

**NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATION: CHALLENGES OF PEACE BUILDING STRATEGIES AND BOKO HARAM CRISES IN NORTHEAST NIGERIA**

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**Abstract**

*This study examined challenges of peace building strategies used by Non-governmental organization in mitigating the effect of Boko Haram crises in Northeast Nigeria. The study employed secondary data obtained through Journals, articles, newspaper, text books etc were used to collect and present findings. Findings revealed that Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) are doing even more peace building activities than any official governmental agencies. In many of the areas in Northeast, they have a long term presence that are afflicted with intractable conflicts in the region. Based on these findings, International partners are currently working with Nigerian authorities to establish databases that will help government agencies capture and share information about all individuals processed through the system including in the initial screening phase, The hope is that such a database will also help speed up and improve the verification of information provided by detainees; government must ensure greater policy coherence: a strategy aimed at rehabilitating defectors will have limited impact as long as the military detains thousands of suspects with only tenuous ties to Boko Haram.*

**Keynotes:** *Challenges, Strategies, Peace Building, Rehabilitation and Strategies Detainees.*

**Introduction**

Despite the Nigerian government's repeated claims of military victory against Boko Haram, violence persists in the country's northeast. Abductions, ambushes, and deadly suicide bombings continued in the first half of 2018. Although military operations have degraded Boko Haram's capacity to hold territory, Nigerian security forces are failing to protect the region's vast rural areas from militant attacks. In the areas surrounding Lake Chad, the Islamic State in West Africa (ISWA)—which split from Boko Haram in 2016—seems to have gained a stronger foothold. Hundreds of thousands of civilians are still displaced and living in internally displaced persons (IDP) camps and neighboring host communities, unable to access their land or return to their villages.

Several overarching challenges have complicated local-level stabilization efforts over the past two years. Ongoing insecurity presents the most immediate challenge, particularly in Yobe, Adamawa and Borno State. Recurring attacks by Boko Haram and ISWAP as well as ongoing military operations have delayed the return of displaced populations, prolonged humanitarian crisis conditions made it difficult for aid organizations to reach vulnerable communities. Donors have struggled to work through and with the Nigerian government, whose conflict response has been plagued by weak coordination and corruption. However, of all these problems, Non-governmental organization has been implementing series of activities aim at peace building and at the same time to cushion the effect of the insurgency on the community members. But this had still not yielded significant progress as we still leave with the scourge. Educational development in the North-Eastern Nigeria is drastically at its lowest level in spite of all funds invested by government and international humanitarian bodies, to the extent that the region ranked first in the Northern Nigeria, out of school children. According to Daily Trust (2017), of 10 million out of school, in the Northern Nigeria, the North-East constitute seven million (7 million). The following

question will guide this study and attempt will be made to provide answers to it within the framework of the study: What are the challenges of peace building strategies used by Non-governmental organization in mitigating the effect of Boko Haram crises in Northeast Nigeria

#### Objective of the Study

The broad objective of the study is to determine the Peace Building Strategies Used by Non-governmental Organization in Mitigating the Effect of Boko Haram Crises in Northeast while the specific objectives is to Identified challenges of peace building strategies used by Non-governmental organization in mitigating the effect of Boko Haram crises in Northeast Nigeria. The study make use of secondary source of data. To this end, the extant literature and body of work on the subject matter of Peace Building Strategies Used by Non-governmental Organization in Mitigating the Effect of Boko Haram Crises in Northeast Nigeria will be critically evaluated and evidence from these literatures reviewed and presented.

The study employ the use of descriptive method of analysis because of the dearth of data in the area of study and the sources of data is secondary, the researcher employ the use of published materials i.e. textbooks, journals, newspaper, magazines, seminar papers, and extracts from the internet.

