

Reintegration of Ex-Combatants and Peacebuilding in Terrorised Communities in Northeastern Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the impact of community awareness and reception on the reintegration programme in terrorised communities in Northeastern Nigeria and how it influences peacebuilding efforts in the area. With primary focus on Maiduguri and Bama Local Government Areas (LGAs) of Borno State, the study relied on both primary and secondary methods for data collection and adopted the mixed-methods approach using qualitative and quantitative data. The study's main priorities were to actively engage actors involved in the design, strategy, and implementation of the reintegration programme, and to ensure that the programme design and execution were contextually relevant. Integrated Peacebuilding theory guided the study, providing a lens through which to better understand the findings of numerous studies. The study identified major gaps and opportunities in strategic engagements and coordination among stakeholders. In particular, it revealed a significant problem in how ex-combatants are screened and categorized in reception centers, which has been criticized for its lack of a systematic or standardized approach. The study also identified gaps in the implementation process of the reintegration programme, such as poor hygiene conditions in the camps, the short-lived and transactional nature of the programme due to a mass wave of defections and increased demand and expectations. Additionally, there was a lack of monitoring mechanisms to assess the success and achievements of the reintegration programme, as well as a lack of coordination among various stakeholders. The study provided valuable recommendations for improving the reintegration programme, emphasizing the importance of including host communities and grassroots levels in the planning and implementation process, better coordination between federal and state governments, and the development of standardized tools for screening and categorizing repentant individuals.

Key Words: Reintegration, Ex-combatants, Peacebuilding, Northeast Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the global community has increasingly recognized the critical importance of successful reintegration programmes for ex-combatants in post-conflict societies. Nowhere is this need more pronounced than in regions afflicted by protracted violence, such as Borno State in Northeast Nigeria. Borno State has been at the epicenter of the Boko Haram insurgency, a conflict characterized by its complexity, brutality, and devastating impact on communities (Guterres, 2022). As the conflict ebbs and flows, efforts to reintegrate ex-combatants into society have emerged as a pivotal component of broader peacebuilding initiatives aimed at fostering stability, reconciliation, and sustainable peace (McMullin, 2013; McNamee and Muyangwa, 2021).

The reintegration of ex-combatants is a multifaceted process encompassing social, economic, and psychological dimensions. It involves facilitating the transition of former fighters from a state of conflict to one of peaceful coexistence within their communities (Ike et al. 2021; Ike et al 2023). However, in contexts like Borno State, reintegration efforts face numerous challenges stemming from poor awareness and misperceptions, deeply entrenched grievances, traumas, and structural inequalities that underpin the conflict (International Crisis Group, 2023). Moreover, the mass wave of surrender amidst societal pessimism due

continued attacks exacerbate the complexities of reintegration and pose significant obstacles to lasting peace (Adekola, et al. 2024).

This paper seeks to explore the impact of reintegration programmes for ex-combatants on peacebuilding in Borno State, with a particular focus on social awareness, reception and how this influenced peacebuilding in the raved communities. By examining the successes, failures, and lessons learned from existing initiatives, this study aims to contribute to the understanding of how reintegration can be leveraged as a tool for sustainable peace in post-conflict settings. Drawing on fieldwork, interviews, and a review of relevant literature, this study seek to shed light on the factors that facilitate or hinder the effective reintegration of ex-combatants and the broader implications for peace and stability in Borno State.

Central to the study is the recognition that successful reintegration goes beyond mere demobilization and reintegration into the society. It requires addressing the root causes of conflict, promoting social cohesion, and rebuilding trust (USAID – Bureau of Conflict Prevention and Stabilization, 2022). Moreover, it demands a holistic approach that integrates economic opportunities, psychosocial support, and community reconciliation efforts. Only through such comprehensive interventions can ex-combatants truly become agents of positive change and contribute to the consolidation of peace in their communities (Kilroy, 2011; Torjesen, 2013; Subedi, 2017).

As this paper delve into the complexities of reintegration and peacebuilding in Borno State, it is essential to acknowledge the agency and resilience of various actors, including development partners, community leaders, and grassroots initiatives. Their invaluable contributions play a vital role in shaping the trajectory of peacebuilding efforts and ensuring that the reintegration programme is contextually relevant and sustainable.

This study examines the attitude of host communities towards ex-combatants and its implications for the success of reintegration and peacebuilding in Maiduguri and Bama LGAs of Borno state, Northeast Nigeria. The study focused on the communities' willingness to accept the reintegration of ex-combatants into society. Additionally, the study explored the processes of deradicalization for ex-combatants and the challenges they face during reintegration. In the overall, this study examined the impact of the reintegration programme on peacebuilding and how both are influenced by community awareness and reception of the programme.

This paper underscores the interconnectedness of reintegration and peacebuilding in Borno State, emphasizing the need for a nuanced understanding of local dynamics and a holistic approach to post-conflict recovery. By harnessing the potential of reintegration programme to address the root causes of conflict and promote reconciliation, and the findings can pave the way for a more peaceful and prosperous future for the people of Borno State and beyond.

Statement of Problem

Studies have shown that the implementation of ex-combatant reintegration has been characterized by a lack of proper community sensitization, leading to hostilities towards returnees and threatening reintegration efforts (Breckenmacher, 2018) . It is proven that reintegration programme often take place in fragile economies with limited formal employment opportunities, and gender disparity exists in deradicalization and reintegration programmes, with male ex-combatants receiving more assistance than females (McKay, 2004; Lamb et al. 2012; Altier et al., 2014; Barelle, 2015; Luna, 2019). Women and girls also face unique challenges in reintegration, including health issues and financial instability (Ike, et al., 2021; Omotuyi, 2022).

Furthermore, despite community engagement efforts, many communities remain reluctant to accept former insurgents. Contextual factors have a significant influence on the success of reintegration programme (Breckenmacher, 2018; CDD, 2022)

Moreso, the entire process has faced criticism for being quick and transactional. There are concerns about the screening process not being systematic, and there is no tracking of the impact of post-reintegration outcomes, among other issues (Owonikoko, 2022; Ike et al. 2023; Godefroidt and Langer, 2023).

This study aims to examine the impact of community awareness and acceptance of ex-combatant reintegration on peacebuilding in Maiduguri and Bama LGAs of Borno State. The research seeks to fill knowledge gaps regarding the reintegration programme's impact on peacebuilding in Northeastern Nigeria.

Reintegration and Peacebuilding: Conceptual Analysis

Knight (2008) posited that reintegration is a longer-term, open-ended social and economic process. Its aim is to help former fighters, as well as their families, assimilate into communities that may not be ready to accept them into civilian life (Knight, 2008). This process often involves providing former combatants with incentives in exchange for their promise not to return to hostilities, offering them long-term job or career training, initiating sustainable income-generation projects, facilitating the return of refugees and displaced people, and establishing forums and processes for truth and reconciliation (Zena, 2013). Reintegration is sustained when local capacity is increased, war-affected individuals contribute to their communities, and post-conflict societies learn to resolve issues without resorting to violence (Knight, 2008).

According to Torjesen (2013) the process of reintegration involves combatants transforming their status from combatant to civilian and modifying their behavior by ceasing to use violent methods and increasing activities that are accepted by the majority society (Torjesen, 2013). Violent extremist reintegration refers to the process through which individuals who leave violent extremism adopt a typical "pro-social" identity and function in society (Knight, 2008). Successful reintegration entails abandoning one's violent extremist personality (Altier, 2021). Reintegration as a set of support activities provided to ex-combatants (Torjesen, 2013).

Reintegration is the programming activity of aiding combatants' return to society in their transition from combatant to civilian identity. Reintegration is the social and economic process by which ex-combatants return to communities, build economic livelihoods, and perhaps most importantly, rebuild social connections in the community and reshape their self-identity in the eyes of society, from one of soldier to civilian, with or without assistance from reintegration programs. (Rhea, 2014, p.25)

The readiness of former fighters to reintegrate, as well as the level of acceptance from communities, plays an important roles in this process (Ozderem, 2012; Salihu, 2021). The goal of reintegration is to reduce the likelihood of future conflict by disarming society (disarmament), dismantling command and control structures (demobilization), and facilitating the integration of former combatants into society, civilian life or the state's security forces (reintegration) (Knight, 2008; Rabassa et al., 2010; Torjesen, 2013; Saldner, 2020; Altier, 2021).

