



Operation Safe Corridor: The Deradicalisation and Reintegration of ex-combatants

Idayat Hassan, Centre for Democracy and Development
&
Dr. Laura Routley, Newcastle University



Centre for Democracy & Development
Centre pour la démocratie et le développement



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Acronyms

AFN	Armed Forces of Nigeria
CJTF	Civilian Joint Task Force
CVE	Countering Violent Extremism
DDR	Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration
DIA	Defence Intelligence Agency
DRR	De-radicalization Rehabilitation and Reintegration
DHQ	Défense Head Quarters
DSS	Department of State Services
EOD	Explosive Ordnance Department
FMOJ	Federal Ministry of Justice
FGN	Federal Government of Nigeria
JIC	Joint Investigation Centre
NIA	National Intelligence Agency
NDE	National Directorate of Employment
NDLEA	National Drug Law Enforcement Agency
NEMA	National Emergency Management Agency
NEDC	Northeast Development Commission
NIS	Nigerian Immigration Service
NMS	Nigeria Immigration Service
NIAC	Non-international armed conflict
NPS	Nigerian Prisons Service
NOA	National Orientation Agency
NSCDC	Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps
NIMC	National Identity Management Commission
NYSC	National Youth Service Commission
MTJF	Military Joint Task Force
MDAs	Ministries, Departments and Agencies
ONSA	Office of The National Security Adviser
OSC	Operation Safe Corridor
PCNI	Presidential Committee on the Northeast Initiative

Executive Summary (incl. recommendations)

In September 2015 Muhammadu Buhari set up Operation Safe Corridor (OSC). OSC is a custodial program, with the major aim to deradicalise, rehabilitate and reintegrate repentant Boko Haram ex-combatants into society. From the outset, OSC has been conceived as a counter-terrorism strategy, with the aim of reducing the rank and file of the insurgents and was initially primarily developed by the security services within Nigeria. Its focus is those who surrendered during the military onslaught, those who were conscripted to the Boko Haram insurgency against their will and those who felt disenchanted with the activities of the leadership of the group.

Since 2015 the sectors and departments engaged in the implementation of OSC have expanded. The OSC Implementation Committee commissioned to undertake the implementation of the program was initially made up of nine military personnel but has since expanded to 30-members both military and civilian personnel (see appendix 3). These 30 members are responsible for implementing the OSC operational framework under the committee's terms of reference. Implementing OSC is complex and involves co-ordination with many

This report is based on interviews and focus groups with OSC staff, ex-combatants going through or graduated from the OSC programme and members of communities where ex-combatants being re-turned with the aim of reintegration. It examines the processes of deradicalisation, rehabilitation and reintegration undertaken by Operation Safe Corridor highlighting areas of difficulty and making recommendations for improvements.

What is clear from the research is that trust deficits complicate reintegration efforts. So too does the fact that the conflict remains ongoing. Victims and other local actors are of the view that the cessation of conflicts is a major precondition for reconciliation and reintegration. This is coupled with the lack of an existing holistic framework for reconciliation and reintegration of repentant ex-combatants at any level. More can be done to provide safe passages for these repentant ex-members in their eventual host communities. There are three areas we which we highlight as in need of particular attention:

1. Absence of justice?

Communities strongly criticise how ex-Boko Haram members are not brought to account and that there is a significant the lack of judicial or non-judicial justice for the violence that has been inflicted.

2. Limited community participation

The lack of real participation and involvement of the local communities in OSC has contributed to the challenges faced in the reintegration of the former fighters. Locals perceive themselves as having been forced to buy into the program, and as a result, do not feel ownership of the process.

3. Screening and categorisation issues

Reintegration of ex-combatants requires that communities have some level of trust around who they are being asked to welcome and live alongside. The lack of

clarity about how ex-combatants are categorised as 'low risk' and concerns about this process therefore significantly impacts the prospects for successful reintegration.

We make six recommendations in this report to address the issues raised by this research:

Recommendation 1: The reintegration element of the OSC programme requires more focus and assistance provided could be refocused to incorporate communities that receive ex-combatants rather than purely individualised settlement packages. These kinds of changes are clearly macro level changes to be considered at the highest policy making levels as they could not easily be implemented by the current OSC programme.

Recommendation 2: Work could be done with communities to explore local systems for accountability – ensuring that these do not in turn disproportionately persecute returnees.

Recommendation 3: The state and non-state actors need to establish transitional justice frameworks and procedures that direct their actions toward addressing the needs of conflict-affected communities/populations not just those that focus on DRR De-radicalization Rehabilitation and Reintegration of ex-combatants. This is not an either-or choice, focusing on transitional justice will provide a better starting point for successful rehabilitation and reintegration

Recommendation 4: The lack of clarity around the criteria for screening is problematic and clear and honest communication of these to receiving communities is vital. The opaqueness of the process leads to lack of trust in its rigor in receiving communities. Work should be undertaken to lay out clearly what criteria are used and crucially to communicate this to communities where ex-combatants maybe returned, as well as to Boko Haram who may wish to defect.

Recommendation 5: The development of an appeals mechanism for the categorisation and screening process. This would provide ways for community members to present evidence that someone has been wrongly categorised. So that communities can challenge this when those have committed significant acts of violence are not presented to communities for reintegration. This should also enable those wrongly categorised as high-risk to have the opportunity to present evidence to counter this.

Recommendation 6: Exploring ways of evidence gathering beyond interrogation of the individual defector to ensure the robustness of the process and prevent the interviewing of defectors under duress.

Introduction

This report presents some preliminary findings of the de-radicalization and reintegration program, aimed at Boko Haram ex-combatant undertaken as part of the federal government of Nigeria's Operation Safe Corridor (OSC). The research looks to explore how these processes of deradicalisation, and rehabilitation are understood to have worked by asking key questions about:

- How staff and clients of the program conceive the de-radicalization programs they are implementing/undertaking? And how successful they have been?
- What kinds of changes staff are looking to achieve and perceive they have achieved in detainees?
- What practices/program/interventions they perceive to be effective in achieving these changes?
- What they see as the constraints on their ability to reform/de-radicalize detainees?

