CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION IN PRACTICE

The Reintegration of Former Boko Haram Associates in Maiduguri, Nigeria

March 2024

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Elements of Analysis and Recommendations
(March 2023 – September 2023)

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Any opinions expressed in this report represent the views of the author alone, and not necessarily those of Cordoba Peace Institute – Geneva (CPI).

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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.

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1. Introduction

The emergence of the Jama'atu Ahlis-Sunna Lidda'Awati Wal-Jihad (JAS) group, known as Boko Haram (BH), dates back to 2002 in Maiduguri, the capital of Nigeria's Borno State. Founded by Mohammed Yusuf, BH has progressively slipped into violent actions against the Nigerian state, taking advantage of the state's weak presence in the Lake Chad Basin. According to data from the *Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project* (ACLED) since 2009, between 20,000 and 30,000 deaths have been recorded, causing the displacement of more than 2.3 million people.[1]

The execution of the spiritual leader in 2009 and his absence marked a turning point and gave way to a fragmented organization that was "both a cult and a social movement."[2] Subsequently, under leader Abubakar Shekau[3], northeast Nigeria was marked by extremist violence, rejected by the Islamic State group, which split from BH to form ISWAP (Islamic State West African Province**)** in 2016. A violent rivalry between the two groups can be perceived. Shekau's death in May 2021 marked a turning point for BH's continued existence in the region. In exchange for their freedom, the government convinced some of them to surrender and go to transit camps[4] such as Hajj, Maiduguri, Shokari or Bulumkutu. Many former associates of BH were worried about falling under ISWAP's control. At least 2,000 fighters – and a few hundred more Shekau affiliates – have reportedly already been released. A small portion of them have joined ISWAP. A phase of disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) ensues. ISWAP has supplanted BH as the dominant insurgency in the region, likely to absorb former associates of BH, while others consider remaining loyal to Shekau's ideas.

Thus, this general context, marked by ambient conflicts and uncertainties about the reconversion of Shekau's supporters towards extremist violence, has been favourable to government interventions and attempts to deploy a specific discourse to deal with jihadist violence. The aim was not to think about a peace agreement or an amnesty, but about the forms of reintegration of former associates of BH. It is important to distinguish between the two models that have been put in place, which correspond to two distinct periods and approaches. Operation Safe Corridor (OSC) is a mechanism set up in September 2015 jointly by the Federal Government of Nigeria and various partners, including international agencies and non-governmental organizations. Controlled by the Nigerian military, it exemplifies current Federal public policy practices, namely, “the rearticulation of existing 'solutions' to new 'problems', implemented through alliances between diverse institutional actors who have identified 'opportunities' ”.[5] The aim of the program was to integrate former associates of BH after their detention "as military operations continue against the hard core".[6] Criticised for its lack of inclusiveness of former associates of BH and for the effects in terms of serious human rights violations, this approach to "deradicalisation", although it has gained real reputation within BH, has shown a lack of means and measures and[7] has led to hostility from communities. In addition, there is a process of filtering and identifying fighters or families placed under the yoke of the jihadists, which is failing[8]. Furthermore, obstacles persist in the reintegration process. Stigma and suspicion within communities[9] remain high. Between 2009 and 2018, more than 20,000 people were arrested in Nigeria on suspicion of links with BH[10]. As a result, an alternative to Operation Safe Corridor, specifically community-based and promoting peaceful reintegration in line with the government's agenda, has gradually emerged. The Borno model has been in place since 2021 and is led by the state government of Borno.

The Sulhu component of the Constructive Alternative Narrative (CAN) project

Before outlining the main trends, analyses and recommendations arising from the recent interviews conducted in Maiduguri in July 2023 by the Dar El Andalus Center (DAAC) project team, it is important to specify the project history in which this report is embedded. Based on spiritual and religious texts that guide the daily life of these communities, the *Sulhu* process initially aims to address desires for revenge and facilitate forgiveness[11] for perpetrators of wrongs within communities. This has included facilitating training workshops and providing technical tools for those involved in these sensitive subjects.

