimeto, 2019). Slow economic growth, political instability, and pandemics have exacerbated unrest, allowing transnational non-state organizations like Al Shabaab and Boko Haram to capitalise on the power vacuum and escalate violence (Gilpin, 2016).

Founded by Mohammed Yusuf in 2000s, Boko Haram is an extremist group with an anti-western ideology and the objective of establishing an Islamic state. Initially focusing on opposing Western education and advocating for a strict interpretation of Islamic law, Boko Haram expanded its operations to include bombings, kidnappings, and attacks on civilians, schools, and government institutions (Thurston, 2018). These developments exacerbated the already serious socioeconomic and environmental issues in Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe states (BAY). By 2010, the organisation had expanded its jurisdiction and began attacking civilians, with 2014 and 2015 being the most severe years.

The Boko Haram insurgency caused significant destruction, instability, and trauma in northern Nigeria. By 2019, around 7.1 million people in northeast Nigeria needed humanitarian assistance, with over two million displaced by conflict (Stoddard et al., 2020). Borno State was the most affected by Boko Haram between 2011 and 2023, with 38,255 deaths (Statista, 2024). The violent activities exposed the weaknesses of Nigeria's governance institutions, decades of government underfunding, the marginalization of local populations, and contributed to the spread of radical Islamist ideologies (Samu 2012).

The group's regionalised operations along the borders of Cameroon, Niger, Nigeria, and Chad impacted the social, political, security, and humanitarian conditions of the affected populations, resulting in mass displacement (Casola, 2020). Prior to the rise in Boko Haram atrocities, the region was already vulnerable due to high rates of poverty, inequality, unemployment, and land degradation. Boko Haram's actions significantly disrupted social services, such as healthcare and education. Schools were closed or demolished, and the health system struggled to meet the increased demand (Dunn, 2018). These disruptions severely impacted Nigeria's economy, commerce, investment, and agricultural productivity, leading to decreased food production (Taylor et al., 2021) and worsening food security (Sylvester and Uwa, 2021).

National governments responded by increasing military and security measures. The Nigerian state deployed troops for counterinsurgency operations, making significant progress against insurgency, although despite military advances, fatalities have decreased slightly in recent years (UNDP, 2024). Certain factors, such as increased military pressure, internal conflict, community opposition, government amnesty initiatives, and the success of rehabilitation programs, all contributed to reducing mortality (Chuku et al., 2020). Many Boko Haram members deserted due to a desire for a different life, a lack of trust in the cause, deplorable living conditions, fear of violence and death, and internal conflict (Huvé et

al. 2022).

Following Abubakar Shekau's death in 2021, around 2000 former Boko Haram fighters surrendered to the government, creating a wave of desertion. This increase in defections highlights the urgent need for comprehensive deradicalisation and reintegration measures. Given the limitations of simple military interventions, there is a growing recognition of the importance of promoting long-term peace (Akhare and Akpabio, 2018). Non-military approaches such as de-radicalisation, rehabilitation, and reintegration are increasingly viewed as more crucial for addressing the root causes of terrorism than military tactics (Onapajo and Ozden, 2020).

Reintegration and Reconciliation Efforts and Initiatives in Post- Boko Haram Conflict Context in Nigeria

The National Counter Terrorism Strategy (NACTEST) was released in 2016 to address the root causes of the conflict without using force. The efforts included the Northeast Development Commission (NEDC), Operation Safe Corridor (OPSC), and the Presidential Committee on the North East Initiative (PCNI). Similarly, a national action plan and multi-sectoral policy framework for DDRR were developed in 2017 to provide a comprehensive strategy.As a result of the Boko Haram conflict, Nigeria implemented Disarmament, Demobilization, Reintegration, and Reintegration (DDRR) initiatives to support former militants reintegrate into society. This strategy aims to reduce violence, rebuild communities, and promote lasting peace.

By 2018, the federal government's nationwide DDRR Action Plan had four pillars: community-based reintegration, technical help, legal and policy concerns, and individual case management. In addition to strengthening legal frameworks and addressing root causes of violence, the plan promotes community resilience against extremism. These strategies promote whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches tailored to the specific needs and challenges of communities (USAID, 2020).