Peacebuilding

One of the most profound definitions was provided by Boutros-Ghali (1992), he referred to peacebuilding as "a sum of strategies and actions undertaken at the end of civil war through the deployment of military and civilian personnel, with the aim to identify and support structures that strengthen and solidify peace" (Boutros-Ghali, 1992; UN, 1992; Milica et al., 2015). Keating and Knight note that "since peacebuilding aims to ensure lasting peace, it involves much more than a cessation of hostilities" (Keating and Knight 2004). These academics view peacebuilding as a proactive method to address the underlying causes of conflict and reduce the likelihood of a resumption of hostilities (Menon, 2019).

In the Brahimi Report (2000), there is an elaborate conceptualization of post-conflict peacebuilding as "Activities undertaken after conflict to rebuild the foundations of peace and provide tools for building on those foundations, aiming for more than just the absence of war" (Brahimi Report, 2000). In this context, peacebuilding focuses on eradicating the root causes of violence and is a comprehensive effort involving political, legal, economic, social, and cultural institutions, as well as complementary and mutually reinforcing security techniques (Menon, 2019). Disagreements arise regarding objectives, methods for achieving them, roles of national and international parties involved, and timelines. Although there is widespread agreement that peacebuilding is a lengthy process, the specifics of what it entails are subject to debate (Brahimi Report, 2000).

According to Peacebuilding Initiatives (2013), peacebuilding is seen as a holistic term that encompasses, creates, and supports a range of processes, approaches, and phases required to shift conflict towards more sustainable, peaceful partnerships. Thus, peace is understood as more than just a moment or a state; it is a dynamic social construct (Peacebuilding Initiatives, 2013).

Peacebuilding is now recognized as a crucial aspect throughout the entire conflict cycle, encompassing the stages before, during, and after the conflict. This implies that sustaining peace should occur simultaneously with peacekeeping, development efforts, and humanitarian activities (UN, 2022).

According to the UN, sustainable peace is both a goal and a process. It focuses on preventing the outbreak, continuation, escalation, and recurrence of violent conflicts. This involves addressing root causes, engaging parties involved in conflict to cease hostilities, facilitating national reconciliation, and transitioning towards recovery, reconstruction, and development. Achieving this requires a comprehensive, coordinated, and coherent approach encompassing political processes, safety and security, rule of law and human rights, social services, core government functions, economic revitalization, and livelihoods (UN, 2023).

The evaluation of various conceptual discourses has highlighted key insights. Reintegration is a long-term, ongoing process that aims to support former combatants and their families in integrating into communities that may initially be hesitant to accept them. This process is crucial for achieving sustainable peace as an inclusive and harmonious society is vital for maintaining order. The primary objectives of reintegration include transitioning combatants to civilian status, promoting non-violent conduct, and encouraging community-approved activities.

Numerous scholarly work have established a strong correlation between reintegration programme and peacebuilding in post-conflict situations. Some scholars argued it is practically illusive to think of achieving peace without reintegrating ex-combatants in post-conflict situation (Subedi, 2018; Sharif, 2018; Suarez and Baines, 2021).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Integrated Peacebuilding Theory

Zelizer et. al., (2013) in a book titled *Integrated Peacebuilding: Innovative Approach to Transformative Conflict* described the concept of "Integrated Peacebuilding", emphasizing the significance of integrating peacebuilding techniques into a variety of fields, particularly those that require the greatest attention, such as development, humanitarian aid, gender issues, business, media, health, and the environment. For today's protracted wars to end in a lasting peace tomorrow, it is essential to incorporate peacebuilding strategies in these domains (Zelizer, et. al. 2013).

The "integrated framework of peacebuilding" by Paul Lederach served as the foundation of integrated peacebuilding model, which proposed that actors and particular methodologies are subsystems that allow peacebuilding strategies to be developed from a local situation while considering systemic structural issues. To address the complex nature of protracted social conflicts, Lederach's model combines a problem-solving approach to conflict resolution with a process-oriented approach (Fetherston, 2000).

Robert (2003) in a book titled "Network of effective Actions: Implementing an Integrated Approach for Peacebuilding" was amongst the earliest writers who advanced the main arguments of the Integrated Peacebuilding approach and argued that in order to be effective in future complex conflicts, organizations working in the field of peacebuilding must adopt a holistic, integrated approach to peacebuilding that combines traditionally separate disciplines like human rights, humanitarian aid, sustainable development, environment, conflict resolution, security, and the rule of law. As a collection of cooperative activities that can facilitate integrated approaches to peacebuilding on the ground and in terms of the theoretical advancement of the subject (Robert, 2003).

This study identifies the lens of Integrated Peacebuilding theory as being more instrumental in guiding a broader perspective to the understanding of the research subject, the study context, and the chosen methodology. This study has chosen this theoretical lens as it is more aligned to the tenets since it is advocating for the mainstreaming of diverse actors, resources, and strategies in addressing the complex sources of the conflict and facilitating a sustained peace process through multi-track implementation strategy and action. This theoretical approach is also very instrument to this study because it offers the problem-solving approach that aims to strengthen the connection between social structures and governing institutions so that they operate together as a concerted force to pursue a single objective through a coordinated framework for action.

The further justification for choosing Integrated Peacebuilding Theory is because of its policy-oriented approach that seeks a unified front for managing post-conflict situations.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study uses the combination of qualitative and quantitative data, leveraging both primary and secondary sources, through the administration of structured and unstructured interviews, and by using open and closed-ended questionnaires. Questionnaires were distributed to respondents in the target locations, while interviews and focused group discussions were conducted with specific participants in ensuring a thorough examination of the target group. The goal was to gather firsthand perspectives from affected populations regarding the study topic. By using methods that provide extensive coverage, this approach avoids potential biases in data collection and analysis. The mixed method is chosen because it combines the strengths of each data type and allows for a deeper understanding of peacebuilding issues and potential solutions. This approach enables a detailed interpretation of the data, clarifies quantitative results, and addresses the generalizability of qualitative conclusions drawn from small samples.

To collect and analyze data on the large population, a survey approach was used in this study. Both primary and secondary sources were utilized to analyze qualitative and quantitative data for a wide reflection and insight.

The quantitative data was analyzed using Tableau version 2023.2.1. Tableau was used to analyze and visualize the trends and relationships of the key variables in the survey data. It allowed for creating charts and graphs to gain better insights and establish facts. The tool supported advanced analytics, including statistical analyses and calculations. It also facilitated the presentation and interpretation of clearer results through a visual presentation.

For the qualitative data analysis, the narrative analysis method was employed. This method allows for the uncovering of behaviors, sensitivities, and motivations that are not explicitly stated, through the research participants' narratives based on their personal experiences.

Study Area

Maiduguri Metropolitan is the capital of Borno state, located at latitudes 1350 E and 1150 N. It is one of the largest commercial cities in northeastern Nigeria and serves as a transit hub, connecting routes to Chad, Niger, and Cameroon. Maiduguri covers an area of 69,436 square kilometers (km²) and has a population of approximately 1.2 million people (All Population, 2023; World Population Review, 2023; (All Populations, 2021; World Population Review, 2023; City Populations, 2022; Mapcarta, 2023; Media Nigeria, 2023). Maiduguri is located at the bottom of the Bama Ridge, which extends in a northwest/southeast direction from the Nigeria-Niger boundary to the Cameroun Mountains in the southeast. The topography to the northeast and southwest of Maiduguri is similarly flat and lacks significant variation. The area is primarily drained by the River Ngadda and its tributary (Daura 2001; Mala 2007; Bukar et al., 2022).

Bama is located along the Cameroonian border, approximately 60 kilometers from Maiduguri, and covers an area of 4,997 square kilometers. It used to be a thriving trade center along the Cameroon border and is the second-largest town in Borno state with a population of over 395,800 inhabitants (City Populations, 2022; Mapcarta, 2023; Media Nigeria, 2023). Bama is one of the LGAs severely impacted by the insurgency out of the twenty-seven LGAs in Borno State (UNDP, 2022). The majority of the inhabitants in these two LGAs belong to the Kanuri and Shuwa ethnic groups (Manpower, 2023; Media Nigeria, 2023).