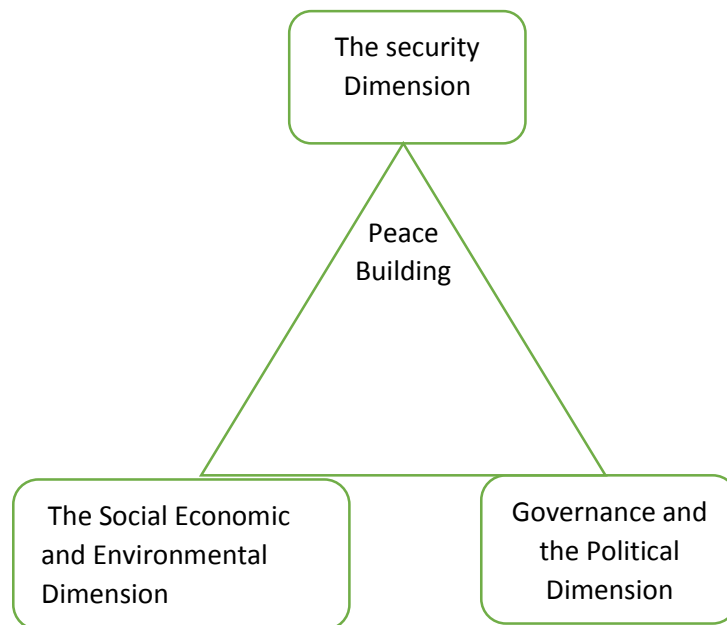
#### **Concept of Peace Building**

Peacebuilding is a term, which started to attract interest in the beginning of the 1990s in circles of international organizations. The former UN Secretary-General, Boutros-Boutros Ghali, put it firmly on the UN's agenda by including it in the document "Agenda for Peace" which came out in 1992 (Boutros Boutros-Ghali, 1992). In 2000, the UN's Brahimi report confirmed this definition of peacebuilding as a more profound and long-term activity than its predecessors peacekeeping and peacemaking, by stating that peacebuilding "involves activities undertaken on the far side of conflict to reassemble the foundations of peace and provide the tools for building on those foundations something that is more than just the absence of war" (Brahimi, 2000)

peacebuilding refers to conflict prevention or resolution activities performed by either external actors such as the UN or other international organizations, or local actors on a community level, with the common aim of establishing a sustainable peace corresponding to more than just an absence of violence, incorporating a structural transformation of a conflictual society to a positive peace available for all (Frère & Wilen 2015).

According to Sambou (2017), Peace building is the Working to make the world a better place for humanity to live in. It is the daily endeavors, individually or collectively, to attain the many positive changes that we all aspire to, for ourselves and all humankind. It is building of good relationships. Peace building is a range of measures targeted to reduce the risk of lapsing or relapsing into conflict by strengthening national capacities at all levels for conflict management, and to lay the foundation for sustainable peace and development. Peacebuilding strategies must be coherent and tailored to the specific needs of the country concerned, based on national ownership, and should comprise a carefully prioritized, sequenced, and relatively narrow set of activities aimed at achieving the above objectives.

According to Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2004), Peace-building can be understood as a supplement to preventive diplomacy, peacemaking processes, conflict resolution and peacekeeping operations. It encompasses measures in the context of emerging, current or post-conflict situations for the explicit purpose of preventing violent conflict and promoting lasting and sustainable peace. Many peace-building activities are similar to development co-operation activities in countries that are not affected by conflict, but the context and purposes are different. A conflict-sensitive approach to what should be done and how it should be done is required. We need strategic conflict analyses and peace and conflict impact assessments.



Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2004)

### **The Security Dimension**

The security dimension encompasses the security of the country and the personal security of its inhabitants. In post- conflict situations, some elements that have to be considered are:

- i. Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of ex-combatants into the local community. This should include special programmes for women and children.
- ii. Humanitarian mine action. This includes mine clearance, stockpile destruction, support to victims of landmines, and awareness programmes.
- iii. Improving control of small arms and light weapons. This includes measures to prevent misuse and illegal trade, providing incentives to hand in weapons, and dealing with the underlying causes of demand for such weapons.
- iv. Security system reform (SSR) emphasizes the importance of civilian control, transparency and accountability as regards the military, the police, the justice and the penal services

### **Governance and the Political Dimension in Conflict Situations**

Some of the underlying or triggering causes of conflict are illegitimate or weak institutions, corruption, insufficient respect for human rights, lack of good governance, and the perception that the administrative and political channels are not adequate or that they are inaccessible. Such underlying or triggering causes of conflict have to be addressed.

- i. Support for political and administrative authorities and structures may be necessary in a transitional period in order to help rebuild and strengthen governments and state institutions so that they can perform sovereign functions effectively and responsibly. This may also include support for the transformation of armed movements into political parties and members of a new government.
- ii. Lasting and sustainable peace depends not only on the commitment of political leaders, but also on social acceptance of peace by the population. Peace-building requires reconciliation and the promotion of non-violent conflict resolution at all levels of society: in the military, among political, religious and business

- leaders, in middle management and at grass-roots levels.
- iii. Assistance to institutions and processes that promote good governance, democracy and human rights is equally important. Special attention must be given to ensuring the inclusion of marginalized and informal groups in political processes, i.e. to promote a culture of peace.
  - iv. Support to governments must be complemented by support for the peace-oriented elements of civil society, including the media.
  - v. The issue of legal action and truth commissions must be addressed. An appropriate balance needs to be found between truth, justice, punishment, reconciliation and impunity.

#### The Social, Economic and Environmental Dimension

Increasing socio-economic differences, unequal distribution of benefits or burdens, marginalization of vulnerable groups or geographical regions, and relative deprivation are all factors that may cause or trigger conflict. Others are competition for limited natural resources for livelihoods, such as water and arable land, as well as environmental degradation. Conflicts may be fueled by competition for valuable and easily tradable natural resources, such as diamonds, oil and metals. Efforts to build peace must address these fundamental or triggering drivers of conflict.