In 2021, "Operation Lake Sanity 2022" was a coordinated effort against Boko Haram on Lake Chad's islands, culminating in considerable neutralization and capture of Boko Haram-affected regions, militants, and hostages. As security in Boko Haram improved, the Nigerian government and its strategic partners shifted their focus to stabilisation and evaluating post-conflict rehabilitation requirements. This operation demonstrated the importance of a voluntary DDRR approach in reducing on-going hostilities and preventing armed groups from acquiring weapons and ammunition (Breitung et al., 2021).

The Operation Safe Corridor (OPSC) program is a national initiative for the rehabilitation and reintegration of repentant, surrendered ex-combatants linked with BH-ISWAP (Doho, 2023). It strives to assist these combatants, as well as individuals who have served prison sentences, de-radicalise, rehabilitate, and reintegrate into society. The OPSC, also known as the De-radicalisation, Rehabilitation, and Reintegration Camp, is located in Kwame Local Government, Gombe State. It offers a temporary haven for willingly surrendered ex-combatants or collaborators, with the primary goal of developing a deradicalization plan to serve as the foundation for counterterrorism operations aimed at de-radicalising, rehabilitating, and reintegrating Boko Haram defectors (Felbab-Brown, 2018).

The Implementation of Reintegration and Reconciliation Initiatives in Conflict Affected Areas in Nigeria

During post-conflict transitions, programs for disarmament, demobilization, reinsertion, and reintegration (DDRR) emerge. These programmes not only assist ex-combatants but also promote peace-building, economic rehabilitation, and violence prevention to enhance community stability. Reintegration and reconciliation are closely connected activities. Reintegration involves returning displaced individuals or former combatants to their communities. Reconciliation aims to rebuild social links and restore relationships between community members.

Effective reintegration is viewed as "the ultimate goal" of DDR programmes, encompassing civilian status, stable employment, and financial assistance for ex-combatants. It is a comprehensive plan primarily implemented at the local level (UNDP, 2013). Torjesen (2013) argues that transforming the "combatant" identity into a civilian one through a process, rather than a policy, is crucial for maintaining long-term peace. This social and economic activity primarily occurs at the local community level (Idris, 2016).

While disarmament and demobilisation can effectively remove weapons and destroy militant groups, Musa (2017) emphasised the criticality of adequate reintegration of former militants into society to significantly reduce recidivism. Reintegration, comprising a complex combination of social, political, and economic elements, aims to assist former fighters and their families in becoming self-sufficient and contributing members of society. Individual capacities should be recovered through development planning and reintegration initiatives, which require significant, long-term programs (IDDRS, 2014).

Three main approaches exist: ex-combatant-focused reintegration, short-term stabilisation (reinsertion), and community-based reintegration, which empowers communities to provide tools and resources to aid in the reintegration of ex-combatants (Danso, 2023). Reintegration initiatives aim to meet the requirements of adult fighters, their dependents, children of armed groups, non-combat workers (such as women), persons with impairments, and those with long-term health concerns. Reintegration support should transition from individual-focused to community-based approaches, promoting more equitable resource allocation and reducing the stigma associated with former members of armed formations while also promoting reconstruction and reconciliation (IDDRS, 2019).

In transition camps, OPSC clients receive comprehensive rehabilitation, including political escape possibilities, education, vocational skill training, psychosocial support, and religious counseling. Since its inception in 2017, the programme has graduated six cohorts of former Boko Haram insurgents. All 2,160 clients, except women, completed the programme and returned to their communities in Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe (Bakare, May 2024).After completing the OPSC programme, graduates swore an oath of allegiance/commitment before a quasi-judicial tribunal. This Oath of Commitment and Allegiance specifies that alumni who are found guilty of crimes committed after the program will lose all benefits gained through the OPSC. To aid reintegration, the OPSC established a procedure whereby graduates are handed over to suitable state government representatives rather than returning to their neighbourhoods.

Following graduation, clients are assigned to suitable governmental agents for on-going support, avoiding a rapid return to potentially hostile surroundings. The Borno State government plays a crucial role in FG's efforts to promote defections by facilitating these transitions through community-based rehabilitation and reintegration.The OPSC establishes the conditions for reintegration and makes significant theoretical advances by using its current dynamics. For instance, Indigenous people from

Borno State are welcomed by the Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development, which accommodates OPSC graduates for two weeks before moving them to their respective villages.