Sampling Procedures

The population for this study consists of respondents and participants who meet the inclusion criteria and are selected based on various characteristics such as education levels, trades, and professions. They are drawn from different parts of Bama and Maiduguri LGAs in Borno State.

The study utilized the stratified sampling technique to divide the population into sub-groups and randomly select samples from each sub-group. This approach allowed for better control over the relative sizes of the different groups and ensured equal representation for each category within the overall population. It also facilitated the calculation of statistical relationships between the sample and the population, as well as the determination of sampling errors.

Considering a cumulative population of 1,559,800 in Maiduguri and Bama LGAs, a 98% confidence level, and a 4% margin of error, the standard sample size was obtained using the Finite Population Correction Factor (FPC) as shown below:

$$n = \frac{Z^2 \times p \times \{1-p\}}{E^2}$$

(Knaub, 2008; Lai et al. 2018; Frane, 2022)

Where:

- n is the required sample size
- Z is the z-score corresponding to the desired confidence level
- P is the estimated proportion of the population
- E is the margin of error

For a 98% confidence level, the Z-score is approximately 2.33.

Now,

$$n = \frac{(2.33)^2 \times 0.5 \times (1-0.5)}{(0.04)^2}$$

$$n \approx \frac{5.4289 \times 0.25}{0.0016}$$

$$n \approx \frac{1.357225}{0.0016}$$

$$n \approx 848.265625$$

Rounded up to the nearest whole number since we have a fraction of a person in sample.

So, the required sample size is approximately 849.

Therefore, a sample size of 849 is needed to achieve a 98% confidence level with a 4% margin of error for a population of 1,559,800.

Method of Data Collection

Closed-ended questionnaires were administered to ensure consistency in responses. The study aimed to collect information on the effects of ex-combatant reintegration in promoting positive change in the target communities, as well as its impact on peaceful coexistence and peacebuilding. This was complemented by in-depth interviews with key informants and focused group discussions involving different sections of society.

Questionnaires were distributed to the literate respondents for completion, while the researcher personally administered them to respondents with a low level of education. The questionnaires ensured wider participation and a high response rate, while minimizing effort and time.

Table 1.0 Disaggregation of Administration of Questionnaire in the LGAs Selected for the Study

State	Local Government Area	Strata	No. of Questionnaires Issued	No. of Questionnaires Returned	Percentage of Questionnaires Issued and Returned
Borno	Maiduguri	Informal Education	84	81	96%
		Islamic/Qur'anic Education	84	82	98%
		Primary/Secondary Level	84	83	99%
		Diploma/Certificate Level	83	83	100%
		Bachelors/Advanced Degrees	83	83	100%
		Others	83	83	100%
	Bama	Informal Education	58	49	84%
		Islamic/Qur'anic Education	58	50	86%
		Primary/Secondary Level	58	50	86%
		Diploma/Certificate Level	58	50	86%
		Bachelors/Advanced Degrees	58	50	86%
		Others	58	49	84%
Total			849	793	93%

Source: Dissertation Research Design

The interviews and questionnaires were conducted in English. However, for illiterate or non-English-speaking participants, the researcher translated the questions and selected their preferred answers. Respondents were assured that their responses would remain anonymous and not be used to personally identify them.

Table 1.1 Disaggregation of Interview Participants - Maiduguri and Bama

Participants	Number Interviewed	Percentage
OPSC/MWASD Staff	3	9%
INGO/NGO Staff	6	18%
Civilian Joint Taskforce CJTF/Community Vigilante	4	12%
Reintegrated Ex-combatants	10	30%
Community Members/Leaders	10	30%
Total	33	100%

Source: Dissertation Research Design

Focused group discussions were also held to engage different participant categories in detailed conversations about the subject matter. This allowed for a more comprehensive understanding of the participants' viewpoints and beliefs.

Table 1.2 Breakdown of Focused Group Discussion (FGD) Participants Maiduguri and Bama LGAs

FGD	No of FGDs	Percentage
Community Leaders of Reintegration Locations	3	33%
Host Community Members (Male)	2	22%
Host Community Members (Female)	1	11%
Civilian Joint Taskforce (CJTF) Members	1	11%
OPSC Graduands	1	11%
Self-Integrated Ex-combatants	1	11%
Total	9	100%

Source: Dissertation Research Design

Reintegration of Ex-combatants and Peacebuilding in Borno State, Northeastern Nigeria

In 2016, the federal government launched OPSC, a programme aimed at addressing the challenges posed by former members of Boko Haram. This initiative was implemented to counter terrorism and build on Nigeria's National Counter-terrorism Strategy. The programme provides deradicalization training, education, vocational training, and psychosocial support to help these individuals reintegrate into their communities. It also seeks to

persuade willing and repentant Boko Haram terrorists to surrender and embrace peace (Tar and Banu, 2023; Glazzard, 2023). The core objectives of the OPSC's reintegration programme is ending the dreaded violent insurgency through an alternative means in enabling the continued surrender of the members of the violent groups, weakening the operational capacity of the insurgent movement and facilitating restoration of peace through conciliatory process (Hassan, 2022; Salihu, 2021; Ogunnubi & Aja, 2022; Osungboye, 2021)

OPSC is an extensive programme that used a variety of techniques to accomplish a number of distinct goals. "To deradicalize, rehabilitate, and reintegrate defectors" or "repentant insurgents" is its core goal, this suggests defection from Boko Haram as well as behavioral and ideological changes as well as social acceptance. The deradicalization component addresses three issues: trauma, social and political grievances, and religious ideology (Bukarti and Bryson 2019; Onapajo and Ozden 2020; CDD, 2021). It was basically aimed to promote defections and encourage ex-combatants to change their behavior and to make them "more productive citizens" by addressing their psychological needs and influencing their beliefs; reintegration was viewed as a challenge for the future (CCCPA, 2022; International Crisis Group, 2021; CDD, 2021).

During the rehabilitation period, the repentant receive a variety of education and services to help with their reintegration. This includes vocational training in skills such as welding, farming, furniture making, barbering, shoemaking, and tailoring. According to OPSC graduates, this vocational training and business counseling have been instrumental in their successful reintegration into the community (UNDP, 2023). Community members also acknowledge the benefits of having skilled OPSC graduate's return. In addition to vocational training, the individuals also receive psychological assistance to help them live in harmony with others, follow social norms, and heal from trauma and violent thoughts (CCCPA, 2022). OPSC arranges visits to the camps in an effort to further foster and promote community acceptance. On one hand, these visits give family and community members a personal look into the rehabilitation process, which can help them reassure their local communities. Nonetheless, these visits allay the repentant' worries that they won't be pardoned and welcomed back into their communities. Government representatives have also paid visits to raise awareness about the reintegration process and help it along (UNDP, 2023).

Upon reintegration into their communities, graduates of OPSC continue to be eligible for business development and psychological assistance. While communities may initially have concerns about security when former associates return, the majority view OPSC graduates as having successfully undergone rehabilitation (UNDP, 2023; Tar and Banu, 2023). This positive perception is a result of ongoing campaigns by the states to raise community awareness and promote acceptance of reintegrated former associates. These campaigns are carried out in collaboration with community partners and leaders (CCCPA, 2023). As part of these efforts, representatives from OPSC and the Borno State administration have launched radio and television awareness campaigns to further promote community acceptance and highlight the benefits of the programme for OPSC graduates. It is undeniable that the OPSC programme has achieved significant results, particularly by providing associates of violent groups with an opportunity for personal growth and development, which many had previously considered futile or were coerced into joining (UNDP, 2023).

OPSC not only offers job training and psychosocial support to help former members of terrorist organizations, but it also assists them in becoming productive members of society. The Bulumkutu and Shokari transit centers in Maiduguri, along with OPSC, are part of the national effort. Borno State oversees these centers with the help of development partners (Tar and Banu, 2023). The journey through OPSC begins when those who have surrendered leave areas controlled by the violent group and present themselves at designated checkpoints in Northeastern Nigeria. At these checkpoints, they undergo an initial investigation, including screening, classification, and vetting to determine their level of involvement in the insurgency. Those classified as low risk are sent to OPSC camps, while those deemed high-risk are referred to correctional institutions (CCCPA, 2022; UN Peacebuilding, 2022; Glazzard, 2023). Community members also acknowledge the benefits of having skilled OPSC graduate's return. In addition to vocational training, the individuals also receive psychological assistance to help them live in harmony with others, follow social norms, and heal from trauma and violent thoughts (CCCPA, 2022).