The communities of Damboa, Kukawa, Kaga, Mafa and Mongnu had been designated as survey sites. In these five rural areas, five community groups were selected representing the community fabric (imams, students, community leaders, women's leaders and youth). Ten participants from these five communities were identified, giving a total of fifty participants for these workshops. Focus groups led by the DAAC, organized by locality and status within the communities, were then organized in order to better understand the issues of reconciliation for these communities. In particular, the aim was to identify several central aspects to facilitate forgiveness, social cohesion for reintegration and the rehabilitation of former BH associated members into communities.

The challenges of reintegration in Maiduguri

The city of Maiduguri was the most affected by the insurgency during Shekau's period. Huge displacement camps around Maiduguri were formed, including former associates of BH or ISWAP groups, or people who had lived under their control. It should be noted that those who have fled BH in the past have little affection for people linked to the movement. Iindeed, there are risks associated with reintegrating these individuals into communities.

Individuals attempting to reintegrate into the local social fabric after being involved in acts of extreme violence may encounter various levels of stigma. This includes outrage over their involvement in utilizing violence against communities, fear sparked by ideologies that advocate for the practice of extremist violence, discrimination, as well as feelings of guilt and shame related to their past behaviors.

Resentments towards this reintegration process could lead to the marginalization of a group and increase the desire to return to armed activities, or even lead to a resurgence of radicalization.[12]

Furthermore, the lack of information among communities regarding the conditions provided to those repatriated to facilitate their sustainable reintegration amplifies the already prevalent sense of injustice. Their perception of the government's disregard for their sufferings, family losses, and socioeconomic setbacks is pervasive across all focus groups, regardless of status or community. This factor is extremely significant since, initially, it could reinforce stigmatizing behaviors against those repatriated.

On 16 July 2023, an assessment of the current situation was carried out in the camps in Maiduguri where former BH associate members are being housed. This data identifying the challenges and successes encountered in their reintegration process is essential for developing programs aimed at ongoing support and ensuring successful reintegration.

On 19 July 2023, meetings were held with former associates of BH by the DAAC team and Borno researchers and the agenda featured discussions on perceptions of reintegration, challenges faced by those repatriated, and the exploration of potential solutions.

2. Psycho-social support and reinforcement of positive attitudes at the individual and collective level

While the former associates of BH generally express a strong desire to return to their respective communities in Maiduguri[13], the reality is much more complex. There are indeed risks associated with the reintegration of these individuals into communities. Resentment towards this reintegration process could lead to the marginalisation of a group and increase the desire to return to armed activities, or even further radicalisation.[14] Psycho-social support as well as the reinforcement of positive attitudes of former associates of BH towards communities and community members towards them is therefore necessary to manage possible frustrations and recurrent feelings of rejection.

2.1. A general trend in Maiduguri

The acceptance of the repatriated by the community is really encouraging compared to rural areas. In a 2021 report on the social, economic and civic reintegration of former associates of BH in Maiduguri, it was previously shown that "most community members wish a peaceful life for former combatants".[15] They are generally willing to interact with former associates of BH in a variety of ways, ranging from socializing to trading. This is demonstrated by the interviews conducted during the most recent activities.

Levels of radicalisation and extremism

The extremist ideology of the group refers to an aspect of a person's identity. It is therefore important to understand the degree of belonging to the group and the affiliation, the place taken by this identity. The post-Shekau faction led to larger power struggles even within the Shekau group. If these factions are distinguished in the uniform used, and in their positions on religious teachings, it is important to go beyond conceptual boundaries because "to name [this or that actor] is to give a fixed identity at a given moment".[16]

Some actors do not have a factional affiliation or have not been involved in past criminal activities[17], unlike others who have been repatriated. Some, wrongly considered as members of extremist groups, even claim to have been detained for years without being prosecuted in harsh conditions. In view of these classifications, which can play a preponderant role in distinguishing themselves and designating former associates of BH, it is in fact possible that some actors are more or less motivated by an ideological opposition force. Between those who surrender, those who have actually pledged allegiance, and those who lie about their allegiance, all of this fuels suspicion within the community. While it is difficult to assess the degree of extremism to which they are exposed, it was noted that participants[18] emphasize the importance of understanding these differences for effective reintegration efforts.

