Reintegrating Boko Haram Fighters In Nigeria: Challenges And Prospects

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Summary

This policy brief examines reintegration as an important aspect of peacebuilding. It investigates it in the context of the ongoing Boko Haram conflict in norhtern Nigeria, which affects the rest of the sub-region. The Operation Safe Corridor (OSC) initiative is examined in this brief.
The debate over its many outcomes is also addressed. This comprises the factors that have impeded the OSC intitative 's stability. Suggested appraoches and techniques for regional and state stakeholders to explore for favourable outcomes in the entire reintegration process of Boko Haram militants in Nigeria are also highlighted.

A cross-section of insurgents surrendering their arms, Nigeria.
Source : apnews.com

Introduction

Without effective reintegration processes, it is unlikely that countries experiencing armed conflict will achieve long-term peace. In post-conflict settings, reintegration processes have always been critical. This kind of reintegration is often implemented after the conflict has ended. Further, the required type of reintegration is evolving in response to the nature of conflict in Africa.[1] The Boko Haram insurgency typifies this.

In 2015, over \$9 billion was required to rebuild the North East of Nigeria[2] due to instability caused by the group. It is predicted that by 2030 if the insurgency still ensues, over 30 billion dollars will be needed to develop the affected areas[3]. The group has not been declared disbanded to present-day 2022. However, there have been reintegration efforts for some of its former members. Reintegration forms part of the broader demobilisation, disarmament and reintegration (DDR) process as a critical component of peacebuilding. However, as a tool for peacebuilding, reintegration has faced several challenges that hampered its effectiveness. In the case of northeastern Nigeria, there have been undesirable outcomes, thus undermining the efforts of stakeholders.[4]

This policy brief examines the challenges and opportunities of reintegrating repentant insurgents as part of

[1]Kingma, K. (2002). Demobilization, reintegration and peacebuilding in Africa. International Peacekeeping, 9(2), 181-201.

[2]World Bank. (2016). North-East Nigeria Recovery and Peace Building Assessment: Component Report. World Bank.

[3]Hanna, T., Bohl, D. K., Rafa, M., & Moyer, J. D. (2021). Assessing the Impact of Conflict on Development in North-East Nigeria. Abuja: United Nationa Development Programme

[4]Ike, T. J., Singh, D., Murphy, S., Jidong, D. E., Porritt, F., & Ayobi, E. E. (2020). Community perspectives of former terrorist combatants, militants and reintegration programmes in Nigeria: a systematic review. Behavioral Sciences of Terrorism and Political Aggression, 1-27.

[5]World Data. (n.d.). *Comparison of the largest terrorist groups*. Retrieved from World Data Info: https://www.worlddata.info/terrorism/groups.php

[6]Index, G. T. (2015). Measuring and understanding the impact of terrorism. Institute for Economics and Peace, 13- 14.

[7]Ibid

[8]Raleigh, C., Linke, A., Hegre, H., & Karlsen, J. (2010). Introducing ACLED: an armed conflict location and event dataset: special data feature. Journal of peace research, 47(5), 651-660.

[9]UNHCR. "2019 Annual Report, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence, North-East Nigeria – Nigeria." United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, March 2020. https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/ operations/nigeria/document/unhcr-2019-reportsexual-and-gender-based-violence-north-east-nigeria

peacebuilding in the context of an ensuing insurgency. It discusses the factors that have hampered the stability and success of the OSC reintegration process in Nigeria, and it concludes with strategies to consider for positive outcomes.

2,000 Boko Haram fighters surrendered since 2015, Nigeria. Source : AllAfrica

The Nature of The Boko Haram insurgency

Since August 2011, Boko Haram has carried out public attacks in North-Eastern Nigeria. Individuals have been killed, injured, and displaced due to these attacks. Since the outbreak of the insurgency in Northern Nigeria, the state's economy and overall security have suffered
significantly, with over 5000 attacks, 16,108 people dead, 7, 575 people injured, and 2,828 people taken hostage as of 2017.[5] Boko Haram was ranked as the world's deadliest terrorist organisation in 2014[6] and the second most lethal group in 2018.[7] The terrorist group has wreaked havoc in the Borno, Yobe, Bauchi, and Kano states of Nigeria. As of 31 July 2020, the conflict has directly resulted in 34,457 deaths in Adamawa, Borno, and Yobe states since the beginning of 2009.[8] In addition, Boko Haram attacks have led to massive internal displacement. More than 1.8 million Nigerians are displaced in Adamawa, Borno, and Yobe states, with the vast majority (nearly 1.5 million) located in Borno.[9]