Moreso, the development of Borno Model for Reconciliation and Reintegration was supported by UNDP. At the same time, UNDP assisted the State Government in creating the Community Based Reconciliation and Reintegration policy (CRR) document. Consequently, UNDP is already supporting the various State Departments and committees involved in the operationalization of the Borno Model and CRR policy with regard to technical assistance and capacity building. Within the Governor's office, technical competence has been merged (UN Peacebuilding, 2022). UNDP's technical expertise has solidified experience in providing government partners in crisis and post-conflict settings with mechanisms for capacity development similar to mass defections in other regions of the world. As a result, the UNDP is now seen by the government of Borno State as a strategic partner (UNDP, 2023).

Borno Model aims to strengthen services and service delivery in communities of reintegration while intervening from the point of surrender of individuals into military reception channels in local government areas, through their identification and evaluation in the transition centers in Maiduguri, to their community-level reintegration. Moreso, the Borno State Community Based Reconciliation and Reintegration policy, encourages the application of the Model's community-focused approach (UN Peacebuilding, 2022).

Awareness and Acceptance of Reintegration of Ex-combatants in Nigeria

Reintegrating former fighters is a contentious process that frequently sparks criticism from the public, especially when they have joined so-called terrorist organizations (Renard & Coolsaet, 2018; Godefroidt and Langer, 2023). For instance, the Nigerian army declared on July 25, 2020, that roughly 600 ex-Boko Haram members will be reintegrated back into society. Many Nigerians expressed vehement resistance to this decision, which generated broad alarm throughout the country (Ogunlade, 2020).

Experiences of the violent insurgency is still in the mind of the people as the victims of insurgency find it difficult to move on, added to the trauma, is feelings of inattention from the government, given the perception that the repentant insurgents are treated more compassionately than their victims of the insurgency (Brechenmacher, 2018; Onapajo & Ozden, 2020). People felt that it was too early for repentant extremists to be reintegrated into the community. They would have preferred a long-term rehabilitation exercise and greater support for both repentant extremists and the affected communities (Christian Science Monitors, 2022). By and large, many stakeholders saw the reintegration programme as unnecessary, wasteful, and a case of misplaced priorities (Ogunnubi & Aja, 2022).

Literatures identified the following as major challenges faced by the OPSC project: Public opinion and trust, there are two issues with this; defectors and would-be defectors frequently express reservations about the government's capacity to keep its commitments to them (Ike et al., 2021; Salihu, 2021); acceptance of the former insurgents by their communities and families presents the second barrier (Idayat and Laura, 2022; Gbadeyan et al., 2019; Salihu, 2021). The former combatants were directly or indirectly involved in the deaths of fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, and children of their kin, as well as the destruction of their farmland and means of subsistence, even though it has been established that forgiveness and acceptance play a significant role in preventing recidivism (Clubb & Tapley, 2018).

Huge resistance and concerns are also experienced due to the significant efforts being devoted to deradicalizing former combatants, while giving little thoughts or attention to the suffering of victims and host communities (Ike et al., 2021; Ogunnubi & Aja, 2022; Osungboye, 2021; Salihu, 2021). The inability to put an end to the insurgency makes the reintegration process more challenging and fosters mistrust between the government and the affected communities (Osungboye, 2021).

Despite the exercise's potential to resolve the seemingly unsolvable conflict that the group in the northeast sparked, there is widespread hostility to the programme throughout Nigeria (Omotuyi, 2022). More so, lack of community involvement structures in the deradicalization programme's design is clearly the cause of the issue of a heightened unfavorable perception and rejection by the communities (Onapajo & Ozden, 2020).

Relatively, a recent study established that while residents were more tolerant of former combatants who willingly chose to join the Boko Haram insurgency and afterwards helped bring about peace, they were less

inclined to reintegrate those who had deliberately chosen to leave the insurgency. These findings collectively imply that understanding how people feel about the reintegration of former combatants depends on their beliefs of danger and justice (Godefroidt and Langer, 2023).

Initially, OPSC encountered many difficulties in getting social acceptance, the target reintegration communities rejected an early cohort. However, by 2020, communities had become far more receptive than the graduates had anticipated. The biggest obstacle to DRR earlier was the continuing insurgency by factions of the violent extremist groups and the fact that, rather than taking place in the communities of return as planned, reintegration was initially in IDP camps. This emphasizes that DRR is occurring during an ongoing conflict and increases the possibility of secondary displacement, which was not ideal for reintegration (USAID Conflict Prevention and Stabilization, 2021).

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

Reintegration of Ex-combatants and the Impacts on Peacebuilding in Borno State

In the landscape of conflict resolution and post-conflict reconstruction, the reintegration of ex-combatants stands as a pivotal undertaking, embodying the delicate balance between justice, reconciliation, and sustainable peace. In the context of Borno State, Northeast Nigeria, where the echoes of the Boko Haram insurgency continue to reverberate, reintegration programme for ex-combatants emerges as a beacon of hope, offering a structured pathway for former combatants to reintegrate into society.

This study embarked on a critical examination of reintegration programme for repentant Boko Haram, aiming to assess its role in facilitating peacebuilding efforts in Borno State. With a keen focus on survey objectives, the inquiry seeks to unravel the multifaceted dynamics, shedding light on both the successes and challenges encountered in the implementation of this programme.

Central to our inquiry are two overarching objectives:

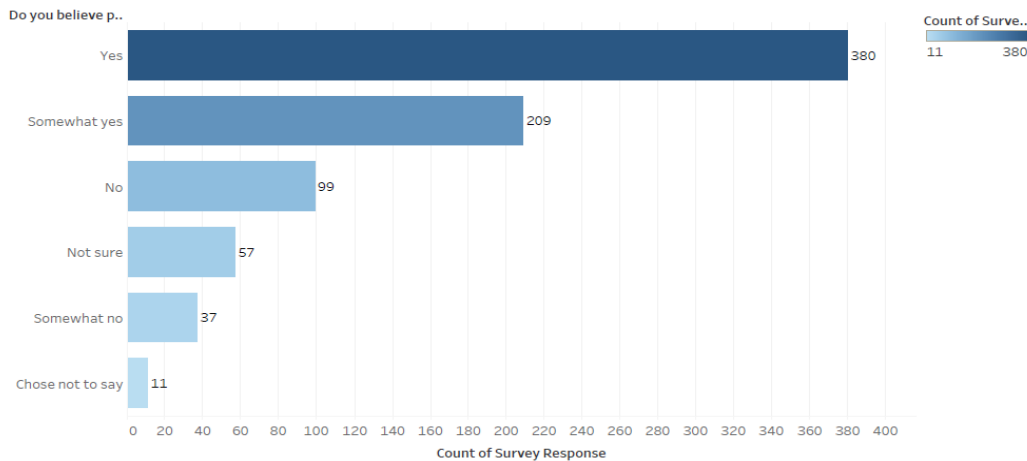
Assessment of reintegration programme's impact on peacebuilding: The first objective delves into the tangible outcomes of reintegration programme, seeking to evaluate its efficacy in fostering peace and stability in Borno State. Through a rigorous analysis of survey data and qualitative insights, the study aimed to ascertain the extent to which the programme has contributed to the broader peacebuilding agenda in the region. This entails examining metrics such as the reduction in violent incidents, improved community awareness and acceptance of reintegrated people, and the promotion of social cohesion.

Identification of challenges in the implementation: Complementing the assessment of the programme's impact is the second objective of this study, which centers on elucidating the challenges encountered in the implementation of reintegration programme. From design, implementation and socio-cultural complexities, this study endeavors to unravel the multifaceted obstacles that impede the effective reintegration of ex-combatants into society. By delineating these challenges, this study seeks to provide evidence-based policy recommendations aimed at enhancing the programme's efficacy and addressing systemic barriers to peacebuilding.