Understanding how this program is supposed to effect change can encourage discussions about improving these processes and ways in which others can learn from the program's successes and failures. It also provides insights into how the Nigerian government, and the other agencies involved, comprehend processes of deradicalisation and reintegration.

In the process of undertaking the research the focus shifted not only to the camp itself but to the communities that deradicalized ex-fighters were to be reintegrated. As Clubb and Tapley (2018) have highlighted it is reintegration which is both a key measure and driver of the success of these kinds of deradicalization programmes.

A note on methodology

The findings of this report are based on interviews and focus groups conducted between July and December 2019 but are shaped by CDD's long engagement with transitional justice in Northern Nigeria (for example see Hassan and Tyvoll 2018).

Interviews were conducted with thirty-three ex-combatants, seventeen of whom were currently in special holding and sixteen of whom had been reintegrated into their community. These interviews explored their experience of the programme and of reintegration. As well as how they thought their views and behaviours had been reshaped by the programme. Staff involved in the programme were also interviewed with five of interviews being undertaken with staff implementing the programme this included those engaged in the deradicalisation, administration and oversighting of the Initiative at the Advisory Committee level. These explored how they understood the programme to work what changes they were looking for in clients and the conditions and activities they considered would achieve these. Members of thirty communities where ex-combatants have been reintegrated were also interviewed. Through these interviews we aimed to understand further what communities considered to be necessary to consider an ex-combatant as deradicalised / reformed. All the interviews have been anonymised

In addition, six focus groups were conducted with stakeholders including members of Operation Safe Corridor Advisory Committee, community leaders (both religious and traditional) from communities where ex-combatants were being resettled, Civilian Joint Taskforce (CGTF) among others were held across the three most affected states of Borno, Yobe and Adamawa. These were aimed at understanding more broadly community perceptions of how the deradicalisation process takes place and the effectiveness of reintegration.

Background

The activities of the Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Wal-Jihad, popularly known as Boko Haram, have caused an estimated 20,000 to 30,000 deaths and displaced over 2.3 million people since 2009. Between 2009 and 2015, the group took control of extensive territories in north-eastern Nigeria, including the Borno state capital Maiduguri, devastated the lives of millions; and constituted a significant threat to the integrity of the Nigerian state. Boko



0-1 Ruth - Internally Displaced Person in Yola whose husband was killed by Boko Haram.

*Photo credit: EU protection and Humanitarian Aid
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Haram's increasing military raids and attacks in territories of Nigeria's neighbours led to the formation of the joint neighbourhood military response force in early 2015: The Multi-National Joint Task Force (MNJTF). Supported by the United States, France, and Britain through the provision of training, advice, and intelligence, the MNJTF came to include the military forces of Chad, Niger, Cameroon, and Benin, in addition to those of Nigeria. Boko Haram lost control of much of its territory from 2015 onwards but despite factionalism that led to a formal split and government declarations of victory, the insurgency continues to kill thousands of people yearly, with about 2,733 people killed in 2019 across the most affected communities in the Northeast, Nigeria. In the last years, the terrorist group has varied its recruitment

strategies; most new members have been forcefully conscripted, abducted, or blackmailed into the group. There are also older members who left and even fled their communities when the group made its transformation from dawah (the proselytizing of Islam) to destructive jihad (the spread of Islam by unholy war).

In 2015 Muhammadu Buhari was elected president. In fulfilment of one of his campaign promises, he set up Operation Safe Corridor (OSC) in September 2015. OSC is a custodial program undertaken under a Presidential Directive, with the major aim to deradicalise, rehabilitate and reintegrate repentant ex-combatants into society. Its focus is those who surrendered during the military onslaught, those who were conscripted to the Boko

Haram insurgency against their will and those who felt disenchanted with the activities of the leadership of the group.

President Buhari has publicly reiterated his government's commitment to the scheme on several occasions. In granting amnesty to repentant Boko Haram members in April 2018 he said, "we are ready to rehabilitate and integrate such repentant members into the larger society".⁴ With increased military pressure, tightened borders, diminished supply routes, internal division in the group and the desire of forcibly conscripted members to escape, the numbers of Boko Haram fighters surrendering themselves to the military has continued to increase with over 1500 ex-combatants as at December 2019. Since the onset of OSC, a total of 800 ex-combatants have passed through the program.

Operation Safe Corridor

The gradual quelling of the insurgency and a recognition that some Boko Haram fighters and associates had been forcibly conscripted was a starting point for the establishment of OSC. Considering these developments' governments of the Lake Chad Basin - namely Niger, Chad, Cameroon, and Nigeria, - commenced ongoing deradicalisation and reintegration programs for ex-combatants including OSC. OSC is essentially a programme of deradicalisation, rehabilitation and reintegration for 'repentant, low-risk, surrendered male Boko Haram combatants. In Nigeria, OSC is important in facilitating peace and complementing Operation *Lafiya Dole (Peace by Force)* - renamed more recently Hadin Kai - the military operation in ending the Boko haram insurgency in Northeast Nigeria.

From the outset, OSC has been conceived as a counter-terrorism strategy, with the aim of reducing the rank and file of the insurgents and was initially primarily developed by the security services within Nigeria. It was the output of the deliberations focused on finding ways to encourage more Boko Haram militants to surrender. Despite the repeated expressions of concern about the preferential treatment of those who go through OSC programme, which we discuss in this report, the emphasis from the inception of the programme has been protecting society (Felbab-Brown 2018). As an outcome of this aim of encouraging defection it focuses exclusively on low-level Boko Haram members who surrender. This group who surrendered can be classified into four groups: those who lived under Boko Haram rule and supported them in some form; those who were conscripted to the Boko Haram insurgency against their will; those who felt disenchanted with the activities of the leadership of the group and those who surrendered voluntarily or under fire from the Nigerian Armed Forces. They volunteer for the programme and undergo screening conducted by the Joint Investigation Centre (JIC) which is made up of representatives from the armed forces, security agencies, community leaders and representatives of the state governments, in some instances, the Civilian Joint Taskforce (CJTF) may also be engaged in this process as deemed necessary.