- i. A pressing challenge in post-conflict situations is the repatriation and reintegration of refugees and internally displaced persons.
- ii. Infrastructure and important government functions may have to be built or rebuilt (often called “quick impact projects”)
- iii. Efforts to promote lasting and sustainable peace must encompass not only quick impact projects, but also long-term development programmes for high-quality and accessible education and health services for everyone.
- iv. Peace-building should include measures to stimulate productive sector development, employment, trade and investment. This includes legal and economic reforms, institutional co-operation and technical co-operation.
- v. Technical and financial assistance from the international community may be needed to build and expand national capacity for sustainable environmental and resource management.

Every conflict situation is unique, and it is obviously not possible to develop an approach that covers every situation. The elements to be included, the order in which the measures are to be implemented, the timing and the amount of effort required will always vary according to the situation. But all three dimensions discussed above must be carefully reviewed when designing specific interventions, so that the peace-building efforts can be tailored as far as possible to the situation at hand

#### **The Concept of Peace**

It is well known that human beings pay much interest in peace from the ancient time until now. Because the word peace, apart from being a pleasant word, also refers to the peaceful society and the beautiful world. It can be stated that peace is the greatest and highest goal or hope that everyone wishes to achieve personally and expects to be created in society and in the world. People have been trying by all means to gain peace. Therefore history of human beings, in one aspect, is the history of searching for peace. Peace has been talked, thought, taught and studied in many ways and many aspects.

As simple as the word “peace” may seem, providing a clear-cut definition of it in the study of International Relations seems more demanding as historic events, ideologies and peculiar regional circumstances have shaped the meaning of peace (Richmond, 2008). But at a first glance, Galtung (1967) describes it as an “umbrella concept”. To him, it is a state of mind felt as a consequence of the actualization of certain stated human desires. That is, it is a feeling of internal serenity as a result of external stability. Galtung (1967) also describes peace as touching the concept of law and order. That is, an anticipated social order achievable through the instrumentality of force and the threat of it. This concept, however, does not ignore violence; rather it erects regulations and outlines punishments to produce and maintain a state of tranquillity. Also there is the idea of peace as absence of any mutually agreed hostility, otherwise known as “negative peace”. It is important to note that this only rule out the existence of deliberate violence

between groups or states, but considers the need for occasional revolts, protests, demonstrations, et cetera. On the other hand, a condition of order conjured by respect for human socio-cultural diversity is called “positive peace”. It is a social condition where multi-culture is respected; multi-ethnic is loved; multi-idea is welcomed; multi-religion is embraced; minorities are protected; equality of rights, equity, justice, guided liberty and freedom are guaranteed. Therefore, the characteristics of peace in International Relations could be cooperation and integration (Galtung, 1967; Scherrer, 2007). However, in the study of International Relations, there have been divergent views and debates on the right theory and practice to attain peace; especially in a world characterized by selfishness, greed, inequality, conflict, violence, war, power, exploitation, oppression, bluff, etc. Perspectives on Peace as a Concept Idealists are the most ambitious group in seeking international peace. Plato (1941) argued that the utopian peace is only found in an ‘ideal form’ just as Socrates’ truth and goodness are found in an ideal form, which cannot be fully attainable. The idealists argued that man, by nature, is not violent; man is a peace lover, he will always want to keep peace with his neighbour, but in case of probable violence, social and political norms, regimes and organization could inhibit such (Richmond, 2008). In ancient political thoughts, Heraclitus, the Pythagorean philosophers, and the Greek ideal saw harmony – peace in this context – as an ultimate principle of state existence. They saw it as physical and ethical principle; a property on human nature (Sabine, 1973). That is, peace is inherent feature of human being. Put differently, Bansikiza (2004) submits that peace is both a gift by God and an effort by the people to achieve it, individually and socially. Due to the fact that peace is not reached once and for all, it demands continuous attempt in connecting divided people, reconciling differences and removing bitterness harboured. However, the idealists’ notion of a world void of war, promoting disarmament, the right of self-determination for all men, and the presence of a world government to ensure order and proper distribution of scarce resources brought about the establishment of the League of Nations and the United Nations Organization after the World War I and World War II respectively (Angell, 1916; cited in Richmond, 2008). Contrary to the above argument, the Realists describe international relations as a Hobbesian “state of nature”; i.e. a “state of war” (Mapel, 1996), characterized by selfishness, misdirected aggressive impulses, and stupidity (Waltz, 1993). The realists argued that life is solitary, brutish, nasty and short, and life is the survival of the fittest. They asserted that since resources are scarce and unevenly distributed, man must struggle for survival. Therefore, peace, as put forward by the idealists is unattainable; chaos and man are inseparable (Morgenthau, 1949). Since the realists see the state as the central unit of international system which structure is anarchical, it is therefore impossible to achieve fundamental quality progress (Soendergaard, 2008). This chaotic nature of the international system made Morgenthau (1949) describes peace as power balance and stability; and he argued that permanent peace cannot be achieved. As a result of absence of a legitimate government authority to regulate and enforce agreements between states and other actors (Carlsnaes, Risse, and Simmons, 2002), and the prevalence of the determination of state units to protect their identities and achieve their outlined national interests by all possible means, peace is unobtainable (Richmond, 2008). Hartmann (1973) posits peace and war as ‘by-products’ of the interplay of the national interests of states. “How is state to preserve and/or achieve its vital interests and make itself secure in a world where peace hangs upon the slender thread of sovereign states refraining from taking decisions to go to war?” (Hartmann, 1973). Therefore he argues that peace – like security – is a relative condition in international relations. States will rather seek the attainment of their national interest and self-preservation (security) instead of peace. Though states are secured in the conditions of peace, the necessity to actualize stated interests makes them prefer uncertainties over peace. The Liberalists are a more optimistic set who believes that peace in international relations is attainable in situations of cooperation and shared norms rather than the quest for power and security. They are concerned with the creation of harmonious domestic political structures with the introduction of acceptable international regimes, laws, and norms that will limit the excesses of states and multilateral organisations in their polity. Even though they share in the belief that peace is not achievable, they see peace as something to be aspired for. The international system could at best experience positive peace when certain domestic and international practices are embraced by all, which will ensure socioeconomic justice and respect for the rights of the individuals (Richmond, 2008). The liberalists believe that interdependence will engender peaceful co-existence. They see

