CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION IN PRACTICE

Empowerment of Youth Through the Construction and Dissemination of Alternative Narratives: Sulhu Process in Northeast Nigeria

August 2023

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About Cordoba Peace Institute – Geneva

Cordoba Peace Institute – Geneva (CPI) is an independent, non-profit organisation working on violence prevention, conflict transformation, social cohesion and peacebuilding. It aims to improve the theoretical and practical resources for conflict transformation and has extensive experience in West Asian and African contexts. CPI is inspired by the Andalusian city of Cordoba, a renowned historical centre of interfaith dialogue, and Geneva, a modern centre of humanitarian action and international dialogue. CPI promotes a methodology that is adapted to and accepted by local communities, conflict parties and peace actors, and uses internal peace resources within the societies in which it works. It applies the following guiding principles in the implementation of its projects: (1) non-violence, (2) inclusiveness, (3) conflict sensitivity, (4) gender sensitivity, (5) cultural sensitivity, (6) promotion of locally owned and demand-driven processes, (7) do-no-harm approach. CPI has Special Consultative Status with the United Nations.

This work was performed in partnership with Dar Al Andalus Center (DAAC), a non-governmental organisation in Nigeria that focuses on peace building and conflict resolution through alternative narratives.



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1. Context

Following the death of Abubakar Shekau, the leader of Boko Haram on the 20th of May 2021, we can observe the establishment of a "Post Shekau" period. A real power shift happened in the Lake Chad Basin since many Boko Haram commanders have been ready to pledge allegiance to Islamic State – West Africa Province (ISWAP). In addition, the establishment of a government by the Taliban in Afghanistan has provided encouragement to extremist Islamist organizations in many parts of the world that governance following strict Islamic precepts and laws may be a viable alternative to western models of government. This could represent an opportunity for extremist armed groups to gain credence as an alternative to the Nigerian federal government. As various experts and researchers explain, this "post Shekau" period could lead to an increase in the recruitment of young boys and men, as well as girls and women. Promoting a faith-based approach to young people, women, influencers, and gatekeepers is a priority to counter extremist discourse.

Furthermore, the increase in the number of Boko Haram followers who surrendered in southern Borno state, more than 1 000 combatants and their families in 2021, reveals the need to support and promote a peaceful process of reconciliation to ensure a sustainable and successful reintegration process for communities.

In general, communities are part of a government-led process of "deradicalization" as a prerequisite for reintegration and acceptance into the community. Indeed, far from being considered as victims of BH, but rather as actors, repentants must go through several stages of screening and a questioning of their respect for human rights and humanitarian law. This double victimization has dramatic consequences in terms of exacerbation of the trauma initially experienced and the perception of the community vis-à-vis the return of these people to the community.

The negative and constantly suspicious perception from the communities (documented on many occasions and observed through the various workshops conducted by DAAC)[1] towards these repentants and especially children, influenced by popular beliefs, ancestral animism and witchcraft anchored in Nigerian society and especially northeast Nigeria, is a major difficulty in this reintegration process. This is largely impacted by the widespread stigma within these communities. Women coming out of captivity are called the 'Brides of Boko Haram', the women of 'Sambisa', 'the blood of Boko Haram', as well as 'Annoba' which means epidemic. These labels sanctioning a certain rejection of the community further amplify the psychological trauma by categorizing survivors and identifying them, as individuals, with the tragedies they experienced. This is only the visible surface of the vast traumatic journey that awaits these returnees. The pitfalls are manifold and lie mainly in the fear of the community to see these women, these children, these repentants transformed, under the ideological influence of BH as a vector of misfortune for the community. The fear of radicalization, indoctrination, and re-recruitment exacerbated by the increase in suicide attacks carried out by women leads to the exclusion and stigmatization of these individuals.