While the study navigates through the intricacies of reintegration programme, it is imperative to underscore the significance of this inquiry within the broader discourse on conflict resolution and post-conflict recovery. By interrogating the nexus between reintegration initiatives and peacebuilding processes, this study endeavors to contribute to a nuanced understanding of the complex dynamics shaping the trajectory of peacebuilding in Borno State and beyond.

With a commitment to empirical rigor and a dedication to amplifying the voices of those directly impacted by conflict, this study embark on this journey of exploration, guided by a shared aspiration for a more peaceful and prosperous future for the people of Borno State and all those affected by conflict worldwide.

Can Peace be Achieved Through Re-Integration of Ex-combatants?



Count of Survey Response for each Do you believe peace can be achieved through deradicalization and reintegration of ex-combatants?. Color shows count of Survey Response. The marks are labeled by count of Survey Response.

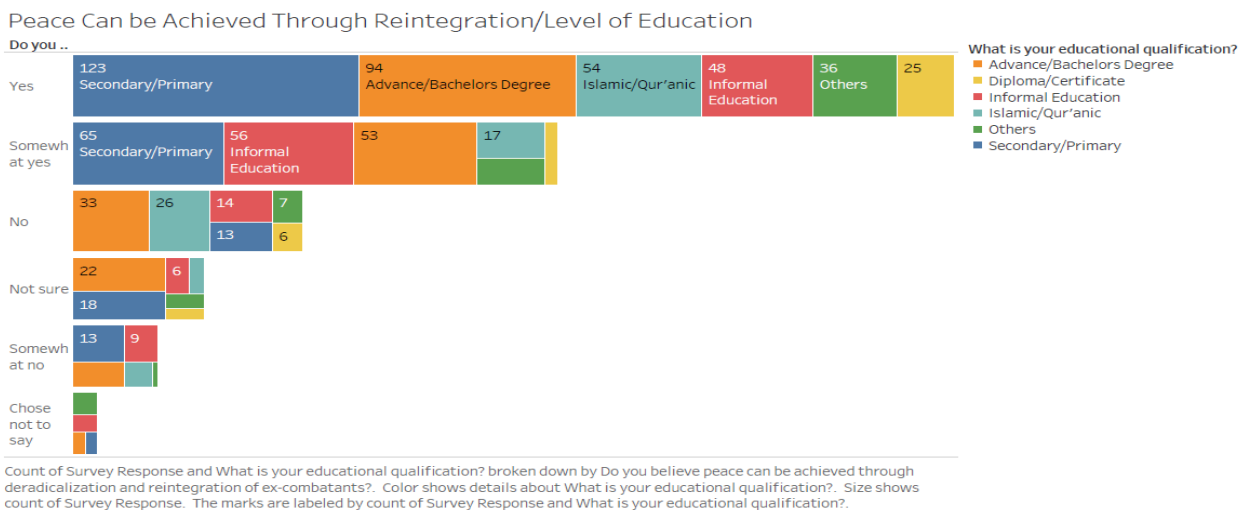
Fig. 1.3.

Source: Researcher’s survey

Figures 1.3 above and 1.4 below show the aggregated response to the question, "Do you believe peace can be achieved through the deradicalization and reintegration of ex-combatants?" Out of all categories of respondents, 380 (48%) responded "yes," while 209 (26.3%) responded "somewhat yes." Additionally, 99 (12.4%) and 57 (7.1%) responded "no" and "not sure," respectively. These figures demonstrate a high level of optimism among the various categories of respondents regarding the potential success of the reintegration programme in sustaining peace.

FGD conducted by this study with community leaders of Moromti, a community that hosts a greater number of OPSC graduates in Maiduguri, revealed that the participants have witnessed sustained peace following the reintegration of ex-combatants. The reintegration programme has facilitated a sustained increase in the surrender of members of the violent group, which in turn has enabled continuous peace in their community. Prior to the reintegration programme, the community experienced a series of periodic overnight strikes and mortar attacks from the violent groups (FGD with Community Leaders of Moramti Community, Maiduguri – December 2023).

Can Peace be Achieved Through Re-Integration of Ex-combatants?



Count of Survey Response and What is your educational qualification? broken down by Do you believe peace can be achieved through deradicalization and reintegration of ex-combatants?. Color shows details about What is your educational qualification?. Size shows count of Survey Response. The marks are labeled by count of Survey Response and What is your educational qualification?.

Fig. 1.4.

Source: Researcher’s survey

The above information was confirmed through an interview conducted with a graduate of the OPSC programme. The graduate was at the time of the study volunteering at the Bulumkutu Rehabilitation Centre, continuing to support the reintegration process. The participant emphasized that the OPSC programme has played a significant role in facilitating peacebuilding. Graduates of the programme have successfully integrated into their host communities, both socially and economically, and have developed positive relationships within these communities. The participant also shared that their families are leading a normal life in the reintegration community, free from any form of discrimination or stigma. He stated, "Wherever I go, no one could tell that I was a former associate. People who are aware of my background and those who know me personally have never shown any apprehension towards me or my family" (KII Maiduguri December 2023).

The above statements further confirm the findings of a 2022 study sponsored by USAID, in which KII and FGD participants revealed a consistent decrease in violence trends as more former associates surrender. According to the study, 78% of participants from the Maiduguri community survey and 57% of respondents from Konduga reported feeling safer at the same level as before the return of the graduates (USAID – Bureau of Conflict Prevention and Stabilization, 2022). These statistics suggest that ex-combatants are successfully reintegrating into society, as indicated by the post-release experiences of OPSC graduates and the communities they have been reintegrated into (USAID – Bureau of Conflict Prevention and Stabilization, 2022).

The feedback gathered from an interview with a reintegration stakeholder in Bama LGA confirmed that the OPSC Programme has greatly contributed to the establishment of unprecedented peace, resulting in an extended period of calm and the elimination of anxiety caused by violent attacks. This has facilitated the return of a large number of people who had been displaced from their homes for an extended period of time. Additionally, it has allowed for the resumption of normal economic activities and livelihoods. The participant mentioned that "People can now travel between Bama and Maiduguri without any fear, and goods are transported freely without any hindrance". (KII Maiduguri December 2023).

Sustained Decrease in the Number of Insurgency Victims

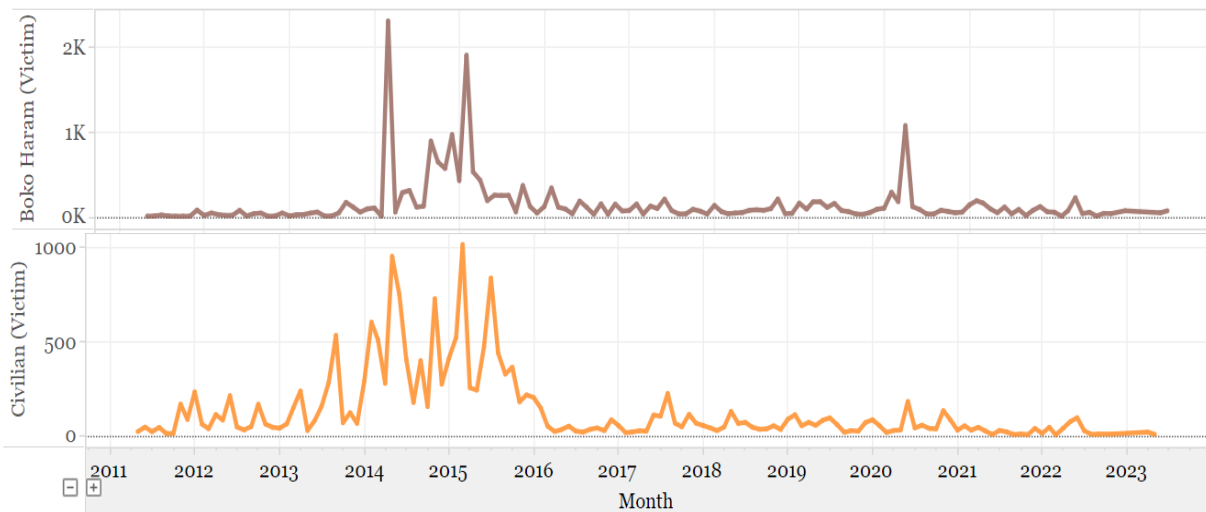


Fig 1.5.