international trade as necessary instrument in promoting such interdependence. To them, state will not necessarily go to war against another state it has trade relations with. That is, mutual benefits derived from trade relations will most often discourage an interruption of war, thus promoting peaceful condition. The Marxists think the condition of peace in the international system to the realities of the global political economy. The idea that the global economic system is divided into a class structure (the developed and the developing countries, the haves and the have-nots, the bourgeois and the proletariats, the owners of factors of production and the owners of labour) manipulating the forces of exploitation and revolution for each other's specific interest. The Marxists contend that peace is not feasible in this arrangement unless there is justice and equality in the distribution of resources (Richmond, 2008).

### **Elite Theory**

Theories act as foundation of analysis especially if the analysis is social science oriented. Theoretical framework therefore, provides a focal guide within which to test our propositions, verify our variables. For this purpose, 'Elite theory' is adopted to guide the analysis and as well theoretical framework Ghani & Abdullahi (2018), Scholastically, Elite theory had posited that power resides in and is always in the control of a network of elite. The proponents of Elite theory include Pareto Mosca, Robert Michels, C. Wright Mills, Ortega Y and Gasset among others. They maintained that public policy is by and large the mirror image of elite interest. Further stressed that in order to understand public policy – one has to examine the socio-economic status as well as power relations within the community. The underline premise of elite theory is that the masses are basically apathetic hence, elite are left to dominate the policy making process

Based on the above analysis and the focus of the elite theory, the following are its strengths:

- A. The elite theory prevents the involvement of large number of people in the decision-making that may end in time consuming and cumbersome.
- B. It reduces the study of politics to power relations, infact if power proves to be inadequate principles for understanding politics, elite theory will collapse.
- C. Elite tries to find a moral and legal basis for its being in the citadels of power and represent it as the logical and necessary consequences of doctrines and beliefs that are generally recognized and accepted.

The strength of the elite theory in power relations, equally calls for its weaknesses which can be analyzed below: The theory does not recognize the contribution of the masses in decision-making since they (the masses) are apathetic and unconscious in focus.

- A. The theory does not condone a radical change, since the elite want to maintain the status quo-ante.
- B. The elite theory also create a gap between the masses and those that occupied the political power, which invites conflicts.
- C. The elite theory is Eurocentric, since most of the proponents of the theory are non-Africans.

### **Challenges Mitigating against the Peace Building Strategies by Non-governmental Organization in Northeast**

Despite the Nigerian government's repeated claims of military victory against Boko Haram, violence persists in the country's northeast. Abductions, ambushes, and deadly suicide bombings continued. Although military operations have degraded Boko Haram's capacity to hold territory, Nigerian security forces are failing to protect the region's vast rural areas from militant attacks. In the areas surrounding Lake Chad, the Islamic State in West Africa (ISWA) which split from Boko Haram in 2016 seems to have gained a stronger foothold. Hundreds of thousands of civilians are still displaced and living in internally displaced persons (IDP) camps and neighboring host communities, unable to access their land or return to their villages.