Over time the sectors and departments engaged in its implementation have expanded. In September 2015, President Muhammad Buhari set up the OSC committee which comprised the governors of the three most affected states - Borno, Yobe and Adamawa -, the Inspector of General of Police, the Director-General of State Security Services (DSS), the chief of Naval Staff, the Chief of Army Staff, the Chief of Defence Intelligence Agency, the Director-General of the National Emergency Management Agency, Chief of Air Staff and Office of the National Security Adviser. The OSC committee is chaired by the Chief of

Defence Staff, who convened the OSC Implementation Committee to undertake the implementation of the program. This committee was initially made up of nine military personnel. It has since expanded to a 30-member committee comprising both military and civilian personnel (see appendix 3). These 30 members are responsible for implementing the OSC operational framework under the committee's terms of reference.

OSC was at the conception stage patterned after a similar program in Saudi with a 12-week time frame for implementation Arabia (see Boucek 2008). This was later increased to 16 weeks and now benchmarked at 24 weeks, although on average it takes around one year for any client - as former combatants are referred to in the camp - to exit the program (see appendix 1). The OSC Camp was established in April 2016 with the initial deployment of officers, men, and civilian personnel from all branches of the armed forces. However, officials of other ministries, departments, and agencies, with specialized and supporting roles such as the Ministry of Women and Social Welfare, National Identity Management Commission (NIMS), National Orientation Agency (NOAA) among others were later deployed in July 2016, to ensure a fully integrated operation.

Ex-combatants arrive at the camp in Gombe having been screened and categorised as 'low-risk'. The screening is done by Operation Lafiya Dole who accept the surrendered Boko Haram terrorists at their detention centres. They then conduct a preliminary investigation of the ex-combatants which includes interrogation about their background and the reasons they joined the insurgents. After these phases, individuals are then segregated into those that are truly conscripted from the hardened committed Boko Haram fighters' ones. After the interrogation, those deemed to have been conscripted are handed over to Giwa barracks where they are to undergo further interrogation. The screening team comprises representatives of the Defence Intelligence Agency (DIA), Nigerian police, Department of Security Service (DSS), Nigerian Immigration Service (NIS), Nigerian Prison Service and the Ministry of Justice. The criteria for the categorisation remain somewhat opaque and are not widely laid out but include: reasons for joining Boko Haram (where they conscripted?), whether they hold radical beliefs, what roles they carried out for Boko Haram or if they just lived under their rule (Felbab-Brown 2018: 21-22). This route is however only made available to defectors, those who surrendered, who are granted some leniency for handing themselves in (Felbab-Brown 2018:22).

It is after this stage that those deemed low risk are handed over to the OSC Camp in Gombe. Whilst, others remain in detention, and will be subject to court trials. Those who enter the leniency programme are held in specific camps called 'special holding' – there is also a leniency programme for women and children in Maiduguri. Those admitted to OSC undergo several weeks of religious education, psychosocial support, and vocational training at a military-run camp located in the former National Youth Service Commission (NYSC) camp, in Gombe state. The facility has been extensively renovated to include security provisions that contain those enrolled on the program until they are deemed suitable for release. The aim is that defecting members of Boko Haram will, through receiving this support, become useful members of society upon release from the program.

Research Findings

One of the key findings of this report was the significance of community concerns about the OSC program especially about the reintegration element. The challenges here relate to a sense of inequity as communities have received no reparation as victims. This tension particularly given the need to resettle the two million people displaced by the conflict has been noted by other observers (Clubb and Tapley 2018: 2061). These centre on the economic benefits that the ex-combatants are seen to derive from participation in OSC. Clubb and Tapley contend that the key for de-radicalisation efforts to be successful reintegration is vital (Clubb and Tapley 2018: 2062) and this sense of disparity and unfairness undermines communities support for this process. Thus, this perceived lack of balance between victims and perpetrators is hindering reconciliation and sustainable reintegration. In an effort, to bridge these gaps, the Operation Safe Corridor program has introduced a community service initiative that allows it to engage and provide free medical care, provision of bore holes and other social services to conflict-affected communities/populations as part of/prior to ex-combatants' reintegration. Moreover, the Northeast Development Commission and the Borno State Government are investing more heavily in services for victims of Boko Haram through their North East Stabilisation and Development Plan.

In the Camp: Deradicalization and Rehabilitation

When the research was conducted in late 2019, 363 ex-combatants had completed the Special Holding program and approximately 550 clients were going through it.

Respondents felt that their treatment during the deradicalisation program, which includes better living conditions, than those they had experienced as fighters for Boko Haram, economic empowerment, and religious counselling, could entice more insurgents to disengage – a key driver for the institution of the OSC. Camp staff perceived the program to be successful since no recidivism has been so far recorded since the beginning of the OSC. Recidivism is frequently used to measure the success of DDR programmes although as Clubb and Tapley (2018) argue this is not always the best measure with the success of reintegration into communities being a more comprehensive way of examining the outcomes of DDR initiatives. As we discuss below reintegration has been the more difficult step for OSC. Staff believed that all the various aspects of the programs have contributed to the effectiveness of the program so far. However, they singled out drug rehabilitation, spiritual deradicalization and one on one counselling and psychotherapy sessions as particularly significant element of its success. This is especially true when the initial assessment, classification, and design of deradicalization and rehabilitation program for the clients is done effectively.