Source: Council for Foreign Relations – Nigeria Security Tracker, 2023)

Moreover, an interview with a senior staff member from the Borno State Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development (the ministry responsible for rehabilitating unaccompanied and separated boys, girls, and women who were former associates of violent groups) revealed that the graduates of the OPSC programme exhibit good behavior due to their comprehensive social and cultural training. Additionally, after receiving adequate training and acquiring livelihood skills, they are successfully reintegrated into society. As a result, they undergo a complete transformation and seamlessly reintegrate into their communities. The interview also highlighted that awareness and receptiveness, particularly among the receiving communities, have significantly

improved as a result of extensive awareness campaigns and the tangible impact that the programme has had on sustaining peace in Borno State (KII Maiduguri December 2023).

Figure 1.5 above shows the Nigeria Security Incident Tracker of the Council on Foreign Relations, indicating a consistent decrease in civilian and Boko Haram victims from 2021. This supports the information gathered through key informant interviews and focused group discussions. Additionally, the data from the Cairo Center for Conflict Resolutions further confirms the Council on Foreign Relations' study, as it demonstrates a sustained decline in the number of civilian fatalities resulting from ISWAP and Boko Haram attacks. (Council on Foreign Relations – Nigeria Security Tracker, 2023).

Furthermore, interactions with community leaders through focused group discussions and key informant interviews in Maiduguri and Bama, where the graduates of the OPSC programme have primarily reintegrated (Moranti, Nguro Yobeye, Nguro Gogua, Nguro Soye, etc.), have revealed that the former associates have successfully reintegrated with their families. These individuals are actively participating in economic activities to sustain themselves. Notably, “A significant number of them have willingly offered their support to the security agencies in their fight against insurgency and military operations. Additionally, many others have been assisting local vigilante groups in community policing”. (KII Maiduguri December 2023).

An interview with the Director of the Bulumkutu Rehabilitation Center in Maiduguri revealed that thorough sensitization is conducted in the target reintegration communities. This sensitization emphasizes the importance of accepting the former associates back into society and highlights the dangers of rejecting them. Various channels are used for the sensitization, including radio programmes and engaging religious scholars across the OPSC camps. The goal is to ensure that former associates are well-educated and enlightened about mainstream Islamic teachings, with the aim of cleansing their minds of deviated dogma and indoctrination (KII Interview Maiduguri, December 2023).

The reduction can be attributed to a decrease in Boko Haram's operational capability, which has minimized the negative impact on civilian populations. Furthermore, mass defection has also played a role in contributing to this decline (CCCPA, 2022).

Trend of Attack Against Civilians in Borno State as a Result of Boko Haram and ISWAP 2019 – 2022

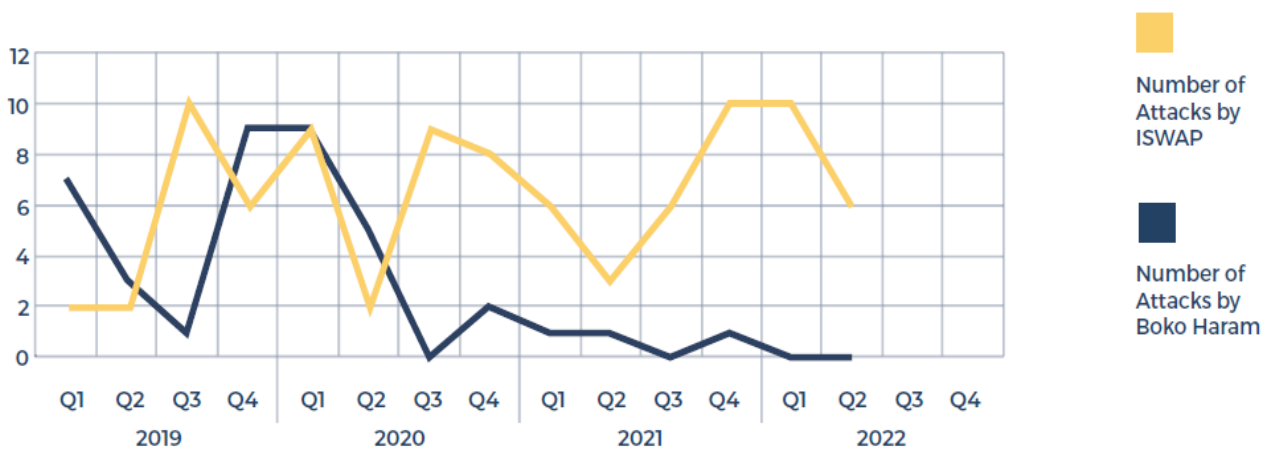


Fig 1.6.

Source: CCCPA, 2022.

A more detailed analysis of the quarterly data from the past two years, specifically figures 1.6 above and 1.7 below, highlights a significant turning point that occurred around the second quarter of 2021. During this period, the frequency of Boko Haram's attacks on civilians and the resultant casualties nearly ceased completely. In contrast, ISWAP's attacks continued to increase, along with the corresponding data (CCCPA, 2022).

Trend of Civilian Fatality in Borno State As A Result of Boho Haram and ISWAP Attacks 2019 – 2022

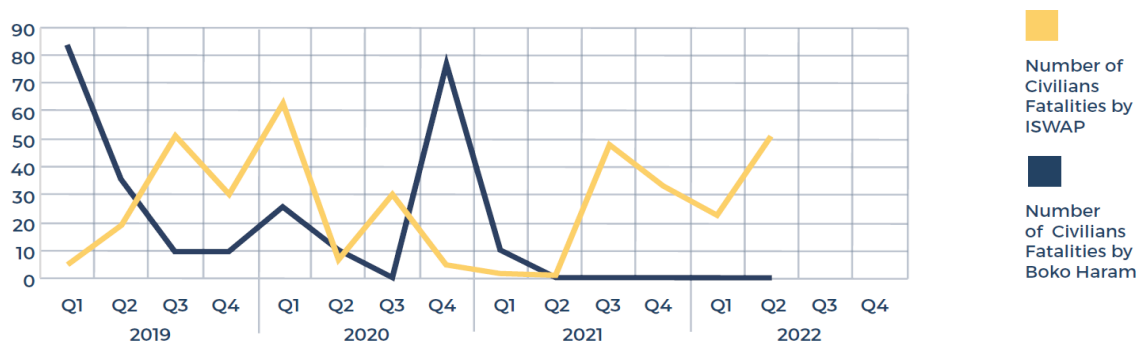


Fig. 1.7.

Source: CCCPA, 2022.

As of 10 June 2022, the Borno State government reports that 58,893 people who were once affiliated with both Boko Haram and ISWAP (although a significantly smaller number) have defected and turned themselves in to the Borno State government since August 16, 2021. This is an average of 200 to 300 people per day. These figures continue to rise (CCCPA, 2022).

The impact of the reintegration programme in facilitating peacebuilding can also be seen in the significant improvement recorded in Nigeria's ranking on the Global Terrorism Index. In 2021, Nigeria moved up two places from fourth to sixth, as shown in figures 1.8 and 1.9 below (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2023; World Data Atlas, 2023).

Nigeria's Terrorism Index (GTI) dropped from 8.23 points in 2021 to 8.07 points in 2022. From 2002 to 2022, Nigeria's Terrorism Index averaged 7.04 points, with a peak of 9.12 points in 2015 and a record low of 3.86 points in 2002 (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2023). This is a change of 2.04% (World Data Atlas, 2023). The 2024 Global Terrorism Index report, Nigeria recorded 7.5 points rating, maintaining the all-time average and 6th place as previous year. If the conflict between the two main insurgent group (ISWAP and Boko Haram) was excluded, terrorism deaths would have declined by 18 percent". (Institute for Economics & Peace Measuring the impact of terrorism, 2024

Nigeria Terrorism Trend Score 2014 - 2022

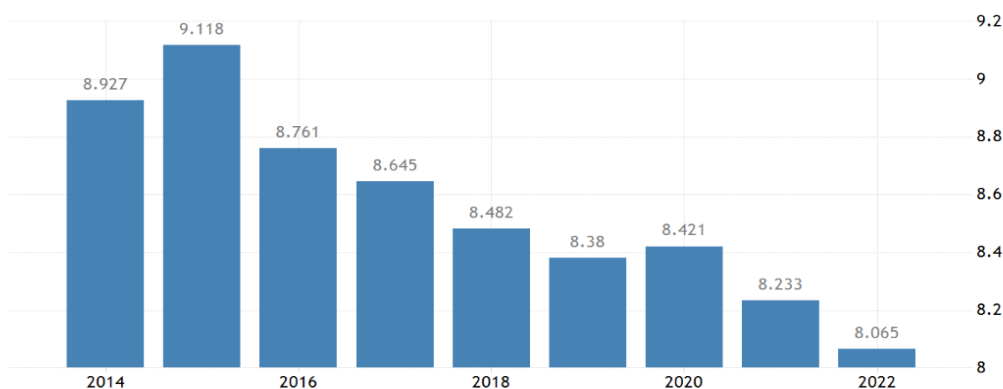


Fig. 1.8.