Boko Haram's resilience highlights the limits of a purely military solution to the conflict. In the near term, neither a complete military defeat nor a political settlement is likely. Although the Nigerian government has announced that it has been in talks with Boko Haram about a possible ceasefire, the scope

and nature of these negotiations are unclear. In the absence of a political deal, a key priority is to incentivize more Boko Haram fighters to defect and to successfully rehabilitate those who are captured or manage to leave the group.

Over the past two years, Nigerian officials and international partners repeatedly have emphasized the need for a disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) strategy. Yet so far, the Nigerian government's efforts in this regard have been disjointed. State authorities have set up a small-scale rehabilitation program for low-level fighters, as well as for low-risk women and children previously affiliated with Boko Haram. However, the program operates with little transparency, and the military's criteria for screening detainees are opaque. Thousands of suspects remain in military detention, held without charges and often in overcrowded and unsanitary conditions.

Brechenmacher (2018) opined that, the Nigerian government, with the support of the International Organization for Migration (IOM), adopted an initial Action Plan for Demobilization, Disassociation, Reintegration, and Reconciliation for those associated with Boko Haram. Yet such a strategy faces significant implementation challenges. To be effective, it must ensure that the military has robust eligibility and vetting criteria in a context of ongoing conflict. It must also provide incentives for Boko Haram associates to reintegrate into communities an effort that will have to include building local support for the effort and providing parallel assistance to vigilante groups that have emerged during the conflict. A piecemeal approach that neglects any part of this complex sequence risks perpetuating insecurity and creating new lines of conflict.

**A Problematic Status Quo** Under the current system, suspected Boko Haram members captured during military operations are subjected to an internal military screening process, and those deemed to pose a security risk are placed in military detention. Yet the screening criteria and evidence used to detain these suspects are opaque. Human rights groups have criticized the Nigerian military's approach for being too indiscriminate: particularly before 2015, Nigerian security forces often arbitrarily arrested villagers in areas suspected of harboring Boko Haram fighters. Individuals caught in areas not secured by the military are automatically considered suspects, partly because of the operational difficulties of verifying information about their backgrounds. Mass trials of suspects began in late 2017, but the large caseload and insufficient or unreliable evidence against many detainees has slowed the court process considerably (Brechenmacher, 2018)

Since 2016, the Nigerian government has also operated Operation Safe Corridor, a small intergovernmental program aimed at rehabilitating low-risk, "repentant" Boko Haram fighters. This program is currently the only sanctioned mechanism for combatants to exit the group. Men who are deemed eligible undergo several weeks of religious reeducation, psychosocial support, and vocational training at a military-run facility in Gombe State. In Maiduguri, the government has also set up a rehabilitation center for low-risk women, children, and elderly individuals associated with Boko Haram a group that in practice includes both former Boko Haram members as well as those who had been abducted by the group or were arrested for living in an area controlled by the group.

From the onset, Operation Safe Corridor generated controversy. For example, it is unclear what criteria the military uses to categorize individuals as "low-risk" versus "high-risk" a distinction that determines who is cleared for rehabilitation, who is kept in detention, or who is informally released. As a result, Boko Haram affiliates have no way of knowing whether they will be deemed eligible after surrendering. Those familiar with the program suggest that it has a very narrow scope, as the military is cautious in classifying any suspected Boko Haram affiliates as low-risk. Moreover, to date only those deemed to be "defectors" have been cleared for entry, although it is possible that those released for rehabilitation by the courts may also be transferred to the Gombe facility in the future. Many others who were arrested in

the earlier years of the insurgency remain in detention, even though large numbers likely had little or no connection to Boko Haram.

Operation Safe Corridor currently lacks a clear reintegration strategy. In part because politicians fear being seen as lenient toward extremist groups, the government has done little to build popular support for the scheme or clarify the misconceptions surrounding it. As a result, many people view Operation Safe Corridor with frustration they are skeptical that those who surrender are truly repentant, and resent that the government provides assistance to former insurgents while neglecting the victims of the conflict. Fears of community retribution have repeatedly delayed plans to release the class of ninety-six individuals who have completed the program. Women and children who have returned to their communities from the rehabilitation center have faced ostracism and rejection (Brechenmacher 2018)

Although Operation Safe Corridor has made a valuable attempt to offer low-risk fighters a way out of extremist groups, it suffers from significant shortcomings. A more effective DDR strategy in northeast Nigeria will have to be much larger in scope to match the scale and urgency of the problem. Yet these reintegration efforts face five particular challenges.

- i. **Clarifying Eligibility:** In most conventional DDR contexts, peace agreements lay out the eligibility criteria for amnesty and rehabilitation. In Colombia, for example, the peace accord with the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) guerrilla movement established a tiered system: rank-and-file fighters are eligible for amnesty provided that they were not involved in war crimes or crimes against humanity, while those who exercised command responsibility or were otherwise implicated in serious crimes have to stand trial.