In this context, CPI in collaboration with Dar Al Andalus Center (DAAC) in Nigeria, has capitalized on previous experience to work on “Empowerment of Youth through the Construction and Dissemination of Alternative Narratives” for a program of 15-months, from December 1, 2021, to February 28, 2023, in Northeast Nigeria.

The intervention has contributed to addressing the root causes of extremization and the call for extremist violence. Equipping the youth with a greater understanding of the true precepts of Islam and deeper critical thinking based on religious tolerance is fundamental to countering extremist discourse and messages.

In this frame, the project team has worked on 3 components which have been shown to be priorities through the previous project phases: (1) Intra-faith and interfaith dialogue, (2) Dissemination of the Constructive Alternative Narratives (CAN) to avoid the appeal of violence, (3) Promoting reconciliation (based on Islamic precepts, including the Sulhu process).

This endline report focuses on component 3.

2. Sulhu Program Background

The output of the third component of the project entitled “Empowerment of Youth through the Construction and Dissemination of Alternative Narratives” – Promoting reconciliation based on Islamic precepts (the process of Sulhu) – was positive.

The process started by organizing high-level meetings between the Ulema of Borno and the Ulema of Kano who have a respected reputation based on Kano’s history regarding the establishment of Islam in Nigeria. The idea was to create a safe space to encourage exchanges on the need for reconciliation in Borno. The “Ulema Conference”, was held in Maiduguri in March 2022 where 5

Ulema from Kano and 25 from Maiduguri (18 male and 7 female) took part. The participants for the conference were carefully selected through the Kano and Borno State Councils of Ulema. This step emphasized the commitments of high-level religious figures to support the process launched by DAAC. They confirmed the main issues DAAC has observed concerning Sulhu and the reintegration process. The scholars resolved to form a group that united to follow up with developments as they unfold with a view to contributing their share in ensuring lasting peace in their communities.

Then, three Sulhu Training workshops on Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR), titled "Developing Community Resilience and Moving forward steps (DECORAMS)" were held in Maiduguri from 11 to 14 June 2022, 11 to14 December 2022, and 17 to 18 January 2023.

A total of 5 communities were selected based on their proximity to the state capital and their involvement in the ongoing efforts of reconciliation and reintegration. These communities are Bama, Gwoza/Pulka, Konduga, Magumeri and Maiduguri Metropolitan Council (MMC). 10 participants were drawn from each community which led to the identification and mobilization of 50 participants comprising Imams, Scholars, Community Leaders, Women Leaders and Youths who are resident in the selected communities.

The Objectives of the training were the following:

- To promote the ideology of forgiveness, reintegration, and rejection of vengeful attitudes in favor of Sulhu and ADR.
- To educate participants from the affected communities on the principles of Sulhu and ADR based on Islamic teachings.
- To provide participants with a comprehensive understanding of the various methods for restoring peace through Sulhu as a shared community responsibility.

With the goal of supporting the reintegration of former insurgents into affected communities through the Sulhu process and Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR), DAAC and CPI were able to reinforce the paradigm of forgiveness and reintegration over that of vengeance and rejection of returnees. These ideas were slowly but positively disseminated by the participating leaders to their respective communities over the course of the process.

At the program's start, it was evident that community members were fully opposed to accepting the returning insurgents back into their communities, largely because of the perceived lack of justice. The participants in the program voiced widespread frustration with the forceful reintegration of former insurgents, especially back into communities where they had suffered from the insurgents' previous activities and hoped for an alternative. Many proposed that to improve the reintegration process, the government program should place returnees into communities that they had not directly impacted through their previous activities as insurgents. However, given that the reintegration of former insurgents was imposed by the authorities, an alternative solution was imposed, specifically one that was community-based, in order to promote peaceful reintegration in accordance with the government's program. The Sulhu process was found to be a strong solution based on spiritual, religious texts that guide everyday life in those communities.

To ensure the full acceptance of the process conducted by DAAC, community involvement was fundamental. This program found strength in the inclusion of community leaders from different schools, such as through the inclusion of women, youth, traditional rulers, scholars, and imams.