Borno State has implemented an innovative "Borno Model for Integrated Management of Mass Exits" to address the enormous number of individuals seeking rehabilitation and reintegration. This strategy combines community-based tactics with OPSC experience to ensure a comprehensive response to former combatants' needs (UNODA, 2022). The national rehabilitation scheme, coordinated by the Borno state administration and backed by external partners, currently includes two transit facilities: Bulumkutu and Shokari. This paradigm evolved into a hybrid that combines complementary and mutually reinforcing activities. Borno'sapproach prioritises community-based rehabilitation and reintegration, drawing on OPSC's expertise with practical therapy (Salem et al., 2022).

The Borno State model's localised strategy was devised to deal with the dynamics and ever-changing terrain. The state administration emphasised two primary strategies: the rapid rehabilitation and reintegration of former Boko Haram members into communities, and the reintegration of OPSC graduates from MallamSidi in Gombe (UNODC, 2018).

Salem et al. (2022) reported that between August 2021 and June 2022, 16,463 males, 14,621 females, and 27,809 children were reintegrated into communities. Meanwhile, 6,666 children, 2,019 males, and 1,974 women are anticipated to remain at the Bulumkutu and Shokari Transit Centres. As the recognised epicentre of violent extremism and terrorism, the Borno state administration has played an important role in the Federal Government's efforts to assist BH defectors by implementing the OPSC programme, a localised approach that facilitates the rehabilitation and reintegration of willing and repentant BH insurgents.

As of May 2024, approximately 162,000 individuals, primaril women and children, were have resided in camps such as Shokari, Bulumkutu, and Hajj Camp. Over 100,000 former fighters, including farmers, women, and children, participated in programmes designed to reintegrate them into their communities and prevent them from becoming victims again. The goal was to transition former to farming instead of fighting, and approximately 7,000 low-risks juveniles had been reintegrated or reunited with their families in communities

According to Brechenmacher (2019), vocational training and business coaching have proven to be extremely effective in preparing OPSC graduates for rewarding jobs that would aid their reintegration into society. Furthermore, community members have noted that graduates are calm and well-behaved, as evidenced by the lack of reprisals, particularly from those who had trained with OPSC, as opposed to those who self-reintegrated from BH-ISWAP, who are viewed as less trustworthy and antagonistic. This reflects a greater sense of security, which is an important indicator of effective reconciliation.

Challenges and Prospects of Reintegration in Post-Boko Haram Context in Nigeria

Reintegrating former Boko Haram fighters into Nigerian society presents significant challenges. Creating a reintegration program that meets the unique needs of former fighters while avoiding the appearance of preferential treatment is extremely difficult. The devastation caused by the conflict has hindered the reintegration of Boko Haram victims and communities. This study explores these opportunities and difficulties, emphasizing the need for community involvement in the reintegration process.

Stigma and Community Resistance

Former members of violent extremist groups often experience violence, mistrust, and shame upon reintegrating into communities. This is particularly true when conflict victims have not received proper assistance (Brechenmacher, 2019). Communities express concerns about the safety and security risks associated with reintegrating former Boko Haram fighters with some fearing it will intensify existing animosity (Eme & Anyadike, 2018). Reintegration is crucial for promoting healing and reconciliation. Boko Haram, its members' families, and affected communities often become targets of social dishonour and suspicion (Miangwa, 2013). Members of extremist organizations face antagonism and mistrust, hindering recovery and reintegration (Cassanelli et al., 2019).

Reintegrating former Boko Haram terrorists presents a major global concern. Incentivising the defection and rehabilitation of low-level soldiers has emerged as a viable tactic for limiting the capabilities of violent extremist organisations. However, OPSC graduates fear being stigmatised, mistrusting others, and facing violence (ICG, 2021). Survivors also face long-standing stigmas, particularly girls and young women who were previously held captive and subjected to kidnapping, sexual enslavement, and other crimes committed by extremist organizations. This stigma harms their mental health, social integration, and general well-being(Amnesty International, 2024).

The transition from combatant to civilian life may result in a loss of identity. Activities that provide general knowledge, mental health, psychosocial assistance, counselling, and referral to support services within DDR programs, economic reintegration, and social reintegration help create trust between ex-combatants (World Bank (2009). According to Roberts et al. (2008), Psychological therapies such as psychological first aid, urgent needs assessment, and stabilization approaches are recommended for acute distress management and as a foundation for more comprehensive interventions.

Women and girls face distinct hurdles when attempting to reintegrate into society. Individuals forced into marriage after being sexually raped by Boko Haram fighters may experience shame, rejection, and other difficulties owing to cultural and patriarchal norms (Amnesty International, 2019). Obisesan (2023) asserted that Boko Haram carried out an extraordinary campaign against women and girls, refuting the notion that women are typically the victims of hostilities. However, a large proportion of terrorists' harsh and violent operations targeted women.