In northeast Nigeria, the absence of a peace agreement means that it is not easy to determine who should be eligible for rehabilitation on what criteria and on what terms. The Nigerian government has at various times floated the idea of a general amnesty to incentivize defections and a cessation of hostilities. Yet many communities in the region oppose such a deal unless it also provides for the victims of the conflict. President Muhammadu Buhari's most recent announcement that the "government is ever ready to accept the unconditional laying-down of arms by any member of the Boko Haram group" once again triggered pushback from civil society groups, who argue that a general amnesty will perpetuate impunity, (Brechenmacher 2018). At the same time, channelling thousands of detainees through the criminal justice system will likely create further backlog and delays. Because many of the alleged insurgents were arrested based on questionable intelligence and denunciations by local militia groups, the prosecutable evidence against them is scant or non-existent. An initial round of secretive mass trials launched held in late 2017 and early 2018 reportedly resulted in 250 convictions, while approximately a thousand people were ordered to be "released for rehabilitation" because of lack of evidence. According to the justice ministry, some of these defendants had been held without trial since 2010.

A more realistic alternative would be to expand the current two-track system: a rehabilitation path open to low-risk fighters and persons associated with Boko Haram (whether or not they have defected), and a criminal justice path for higher-risk combatants and commanders. Doing so will require the Joint Investigations Committee, which oversees the military vetting process, to establish more consistent, reliable, and transparent screening criteria to determine an individual's level of risk and degree of affiliation with the group, ideally subject to oversight by human rights experts. International partners are currently working with Nigerian authorities to establish databases that will help government agencies capture and share information about all individuals processed through the system, including in the initial screening phase. The hope is that such a database will also help speed up and improve the verification of information provided by detainees. Yet ultimately, the government must ensure greater policy coherence: a strategy aimed at rehabilitating defectors will have limited impact as long as the military detains thousands of suspects with only tenuous ties to Boko Haram. Any effort to establish systematic screening



criteria has to grapple with the complexity of people's relationships to extremist groups, as well as the difficulties of collecting and corroborating information in a context of ongoing conflict. Some Boko Haram members willingly joined the group, yet later were unable to leave; some were forcibly abducted. Many others' pathways fall somewhere in between volition and coercion, with social and economic pressures playing significant roles. And although some played active combat roles, others filled various nonviolent support functions under duress, or merely lived under Boko Haram rule, having been unable or unwilling to flee. Erasing these nuances for example, by referring to those who merely lived in Boko Haram controlled areas as "repentant Boko Haram members," and by grouping them with low-risk Boko Haram associates risks reinforcing stigmatization and fuelling the misconception that Operation Safe Corridor is an amnesty for violent terrorists.

- ii. **Tackling (De-) Radicalization:** A second challenge concerns the relationship between countering violent extremism (CVE) and rehabilitating Boko Haram fighters and associates. What types of deradicalization programs should be included in rehabilitation efforts to minimize chances of recidivism? Merging deradicalization measures into DDR processes is a relatively new field of practice, with little rigorous evidence to support particular efforts or initiatives. Yet a number of emerging findings from the CVE field may nevertheless help guide more effective programming. Research suggests that radicalization and entry into extremist groups tends to be a highly individualized process. It often results from a combination of structural "push" factors like relative deprivation or political grievances, and "pull" factors like appealing ideologies, charismatic recruiters, and material or social benefits. Interviews with former Boko Haram members echo these insights: some young people joined to deepen their religious knowledge, whereas others saw the group as a pathway to get ahead economically. Many highlight the influence of friends, relatives, and colleagues. Ideally, deradicalization programming should thus be individually tailored: not all those who need rehabilitation also need deradicalization or religious retraining. For those who played minor roles within the groups or joined for nonreligious reasons, obtaining training and psychosocial support to make a transition back to civilian life is most crucial. For those radicalized and recruited through social networks, deradicalization efforts may be more effective if delivered jointly to relatives or peer groups rather than in isolation. However, proper program tailoring requires in-depth information and monitoring of all program participants, which in turn demands greater resources, staff training, and capacity. At the moment, international assistance providers know little about the backgrounds and deradicalization needs of those detained in military facilities. Systematic record-keeping on all those passing through the system including those cleared for rehabilitation and those awaiting trial will be essential for deradicalization programs to succeed. A second insight from past deradicalization efforts is the importance of credible interlocutors and detention conditions. Government officials or religious figures who detainees do not trust to speak on religious questions are unlikely to be in a position to challenge extremist narratives, not least because hereditary religious hierarchies and government abuses have been important drivers of radicalization. Anecdotal evidence from Afghanistan and Saudi Arabia, as well as from the pilot deradicalization program in Kuje Prison in Nigeria, suggests that fostering trust and mentoring relationships between detainees and program officials can increase the likelihood of positive behavioural and ideological change. Abusive prison or detention conditions, by contrast, have been shown to increase the likelihood of radicalization. These findings underscore the risks of the current system, in which many detainees are subjected to prolonged pre-trial detention periods in difficult and abusive conditions.
- iii. **Preparing For Sustainable Reintegration:** The reintegration of former combatants into civilian life is often the weakest link of DDR programs. Whereas dissociation and demobilization involves a set of relatively standardized activities, reintegration has multiple complex and decentralized transitions, from helping combatants rebuild civilian identities to strengthening interpersonal trust and restoring livelihoods in war-affected communities. Ongoing conflict further complicates reintegration: civilians are more likely to distrust returnees and defectors when the militant group itself remains active, and returnees themselves may be at risk of retaliatory violence. Despite these risks, Operation Safe Corridor currently lacks a clear