Source: Institute for Economics and Peace, 2023.

A significant contributing factor that not only encouraged subsequent waves of mass defections but also, more crucially, kept the momentum going over time, was the government of Borno State's message of assurance that those who surrender would not be executed or subjected to cruel treatment (CCCPA, 2022).

Nigeria Terrorism Trend Score 2010 - 2022

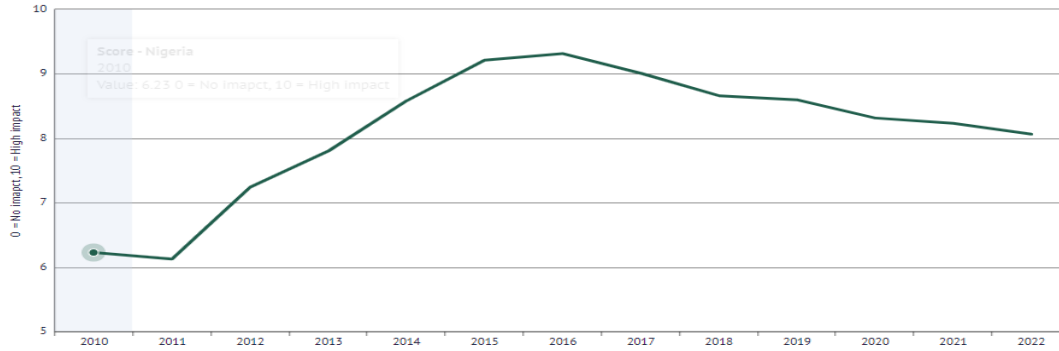


Fig. 1.9.

Source: World Data Atlas, 2023.

When given the choice, thousands of Boko Haram members have opted to surrender to state authorities instead of joining ISWAP. This is because they would be treated as inferior and forced into slavery if they joined ISWAP. They have made this decision because they have been assured that those who surrendered before them were not harmed or mistreated (UNDP, 2023). This is further confirmed by the findings of this study, through an interview granted by a Senior Staff of Borno State Ministry of Women Affairs that “ The programme has recorded thousands of defectors due to the assurances they’re getting through various channels, including all the reception centers on the outskirts of Mafa, Konduga, Bama etc.” and, considering the current caseload, the programme’s coverage of the repentant is just around 50%”. (KII Interview Maiduguri, December 2023).

Additionally, to instill a sense of peacebuilding in the former combatants, civic education was included in the OPSC training packages. The UNDP provided support for this, along with other services such as mental health psychosocial support, gender-based violence (GVB) counseling for survivors of abuse, case management, trauma counseling, family tracing, reunification, and sensitization. The OPSC programme heavily involves religious institutions in peacebuilding training. These institutions emphasize the importance of reconciliation, living harmoniously with host communities, seeking forgiveness, and practicing tolerance to the ex-combatants (KII Interview Maiduguri, December 2023).

Challenges Encountered Through the Implementation Operation Safe Corridor’s Reintegration Programme in Borno State

Challenges Encountered by the Former Associates Passing Through the OPSC Process

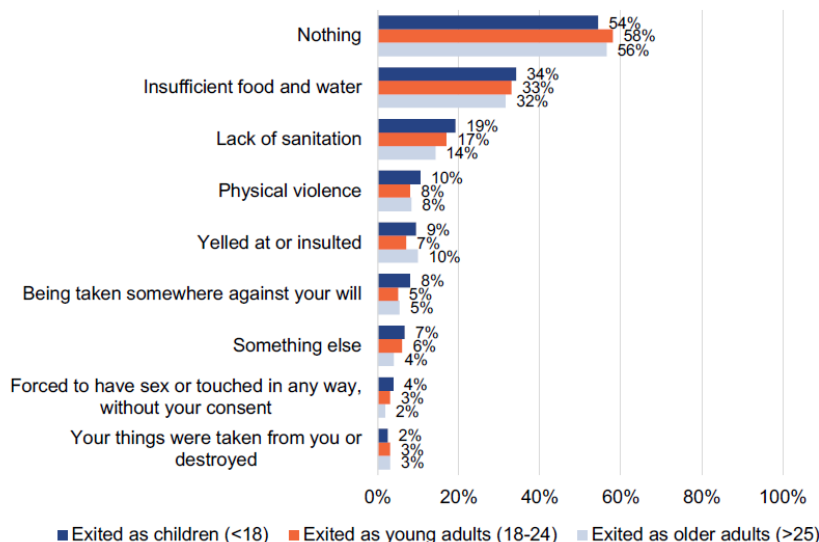


Fig. 2.1.

Source: United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research, 2023.

Key Informant Interview (KII) with residents of the Hajj Camp area, Bulumkumu Old Airport, Maiduguri revealed that in August 2023, the repentant who were undergoing rehabilitation protested against poor living conditions, unacceptable quality of meals, and the non-payment of the promised thirty-thousand-naira allowance. This protest resulted in ex-combatants blocking highways and causing disruptions to traffic (KII 1000 Housing Estate Maiduguri, December 2023). Figure 2.1 above shows the findings of the study conducted by United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research in 2023, which further affirms the findings of this study.

During a focused group discussion (FGD) with village heads in the Moramti community in Maiduguri, it became clear that there is a considerable gap. Village leaders are not informed beforehand when a new group of OPSC graduates is integrated back into the community. Despite having the largest number of reintegrated individuals in Maiduguri, the village leaders are unaware of the exact number of people who have already been reintegrated into their communities. These individuals are reintegrated without any established community reception structures in place to register their arrivals, track their presence, and monitor their situations after reintegration. The participants expressed their concern by stating that:

We are not informed about any new arrivals; they don't come through us, so we don't have information on who is reintegrated into OPSC. Another leader said, "We assist them when they come to us looking for a house to rent; afterward, they're just on their own doing their businesses, mostly menial work (daily pay labourer, water vendor, driving tricycles, etc). (FGD IMaiduguri, December 2023).

The FGD further revealed that most of them change locations sometimes due to the high cost of rent, which makes it difficult to track recidivism. Once the OPSC graduates change locations of residence after the first reintegration settlement, it is difficult to tell their whereabouts, whether they are still in the city or have returned to the bush (FGD Moramti Maiduguri December 2023). This further prompted the subsequent effort towards biometrically registering ex-combatants undergoing the rehabilitation programme in the various camps under the auspices of Borno State Ministry of Information and Internal Security (FGD Moramti Maiduguri December 2023; The Sun 19th August 2024).

Due to the mass surrender following the heightened sensitization and assurances provided by the OPSC and Borno State government, an unprecedented number of repentant former associates are received through the reception centres established by the Borno State Government, coordinated by the office of the State Security Advisor to receive those who are turning in through the outskirts of Bama, Mafa, Konduga etc. However, due to the large number of returnees, not all of them could access the rehabilitation services due to the limited capacity of facilities and resources to accommodate the large number: "Only about 70% (rough estimate) of the repentant persons have been covered by the OPSC services, and they always say there's still more than half of us in the bushes." (KII Interview Maiduguri, December 2023).

Relatively, a FGD with a set of community members around the areas most preferred by the former associates for reintegration in Bama revealed that there is a significant number of former associates who are self-reintegrated into society without actually passing through the required deradicalization and rehabilitation process. They noted that it is difficult to ascertain their motive and trace the level of recidivism amongst this category of former associates. In terms of attitude, they are very aggressive and intolerant, and most of the concerns of former associates returning to the bush are attributed to this group. This is also corroborated by information received from the senior staff of Borno State Ministry of Women Affairs: "Most of the cases of recidivism are attributed to those reintegrated straight from the bush and who did not pass through the formal rehabilitation process" (KII Interview Maiduguri, December 2023).