They increased community participation since the different leaders were able to transmit the teachings to their community. For example, the youth leaders were able to disseminate the Sulhu teachings by speaking with other youths in areas that were known for harassing returnees and even by circulating the information they received from the program around the schools. Additionally, the inclusion of the scholars and imams was found to be very useful, as they could use religious texts to encourage people to embrace returnees during their preaching. With the conclusion of the program, the participants within each group reported success following the returns to their communities and the dissemination of Sulhu teachings.

3. Assessment – Main Findings

Focus group discussions were conducted by DAAC and M&E agents in local languages in February 2023. The group discussions were organized by locality and by status within the communities. The main goal was to assess the impact of the Sulhu process conducted by DAAC throughout the project and to explore pathways to increase social cohesion and peaceful reintegration for the next phase.

3.1. Findings among represented groups

— **The women's group** responded positively to the Sulhu process and noted their success in spreading the teachings. Many reported positively implementing the teachings in their own lives, such as by finding forgiveness for those who killed their family members and sharing the information with their families upon their return home as well. They also promoted Sulhu among their neighbors and helped them to forgive and accept their sons, daughters, and family members who had returned to the community. At a larger scale, they found success in promoting forgiveness among other women in the community and even among students at local, nearby schools.

— Participants from the **youth group** found creative ways to disseminate Sulhu teachings that they gained from the program. In some communities they found central locations and events to promote forgiveness and harmonious coexistence. For example, the youths promoted the Sulhu teachings by meeting with groups of farmers in the morning waiting to access their farms, talking to youths in areas where they are known for name-calling, and sharing the teachings within their classes and among their classmates at school. The youths in one area had a significant impact through the organization of a football match, with the help and sponsorship of NGOs, which helped to alleviate tensions in their community.

— **Traditional rulers** were able to use their position to speak to larger numbers of people; however, they noted the most success and largest impact through their one-on-ones that they conducted with different community members and returnees. For example, one leader helped a woman to forgive her husband and sons' killer and enabled one of the returnees to start helping within the community.

— **The imams and scholars** spoke of many different methods that they employed to promote Sulhu and forgiveness within their communities. Some found success through the promotion of peace and forgiveness through sermons, leading to community members making larger efforts towards forgiving returnees. Some focused on the benefits that the community has gained from the surrender of the former insurgents, such as being able to access greater farmland, and focused on the promotion of peace and forgiveness so that society may continue to benefit from the surrender of further insurgents. Some spoke of success as well when preaching to youths about the importance of forgiveness using religious texts. Others found success by establishing relationships

with returnees so that they may gain their trust and speak of their repentance and reintegration among community members.

As demonstrated through the reports from the different groups, significant impacts were made, though the greatest success was reported through individual interventions. One of the challenges that community leaders reported facing at the macro level was that interacting with returnees could result in community members accusing them of collaborating with returnees and being hired to do so. Some communities faced additional challenges, including returnees bragging and daring people in the community, which helped to fuel the community's anger at the lack of government support provided to victims.

3.2. Findings among represented communities

Upon the reflection of leaders from each individual community, some continuities were found in regard to preventing violence in the future, the capacity of offenders to ask for forgiveness, and the possibility for offender-victim dialogues to take place. Community leaders from the participating communities emphasized the importance of government support for victims to help correct the harm suffered from the conflict. Leaders from the different communities also shared the common sentiment that following the education of returnees, the journey towards seeking forgiveness from the community would be most successful with the help of community leaders. Additionally, this journey for forgiveness would be possible so long as returnees are ready and willing to sit for such a conversation and are no longer ingenuine or bragging. If returnees are able to do so and are trusting enough of the community and community leaders to sit through such conversations, a common sentiment was expressed that these conversations could result in peace and improved social cohesion. Finally, based on their interactions with their respective communities, leaders agreed that it would be possible to stop the stigmatization of the returnees through education and the continuation of the Sulhu process in their communities.