reintegration component. Low-risk detainees have been released back into IDP camps with little preparation or follow-up; others appear to have been held in continued detention at the Gombe facility even after completing deradicalization programming out of fears that they will face retaliatory violence upon release. Of course, the views among local communities are not uniform. Many recognize the long-term need for reintegration but feel that it is too soon for former fighters to return. They demand a longer rehabilitation process, and greater support for the affected communities as a whole. Others find it hard to envision living side-by-side with those who killed their relatives or destroyed their village, particularly as long as the needs of victims are left unmet. As one community worker said in Yobe, “If somebody shot your father and ran away, how can you accept them back?”

In response, several international and local civil society groups have been pressing for community participation in reintegration and reconciliation issues. Community-based rehabilitation models can take different forms. Some simply combine support to former combatants and those associated with armed groups with parallel assistance for affected population groups, such as youth with similar socioeconomic profiles, IDPs, and other vulnerable groups. Others go further and integrate forums for community decision making to ensure that the DDR process fosters understanding and is embedded in traditional conflict resolution mechanisms. Underlying these efforts is the assumption that former combatants and returnees must be socially accepted in order to prevent them from returning to violence. A locally owned reconciliation process may also help overcome the multiple cleavages that have emerged during the war, not only between Boko Haram fighters and civilians but also between different religious and ethnic groups, IDPs and host communities, citizens and security forces, and those who fled Boko Haram and those who stayed behind.

- iv. Adopting A Gender-Sensitive Lens: Historically, DDR programs failed to integrate gender into their program design and implementation, thereby reinforcing women’s marginalization from post conflict development processes. Over the past several years, donors and policymakers have realized the need for a more gender-sensitive approach, although implementation often lags behind. In northeast Nigeria, the gender dimensions of the conflict particularly Boko Haram’s reliance on female suicide bombers and the group’s targeting of women and girls have received significant attention. Both international donors and local actors emphasize the specific vulnerabilities and needs of women and girls in the crisis. Yet studies of other conflict contexts caution against depicting women only as victims to be protected, and neglecting the ways in which gender norms also affect men’s wartime experiences and likelihood of reintegration.

Such an approach carries several risks. First, framing women only as victims of Boko Haram risks denying their political agency and erasing the complexity of their experiences. Although Boko Haram did indeed abduct many women and girls, others joined voluntarily or followed their husbands and family members. Interviews with female Boko Haram members suggest that some viewed the group as an opportunity to escape hard agricultural labor and receive a religious education, which was inaccessible to girls in many rural parts of northeast Nigeria. These experiences of structural marginalization have to be understood in order to address the reasons why women joined or supported Boko Haram in the first place, and to ensure specialized reintegration support.

Marginalizing women’s wartime roles and experiences can also perpetuate their exclusion from key decisions around the broader peace-building process. For example, restricting transitional justice processes only to civil and political rights violations may mean that the “forms and places of violation that may be of particular significance to women” are left unrecognized, such as violations that occur in private spaces. This risk is particularly acute in north-eastern Nigeria, where women are largely absent from both government and traditional decision making structures. For example, a recent study conducted in Yobe, Borno, and Adamawa States suggests that women may be more reluctant than men to embrace community-level reconciliation and reintegration, and more likely to stress the need for legal

accountability for sexual violence. Rather than treating women only as subjects of DDR efforts, local gender expertise through existing women's movements and organizations should therefore be integrated into all aspects of the design and implementation process, including in the community dialogues organized to prepare for the return of rehabilitated Boko Haram associates. Under the military's purview, the DDR process to date has lacked even the most basic elements of gender sensitivity. For instance, international aid officials report that women and men have been detained together in overcrowded facilities, with inadequate protection and provisions for privacy. In remote camps for internally displaced persons, women alleged to be sympathetic to Boko Haram have faced severe movement restrictions and have been specifically targeted for sexual violence by security forces.