Gender and Age Considerations

In Maiduguri, men are less accepted than women and children because they are perceived as potentially dangerous. It is also important to see women as fighters and not just wives under the yoke of armed groups. As potential active parties within the system established by armed groups, and vectors of extremist violence in many cases, they may have voluntarily pledged allegiance to extremist armed groups, rather than merely being passive wives under the control of these groups. This "screening" among women is fundamental for a peaceful and sustainable reintegration process. They bear the responsibility of educating children, particularly in the religious education of girls in many instances. Adopting an intersectional approach taking into account the generational dimension is necessary for the pacification of relationships within the community.

2.2. Taking emotions into account as a resource for reintegration

Unresolved, certain traumas and emotions are likely to resurface and reinforce conflicts within communities and among repentant upon reintegration. Perceptions and ambivalent attitudes towards members of the other group must be taken into account for the acceptance of former associates of armed groups within the community and the reduction of feelings of mistrust and marginalization of former associates.

Between stigma, difficult memories and nostalgic reminders of an experience within BH

The stigma associated with certain extreme identities can lead to frustration, humiliation and a sense of marginalization when returning to the community. These stigmas limit the ability to reintegrate, access services, and be admitted as new members into a community[19]. Identification as former associates of BH poses challenges for those who do not have a factional affiliation or have not been involved in criminal activities.

First, several testimonies demonstrate that the actors are aware of their indoctrination and the ideological manipulation used by extremist groups. One former fighter said he was tricked into joining BH by misinterpretation of verses from the Quran. Secondly, field surveys have highlighted peer pressure to escape this experience. A commander who had a scholarly role shared his experience under Shekau's leadership. He reveals how difficult it was for him to get out of BH despite peer pressure. His wife, with whom he fled, was pregnant and had an infant. This brutality of retraining and the difficulties associated with it are reminiscent of trauma. However, beyond the stigma, a form of nostalgia linked to accumulation and financial gains punctuates the words of former associates of BH. Some talk about how rich they were when they lived in BH camps. Although most also realized afterwards that the ideology was wrong[20], some still claim to have "harvested up to 2 million Naira in just 2 days". Thus, these mixed emotions, oscillating[21] between rejection of past experience and nostalgia, are to be taken into account in a perspective of reintegration of former associates of armed groups within the communities.

Controlling emotions and conflict avoidance strategies...

In the absence of a quiet life for community members, efforts to take up arms again may emerge. "Some respondents consider [inter alia] retaliatory attacks to be acceptable exceptions to a peaceful existence after leaving the armed group."[22] To the extent that negative emotions and *negative preconceptions* about each other are likely to resurface and express themselves in a conflictual way during reintegration, it is important to work on the types of strategies for avoidance or control of

emotions. "We try to avoid getting involved in conflicts within the community to avoid being accused," said the repatriate, who was the target of harm. In the longer term, each question and issue raised within the community is likely to crystallize tensions between former associates of BH and the communities that receive them, and to see the emergence of blame games.

...attempts to compromise, resolve conflicts, and accommodate by maintaining cohesion and unity.

Attempts to encourage each other, to maintain a semblance of unity and cohesion can be seen in Maiduguri. The words of one commander make it clear: "We meet people who speak badly of us in general, taking into account past atrocities. However, we encourage each other and try to control our emotions so as not to show that we are unhappy with their reactions."[23] This type of speech is indicative of the emotion control strategies employed in order to preserve a semblance of unity and avoid conflict. This highlights the power of human resilience and the ability to transform negative emotions into vectors of change and reconciliation. At the heart of this reintegration process, emotion regulation strategies play a crucial role. They aim not only to ease immediate tensions but also to rebuild bridges between former associates of armed groups and community members.