Salem et al. (2022) asserted that, women are more susceptible to conflict triggers and grievances, which may lead them to re-join organisations after reintegrating into society. Bouka, (2019), argued that, when women receive comprehensive rehabilitation that focuses on deradicalisation and disengagement, they are better prepared for reintegration into society. Those who have been marginalised by society, especially women and girls who have been sexually assaulted or forced into marriage, may suffer from greater psychological suffering. Further emphasising that, if returnees are still struggling with acceptance, there is a significant risk that former Boko-haram members will start arguments and use violence.

Ex-combatants' reintegration into civilian society is challenging since they lack the necessary skills and education to obtain work.Local economies in areas afflicted by violent conflicts are often severely harmed, resulting in high rates of poverty, food insecurity, unemployment, suffering, poor governance, and religious fanaticism (Mercy Corps, 2019). As a result, social opportunity is a significant risk factor for crime and violence. Ex-combatants suffer difficulties in reintegrating into civilian society because they lack the necessary skills and education to obtain work.

The absence of retaliation, especially from those who had received the OPSC training, has been cited by

community members as proof that graduates are well-behaved and peaceful, in contrast to those who self-reintegrated from BH-ISWAP, who are perceived as less trustworthy and confrontational. According to Brechenmacher (2019) business counselling and vocational training have been very effective in preparing OPSC graduates for meaningful careers that would aid in their reintegration into society. This suggests that increased feelings of security and successful reintegration are closely related to these outcomes.

However, there is no clear strategy to accelerate infrastructure development, economic growth, and social progress. According to the World Bank (2016), a multi-sectoral approach combining emergency aid with long-term sustainable development initiatives is required to improve resilience, create jobs, and stimulate the economy. These risk factors remain and contribute to community opposition to Boko Haram (ISS, 2021). Unsatisfied people are more likely to become radicalised if they continue to live in poverty, therefore long-term economic growth is essential (Cassanelli et al., 2019).

Trauma and Psychological Impact

Mental health challenges are prevalent among populations affected by conflict (Neuner & Thomas, 2007). Exposure to war or violent conflicts can result in mental illnesses such as PTSD, alcoholism, substance misuse, depression, and suicidal ideation in both fighters and civilians. Individuals repeatedly exposed to stressful conditions are particularly vulnerable to these issues (IDDRS, 2014). Socially, impacted ex-combatants may struggle to adapt to new societal roles and identities. Involvement in violence can lead to pathological behaviour during the post-conflict period, potentially resulting in interpersonal violence and hindering their ability to cope independently with civilian life (Ball, 1997).

The atrocities committed by Boko Haram, such as forced indoctrination, massacre, and physical and psychological abuse, have a severe negative impact on both communities and people. Violence victims often experience psychological distress, including anxiety, insomnia, and physical symptoms, as a result of being abducted, mistreated, and forced to flee (Giardinelli, 2017). Former combatants' mental health suffers greatly as a result of this exposure, which is also closely linked to the emergence of psychopathology and physical problems (IDDRS, 2014).

Despite their obvious anguish and different roles, women's experiences with certain post-conflict procedures, such as de-radicalisation and reintegration initiatives in the context of BH, are sometimes disregarded. The OPSC does not admit women, and the vast majority of BH associate trials feature juveniles who were eventually ruled not guilty (Obisesan, 2023). Although the Nigerian government advocates for deradicalisation and reintegration, efforts to address women's issues are unorganized. Women who are considered low-risk are frequently denied equal opportunities for rehabilitation and reintegration. As such, the Screening, Prosecution, Rehabilitation, and Reintegration (SPRR) procedure should prioritise and utilise gender-sensitive measures.

Lack of Community Engagement

Former combatants may be stigmatised by the community as deviants who commit crimes, or they may be seen as using crime and violence to vent their frustration at being unable to reintegrate into society and their dissatisfaction with the government's offer of assistance (Spenser, 1997). Ex-combatants face the consequences of physical and psychological trauma sustained during conflicts. As IDDRS (2014) emphasises, these obstacles posed by these dynamics have hampered the goals of social reintegration and

community cohesiveness, jeopardising the viability of reintegrated programmes.