Staff perceived that client developed a new understanding of Islam during their time in the Gombe camp. According to one of the respondents

“After attending the religious classes in the camp, the belief and sympathy in the ideology of Boko Haram are reversed”. – (Interview Camp, Gombe. October 2019)

Several ex-combatants claimed they liked the approach and deradicalisation measures, such as the provision of functional western education, spiritual counseling, and Sulh narratives, which is a culturally appropriate counter-narratives derived from the Holy Book (Koran), as part of the advice they were given on countering Boko Haram narratives. In acknowledging the success of the program ex-combatants claimed it had given them a better understanding of what “Boko”, in other words, western education, is. One noted how he had embraced the concept of democracy and one Nigeria,

“I feel more positive towards Nigeria and her leaders”. (Interview ex-combatant, Maiduguri, September 2019).

These elements of OSC have been seen to be a key strength of the programme as this religious framing rather than disavowal and “emphasis on Nigerian identity” aids defectors to reintegrate into what Clubb and Tapley call the “referent milieu” (2018: 2063). In other words, these elements are seen to not only be useful in reforming the ex-combatants themselves but also in terms of reorientating them in ways that would aid their reintegration into the communities that they go on to join.

Ex-combatant interviewees from a range of stages in the process exhibited positivity about their participation.

“When I went to Gombe, experts told me everything I wanted to know, the teaching and orientation I received even make [sic] me hate Boko Haram. I was taught how to trade and promote my business.” (Interview, ex-combatant, Maiduguri, July 2019)

As this quote shows there are at least two elements of this firstly they asserted the value they placed on the different approaches to Islam and their county that the programme promoted. But secondly there is a focus on economic empowerment initiatives which aimed to train and equip clients for reintegration. Many in the camp were positive about the new skills - such as phone repairs - they had acquired as part of the program as well as the advice provided on setting up a business which as the interviewee quoted above mentions. But some expressed concerns for example, that what they were taught would not easily translate into gainful employment opportunities once they were out others expressed concerns that the classes were overcrowded. This raises important questions about whether the skills being taught appropriately targets to jobs on reintegration. As well as the capacity levels of the education and skills elements of the programme.

Additionally ex-camp residents reflect warmly on the recreation activities within the camp; football matches, watching films, playing music and acting were viewed very positively. One of the respondents explained that acting in the stage drama is the fondest memory he has of the program.

“I cannot forget the time we spent on recreational activities such as playing football with my former colleagues, watching films, playing music and dancing. I also love the stage drama performances. These were often recorded and played back to us.” (Interview, ex-combatant, Maiduguri December 2019.)

These positive camp experiences ex-combatants helped to forget their negative experiences in Sambisa, the forested area in which Boko Haram has its strongholds. From their explanations, these aspects of the curriculum remain etched in their memories partly because they were a source of escape from their traumatic and regimented

lifestyles with Boko Haram. Many of the boys were taken in their early teen years and thus were deprived of a natural supportive environment to grow up in with the latitude to make mistakes and grow in an organic environment.

“It is right to assume that the experience in the camp is a taste of freedom some of the men have never experienced previously”. (Interview, ex-combatant, Gubio, November 2019).

Whilst there is then much that is seen as positive in the deradicalization and rehabilitation activities within the camp the key set of stumbling blocks around the final and key element of OSC which is reintegration. As mentioned, clients discussed the fit of the skills they learnt to the lives they were able to take up when reintegrated. On leaving the camp OSC graduates are given a support package to help with their economic reintegration. Some respondents shared challenges with regards to starting afresh. One believed that the starter packs (including manageable start-up capital and work tools) given to them could be increased, while others reported that they were late receiving the starter packs. One respondent noted that whilst the relationship between him and the CJTF he was handed to was cordial, he did admit that the main challenge he continues to face is low patronage of his business, which is affecting his income. Moreover, camp staff noted that delays to reintegration of clients was a challenge. In most cases, these delays are due to the inability/ unwillingness of states to accept the transfer of the ex-combatants. These postponements of transfers out of the camp have put a strain on the trust between clients and staff, and between staff in different roles. Trust is a very important element of the process and is often initially a major challenge when a client first arrives at the DRR camp. However, camp staff said that as individuals progressed through the programme they usually began to see a shift as more trust was built by all actors through regular interactions and trust-building mechanisms.

The major issues with the programme emerge around reintegration (Felbab-Brown 2018: 25). These can range from reluctance of states to accept those being discharged from the camp, respondents facing ostracization such as low patronage of the businesses they establish, to more violent reactions. To understand these dynamics, it is the concerns and dynamics of the communities into which they are supposed to be reintegrated that require more detailed attention and so we move to examining the communities' attitudes to reintegration (see also Ike et al. 2021).

In the Communities: Reintegration

The reintegration process is a vital part of the OSC program. Reintegration is important as it helps the graduates of the OSC to become upstanding members of society, prevent recidivism and move towards the reduction in violence. The success of this key reintegration stage is limited by the extent to which the communities are willing to accept and peacefully coexist with ex-combatants (Ike et al. 2021; Clubb and Tapley 2018). The interviews conducted for this report with community leaders, internally displaced persons and other community members demonstrate that this openness to the reintegration of individuals through the OSC programme is either absent or very fragile.

The only viable option for most ex-Boko Haram members is return to their communities for Nigerians and home country for non-Nigerians (Two Chadians so far have graduated

and been repatriated). Since the beginning of the program, most of the Nigerian ex-combatants have opted to go back to their states, despite community resistance.

The significance of communities to the reintegration process is acknowledged by the OSC program. The program approach possible communities where clients can be reintegrated usually where they have family connections. To try to address the barriers to successful reintegration OSC have utilized community sensitization and dialogue sessions through town hall meetings as a means of preparing communities for the reintegration process. This is followed by a sensitization program held in the community with religious leaders, traditional rulers, and residents. This is followed by contacts with religious and community leaders ahead of each clients' return. The program has been further developed to allow family members to visit the clients at the camp. The community dialogues and sensitization have been supported by CDD and the Presidential Committee on the Northeast Initiative (PCNI) (which is now the Northeast Development Commission (NEDC). It is designed to engage, inform and prepare the affected communities ahead of the ex-combatants' reintegration. On leaving the camp clients are handed over to the state government [the states involved are Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa] for reintegration into their communities. The the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) are tasked with monitoring them.