The Centrality Of Reintegration To Peacebuilding

Reintegration is the third component of a three-pronged post-conflict process that includes disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegrating ex-combatants into society. According to the United Nations (UN), reintegration relates to the process through which ex-combatants gain civilian status and gain long-term employment and income.[10] it is, at its core, a social and economic revolution. Reintegration is part of a country's overall development and national responsibility and frequently necessitates long-term assistance. It provides ex-insurgents with an opportunity to reintegrate into civilian life and change their habits and identities.[11] Reintegration must be recognised as a process, not a project, with social, economic, and political dimensions.[12] Economic reintegration refers to how ex-combatants obtain long-term employment and income.[13] Although vocational training and economic reintegration are essential, they are not critical determinants of reintegration success.[14]

This endeavour directly affects the long-term peacebuilding prospects for any post-conflict society.[15] in the case of Nigeria, which is not a post-conflict state it is critical to recognise the distinction in reintegration requirements to suit its peculiarity while the Boko Haram insurgency ensues. The ineffectiveness of reintegration initiatives in Nigeria has caused socio-cultural tensions in communities.[16] this inefficacy is due to the low level of awareness and understanding regarding reintegration issues. As a result, psychological trauma, physical ostracism, and personal and interpersonal stress have been observed in communities where reintegration has been attempted.[17]

Reintegration In The Context Of Insurgency

Danso[18] poses two critical questions on the subject:

[5]Ibid.

[6]Republic of Cote d'Ivoire, (2005). Decree No. 95-817 of 29 September 1995.

[7]Interviews with a cattle breeder from Bounia, north of Cote d'Ivoire in Abidjan, March 2021.

[8]According to the World Bank, the 2020 GDP of Cote d'Ivoire is estimated at US$61.348 billion. Available at: https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD?locations=CI; (accessed: 27 September 2021)

[9]See the website of Centre National De Recherche Agronomique: http://www.cnra.ci/descprog.php?id=14&prog=Productions%20d%27%E9levage&act=present (Accessed: 18 February, 2017)

[10]United Nations. (2006a, March). Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (Report A/60/705). New York, NY: Author.

[11]Torjesen, S. (2013). Towards a theory of ex-combatant reintegration. Stability: International Journal of Security and Development, 36(3), 1-13

[12]Ibid

[13]United Nations. (2006a, March). Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (Report A/60/705). New York, NY: Author.

[14]Humphreys, M., & Weinstein, J. M. (2007). Demobilization and reintegration. Journal of conflict resolution, 51(4), 531-567

[15]Knight, M., & Ozerdem, A. (2004). Guns, camps and cash: Disarmament, demobilization and reinsertion of former combatants in transitions from war to peace. Journal of Peace Research, 41(4), 499-516.

[16]Interview with Mr. Abba Khali on February 17, 2021.

[17]Munive, J., & Jakobsen, S. F. (2012). Revisiting DDR in Liberia: exploring the power, agency and interests of local and international actors in the 'making'and 'unmaking'of combatants. Conflict, Security & Development, 12(4), 359-385.

[18]Danso, F. K. (2017). Rebuilding Relationships after Civil War: Relational Justice and Ex-Combatant Reintegration in Liberia.

a. what constitutes a post-conflict process as reintegration, and b. what factors influence success. While the latter question will be addressed later in this brief, the former question highlights the distinction between Nigeria's case as the insurgency continues. It is essential to recognise that Nigeria is not a post-conflict state, unlike in countries such as Liberia, where reintegration initiatives began through a peace accord. Because the conflict is still ongoing, employing reintegration to address the Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria necessitates a unique approach which caters to this distinct circumstance. A tailor-made approach should be considered to round up ex insurgents and reintegrate them into communities. Furthermore, the initiatives must be recognised as a cycle that should be constantly monitored and addressed until the insurgent group is finally disbanded. To this effect, Nigeria sought to implement the deployment of the Operation Safe Corridor (OSC) initiative.