To reintegrate ex-combatants, they must acclimatize to a new social framework that includes the community's norms, beliefs, and laws; this acclimatisation requires unlearning violent behaviour and learning to cope with barriers and social conflict in a nonviolent manner (Hazen 2005). In this context, the DDR programmes' rehabilitation and reintegration procedures include religious rehabilitation, counselling, education, occupational skill training, psychosocial therapy, and a political exit strategy in transition camps.

To improve acceptability, buy-in, and ownership of the process from program development to implementation, a community-centric and community-driven paradigm is advocated. This will benefit both individuals and the community as a whole since it will influence people to reconsider their views about those who were previously involved with extremist organisations (Salem et al., 2022). Former fighters and community members affected by conflict should be the primary receivers of aid; the exact number will depend on the circumstances. In addition to encouraging greater participation in the reintegration process, this strategy has the potential to improve community security and risk management.

It is important to note that community-based reintegration aims to help displaced people and communities in areas affected by Boko Haram recover and reintegrate. Additionally, it involves the local community in the process of reintegrating ex-group soldiers. It acknowledges that building trust, attending to local needs, and guaranteeing the long-term sustainability of the intervention depend heavily on community ownership and involvement in the reintegration process. Critics have especially characterized OPSC's operations as ad hoc and transactional, lacking a formal framework for producing results where communities negotiate for reintegration.

Monguno averred that,

> There are few community-level trust-building programs, implying that the reintegration approach has been more of a "top-down" imposition rather than actually engaging and preparing local populations. Arguing for a bottom-up, community-led strategy to preparing the ground and creating trust, rather than a top-down imposition of programs (Monguno, May 2024).

Brechenmacher (2019) characterises the activity as reckless endeavours with inadequate response coordination among government agencies, which have arisen due to a lack of a defined framework, corruption, internal disputes, conflicting goals, and unclear accountability pathways.In Boko Haram-affected areas, community-based reintegration intends to involve local communities in the process of reintegrating former Boko Haram militants while also assisting in the recovery and rehabilitation of displaced persons and communities. It recognises the importance of community ownership and participation in the reintegration process in order to build trust, addresses local needs, and ensures the intervention's long-term viability (Oodemene, 2020).

Monguno asserted that:

> Building trust between former combatants, their families and broader community seems to be critical weakness in the current Borno Model, identifying the lack of   community "buy-in" and ownership suggesting that, the reintegration process has no sufficiently involved local community members, families and traditional authorities in the planning and implementation (Monguno, May 2024).

Opportunities and Approaches of Reintegration in Boko Haram Affected Areas

The World Bank, (2004) highlight the link between successful reintegration and reduced criminal activity. According to this assertion, "Crime and insecurity can result from failure to achieve reintegration". The DDR program must include robust public education to inform communities and ex-fighters about the reintegration strategy, as the return of former combatants may pose genuine or perceived security risks.

Splintering armed factions impact strategic communication by promoting misinformation and deceit within DDR processes (Breitung et al., 2021). This has worsened actor fragmentation and divisions within armed factions and on social media. Armed organizations engage in public communication campaigns to promote their views, using rumours, misinformation, and disinformation to undermine the DDR process. This communication environment is rife with incorrect or misleading information regarding the DDR processes' objectives.

Though, the sensitisation initiatives that utilises local language to solve cultural linguistics differences have been launched through television and radio campaigns to raise awareness on the benefit of DDRR for ex-combatants and the communities, reintegration goals have been hindered by poor communication and leading to misunderstandings and ultimately, recidivism. While the government provides reinsertion support, many ex-combatants erroneously believe they will be lifelong dependents, expecting continued financial assistance even after completing programmes. This misconception stems from a lack of clear communication regarding the government's reintegration goals and the ex-combatants' responsibilities in achieving sustainable self-sufficiency lead to frustration and disillusionment among the ex-combatants.

Therefore, it is necessary to monitor and manage information and disinformation in DDR scenarios (Breitung et al., 2021). Promoting effective initiatives to reduce armed violence relies on collecting and analysing reliable data on its origins and repercussions (James and Potter, 2008). A strong, long-term public awareness campaign is essential to keep communities and ex-combatants informed about reintegration efforts. The innovative use of media can increase public awareness and sensitization about DDR activities by offering frequent programming information and updates (IDDRS 2014).

To raise awareness of DDR's purpose, comprehensive community sensitisation activities, including larger peace-building themes, are required. Peace-building sessions and other community sensitization programs have been implemented in affected areas to encourage open dialogue among local citizens, religious leaders, and traditional authorities. These initiatives aim to improve understanding, foster mutual trust, and resolve issues among various ethnic groups in society (Salem et al., 2022).