Moreso, the reintegration programme, from the onset, has been criticized for keeping the repentant beyond a time that is necessary. With the massive defections and increased number of returnees, the rehabilitation period has been reduced to 16 weeks, compared to the 24-weeks of training from the onset and 12-weeks for women and children. This period is considered inadequate to provide the quality services required to achieve the desired rehabilitation and reintegration (CCCPA, 2023; Glazzard, 2023; KAIPTC, 2023).

Another gap identified through this study is the parallel implementation of reintegration programmes between the federal and state governments. The OPSC by the Federal Government and the “Borno Model,” have been criticized as a parallel effort conducted with different implementation strategies, albeit with the same objective. (UNDP 2022; UNDP, 2023). In addition, poor community involvement, the lack of local ownership at the grass-roots level, exclusion; the nonexistence of community-level reconciliation and peacebuilding structures to facilitate local receptivity and manage post-reintegration activities (FGD Moramti Maiduguri December 2023).

By and large, there is no post-reintegration monitoring and tracking system to ascertain progress of the reintegration programme, particularly in tracing possible recidivism and observing the level of social and economic integration of the reintegrated persons, to know if the startup kit and the capital allowance given to them have been enough to sustain them through the startup period, particularly under the current economic hardship created by worsening inflation.

There are incidents of burglary and theft of food commodities in the Moromti community, which initially the people of the community associated to the reintegrated person, with heightened community policing the issue has subsided. This is not unconnected with the hardship the reintegrated persons and the members of host community are going through. There is a high vulnerability amongst the repentant, which might be less encouraging to those in the bushes. (KII Interview Maiduguri, December 2023).

The above information was corroborated by KII with a OPSC graduate who is currently volunteering at the Bulumkutu Rehabilitation Centre which revealed that most of the reintegrated former associates are already used to the free money they have been getting in the bush and have little experience earning a living. It’ll be very difficult for them to start over after graduation from the programme. They just consume the capital money and the startup kit given; that is the reason for the high vulnerability amongst the former associates, added to the high cost of rent in the city. These categories often provided negative feedback to their former colleagues who were still out there in the bush. On the contrary, those who have had prior business knowledge have effectively invested their startup capital and engaged in a meaningful life “Most of them have more than one wives and many children, making it difficult to sustain startup of meaning livelihood”. (KII Interview Maiduguri, December 2023).

Summary of Major Findings

1. Whether there was a community-level sensitization to the reintegration of ex-combatants across various locations was examined in this study. 35% of the study population responded “no”, while 29% responded “yes”, 16% “somewhat yes”, 11% responded “not sure”, and 6% “somewhat no”.
2. The study revealed a prominent level of acceptance of repentant insurgents returning to their communities. Out of all the responses, 45% answered positively, indicating that they have welcomed the repentant insurgents in their communities.
3. Regarding whether the ex-combatants have sincerely and genuinely repented, 25% of the total respondents answered "yes," 24% answered "not sure," 22% answered "somewhat yes," and 19% answered "no."
4. With regards to willingness to forgive ex-combatants, 41.2% responded affirmatively, indicating a significant majority in favor of forgiveness. In contrast, 20% of the respondents answered negatively, representing a considerable minority.
5. When asked whether the reintegration programme could effectively put an end to insurgency, 56% answered "yes," 31% answered "maybe," and 12.3% answered "no."
6. The study revealed a widespread uncertainty and skepticism among participants in various locations regarding the genuine dedication and commitment of the former associates. The responses indicated a significant level of concern among respondents regarding the possibility of reintegrated ex-combatants reverting back to their previous lifestyles. This is because over 50% of the respondents who answered "yes" and "somewhat yes" expressed fear that the repentant individuals may return to their former lives.

CONCLUSION

While considerable achievements were recorded over the years in a pragmatic peacebuilding efforts, despite widespread cynicism and disapproval of the programme by many affected individuals, the government and implementing agencies' determination and resilience have made a positive impact. This impact is evident in the significant decrease in membership of violent groups due to mass defections and in the growing social support and acceptance. Donor involvement has also played a crucial role at various stages of programme implementation.

The key things that emerged strongly from this study include the fact that, despite an elevated level of pessimism regarding the sincerity and authenticity of the repentant ex-combatants, the willingness and determination of the affected communities to forgive them is remarkably high and supportive of peacebuilding efforts. Although there was a significant variation in the perceptions of the host communities and the repentant ex-combatants regarding reception, the commitment to tolerance and the levels of receptivity revealed by this study have been quite reassuring.

OSPC's main focus is deradicalization and rehabilitation components of DRR, while the Borno State Government championed the reintegration component through the Borno Model, which is mostly sponsored by donor agencies and development partners. As a result, there is a parallel process in place with different priorities and indicators, leading to a disconnect between the two levels. This is due to the lack of adequate guiding standards and strategic coordination in facilitating an effective complementarity. With the unprecedented number of defections, resources are strained, and the congestion in the camp would result in a reduced quality of services amidst high demand and expectations.

Currently, only a small fraction of the total number of repentant undergoing rehabilitation have graduated. Out of over one hundred thousand repentant persons received by the OPSC and Borno State, just about five thousand have successfully completed the programme between 2021 to 2023. It is expected that more people will surrender as awareness increases, and an enabling environment is created to encourage more defections. However, the major gap in the current setup is that the government's support ends with the integration package given to OPSC graduates to start over. There is no further support or monitoring mechanism in place to track the post-integration situation of the reintegrated people. Consequently, it is practically impossible to ascertain the level of recidivism as there are no records of community reception or monitoring of the reintegrated person's post-integration performance and subsequent activities.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

To achieve sustainable reintegration, strengthen resilience to violent extremism, and improve contextual programme design and responses, the following recommendations are provided for an insightful guidance into addressing the recorded challenges at both strategic and operational levels:

1. A community focused approach is more viable in addressing community concerns, it improves local awareness, fosters greater receptiveness and acceptance. Former associates may face rejection or be stigmatized, which is detrimental to the peacebuilding strides, and there is a substantial risk that the repentant may be pushed to consider recidivism. To address this, it is important to ensure that both the communities and the reintegrated individuals benefit from reintegration programmes. Creating an enabling environment will support sustainable reintegration that meets the needs of all parties, thus facilitating a conducive atmosphere for peaceful and harmonious coexistence.
2. It is imperative to view the current efforts at the state and federal levels as complementary and mutually reinforcing models that capitalize on each other's strengths, rather than as separate processes. Accordingly, a consolidated approach should be used to manage the ex-combatants, requiring adjustments at both levels for federal and state policies to handle the increasing number of cases. This consolidated model should combine components of the Borno and the OPSC systems to create a nexus between these complementary and mutually reinforcing processes. By leveraging Borno State's tailored approach and extensive background in community-based rehabilitation and reintegration procedures,

together with OPSC's proven expertise in programme interventions, a more effective approach can be established. Hence, the harmonization of the parallel implementation of the OPSC and the Borno State Model can be achieved through effective coordination and integration of essential components.

3. In order to effectively oversee the challenges that come with a larger number of people repenting, it is important to establish a multi-layered screening process. This process should refrain from simply classifying individuals as either high-risk or low-risk, and instead consider the full spectrum of risk levels, including those that fall in between. The responsibility of determining risk categories should be entrusted to behavioral specialists, social workers, and healthcare professionals who are well-versed in established protocols and guidelines in managing such cases. It is crucial that their work is informed by a comprehensive understanding of the local context and standardized tools.
4. The process of reintegration should not be a linear approach. Multiple approaches can be explored depending on the circumstances and the conditions of each person who was once a member of violent group. The goal of all these subjective approach is to prepare individuals to take on their previous responsibilities in their communities and societies. Ensuring the sustainability of reintegration, it is particularly important to avoid reintegrating the repentant into the same society and system that created them. This requires simultaneous efforts to establish a support community for reintegration, with local leaders and communities playing vital roles.

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