Operation Safe Corridor

The Nigerian government launched the Operation Safe Corridor (OSC) initiative in 2015 to de- radicalise, rehabilitate and reintegrate[19] and eventually reintroduce former Boko Haram insurgents into society.[20] This project began after the realisation that military[21] and non-military[22] approaches to combat the uprising proved futile. Therefore, its primary goal was to counter the extremist group's activities, as the military approach proved insufficient.[23] In addition, the idea was to successfully rehabilitate and reintegrate 'the ex-fighters into their respective communities as productive law-abiding citizens.'[24] The Nigerian government has relied on both kinetic and non-

kinetic measures in addressing the over a decade-long insurgency, the abstract and non-combative approaches, respectively. The foremost kinetic response took the form of successive military deployments such as Operation Restore Order, Operation Boyona, Operation Zaman Lafiya, Operation Lafiya Dole and Operation Last Hold. In addition, the national military operations were complemented by the regional military framework known as the Multi-National Joint Task Force (MNJTF), deployed by the Lake Chad states to defeat the Boko Haram insurgency.[25]

The OSC initiative employed community awareness campaigns to sensitise communities about the need for reintegration and, further, the activities of the OSC.[26] one primary goal was to educate repentant fighters about the benefits of rehabilitation and reintegration. Awareness campaigns were launched through various media, held community dialogue sessions, and made advocacy visits to key stakeholders such as the State Government, the North-East Nigeria Initiative (NERI), the Presidential Committee on the North-East Initiative (PCNI), and local government councils. The Nigerian government took this step after failing to address the Boko Haram insurgency in other ways. Existing legislation, the Terrorism Prevention (Amendment) Act 2011,[27] generally provides a legal basis to detain terrorist suspects.[28] The process included ex-combatants being called to surrender, others being rescued and rounded up, and others voluntarily pulling out. The OSC had social, religious, psychological, and economic components and thirty-six full-time employees, fifteen interpreters, ten brigade

[19]Ugwueze, M. I., Ngwu, E. C., & Onuoha, F. C. (2021). Operation safe corridor programme and reintegration of Ex-Boko Haram fighters in Nigeria. Journal of Asian and African Studies, 00219096211047996.

[20]CDD (2015) Stakeholders Dialogue on government approaches to managing defecting violent extremists. Policy Brief. Available at: https://media.africaportal.org/documents/Stakeholders__Dialogue_on_Government_Approaches.pdf (Accessed February 17, 2022).

[21]Onapajo, H., & Ozden, K. (2020). Non-military approach against terrorism in Nigeria: Deradicalization strategies and challenges in countering Boko Haram. Security Journal, 1-17.

[22]Ugwueze, M. I., & Onuoha, F. C. (2020). Hard versus soft measures to security: Explaining the failure of counter-terrorism strategy in Nigeria. Journal of Applied Security Research, 15(4), 547-567.

[23]Crisis Group interview, senior Nigerian security official, Abuja, 6 December 2019 (concerning authorities' realisation of the usefulness of defections). With respect to the terminology used in this briefing: Boko Haram(generally translated from Hausa as "Western education is forbidden") is a derisive designation used by Salafi critics of the jihadist organisation operating in north-eastern Nigeria and along the borders with Niger, Cameroon and Chad. In 2016, this group split into two factions, JAS and ISWAP. This briefing uses the familiar term Boko Haram to refer both to the group before the 2016 split and to the ISWAP and JAS factions collectively since then. For background on Boko Haram, see Crisis Group Africa Reports N°213, Curbing Violence in Nigeria (II): The Boko Haram Insurgency, 3 April 2014; and N°168, Northern Nigeria: Background to Conflict, 20 December 2010.

[24]CDD (2015) Stakeholders Dialogue on government approaches to managing defecting violent extremists. Policy Brief. Available at: https://media.africaportal.org/documents/Stakeholders__Dialogue_on_Government_Approaches.pdf (accessed February 17, 2022).
Ugwueze, MI, Onuoha, FC 2020) Hard versus soft measures to security: Explaining the failures of counter-terrorism strategy in Nigeria.Journal of Applied Security Research 15(4): 547-567

[26]Community Sensitization and awareness of communities of reintegration and activities of OSC by National Orientation Agency (NOA).

[27]The law enforcement agencies shall have powers to -(a) enforce all laws and regulations on counter - terrorism in Nigeria; (b) adopt measures to prevent and combat acts of terrorism in Nigeria and conduct research with the aim of improving preventive measures to efficiently and effectively combat terrorism in Nigeria.

[28]Nigeria Statement-International Terrorism. Retrieved from https://www.un.org/en/ga/sixth/75/pdfs/statements/int_terrorism/03mtg_nigeria.pdf Accessed on March 4, 2021.