Despite these agreements, continuity among the community leaders did not exist for all contexts. Unlike leaders from the other communities, leaders from the Bama community voiced the sentiment that forgiveness of the returnees would be possible, but that they would always identify returnees by their former insurgent associations and their repentant identity. Leaders also had separate opinions regarding community members' capacity for patience and forgiveness of returnees. Opinions on this topic varied, with some believing it possible with the guidance of community leaders and counseling of victims, some believing it possible with financial assistance from either the government or wealthy community members, and others believing that it would be impossible while the offenders are still living within the community.

Given participant feedback from the program, the education of the Sulhu process for the purpose of promoting peaceful reintegration and ADR in these communities had an overall positive impact. Even with anxieties regarding the motives of returnees and the continued hesitation to trust and interact with them, the different representative groups from the participating communities were able to provide multiple examples of success stories inspired by the Sulhu teachings. These stories clearly demonstrate the impact of the Sullhu teachings and efforts towards peaceful coexistence, such as convincing vengeful victims to forgive the offenders who directly harmed them.

With the demonstrated success of the program and the requests from the previous participants to continue to spread Sulhu teachings, the planning of a second iteration of the program is underway. To ameliorate the program for the next version, several recommendations have been made.

4. Reintegration recommendations

1. Create spaces and opportunities for community strengthening.

To solidify the reintegration process and peaceful ties between community members and returnees, it is important to strengthen community relations and create a common tie between all people to alleviate the "us vs. them" narrative that perpetuates distrust and tension.[2] To do so, imams should continue to speak to the community all together so that they can feel unified through the process that they are undergoing. Examples of forgiveness and reconciliation in Islamic history and other contemporary regions or countries could be a relevant tool. The community could also be strengthened by bringing together returnees and community members, when all parties feel ready and willing, to create a common vision for life together in the community going forward. It is important for returnees to actively participate in this process to contribute to a sense of unity and ensure that the community is collectively working towards future goals.[3] A community-based approach would be fundamental for the success of the process and could be added to the next program iteration through the community-led bridge building activities within the Sulhu process.

To ensure community voice in this process, it is recommended that the participants in the DAAC program monitor the attitudes of their community members. Once participants have noted a significant shift in the attitudes of their communities based on Sulhu teachings, they should open conversations about the possibility of meeting with repentants and creating a community vision for the future. Once community members and returnees agree to meet for this process, a safe space must be created in which community members and returnees can meet to interact for the purpose of creating a common vision for the community going forward and determining what changes may be implemented together for the benefit of the community.

To help prepare the community leaders for such a conversation, it would be useful, as part of the focus group discussions, to prompt them with questions regarding what they think would be necessary for them to successfully and peacefully host victims and returnees so that they may work towards a common vision for the betterment the community. These questions should address not only the needs of the community at large, but also the needs of the individual sectors of society, such as women, youth, etc. The needs of those groups could be specifically discussed and addressed by the participants representative of those sectors. Another key component to be included to prepare participants for these dialogues would be to provide them with conflict resolution tools to correspond with those that they already receive through the program, such as conflict transformation and how to deal with grievance and forgiveness.

An additional component that would be beneficial for ensuring peaceful dialogues, though that may not be in the capacity for this current program, would be to include actors trained in mediation and conflict management. It is recommended that work should be done to create a pool of trained mediators who are informed on the issues specific to these communities, as well as any relevant cultural knowledge, from which communities could source mediators to assist with dialogues between community members and returnees.