2.3. Religious Education and Teachings

In Maiduguri, the majority of former associates of BH we met so far have an extremist interpretation of religious precepts because of their religious education advocating the use of extremist violence. Violent extremist groups have been able to exploit the vulnerability of younger people, *due to the lack of education and resources in Maiduguri.* Thus, while some were able to participate in ideological debates despite their surrender, most women and children were initially very ignorant of the debates inherent in Islamic teachings, including ritual purifications and prayer. Substantial parts of the Qur'an were memorized without knowing its true meaning and interpretation. One repentant, for example, had memorized 40 hizb of the Qur'an during his stay in the BH camp. Some field data suggest the importance of radio and its positive role in encouraging critical thinking in Maiduguri. "The radio show hosted by scholars encouraging community members to accept us was very helpful in facilitating our return. The efforts of the scholars really helped us,"[24] said one veteran. In addition, it should be noted that many former associates of BH have gradually demonstrated significant changes by agreeing to pray with others and cooperating with stakeholders. The teaching of religious precepts through preaching is thus likely to contribute fully to the pacification of relations and reintegration.

Trainings and "peace clubs" have been set up to teach the fundamentals of religion, prayer, fasting, and topics such as Kufr and democracy. Programs have been initiated by the Association of Islamic Schools of Borno in Maiduguri to raise awareness through religious teachings that "following a Western education is allowed".[25] It would be interesting to subsequently list the Qur'anic schools that are not controlled and operate independently, to explore the options and avenues for mediation to facilitate children's access to certain aspects of secular western education, which is a major concern in the context of child protection.

However, while educational programs have been developed, their low attendance by former associates of BH poses difficulties. A major challenge is the lack of incentives to actively motivate former associates of BH to participate in the programs. In addition, demands for resources in educational programs often cannot be met due to budget constraints. A local curriculum had been developed to meet the specific needs of ex-combatants, as well as a support manual (Constructive Alternative Narratives). Although it has not yet been officially published, despite its submission to

the IOM two years ago, a collaboration of researchers on this curriculum on the theme of reconciliation has been proposed[26].

Therefore, in order to actively encourage young people to get involved in this type of local scheme, it would be useful to:

1) Implement targeted incentives

For example, this could include formal recognitions and certifications that reward the active participation of veterans or youth in educational programs. These incentives could be more specifically linked to job opportunities, financial aid, and specific benefits.

The following table[27] compares the different perceptions and representations of communities and former associates of BH. Understanding each of the variables mentioned is helpful in maintaining positive attitudes, reducing stigma, and essential for future interactions. While serving as an analytical framework, these are avenues on which further work should be done before any contact and rapprochement between former associates of BH and the host communities.

Former associates of Armed Groups vs. Veterans Reception Communities

Variables	Former associates of Armed Groups	Reception Communities	Main results
Attitudes	Anticipation of harm or discrimination/rejection to which they may be subjected.	Desire for a peaceful and harmonious life	Attitudes can play a role in future interactions and possibly generate new conflicts. Prior work on attitudes rather than violent behaviour is essential.
Types of anxiety/resentments in preparation for the reintegration process[28]	Becoming the primary target of harm Evaluate the motivations/reasons for disengaging from prior identity (or not): Economic Reasons or Ideological Reasons/Search for Islamic Knowledge Expression of regret (see below in the table for details)	Resentments and essentialization of all Former associates ofArmed Groupswith violent extremism	Reduce the types of anxiety related to the reintegration process and prejudices, which are potential vectors of conflict. To this end, it is important to focus on dialogue and psycho-social support.
Strategies Considered Prior to the Reintegration Process	Strategies Considered to Reduce Stigma and Gain Acceptance Moments identified as those when they "control their emotions that allow them to 'keep face'".	Both inclined towards peaceful reintegration and angry; heavy traumas to bear.	The identification of stigma reduction, avoidance, and emotion control strategies in each of the groups is the common foundation.
Interests and willingness to engage in society are closely dependent on...	... Positive or negative views of the process ... Types of past experiences (degree of exposure to violence, age of entry into the group, previous recruitment strategies – sensitivity to media, funding, or coercion)	... Their positive or negative view of the process ... Types of past experiences with armed groups	Identify what might lead to engagement in society rather than taking up arms/violence. It is essential that the gain is greater than the cost of the commitment and the incentive to join the group or return to the bush.