It is crucial to expand the gender lens to include boys and men, and to pay attention to the role that masculinity norms play in the conflict. Despite increased attention to gender in post conflict peace-building, men and boys still are rarely considered as gendered subjects. Yet in the case of Boko Haram, some young men may have joined the movement because poverty excluded them from the "marriage market," and Boko Haram filled a crucial gap by arranging marriages for loyal supporters. Similarly, changes in women's roles and livelihoods during and after conflict can threaten the traditional gender norms that require men to be the providers for their household, which can complicate men's social reintegration and exacerbate gender-based violence. As the scholars Dyan Mazurana, Roxanne Krystalli, and Anton Baaré note, "a gender-aware approach to DDR transcends getting women into DDR programs and requires examining how these programs imagine, address, and reconstruct masculinity, femininity, and relationships in the aftermath of conflict."

- v. **Demobilizing and Reintegrating Civilian Militias:** A broader question surrounds the future of the civilian militia groups, most commonly known as the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) that emerged during the conflict. Although their exact numbers are uncertain, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) estimates that around 25,000 to 27,000 such fighters currently are active in northeastern Nigeria. Formed at the height of the insurgency to protect local communities, they assist the Nigerian security forces with intelligence collection and military operations, particularly in more remote areas. Given the lack of official Nigerian policing capacity, CJTF members also have taken over policing functions in some parts of North East, often exerting significant control over IDPs.

Members of these community militia in some ways fall between categories: they do not qualify for existing reintegration programs, nor are they considered victims of the conflict. They also are not a homogenous group: although a small number of fighters have been trained, armed, and placed on the military payroll, others are armed but unpaid, and the overwhelming majority neither carry arms nor receive direct financial support for their services. Many of the latter are dissatisfied with their current status and seek to be formally integrated into state security forces.

To date, these fighters have not been formally discharged or demobilized. Yet the status quo poses several challenges. The first is the lack of framework for civilian protection and accountability. As noted above, most of the CJTF never received formal training; they often have little knowledge of existing legal frameworks and civilian protection norms. Given their lack of integration into formal chains of command, civilians have few effective channels to appeal the decisions of vigilante fighters, or demand justice for their abuses including sexual exploitation, intimidation, aid diversion, and assaults on those suspected of being part of armed groups.

At the same time, CJTF fighters are mostly young men with few alternative livelihood options. Many have little or no formal education, and do not fulfil the minimum requirements that would enable them to be integrated into the formal security forces. Drug addiction and abuse problems are widespread and likely growing. Without a comprehensive reintegration plan, the Nigerian government risks sustaining a pool of young men with few opportunities yet significant experience wielding violence and authority.

Conclusion: This study has attempted to examine challenges of peace building strategies used by Non-governmental organization in mitigating the effect of Boko Haram crises in Northeast Nigeria. The study therefore concludes that the role of NGOs in the peace building should go beyond humanitarian services to include reconstruction and re-settlement of victims of the conflicts as lasting solution to the conflict. The study also recommends that NGOs should be thoroughly accredited to fish out the rotten and fake emerging NGOs in the activism. This is addition to objective reportage on the security, issue of the region.

The NGOs Conflict prevention and resolution mechanisms have proven effective at the local level, yet their reach is limited. If well-designed and coordinated, such programs have helped address local sources of insecurity, and improved communication flows between citizens, security officials, and local government

### **Recommendations**

- i. Nigeria's international partners should continue to push for greater civilian oversight of the military's screening processes and detention facilities, building on the coordinated pushback against premature relocations of IDPs. At the same time, expanding community-based and gender-sensitive programs aimed at addressing the stigmatization of those released from Boko Haram and ensuring their rehabilitation should remain an essential priority.
- ii. International partners are currently working with Nigerian authorities to establish databases that will help government agencies capture and share information about all individuals processed through the system, including in the initial screening phase. The hope is that such a database will also help speed up and improve the verification of information provided by detainees. Yet ultimately, the government must ensure greater policy coherence: a strategy aimed at rehabilitating defectors will have limited impact as long as the military detains thousands of suspects with only tenuous ties to Boko Haram.
- iii. Going forward, one option is to integrate the civilian militia groups into a broader community policing framework. This would allow security forces to continue tapping into their local expertise while also ensuring that the militias receive adequate training and are linked to community justice mechanisms. Yet the precise structure of such a program remains hotly contested: the Nigerian federal government has long resisted calls by state governments to establish security structures that challenge the centre's monopoly over the security sector. In the absence of an agreement on such a framework, current nongovernmental organization efforts centre on connecting CJTF fighters to livelihood and educational opportunities, as well as psychosocial support and drug addiction treatment. Yet more systematic and longer-term support is urgently needed.

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