However, despite the community sensitization and visitation programs, many communities remain resentful and mistrustful of accepting former Boko Haram members. Communities' reticence and even opposition to the OSC programme and reintegration emerged through this research and has been highlighted in other studies (Ike et al. 2021; Adebayo and Matsilele 2019). This, wariness of or even hostility to reintegration has four different aspects: firstly, fear of violence from those being re-integrated; secondly, anger and being asked 'to forgive and forget' the atrocities of Boko Haram without justice for these horrors being offered; thirdly, mistrust of the motives / genuineness of those going through the OSC programme; and fourthly a disbelief that Boko Haram fighters could be deradicalised.

Some communities and individuals are afraid and apprehensive that ex-combatants may take up arms again.

"...at first, I won't feel safe, anytime I see them, I will be thinking they will still launch an attack." (Interview, 32-year-old female IDP, Borno State, November 2019)

"Anything can happen if they are within us [the] community will not accept it. I would advise that should be relocated elsewhere." (Interview, 37-year-old male CJTF member, Borno State, November, 2019,)

This is a concern perhaps felt particularly viscerally in many of the communities in the Northeast of Nigeria, engaged with for this study, where significant numbers of people have been displaced by the conflict with Boko Haram and where communities experienced the violence directly. Although, concerns of a return to violence have also been highlighted in another study that interviewed Nigerian's further away from the epicentre of the conflict (Ike et al. 2021). This fear of violence expressed by the first interviewee is somewhat more ambivalent in the second quotation where the focus was also on the fact that the 'community will not accept it'. The fear of future violence is entangled with the trauma and anger from previous violence: one respondent recounted how 29 members of his family had been killed by the insurgents. There is therefore

significant distress that communities are being asked to live with those they perceive to have committed or to have at least been party to inflicting serious violence the CJTF member continues.

“... for example, the person that they kill his wife will not be happy to live with them. Even the Boko Haram will not accept or feel comfortable to be reintegrated back to their community because they know what they have done.” (Interview, 37-year-old male CJTF member, Maiduguri, October 2019)

“How do you expect me to live in peace with any of so-called Boko Haram whom you claimed have been radicalized?”. (Interview, 43 – year – old female IDP, Maiduguri. October 2019)

Whilst OSC is supposed to only operate for those who have defected from Boko Haram who are also deemed ‘low risk’ what this means and what violence they may have been responsible for or not is not fully clear to communities. Indeed, as we will discuss later there is a broader issue with the lack of transparency in the criteria and processes for how defectors are categorized (see also Felbab- Brown 2018). There is also an issue with the lack of transitional justice mechanisms that means that effected communities have little evidence of their trauma and suffering being recognized or perpetrators being brought to justice.

The apprehensiveness about returnees’ future actions is also rooted in a sense that the deradicalization will not have worked and the repentance they supposedly exhibit is not genuine. Rather, the perception is that ex-fighters are using the OSC programme for their benefit - to address their hunger and obtain information for Boko Haram (Felbab-Brown 2018:25). This perspective is found amongst officials as well as from ordinary community members. A senior government official recounting his experience claimed:

Boko haram cannot be trusted, they love money so much, so some of them joined the OSC program just to get money and also gather intelligence for their members in the bush.” (Interview, Government Official, Maiduguri, Borno State, July 2019).

This sense of the counterfeit nature of the repentance proffered by those going through the OSC program is, we suggest entangled, with the sense of in justice in these processes whereby those internally displaced by the conflict and those impacted directly by the violence of the conflict have not received support. While the former fighters are supported to economically reintegrated there are no similar opportunities or access to funds for the survivors in the communities they are being reintegrated into. Thus, this breeds a sense of not only perpetrators not being brought to justice but being economically rewarded whilst the communities who directly suffered violence and the millions who were displaced are not similarly compensated. The resettlement assistance they receive comes to be seen as the motivation for disingenuous protestations of repentance.

Whilst, for some ex-Boko Haram combatants simply cannot be reformed:

No, it is impossible because of their ideology, they don’t have faith and even if we deradicalise them, they will still go back to their violent behaviours. (Interview, 32-year-old female IDP, Maiduguri, October, 2019)

“A Boko Haram is like a leopard, who can never change his color, they can pretend today but they will always go back to their group. (Interview, Community Leader, Yola, Adamawa, November 2019)

However, for many respondents the ex-Boko Haram combatants can take place in some cases. Community members make a clear distinction between those forcibly conscripted by Boko Haram and those who were willing combatants. Viewing those who were given little choice as suitable candidates for deradicalisation but much less so those who joined voluntarily. There is a near consensus among people and the traditional and religious leaders in the most affected states that only conscripted former Boko Haram can be reintegrated into the communities, a view expressed in several interviews with community members.

“Interviewer: Do you think it is possible to de-radicalise someone?

Respondent: Yes, it is possible especially those that are forced to join Boko Haram.” (Interview, Yola, Adamawa. 28-year-old female community member, October 2019)

“Those BH ex-combatant that are forced to join can be de-radicalised but those that voluntarily join cannot be deradicalised” (Interview, Maiduguri, 37-year-old male CJTF member, October 2019)

This possibility is often framed in religious understandings just as the inability to reform was seen to occur because “they don’t have faith” was framed by the respondent above. Deradicalization is seen as analogous with repentance and respondents citing preaching and prayer as a route to this taking place.

“If he repents, we believe God has destined that it will happen.” (Interview, 25-year-old female community member, Yola, Adamawa, 2019).