[29]Musa K. Chantu, National Orientation Agency, Community Sensitization and awareness of communities on reintegration and activities of the Operation Safe Corridor(OSC) in Borno State. Unpublished report.

volunteers, ten counsellors, and a drama group.[29] The OSC also combined vocational training, psycho-social therapy, and religious re-education in rehabilitating ex-fighters. There are at least 13 agencies of the Federal Government of Nigeria and over one hundred experts, including religious leaders, psychologists, social workers, educators, artisans, and de-radicalisation specialists, among others, that are directly involved in the implementation of the OSC.[30] Camping ex-fighters lasted approximately sixteen weeks. The ex-insurgents were shaped to reject the extremist group's values during that time. It included a feasible specific examination of elements such as the legal framework, outreach strategies, community-focused programs, profiling techniques, and logistical and security dimensions with various actors such as the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the United Nations (UN). However, the OSC program has been plagued by disputes, rendering it ineffective. In effect, communities rejected the repentants. While ostracised, the insurgents were equally violent with themselves, their families and the communities. Some went back to rejoin the group.

Challenges Affecting Effective Reintegration Through The OSC Process

Reintegration is a complex and contingent process, making it difficult due to unfavourable outcomes.[31] Furthermore, Saldner[32] argued that the expansion of the scope of DDR under the second generation has 'exacerbated the long-standing challenge of how to conceptualise and measure the intangible concept of reintegration', which, he pointed out, 'has often been criticised for being vaguely defined and under theorised'. However, considering the factors that influence successful reintegration, it is critical to have a measurement metric.

While several government officials lauded the successes of the OSC initiative, members of the local communities,[33] including some elected political representatives and victims of Boko Haram attacks, have been critical of the program. These concerns are related to policy, design and delivery of the OSC. In the case of Boko Haram, the fact that the insurgency continues creates an unending cycle in the reintegration process, possibly until the group is completely disbanded. Ex-combatants' dissatisfaction and backsliding are still common in many reintegration campaigns.[34] This concern is a significant challenge because it is the presence of an accepting group to return to, impeding the efforts of reintegration processes. This occurrence is linked to treatment in camps or the push-back experienced by communities and families. This reversal involves both psychological and physical aspects. In other words, while the individual has physically separated from the group, it is critical that they mentally detach themselves from the group's ideologies and values and adopt mainstream society's identity and value system. Individuals must also be prepared as they reintegrate into society. The disconnect between the community and the DDR agencies and donors regarding the operation safe corridor initiative led to solid push-back from the communities,[35] leaving former fighters to go back to the insurgent group. General criminology studies have shown that released prisoners often face challenges upon return from prison.[36] While family and community assaulted the ex-combatants out of insecurity,[37] they also harmed themselves due to psychological distress. The widespread belief that the OSC was more concerned with perpetrators than victims also affected how it was embraced in the communities. In other words, instead of being punished, these ex-mutineers had been somewhat pardoned. This strain expressed scepticism about the project's viability.[38] According to findings, this scepticism creates the possibility of ex-combatants returning to the group or new ones joining[39] due to the 'romance' between terrorists and the federal government.[40]

[30]Bukarti, B (2019) Making peace with enemies: Nigeria's reintegration of Boko Haram fighters. Work on Rock, 27 March   https://warontherocks.com/2019/03/making-peace-with-enemies-nigerias- reintegration-of-boko-haram-fighters/?s=09 Accessed on February 17, 2022.

[31]Karazsia, Z. (2015). Evaluating the "Success" of Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration Programs: The Case of Congo-Brazzaville. Journal of Interdisciplinary Conflict Science, 1(2), 83.

[32]Saldner, S (2020) Contextualising reintegration: Conceptualising and measuring ex-combatant reintegration relative to civilians. Civil Wars 22(4):1–25.

[33]Vanguard (2019). Operation Safe Corridor in Gombe, now a global model – CDS. 19 September avaliable at: https://www.vanguardngr.com/2019/09/operation-safe-corridor-in-gombe-now-a-global-model-cds/ (Accessed August 4, 2022).

[34]Zena, P. N. (2013). The lessons and limits of DDR in Africa. National Defense Univ Fort Mcnair Dc Africa Center for Strategic Studies.

[35]Interview with Chris Ogbonna on February 20, 2021.

[36]Brazzell, D., & La Vigne, N. G. (2009). Prisoner reentry in Houston: Community perspectives. Urban Institute.

[37]Interview with Boko Haram repentant on February 16, 2021.

[38]Chris Ogbonna, December 22, 2017- March 31, 2018. Dialogue, Reconciliation and Peace (DREP) Center Report, Traditional and Religious Leaders Forum on transitional Justice for Reintegration in the North East.

[39]Dreyer, DR (2012) Issue intractability and the persistence of international rivalry. Conflict Management and 471–489.Peace Science 29(5): 471-489 us-to-join-boko-haram/

[40]Vanguard (2020c) IDPs to FG: Your romance with terrorists pushing us to join Boko Haram. Vanguard, 27 August Available at: https://www.vanguardngr.com/2020/08/your-romance-with-terrorists-pushing-(Accessed March 1, 2022).