The method of Kenneth W. Thomas and Ralph H. Kilman makes it possible to assess the behaviour of a person in a situation where the aspirations between two groups are difficult to reconcile and would be appropriate here to analyse the issues and challenges related to the reintegration of former associates of BH. According to them, two main trends can be identified: 1) determination, which defines the extent to which a person seeks to satisfy his or her own aspirations, and 2) cooperation, which defines the extent to which an actor seeks to satisfy the aspirations of others. It is essential to foster these dynamics.

2) Acknowledging the regrets expressed by former associates of armed groups

After surrender, regrets may be expressed. Given that the expression of discontent is never direct but is also and above all expressed through discourses on the past, it is necessary to identify the issues related to the expression of these nostalgic discourses. For some, it may be a matter of expressing regret for surrendering rather than joining armed groups or criticizing a particular attitude. Understanding these discourses and the grievances, sometimes quite far removed from an official version[29], concerning their surrender would allow a possible improvement of the programmes already implemented in Maiduguri and prevent returns to the bush. Some may target certain objects, people, or attitudes.

To the extent that stigma has tended to hinder reintegration into society in other contexts[30], it is important to assess "what matters most"[31] in order to reduce the propensity for recidivism and violence.

3) The importance of symbolic acts and the active participation of both groups in maintaining positive attitudes

The forthcoming phases of the project aim to establish secure spaces for exchange and interaction around micro-projects involving former associates of armed groups who have returned to communities and the communities themselves. Creating opportunities to rebuild bridges between former associates of armed groups and community members is affirmed as a fundamental approach to alleviate tensions, anger, and resentment, with the ambition of gradually making room for compassion and redemption. Among the avenues to consider:

— Social rituals have significant emotional and psychological impacts. These can be religious rituals, or symbolic gestures or promises, marking the passage and return to the community. The aim is to let former associates of armed groups know that the community as a whole is open to their reintegration.

— Promoting the quality of meetings is more important than the frequency of meetings. One way to promote the quality of meetings could be to identify activities that allow for a change in community attitudes.

— Promoting platforms and workshops that would highlight the multiple armed groups identities of former associates and their desire to make a meaningful contribution to the community.

— Engaging religious and community leaders to amplify the credibility of the process.

4) Psychological health of repatriates and management of the risk of recidivism

Based on previous reports on psychological health in relation to extreme violence, it has been shown that awareness and psychosocial support are crucial to building acceptance.[32] However, to the extent that ideological commitment may remain, it is important not to address psychological problems in isolation. It is also necessary not to refute the validity of extremist ideology from the outset, but to discuss how it affects the life of the former associate or veteran in collaboration with health professionals, social workers, and local organizations. Different methods to motivate repentant to become active in the community or to get involved can be deployed as follows:

5) An approach based on identity formation and psycho-educational therapy

The objectives will be chosen by the actor because he or she has the resources and skills to bring about the changes. It is necessary to understand the reasons why they joined a certain group and how it affected them[33]. A clear specification of expectations will be necessary. For this, steering discussions towards objectives and solutions[34] will be fundamental.

In this regard, personalized sessions will be set up, where each individual could explore their personal history in a secure and supportive environment. These sessions would allow for discussions on topics such as personal values, beliefs, and how these elements intertwined with the ideologies of the group to which the repentant individuals belonged. The support could also focus on rebuilding a positive identity, distinct from the one shaped by the group, emphasizing everyone's strengths, talents, and aspirations.

Psycho-educational therapy workshops could also be organized, aiming to provide concrete tools for emotion management, conflict resolution, and ethical decision-making. These workshops would encourage reflection on the consequences of past actions and on how to make decisions aligned with positive ethical and social principles in the future.

Concurrently, an activity being implemented as part of this project is the creation of a support network, encouraging interactions with community members who share constructive and peaceful values. This promotes the consolidation of the new identity outside the context of the extremist group and contributes to the feeling of belonging to a broader and more supportive community.

