Advancing Holistic and Comprehensive Efforts to Confront Africa’s Growing Terrorism Challenge

A Nigerian Case Study on Developing Sustainable Pathways Out of Extremism for Individuals Formerly Associated with Boko Haram and the Islamic State in West Africa Province

By: May Salem, Lina Raafat, Maya Ragab and Norhan Amin
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Foreword

Since the inaugural edition of the Aswan Forum for Sustainable Peace and Development in 2019, efforts to advance holistic approaches to confront terrorism in Africa have been at the centre stage of its discussions. In this regard, the Forum’s Conclusions, which are issued after each edition, have emphasized the importance of ensuring national ownership, investing in prevention efforts and resilience-building, as well as the imperative of adopting holistic, whole-of-government, and whole-of-society approaches in curbing the spread of terrorism across Africa.

The Cairo International Centre for Conflict Resolution, Peacekeeping, and Peacebuilding (CCCPA), as the Secretariat of the Aswan Forum, strives to operationalize these Conclusions through implementing concrete activities, including policy engagement and capacity building. The lessons learned and findings emerging from these activities are then presented at the Forum to share experiences and identify best practices.

In this context, the present report is of particular significance as a practical example of operationalizing the Aswan Forum Conclusions. It examines good practices and lessons learned from the Nigerian experience in confronting terrorism, and the relevance it holds for other similar contexts. The report is based on a field visit carried out by a CCCPA team to Nigeria last December and on extensive consultations with Nigerian authorities and stakeholders, at both the federal and state level, as well as with relevant international partners. The findings of the report will be discussed at the third edition of the Aswan Forum (21-22 June 2022) to showcase Nigerian efforts in this area, as well as discuss its relevance beyond the Nigerian context, to the Lake Chad Basin, and the African continent at-large.

The preparation and completion of such a report would not have been possible without the active involvement and support of the Nigerian authorities, to whom we express our deep appreciation. It is worthwhile to note that Nigeria has been actively engaged in the Aswan Forum since its inaugural edition, which was attended by President Buhari.
The report was prepared by an able team at the Cairo Centre composed of: May Salem, Lina Raafat, Maya Ragab and Norhan Amin. I wish to thank them for their dedication and hard work, as well as their ability to navigate complex policy issues. I would also like to convey my appreciation to the partners of the Aswan Forum and of CCCPA for their support to our work in this and other areas.

Last but not least, we are grateful for the invaluable support provided during the field visit and the process leading up to the elaboration of this report by the Egyptian Ambassador in Abuja, Ihab Awad and the Head of Political Affairs Division at the Embassy, Mohamed Ossama. Their support was essential for this report to come to fruition.

We will continue to advance Aswan “in practice” through reports such as these and other activities in the areas of capacity building, convening and research, with the ultimate objective of making a concrete contribution to efforts towards sustainable peace and development on the continent.

Sincerely,

Ambassador Ahmed Abdel-Latif
Director General, CCCPA
Executive Director, Aswan Forum Secretariat
Acknowledgements

The Cairo International Center for Conflict Resolution, Peacekeeping and Peacebuilding would like to extend its sincerest gratitude to the partners whose support helped make the field mission to Nigeria and this report materialize. This endeavor would not have been possible without the invaluable contribution and assistance of the Nigerian stakeholders who have been part and parcel of this process.

We would like to express our thanks to the government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, namely: the Office of the National Security Advisor (ONSA); the Federal Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs, Disaster Management & Social Development (FMoHADMS); the National Orientation Agency (NOA); the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC); and Operation Safe Corridor (OPSC) Mallam Sidi Camp in Gombe. At the state level, we would like to pay special regards to: Prof. (Engr.) Babagana Umara Zulum, Governor of Borno State; Hon. Zuwaia Gambo, Commissioner for Women Affairs and Social Development; Hon. Abatcha Bukar, Commissioner for Religious Affairs; and Brigadier General Abdullahi Ishaq, Special Adviser on Security Affairs to the Borno State government. We are also extremely grateful for the immense support we received from the International Organization for Migration (IOM) office in Nigeria, prior to and throughout the mission.