There are clearly some distinct concerns with the reintegration part of OSC. As highlighted in the previous section, elements of the program within the camp require strengthening (Felbab- Brown 2018: 25), with vocational education needing better focusing and basic education requiring more resources to prevent overcrowded classes. However, the religious reorientation is seen as valuable. Its value may lie in part in creating ways for those who have defected to re-integrate into what Clubb and Tapley (2018) call the ‘referent milieu’. In other words, those attempting to reintegrate have a common set of reference points a language that should aid in making connections and developing relationships through the shared engagements with Islamic teachings and practices. This, facilitation of ideological re-integration is expected to aid in the development of positive public attitudes towards defectors (Clubb and Tapley 2018: 2063). Currently there is some evidence that this is particularly the case not only in terms of Islam but also in their orientation towards the Nigerian state as highlighted in the previous section. Therefore, the religious education element of the reintegration program has distinct value. However, on its own this is not bringing the communities concerned to see the OSC program in a positive light. Rather much more needs to be done to enable communities to engage willingly and openly with the aims of OSC reintegration.

Discussion and Recommendations: What about Justice?

What is clear is that trust deficits complicate reintegration efforts. So too does the fact that the conflict remains ongoing. Victims and other local actors are of the view that the cessation of conflicts is a major precondition for reconciliation and reintegration. This is coupled with the lack of an existing holistic framework for reconciliation and reintegration of repentant ex-combatants at any level. More can be done to provide safe passages for these repentant ex-members in their eventual host communities. Below we make some recommendations to tackle some of the issues raised by this research.

Absence of justice?

Communities strongly criticise how ex-Boko Haram members are not brought to account and that there is a significant lack of judicial or non-judicial justice for the violence that has been inflicted. They see this absence of justice as promoting impunity. The communities cannot fathom how Boko Haram members who killed their family members, displaced millions, burnt their households rendering them internally displaced and took away their livelihoods, can come back to cohabit with them with no penalties. Moreover, those being resettled are provided with start-up packs including cash and equipment whereas there is little or no help for communities and IDPs, who experience much worse material conditions in the densely populated IDP camps.

“the OSC videos show the former fighters learning a trade, getting good food when the same is not available in the IDP camps and above all, they get economic incentives to begin a business after exiting the program.”
(Interview, 33-year-old male, IDP, Maiduguri, October 2019)

As such, in the eyes of some community members, the former fighters who oppressed them are now better off compounding the injustice of them not being held to account. This disparity undermines the reintegration aims of OSC and more broadly

Some community respondents broached the idea of using traditional mechanisms to seek accountability. For instance, in Duhu District, in Adamawa state, Kabara traditional justice mechanisms have been used by the communities to bring former Boko Haram members to account. They are asked to swear an oath never to regress, made to pay compensation to affected community members and to undertake community services. Respondents recommended that community service and financial reparations, known in Islam as *Diyah*, can complement the OSC programme. This is only possible, however, in some communities where these mechanisms are an established practice.

There is discussion in the academic literature of the need to better integrate transitional justice and disarmament demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) processes has been around for a little while (see Sriram and Herman 2009 and Clark 2014). This literature highlights precisely that incentives offered for participation in DDR processes may undermine transitional justice (Sriram and Herman 2009) and this seems to be taking place with the OSC programme. There is a tension between justice and peacebuilding. Whilst this is not an easily resolved tension there are some suggestions from this litterateur that moving from individual packages that support individual ex-combatants to aiding the whole community “may minimise the perception of combatants as a special

group and assist in the longer-term reintegration process (Sriram and Herman 2009:469).

Clark's work on Rwanda and Uganda has highlighted that in cases of decentralised conflict "in which the vast majority of perpetrators and victims are ordinary citizens who know each other intimately" there is a desire that individuals directly responsible for harms are held accountable (Clark 2014: 255). This is despite their age or rank etc. In line with this, whilst communities did distinguish between those that were conscripted into Boko Haram versus those who joined willingly, communities felt that Boko Haram members should be held accountable for the offences they committed, regardless of how they joined Boko Haram. Clark highlights that more informal processes, local rituals, have been utilised in Uganda, again reflecting the practice in some communities in Nigeria engaged with for this study.

Recommendation 1: The reintegration element of the OSC programme requires more focus and assistance provided could be refocused to incorporate communities that receive ex-combatants rather than purely individualised settlement packages. These kinds of changes are clearly macro level changes to be considered at the highest policy making levels as they could not easily be implemented by the current OSC programme.

Recommendation 2: Work could be done with communities to explore local systems for accountability – ensuring that these do not in turn disproportionately persecute returnees.

Limited community participation

The lack of real participation and involvement of the local communities in OSC has contributed to the challenges faced in the reintegration of the former fighters. Locals perceive themselves as having been forced to buy into the program, and as a result, do not feel ownership of the process. At the beginning of the program, there was no attempt to reflect the needs of the communities who are expected to receive the graduates of the OSC program. The approach at the onset was to only conduct community sensitization when the former fighters are ready to graduate from the program. The immediate fall out of this is the failure to promote reconciliation and acceptance of the ex-combatants.

The new approach of taking family members and some community leaders to see ex-combatants at the camp is useful but also limited. For sustainability purposes and to enable reintegration there is a need to get the buy-in of the communities. The program must also consider the fact that most of the traditional leaders were grossly affected by the insurgents with many of them having to abscond from their stools and ancestral homes to take refuge in the state capitals of Yobe, Borno and Adamawa.

The lack of local ownership is not limited to the communities alone. State governors do not feel involved enough in the program and claim that there is a lack of synergy, consultation, and involvement from the outset. There is a need for the program to cultivate ownership at national, state, and local levels for sustainability purposes. This will only grow in importance as more former fighters graduate from the program and seek community reintegration.

Recommendation 3: The state and non-state actors need to establish transitional justice frameworks and procedures that direct their actions toward addressing the needs of conflict-affected communities/populations not just those that focus on DRR De-radicalization Rehabilitation and Reintegration of ex-combatants. This is not an either-or choice, focusing on transitional justice will provide a better starting point for successful rehabilitation and reintegration

Screening and categorisation issues

Reintegration of ex-combatants requires that communities have some level of trust around who they are being asked to welcome and live alongside. The lack of clarity about how ex-combatants are categorised as ‘low risk’ and concerns about this process therefore significantly impacts the prospects for successful reintegration.