6) Identification of triggering events related to individual, social or psychological factors

Managing triggers that may arise in the trajectory of a former member of an armed group, which could lead to confrontations and conflicts with the community, is fundamental. By anticipating and identifying these triggers, it is possible to ensure sustainable integration within the community. For example, this could involve exposure to extremist messages and beliefs, traumatic memories, depressive episodes, social disorders that could rekindle ideological feelings, and changes in public policies that may impact the perception of the repatriated individual. The systematic implementation of community-based early warning mechanisms is an essential aspect of preventing the risk of recidivism to consider.

7) Preparing for predictable attitudes

For the needs of the receiving community, it is essential to anticipate the predictable attitudes of the former associates and to prepare the community for the related behaviours, thus minimizing the

risk of tensions. That's what the current project is all about, with multiple training workshops set up with the communities to address the concepts of conflict transformation, reconciliation, the forgiveness process and "restorative" justice.

3. Acceptance and economic reintegration

Challenges related to the process of adapting to civil, social, and economic life are generally highlighted as major obstacles to reintegration. Indeed, injustices and economic redistribution are vectors of conflict. Extremist violence is both caused by and contributes to poverty[35]. Socio-economic disparities between communities and regions in northern and southern Nigeria, as well as the lack of equitable redistribution, fuel cycles of violence and exacerbate animosities between groups.

In Nigeria, the implications of BH's insurgency operations in the northeast have had serious consequences for the economy and social life of the people. Markets and commercial areas have come under attack in the past and caused residents to flee the city of Maiduguri. The economic impact of violent extremism on infrastructure, physical damage, formal and informal economies was documented in Nigeria in a 2020 UNDP report[36]. While the economic implications of BH in the city of Maiduguri are difficult to quantify, the social costs are salient[37]. Thus, in addition to transformations at the psycho-social level, inequalities and social injustices need to be addressed in the reintegration process in Maiduguri.

3.1. Issues related to incentives for people to return to the forest

The lack of appropriate treatment in the camps is a major contributing factor to misconduct among residents. Repatriates in Maiduguri, while encouraging other fighters to surrender, face difficulties in doing so or moving away from extremist ideology mainly due to poor treatment in the camps, which hinders their confidence to surrender. BH members often use forest areas as rear bases. Their return to the forest can create a pocket of instability, potential attacks on local populations or infrastructure. The wishes expressed by the former partners to return to the forest must therefore be the subject of particular attention[38]. Some invoke the argument of the presence and risk of stigmatization by the community to return to the forests, while others suggest a link with the economy, the lack of resources in the transit camps and the treatment to which they are subjected. It should be noted that a commander intervened publicly to call on the other repatriates to return to the forest, questioning the government's efforts[39]. This is also why it is important to focus on the management of public discourse. In other words, it is about putting in place communication management strategies to publicly address concerns raised by some repatriates, favouring constructive dialogue rather than public interventions that could undermine reintegration efforts.

3.2. Importance of the family lexicon

Some former associates of armed groups are motivated to return to the forest because of the pre-existing family ties that influence them. For one ex-combatant, discrimination in his hometown pushed him to stay in Maiduguri while abandoning his wife and children. Another ex-combatant revealed how discrimination by members of his own community discouraged him from returning to his hometown. As a result, some prefer to stay in Maiduguri rather than return to their villages.

These examples demonstrate why it would be interesting to work on:

1) An individual assessment

Understanding family ties, experiences of discrimination, and the specific reasons why they are reluctant to return to their villages. In particular, understand how family support or lack thereof can play a role (in addition to other specific barriers) in encouraging people to return to the forest.

2) Strengthening family ties

To identify the consequences of the decision to stay in Maiduguri on the family life of former associate members, it is important to develop family communication workshops, family counselling sessions and the participation of family members in the reintegration process.

3) Community outreach

Raising awareness at the community and/or family level to combat discrimination and promote an understanding of the family challenges that former associates of armed groups face upon their return. For example, work collaboratively with community and religious leaders.

3.3. Integration to cope with economic constraints

Other arguments are used to describe the desire to return to the forest, in particular the question of the low supply of consumer goods, which is considered limited compared to their abundance in the forest. According to a former commander, getting food in the forest is indeed much easier than in the city. This is considered necessary to maintain a good quality of life. Most veterans will need stable livelihoods. While some communities may have perceived the former associates as being favoured by the government, one repatriate said: "In reality, we only receive one hundred thousand naira (NGN 100,000) from the rehabilitation centre, which is barely enough to cover the rent for accommodation for a year after leaving the camp." Some have returned to the forest after exhausting the meagre sums they received from the camp. They were welcomed into the forest and even brought back some samples of what they had received from the camp.