Generally, reintegration in the context of an ongoing insurgency should have a tailor-made approach to suit the circumstance of an ensuing insurgency. The 16-week camping and counselling period had proven insufficient prior to release into communities. This outcome is because, even after the period, ex-fighters had not fully repented psychologically and had expressed themselves in violent ways, as previously stated. While there does not appear to be a definite duration that will be appropriate, it is suggested that a more extended period will likely yield better results.[41] Another major setback in the OSC programme is the failure to adequately consult and prepare the local communities about the initiative'sconception,design,and delivery. The general perception of the local population is that a killer, an abductor or a rapist will never be welcomed back into their community, and they describe the government's OSC programme as 'terrible and unjustified.'[42] Significantly, reintegration outcomes rely on the communities' cooperation that the ex-fighters are reintegrated into.[43]

The UN has identified monitoring and evaluation as "one of the weakest areas of disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration programme management."[44] This realisation was a point of contention with the OSC, as it had been with other DDR initiatives. Reviewing the process and measuring the results is always difficult for institutions, especially as the Boko Haram insurgency continues. This issue is because the process's outcomes are not immediately tangible and measurable enough to monitor and assess adequately. In addition, there is a lack of political buy- in among elected officials to the program's philosophy. Evidence suggests that some government officials rejected the OSC, undermining the initiative's credibility. For example, in an interview, a Borno South Senatorial District member in the National Assembly hinted that " insurgents will never repent."[45]

Conclusion

When proper scrutiny is used at various stages of the process, the benefits of reintegration as a tool for building sustainable peace in Nigeria and elsewhere can be chalked up. Considering the limiting factors and contentions surrounding reintegration in Nigeria, the state and actors are urged to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the reintegration processes. From the discussions in this policy brief, it is critical to take cognisance of the contrasting features of a (post) conflict situation to make timely and effective interventions. Reintegration is only as effective as a country's peace agreement and overall reconstruction efforts as a tool for peacebuilding. If a country's peace does not last, ex-combatants may quickly return to fighting, exacerbating the presence of the mutinied group. This dynamic eventually adversely impacts a state's overall stability and governance.

Recommendations

This section offers policy recommendations suggested approaches for shaping Nigeria's future reintegration and setting an example for other (regional) states. In various approaches, it is critical to identify the responsible party required to carry out the task, the method of execution, and the likely outcomes after implementation. Below are a few recommended approaches:

- Fruitful demobilization could be ensured if agencies and implementers considered an effective and efficient recruitment process that included functional recruitment options. Although this approach is specific to demobilization, it has a knock-on effect on reintegration processes because it presents the process with the desired reintegration candidates.
- Reintegration should be viewed as a process rather than a project, and (federal) governments, state agencies, donors, and experts should consider a longer period, as the average has not proven sufficient. It demonstrates the importance of attaching a sense of extended longevity to

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[41]Interview with Mr. Abba Kalli on February 18, 2021.

[42]This observation was made during a series of focus group discussions with internally displaced persons in Borno State between 11 and 12 July 2019.

[43]United Nations Peacekeeping (2020) Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration at: https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/disarmament-demobilization-and-reintegration

[44]United Nations, "3.50 Monitoring and Evaluation of DDR Programmes", IDDRS Module, Level 3: Structures and Processes, available from http://www.iddrtg.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/IDDRS-3.50-Monitoring- andEvaluation-of-DDR-Programmes1.pdf Accessed April 4 2021.

[45]Vanguard (2020a) Ndume flays FG over amnesty for Boko Haram fighters. Vanguard, 30 July Available at: https://www.vanguardngr.com/2020/07/ndume-flays-fg-over-amnesty-for-boko-haram-fighters/ (Accessed March 1, 2022)

reintegration initiatives, particularly when the conflict has not ended. This can be accomplished by separating the various stages of the process during the evaluation and monitoring exercises. Although this method incurs additional costs for donors, it is worthwhile to consider.

- To obtain community buy-in, it is critical to actively and continuously engage in dialogue with civil society groups, religious leaders and groups, and community actors about the importance of reintegration to the community. While communities have been known to misinterpret the dynamics of reintegration, this outlook has the potential to establish a reliable network of communication between donors, agencies, and communities.

- While the indicators of a reintegration process's success are still debated, agencies and actors must develop a metric that captures tangible and measurable outcomes of specific reintegration processes. A post-conflict situation will necessitate a tailored approach to measuring outputs and outcomes that predict success or failure.

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