2. Provide the community with a voice in the reintegration process.

When implementing these programs, it is important to listen to community desires to see how the program can be molded to the specific needs of the community and more specifically women,

youth, and people with specific needs. The practice from the previous iteration of asking the community leaders what they believe were the specific needs of their groups and communities in general was positive and was a good way of centering the needs of the community. It is great for community leaders and members combined to have a general understanding of the common needs as well as the varying perspectives regarding returnees and their situation as a starting point.[4] With this understanding, the community could benefit from sharing its wishes in regard to reintegration and hopes of what the community will look like in the future so that steps can be made towards achieving this.[5]

While those formerly associated with Boko Haram may already have returned to society without community consultation, it is beneficial for the community to feel it has some say in what is happening.[6] To provide the community some input and to ensure inclusivity and that the voices of the different groups within the community are heard, it is recommended to create representative groups for different sectors of the community that meet and discuss obstacles to peaceful reintegration and the vision for the future.[7] These groups may already be represented by the community leaders that meet with DAAC, but there should be consultation to ensure there are no smaller and perhaps marginalized groups that lack representation among the chosen community leaders. The community leaders or representatives, depending on what seems like the best option to represent the voices of the community, can focus on short- and medium-term barriers to reintegration, which can be addressed through the Sulhu process.

Create a check-in process for returnees to build trust among the community.

As part of fostering trust, community reintegration, and giving the community some ownership in the process, the community could benefit from creating a check-in process for returnees. This could help to address the general concern that has been identified regarding the lack of a monitoring system of returnees from the government DDR (disarmament, demobilization and reintegration) programs.[8] In addition, it could help address the community's distrust of returnees by allowing them to consistently see the changes that returnees have undergone. For such a system, community leaders could meet with both community members and returnees to create an overall agreed-upon check-in process. The process should not look to blame or reject returnees, but rather measure progress based on what the community is hoping to achieve in terms of peace and reintegration through support and slowly accepting returnees back into the community. If established by community leaders that have undergone the Sulhu process training with DAAC, they could also work to implement components of Sulhu into the check-in process. By doing so, they could measure and report on how the community is responding, in general and/or within the different sectors, to reintegration and the greater impact of the Sulhu process.

To best support such a process, it would be beneficial to create a tri-partite check-in process involving the authorities. Given the large role that the authorities play in the DDR process, including preparing those formerly associated with Boko Haram for reintegration and determining when and where they are reintegrated, as well as their knowledge of the government's DDR programs, their inclusion would be significant. As such, steps should be taken to advocate for the authorities to participate for the betterment of the communities, receiving repentants, and for the overall success of the DDR program. With the cooperation and support of the authorities in facilitating check-in processes with returnees and the community to contribute towards a peaceful reintegration process, parties may be more open to and willing for reconciliation.

3. Build relationships and greater trust between community leaders and returnees.

Currently, community members have little information about those who have returned to their communities and are very distrustful of the changes and processes that they have undergone, believing that the returnees are pretending to have repented.[9] As a result, it will likely take a time for them to feel ready to communicate with returnees. If community leaders feel prepared, especially with the skills and information that they learn during the Sulhu process, it could be beneficial for them to meet with the returnees and build a rapport. After slowly getting to know returnees, the community leaders could then provide more information to community members in an effort to build greater trust.

a) Have community leaders meet with returnees.

Given the difficulty of DAAC going into communities to meet with returnees and the difficulty of having returnees come to DAAC offices, it could be beneficial for community leaders to meet with returnees. If they feel prepared given what they learn during the Sulhu process, there are several benefits that could be gained by community leaders building a rapport with returnees. Meetings with returnees could help community leaders learn more about the returnees, such as their stories, what factors led to their affiliation with Boko Haram, how they understand their situation, and how they view the reintegration process.[10] These meetings could help build trust among community leaders regarding the attitude, progress, and rehabilitation of returnees. For trusted community leaders to share this information with the community could contribute to trust building and the opening of dialogue between community members and returnees when the time comes. Additionally, relaying this information could be particularly helpful for improving relations between community members and those who were forcibly taken by Boko Haram, since the community could better understand that the returnees were not all active combatants and thus may pose a lower risk.[11]

b) Gather information about the processes that returnees undergo in government DDR programs.