In Maiduguri, former associates face difficulties in reintegrating into society due to the lack of education and the lack of vocational training, which *de facto* prevents their economic integration. Employment opportunities remain limited even though support for businesses has been provided. The sale of petrol, aquaculture and the cultivation of land are activities specific to demobilized actors, as was pointed out in the interviews. The important thing for these actors is to find sources of income that allow them to "increase their skills and build a career – or at least hope to do so".[40]

Another salient problem that emerged from the interviews was agricultural issues. In the past, farmers in Borno State[41] have faced killings and reprisals by BH. Therefore, it is important that the process of reintegration of former associates of BH takes into account the specificities of these struggles, the lines of past conflict that are always identifiable between groups for economic integration in the agricultural environment. During the investigations, some former associate members said they were keeping farmers safe, allowing them to revive access to livelihoods in the area, despite the challenges of owning weapons.

Considering the challenges mentioned, it would be interesting to work to:

1) Strengthen and optimize urban livelihoods at the individual level

Temporary food aid mechanisms for repatriates in the city, in collaboration with humanitarian agencies and local partners, have been set up. There is a need to inform repatriates of the resources available and to foster understanding within the community of the financial challenges faced by repatriates.

2) Promote the economic integration of repatriates

This needs to be tailored to their skills to help them find stable jobs and improve their urban livelihoods. It is important to promote economic activities and know-how within the community. Vocational training, education and access to employment programmes must therefore be put in place.

3) An economic integration in coordination with the security services and state supervision

The implementation of this security at the local level is crucial to promote integration within the community for several reasons. On the one hand, their commitment demonstrates a change of allegiance and a willingness to contribute positively to the daily lives of the affected farmers and restore trust. It is imperative that they act as "security agents" of the state, thus ensuring a legal framework for actions and limiting the harms associated with gun ownership. However, the lack of clarity poses a problem frequently encountered with "self-defence" elements within these communities. These actors provide services that can lead to lethal violence, in an ambiguous legal and legal context, thus contributing to deviant behaviour.

On the other hand, this security creates an environment conducive to economic activities, community trade and the resumption of agricultural activities in a safer context. In particular, farmers are more inclined to invest in their farms and explore new opportunities when the threat of insecurity is reduced.

More broadly, economic mutual aid is a powerful tool for changing negative perceptions of veterans or former associates ofextremist groups. By opening doors to employment or entrepreneurship, not only does it improve the financial situation and social integration of former partners, but it also illustrates their ability to make a positive contribution within the community. By addressing the root causes of recruitment by extremist groups, such as poverty and lack of economic opportunities, mutual aid can help reduce inequality. All these elements work together to dispel prejudice and stigma and build trust between groups.[42]

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, the reintegration process of former associates of Boko Haram in Maiduguri highlights the complexity and the necessity of a multidimensional approach that accounts for various social, psychological, and economic factors.

The testimonies collected underscore an awareness of ideological issues, challenges related to stigmatization, and ambivalent feelings of regret and nostalgia towards the past. Emotion

management, particularly through conflict control and avoidance, proves crucial for maintaining unity and cohesion within the community.

Reconciliation strategies must necessarily incorporate an educational dimension, emphasizing the revision of extremist interpretations of religious teachings and promoting critical thinking. Furthermore, attention to individual, social, and psychological factors that can trigger confrontations is essential for preventing recidivism and ensuring sustainable reintegration.

Lastly, the implementation of symbolic acts and the active participation of all stakeholders are fundamental to promoting successful reintegration and addressing the inequalities that fuel cycles of violence. This report underscores the importance of a holistic and collaborative approach, involving former armed group members, communities, local and religious authorities, as well as international partners, to overcome reintegration obstacles and build a peaceful and inclusive future in Northeast Nigeria.

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