The Borno State Government and Operation Hadin Kai launched television and radio campaigns to raise awareness of the plan that will benefit both OPSC graduates and the communities. The Borno State Commissioner for Women Affairs and Social Development makes regular visits to villages to share information about OPSC graduates' reintegration. These activities are part of a broader plan to raise awareness and educate communities about the benefits of admitting rehabilitated ex-combatants. Furthermore, as mobile phones become more common, mass SMS can assist DDR participants, implementers, and communities in becoming more engaged and committed to the program. It can also be used to communicate job opening information and build a support network during times of unemployment (Zena, 2013).

The OPSC provides start-up kits to each graduate and at least two reintegrated community members, assisting with community rehabilitation and reintegration initiatives in accordance with DDR's operational and programme objectives. These initiatives involve both community members and former

combatants. This aids individuals' reintegration into their environment and reduces tension and complaints (Bakare, May 2024). When former warriors return to their communities, security issues typically arise. The demobilized and their dependents may pose a significant security danger to receiving communities due to a lack of work, education, or training, trauma from the conflict, and a militarized attitude (Cornelis Steenken & Langholtz).

Strengthening community ownership and engagement is critical to the long-term success of these efforts (Monguno, May 2024). Family and community support are essential components of the rehabilitation and reintegration process. Any de-radicalisation treatment that does not take into account the family and community context is unlikely to succeed (Onapoju & Ozden, 2020). Communities and families play an important influence in changing attitudes and behaviors and lowering recidivism rates (Fink, 2015). For demobilised people and their dependents to effectively reintegrate, community and family support are critical, as is the local population's perception of vulnerability, as they often lack the means or incentive to assist former combatants. According to Steenken and Langholtz (2017), OPSC has helped communities prepare by conducting advance family tracing visits.

Reconciliation efforts gain credibility and momentum when they are visible and effective, ensuring that former combatants contribute positively to society while also enhancing trust and social cohesion. Successful reintegration requires communities to be prepared to accept former fighters back, which can only occur in a reconciled environment. These activities are tied to Nigeria's overall peace-building strategy. Reconciliation and reintegration are essential components of the OPSC's rehabilitation program for clients and ex-combatants. It ensures that combatants are reintegrated into society following proper reconciliation with their families and communities (Schmid, 2013).

Interfaith discussion can benefit victims and remorseful Boko Haram collaborators begin the healing process in communities that value community-level truth-telling. In towns affected by Boko Haram, religious and community leaders serve as interlocutors, promoting discussion and peace-building under the well-known Islamic framework known as Sulhu. This paradigm promotes forgiveness, healing, reconciliation, trust, and community cohesiveness (Hassan, November 2023). Furthermore, the participation of local communities, religious groups, and non-governmental organizations has proven to be extremely beneficial in reintegration projects that prioritize social cohesiveness and neighbourhood-based partnerships (USIP, 2018). In the affected areas, NGOs, local organizations, and religious leaders have all supported reintegration efforts.

The Integrated Disarmament Demobilisation and Reintegration Standards (IDDRS) urged community-based local staff to develop sensitisation and public awareness programs on mental health and related psycho-social issues. This is to sensitize the community to the symptoms experienced by those suffering from mental illness and the impairment of associated functioning. Effort should be made to de-stigmatize the issues experienced by psychologically disturbed individuals (IDDRS, 2014).

Traumatising experiences during violent wars, such as those involving Boko Haram, destroy social capital and make recovery difficult. Furthermore, the death of family members might significantly impede former fighters' reintegration into society (Colletta et al., 1996). To address these concerns, initiatives have been launched to improve mental health treatment in Boko Haram-affected communities. Former combatants, including Boko Haram members, get mental health assistance and skill development under the Nigerian military's Operation Safe Corridor (UNGA, 2014). Furthermore, individuals affected by the Boko Haram conflict have received counselling and psychological support from Medecins Sans Frontières (MSF) (Ezedike et al., 2020).

Aside from direct assistance, other activities include family support groups, community dialogues, reconciliation and conflict resolution training for community leaders, and radio broadcasts to raise public awareness about the reintegration process. Mobile teams offer direct psychosocial support, lay counselling, recreational activities, and referrals to specialized mental health services (Giardinelli, 2017). These explicit efforts to address trauma are critical reintegration components of Disarmament Demobilisation Rehabilitation Reintegration (DDRR).