Given the significant distrust among communities in Northeast Nigeria regarding rehabilitation and deradicalization of those formerly associated with Boko Haram, especially considering Boko Haram remains active, it could be beneficial to increase knowledge about the government's DDR processes.[12] If DAAC or community leaders have any information about the processes undergone by returnees during the Operation Safe Corridor (OSC) program, it would be beneficial to share the information with community leaders. If they are not currently aware of the process undergone in the government's DDR process, gatekeepers could gather this information during their interactions with the returnees by asking about their individual experiences and rehabilitation processes. If gatekeepers gather this information and are later able to share it with community members during the Sulhu process, it could help improve understanding, answer some of the community's questions, and alleviate some of the community's distrust.

c) Have returnees go through the Sulhu process as well.

Noting the difficulties mentioned by DAAC about having meetings with returnees directly, it may be best for the gatekeepers that are taken through the Sulhu process with DAAC to relay the teachings to the returnees, so long as they feel ready and willing. Given that they are providing the

same assistance to the community, it could be positive for the community to know what returnees are being taught and vice versa, especially since they would both receive the information from the same sources within the community. Additionally, since tensions are supported by the "us vs. them" mindset, having everyone go through the same process could be a useful link to unite the community and help work against this harmful mindset.[13]

d) Have imams communicate with those formerly associated with Boko Haram in camps.

Given that communities and community leaders are not currently prepared or informed about returnees before they reenter society, a crucial aspect of DDR programs, it would be beneficial to fill in this information gap. One recommended way of doing so would be to locate and speak with imams that currently or have previously conducted training in the camps as part of the DDR program. The information that such imams could provide would be of use for understanding the processes undergone by those formerly associated with Boko Haram before they are returned into communities. For example, communities and community leaders could benefit from learning more about the curricula in the camps and whether or not Sulhu is part of the trainings they implement.

If such imams could be included in the program by speaking to the participants about their approaches and teachings in the camps, as well as their points of view regarding returnees given their interactions, participants could then use this knowledge to inform their communities. Learning more about the processes undergone and the religious teachings imparted to returnees before they were reintegrated into communities could ease some of the community's apprehension when the individuals return or that they may have towards those who have already returned. Additionally, if Sulhu is part of the teachings that those formerly associated with Boko Haram receive in the camps, community members could feel more confident by knowing that returnees have received the same teachings as the community. Given the importance of preparing communities to the best possible extent for the return of those formerly associated with Boko Haram, this process could be valuable for the overall reintegration process.

4. Create space for dialogue between community members and returnees.

When gatekeepers see that community members and returnees feel that they are ready and willing to enter into dialogue, it would be beneficial for them to create the space and opportunity for dialogue to take place. Most likely, it would be best for dialogue to occur no less than halfway through the Sulhu process so that community members and returnees have time to process and begin healing from all that they are learning. These processes have successfully taken place in multiple programs in multiple different countries and are often tailored to the specific traditions and rituals of the communities.[14] It is thus recommended that during the initial stages of the program, information is gathered from the participants regarding key traditions or rituals in their communities that could be relevant for such dialogues and possibly reconciliation. Given the findings from the previous program, it is likely that Sulhu teachings will be beneficial for community dialogues as well. In addition, information should be gathered about the challenges that participants foresee with this process within their communities. This information may then be utilized, once participants believe that their communities are ready for such a step, to draft a strategy for such dialogues that include any identified traditions and that ensure that the perceived challenges are addressed to the best of their ability before opening dialogues. The importance of creating opportunities for dialogue between community members and returnees and the benefits that it can have for those who partake continues to be emphasized.[15] Creating this dialogue gives victims and community members the chance to see the change in mindset that those formerly

associated with militant groups have gone through. While creating space and preparing for creating this type of dialogue, there are several key points to consider.