So, the community are afraid to live with the Boko Haram because they do not trust that the exited Boko Haram that may actually be the low risk or conscripted ones as the military claim. (Interview, 37-year-old male CJTF member, October 2019)

Respondents in communities are concerned with how persons from Kainji or Giwa barracks are correctly fit into the low risk or high risks categories. The Giwa Barracks is a holding facility for all classes of combatants and ex-combatants. All those held here are investigated and profiled by the Joint Investigation Centre (JIC). Post investigation and profiling, persons at the holding facility are further classified by intelligence officers and psychologists into the following categories:

- a) Non-associated persons - cleared by the JIC of any connection with Boko Haram activities. They are transferred to the Borno State Government for a two-week DRR program prior to reintegration.
- b) Low-risk associates - generally conscripted into insurgency extremist operations by the rebels. Most of the ex-combatants in this group are surrendered persons. Those categorised as low risk are transferred to the OSC DRR camp.
- c) High risk persons - heavily involved with Boko Haram activities and violence. This group of people is transported to the Kainji Camp for trial.

Respondents from several of the agencies that take part in the screening highlight deficiencies in the screening process such as lacking any options to corroborate the information that they are told by the detainee. They agree that the screening process is not full proof and may be counter-productive in the long run. Many respondents argue that it is very difficult for the military to identify the active insurgents from the lower-level members. Some respondents argued the ex-Boko Haram members have even perfected a way to go through the profiling process. However, most escapes/defectors remain in detention and do not go through the OSC leniency route (Felbab-Brown 2018: 32). The power of the programme to encourage defection, one of its key aims, must therefore be somewhat limited. Especially as there is no clear idea how someone defecting will be assessed and progressed. The lack of clear criteria therefore not only creates a mistrust

from communities being asked to receive those who have been through the OSC program but also undermines a key aim of encouraging defection due to the arbitrary nature of the screening and categorisation.

Fighters are wary of the scheme and worry for their safety if they engage with it. One former Boko Haram fighter who has undergone rehabilitation cited the need for better information in Kanuri and Hausa on how and where to disengage that can help foster confidence that defectors will not be extra-judicially executed (Interview, ex-combatant, Maiduguri, October 2019). These concerns emerge as there have been several allegations of extrajudicial killings of those in detention. An example frequently cited by interviewees was the alleged murder of a young man by soldiers after he tried to surrender in Gwoza, Borno State. These stories circulate in a context where Nigerian military have been known to execute large numbers of captured Boko Haram fighters in detention (Felbab-Brown 2018: 14). Regardless of their accuracy in any particular case, such reports deter others from surrendering. Respondents indicated that this narrative is pushed in Boko Haram camps, that if they escape or turn themselves over to the soldiers, they will be killed (Interview, ex-combatant, Maiduguri, November 2019). In this context the arbitrary nature of the screening processes further undermines the efforts to demobilise, deradicalise and reintegrate ex-combatants by making defection more of a risky prospect for low level Boko Haram members.

Recommendation 4: The lack of clarity around the criteria for screening is problematic and clear and honest communication of these to receiving communities is vital. The opaqueness of the process leads to lack of trust in its rigor in receiving communities. Work should be undertaken to lay out clearly what criteria are used and crucially to communicate this to communities where ex-combatants maybe returned, as well as to Boko Haram who may wish to defect.

Recommendation 5: The development of an appeals mechanism for the categorisation and screening process. This would provide ways for community members to present evidence that someone has been wrongly categorised. So that communities can challenge this when those have committed significant acts of violence are not presented to communities for reintegration. This should also enable those wrongly categorised as high-risk to have the opportunity to present evidence to counter this.

Recommendation 6: Exploring ways of evidence gathering beyond interrogation of the individual defector to ensure the robustness of the process and prevent the interviewing of defectors under duress.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Different Stages of the De-radicalization Rehabilitation and Reintegration Program

1.1. Step 1 - Reception of Surrendered Ex-Combatants

- 1.1.1. The military operation *Lafiya Dole* is implementing this stage for **receiving, disarming, conducting initial screening and transfer** of surrendered ex-combatants to OSC through the Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) Centre in Maiduguri.
- 1.1.2. The DIA Office in Maiduguri documents and facilitates transfer/transporting of surrendered ex-combatants to the OSC Camp in Gombe

1.2. Step 2 - Reception, Documentation and Profiling at the Camp

- 1.2.1. Medical tests [including drug test for use of illegal substances]
- 1.2.2. Documentation and profiling /assessment towards the design of individual and group interventions
- 1.2.3. Clients' classification [measuring level of engagement, indoctrination/belief, and ideology]

Note – this stage of the program is being implemented by the Operation Safe Corridor cam reception committee including members of the Armed Forces and Professionals from MDAs

1.3. Step 3 - Design and Implementation of Deradicalization and Rehabilitation Interventions

- 1.3.1. Design of individual and group interventions based on the outcomes of the clients profiling and assessment by the DRR team, which is led by the Prison Service but also involving professionals from other MDAs
- 1.3.2. Implementation of the deradicalization and rehabilitation programs by the DRR Team. The deradicalization program is conducted in six phases. They are a] counselling b] psychotherapy c] spiritual therapy d] psychosocial and coping activities like drama/play, music e] education f] sporting activities/events. The rehabilitation program includes farming, shoe making, fishing, carpentry, pure water production and poultry farming

- 1.3.3. Clients Intervention Evaluation and Recommendation – this is a reassessment program designed to measure the progress of participating ex-combatants (individual and groups) as to reestablish their progress or challenges they face receiving the DRR programs. This is more like a learning and recommendation stage as to what next for each of the participating ex-combatant.
- 1.3.4. Application of evaluation recommendations and re-evaluation [the cycle continues to run this way until the DRR team is satisfied with the intervention outcome]

1.4. Step 4 – Strategic Communication, Community/Civil-Military Intervention.

- 1.4.1. The communication component is implemented using the following strategies: a] media engagement, b] sensitization of host communities c] advocacy and engagement with state and non-state actors d] design and development of community engagement narratives