Reintegration has been carried out progressively, with external coordination efforts playing a significant role. Despite the difficulty of developing a long-term legal and policy framework for demobilization and reintegration, donors are overseeing the defection and rehabilitation of low-level BH members through more comprehensive programs. The Nigerian government, USAID, UNDP, and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) collaborated to develop a legal and policy framework that will guide future reintegration efforts (Brechenmacher, 2019).

Civil-Military Cooperation (CIMIC) programmes increase development and trust by promoting social cohesion and collaboration between affected communities and security forces (Amnesty International, 2014). However, it appears that civil society organizations, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and local community organizations play a limited role in fighting violent extremism. Although some academics and religious leaders attempt to provide counter-narratives and de-radicalization messages, these efforts are not always well-planned or coordinated (Monguno, May 2024).

The National Orientation Agency's town hall events serve as a good illustration of this strategy. These gatherings provided an opportunity for local communities to express concerns concerning the rehabilitation and reintegration of persons previously connected with Boko Haram and ISWAP. Furthermore, government authorities were able to address these concerns and emphasize the importance of the reintegration process as part of the DDRR/SPRR program (Salem et al., 2022).

Former fighters interact with local community and civil society leaders to evaluate which activities are appropriate for their area. These exercises instil a sense of responsibility in former warriors as they reintegrate into society. The majority of graduates reported having access to counsellors, a network of supportive family and friends, a helpful religious organization, a sense of belonging, enough accommodation, a job, and financial stability (USAID, 2021). The Borno State Government and OPSC collaborated with local leaders to promote community acceptance of rehabilitated former comrades through on-going awareness efforts. To provide updates on the reintegration process of OPSC alumni, and have organised regular travels to villages and conversations with local leaders (Salem et al., 2022).

According to Owonikoko (2022), IOM and BAY states play an important role in preparing communities to receive returned combatants. Verifying that an IOM team would travel to the village where the ex-combatants have been relocated in order to tell them about the returnees' new outlook and assist the community in preparing. Quick-win efforts are launched for the community if the former combatant agrees; otherwise, they are told and relocated to another community. Monguna (May 2024) emphasized, however, that the lack of community ownership and buy-in indicates that the reintegration process has not adequately included families, traditional authorities, and members of the local community inits planning and execution, arguing for greater community ownership and participation.

Overly, successful post-conflict transitions necessitate effective DDRR programmes that prioritise both individual reintegration, addressing the social, economic, and psychological needs of ex-combatant and community-level reconciliation, fostering community acceptance and trust, as exemplified by the Borno model, which demonstrates the importance of localised, community-based approaches that adapt to

specific regional needs, ultimately contributing to long-term peace. However, the Nigerian government must communicate its reintegration goals and roles, engage communities to foster trust and acceptance, develop long-term programs to address ex-combatants' socioeconomic needs, ensure transparency and accountability in the reintegration process, and collaborate with civil society organisations to improve the effectiveness of reintegration programmes.

Conclusion

Nigeria's government has used a diversified approach to confront the Boko Haram insurgency. DDRR initiatives aim to address the fundamental causes of violence through community-based reintegration and military operations. The success of programs like Operation Safe Corridor indicates how peaceful tactics can be used to limit the power of armed groups. However, the conflict's dynamic nature needs a creative and adaptable response that balances balance between post-conflict stabilisation efforts and security operations. Efficient post-conflict transitions beyond security measures rely on successful DDRR initiatives. Such initiatives must prioritise both community-level reconciliation, which encourages acceptance and trust throughout society, and individual reintegration, which meets the social, economic, and psychological needs of former fighters.

The Borno State strategy exemplifies the importance of community-based, locally tailored initiatives that consider the area's specific needs and constraints. Even though issues such as psychological trauma, community humiliation, and a lack of community involvement persist, effective reintegration programmes are critical to sustaining peace and stability over time. They reduce recidivism, promote social cohesion, and help to prevent future violence. Community-focused activities, such as increased community ownership and communication, are required to solve these challenges. By providing trauma-informed care and mental health support, it is also essential to address the psychological needs of impacted communities and former combatants. Finally, in the post-Boko Haram era, efforts include community-based projects, interfaith discussions, public education campaigns, interfaith dialogues, and community-based projects that present potential opportunities for effective reintegration and long-term peace-building.

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