The most important element of these dialogues is to ensure that both parties, being the community/individual victims and the returnees, are ready and willing to be a part of the conversation. For the parties to fully consent to engaging in dialogue, they should both be aware that the conversation may not go as they hope. For example, they may not be ready to forgive or may not be forgiven on the spot. Once one or both parties feel ready, community leaders could inform the other party and then organize a meeting in a safe environment. Transparency within these conversations should be reiterated and they should act as safe spaces for open dialogue about perspectives and feelings without risk of retaliation or revenge against either party.[16]

It is recommended that community members meet with those who committed lower-level crimes, as those crimes are likely easier to forgive.[17] Thus, it could be best to start by opening dialogue between community members and those who were forcibly taken by Boko Haram. During these interactions, community leaders could facilitate open dialogue between both parties so that they may discuss their experiences and express their fears about the reintegration process. Later, when feeling ready, community members could meet with low-risk returnees and go through a similar process.

Finally, during dialogue between community members and returnees who committed offenses, conversations are more fruitful when returnees take reconciliatory steps, such as fully and honestly telling the facts and looking the victim in the eye, and providing a genuine apology.[18] Otherwise, ingenuine and incomplete apologies can be insulting to victims and can increase tensions.[19] Thus, these conversations should not be scripted and should not occur until community leaders and both sides feel prepared.

5. Culturally grounded community programs and dialogues.

If relevant, it would be beneficial for any steps taken or any processes implemented by gatekeepers and regarding the Sulhu process or any other dialogues or programs to be culturally grounded and centered around traditional practices. In other contexts, utilizing culturally-grounded or traditional processes for healing and reconciliation processes has been found to improve community relations, reintegration, the reconciliation process, and even psychosocial support.[20] These practices have also been found to help with community strengthening.[21] Without adapted programs, communities can feel as though international standards are being implemented on them for biased or political reasons, which can result in backlash.[22] While there may not be traditional or cultural reintegration practices within communities, it could be beneficial to ask community leaders or have them ask the communities themselves whether there are traditional methods for responding to crimes or for conflict resolution that could be used in this process.

An important aspect to note is that despite the benefits of using traditional and cultural methods, they can also reflect inequalities and gender bias through discriminatory practices. Thus, it could be useful to have community leaders work together to identify traditional practices, if there are any, and to ensure that they are adapted to limit discrimination or bias that may be embedded in the practice. During the initial stage with participants of the next iteration, it is recommended for DAAC to try to identify any culturally grounded practices particular to the region or participating communities. While the identification of any cultural practices could provide input on how to mold specific aspects of the program to the individual communities, it could be particularly beneficial to

try to identify practices that are especially relevant to criminal conduct, conflict resolution, reparations, and forgiveness.

6. Implement a gendered lens.

While the community is changing and growing as it goes through the reintegration process, it would be beneficial for a consideration of gender and the roles that it plays to be incorporated into dialogues and plans for the future. Work should be done to ensure dialogues and reintegration practices do not perpetuate harmful stereotypes. Additionally, within dialogues, gender and how it impacted the experiences of both returnees and community members should be discussed to help parties better understand one another. For example, if relevant, men and women could discuss the societal structures that influenced or contributed to their affiliation with Boko Haram. Understanding these factors and having open discussions about their impact can help them to be addressed by the community, whether it be in relation to reintegration support or addressing those societal structures going forward.[23]

The participation of one male and one female who previously faced Boko Haram captivity would also be beneficial for sharing the experiences of those who lacked autonomy in their affiliation with the insurgency. This insight could then be used to inform the other participants in the DAAC program about the experiences of former captives and key points from their experiences that could be utilized to promote their reintegration among the community. Otherwise, as mentioned from stories from the previous iteration, if former captives continue to face rejection from the community, they may be compelled to return to Boko Haram. This has been found to be particularly true for female returnees given the rejection faced by their children and themselves. The importance of considering the role of gender is paramount and should be reiterated to community leaders, especially given the role they play in fostering peaceful reintegration.

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