1.5. Step 5 – Further Rehabilitation and Reintegration of Deradicalized Clients

- 1.5.1. Mapping of communities of return for all the ex-combatants
- 1.5.2. Visitations by families
- 1.5.3. Passing out and swearing of oath of allegiance to Nigeria before the judicial panel – (Quasi-Judicial Panel)
- 1.5.4. Return of the clients to the States [Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa and in some cases Bauchi, among other states with ex-combatants who has gone through the program] for completion of their rehabilitation program and reintegration back to the community. This is done in partnership with the state governors who are strategic members of the OSC committee, National Directorates of Employment [NDE] and the Civilian Joint Task Force [CJTF]. The OSC releases the clients to the state governments, who in turn return them to their relations.
- 1.5.5. Ex-combatants are reintegrated directly into communities in states such as Adamawa and Bauchi while under the care of community leaders (traditional and religious leaders) and local security agencies, whereas in Borno, they are initially sent to a hold camp where their reintegration into communities is gradually facilitated in consultation with the receiving communities. The CJTF are responsible for monitoring the reintegrated participants.
- 1.5.6. The DIA provides oversight and intelligence for CJTF in monitoring reintegrated participants.

Appendix 2: The Committees/teams and their roles

Committee/team	Members	Role
Reception	Lafiya Dole (now Hadin Kai)	Receiving, Disarming, initial screening of ex-combatants and transfer to OSC
Security	AFN, DIA, DSS, NSCDC, Police, ONSA, NIA, NIMC	Provision of physical and intelligence-based security
Justice	Defence Intelligence Agency, and Federal Ministry of Justice	Legal advice/guidance and transitional justice
Deradicalization & Rehabilitation	Prisons, NDLEA, Federal Ministry of Women and Social Development, NDE.	Assessment, design, implementation, and evaluation of Deradicalization and Rehabilitation Interventions
Strategic Communication and Host Community Sensitization	DIA as the coordinating body, NOA, NEDC, all the MDAs and CSOs [including CDD]	Civil military, advocacy, and host communities' engagements
Reintegration of Foreign Nationals	Nigerian Immigration & Service, Nigerian Intelligence Agency	Reintegration and monitoring of returned foreign nationals
Food and Non-Food Items.	NEMA, NEDC	Provision of food and non-food items, including medical supplies.

Appendix 3: Roles of Ministries, Departments and Agencies participating in OSC

- **Armed Forces of Nigeria** – The lead agency for security and responsible for providing an enabling environment and coordinating the conduct of all OSC activities.
- **Defence Intelligence Agency (DIA)** – The coordinating agency for OSC, and the lead agency for the provision of intelligence in OSC. It also coordinates required legal activities for the OSC DRR program.
- **Department of State Services (DSS)** – Part of the security component of OSC, and responsible for exploiting all intelligence sources for the enhancement of OSC Camp Security, including clients debriefing, and exploring its network to monitor clients reintegrated back into their communities.
- **Federal Ministry of Justice (FMoJ)** – Responsible for providing legal guidance for OSC, including the constitution of a Quasi-Judicial Panel administering transitional justice on the clients before discharge from the DRR program.
- **Federal Ministry of Women and Social Development (FMWSD)** – Serves as part of the deradicalization and rehabilitation component as well as to liaise with the state ministries to provide social workers for OSC activities.
- **National Directorate of Employment (NDE)** – They are part of the de-radicalization and rehabilitation team, responsible for planning and implementation of vocational training interventions for clients in liaison with PCNI [now NEDC], including the provision of starter packs for the clients and their enrolment for further training in the NDE Skill Acquisition centres in the states of return/origin.
- **National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA)** – Part of the de-radicalization and Rehabilitation team and responsible for counselling clients diagnosed of substance abuse and as well monitoring of the clients across their communities after graduation from OSC program on the use of drug and drug-related issues
- **National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA)** – Part of the de-radicalization and rehabilitation team, and responsible for providing food and non-food items, relief items as well as medical expendables for running the OSC Camp. NEMA also works with state counterparts to provide food and non-food items for the clients for six months after graduation from the OSC DRR program.
- **National Identity Management Commission (NIMC)** – Part of the security team and responsible for capturing the clients' biometric details on national data systems and issuing them ID cards on graduation

- **National Intelligence Agency (NIA)** – Part of the security component and plays the role of debriefing foreign clients and exploring its network to monitor the repatriated clients in their countries.
- **National Orientation Agency (NOA)** - Part of the de-radicalization and rehabilitation team and responsible for the sensitization of host and receiving communities.
- **Nigeria Security and Civil Defence Corps (NSCDC)** – Part of the security component of OSC and assists in the physical security of the camp.
- **Nigerian Immigration Service (NIS)** - Responsible for preparation, planning, and repatriation of foreign clients back to their home countries upon graduation from the OSC program.
- **Nigerian Police** – Involved in all associated policing duties of the program. They include investigation and Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) functions for OSC and the monitoring of DRR program clients that are reintegrated back into their communities.
- **Nigerian Prisons Service (NPS)** – Is the lead agency for the de-radicalization and rehabilitation aspects of OSC activities. NPS is responsible for the design, and implementation of the deradicalization and rehabilitation program in partnership with other agencies.
- **Office of The National Security Adviser (ONSA)** – As the coordinator of all federal government of Nigeria counter-terrorism efforts, it provides the strategic guidance for OSC.
- **Operation Lafiya Dole (now Hadin Kai)** – The first responder in the chain, their role includes receiving, disarming, conducting an initial screening of the ex-combatants and transferring them to OSC Gombe Camp.
- **Presidential Committee on the Northeast Initiative (PCNI), Now Northeast Development Commission (NEDC)** – Responsible for interfacing between OSC and relevant stakeholders in the Northeast. It also facilitates sensitization meetings with receiving communities in the Northeast and the supply of relief materials to OSC by NEMA.