The Cairo International Center for Conflict Resolution, Peacekeeping and Peacebuilding would also like to thank the Embassy of the Arab Republic of Egypt in Nigeria for the tremendous effort it exerted in coordinating the meetings with the relevant stakeholders, outlining the context in Nigeria to the mission team, and continuously following up with any inquiries. Special gratitude is extended to H.E. Ihab Awad, Ambassador of Egypt to Nigeria and Mohamed Ossama, Head of the Political Affairs Division, Embassy of Egypt in Nigeria, for their continued support and guidance.

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About The Cairo International Center for Conflict Resolution, Peacekeeping & Peacebuilding

Founded in 1994 by the Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Cairo International Center for Conflict Resolution, Peacekeeping and Peacebuilding (CCCPA), is an Egyptian public agency specialized in capacity building, convening and research in the fields of sustaining peace and development in Africa and the Arab region. CCCPA is also an African Union Center of Excellence and the only civilian training center on issues of peace and security in the Arab region. Through its research and convening activities, it has established itself as a leading voice from the Global South on a wide range of topics, including conflict prevention and resolution, peacekeeping, peacebuilding, preventing radicalization and extremism leading to terrorism, women, peace and security, transnational threats and climate, security and development.

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About The Aswan Forum for Sustainable Peace and Development

Owned by Africa, and supported by international and regional partners, the Aswan Forum for Sustainable Peace and Development is a high-level, multi-stakeholder platform that brings heads of state, leaders from national governments, international and regional organizations, financial institutions, the private sector and civil society, together with visionaries, scholars and prominent experts, for a context-specific, action-oriented and forward-looking discussion on the opportunities, as well as the challenges, facing the continent amid ever-evolving global dynamics. It provides the first-of-its-kind platform in Africa that seeks to operationalize the “humanitarian-development-peace nexus”, by championing African solutions to African problems, including through strengthening the links between policy and practice.

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<tr>
<td>ACLED</td>
<td>The Armed Conflict Location &amp; Event Data Project</td>
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<td>CCP</td>
<td>Child Care Programme</td>
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<td>CJTF</td>
<td>Civilian Joint Task Force</td>
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<td>CTED</td>
<td>Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate</td>
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<td>DDRR</td>
<td>Demobilization, Disassociation, Reintegration, and Reconciliation</td>
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<td>DDR</td>
<td>Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration</td>
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<td>EU</td>
<td>European Union</td>
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<tr>
<td>FMoHADMS</td>
<td>Federal Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs, Disaster Management &amp; Social Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>HDPN</td>
<td>Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus</td>
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<tr>
<td>IDP(s)</td>
<td>Internally Displaced Person(s)</td>
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<td>IOM</td>
<td>International Organization for Migration</td>
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<td>IS</td>
<td>Islamic State</td>
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<td>ISIL</td>
<td>Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant</td>
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<td>ISCAP</td>
<td>Islamic State of Central Africa Province</td>
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<td>ISGS</td>
<td>Islamic State of Greater Sahara</td>
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<td>ISWAP</td>
<td>Islamic State of West Africa Province</td>
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<tr>
<td>Organization</td>
<td>Abbreviation</td>
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<td>Jama’at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin</td>
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<td>Jamaat Ahl al-Sunna lil-Dawa wal-Jihad</td>
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<td>Joint Investigation Center</td>
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<td>National Human Rights Commission</td>
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<td>National Orientation Agency</td>
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<td>Office of the National Security Adviser</td>
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<td>Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism</td>
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<td>Screening, Prosecution, Rehabilitation and Reintegration</td>
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<tr>
<td>United Nations</td>
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<td>United Nations Children’s Fund</td>
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<td>United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism</td>
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<td>United Nations Office of Drug and Crime</td>
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For several years, Nigeria has been confronted with a terrorist threat posed by the Boko Haram insurgency. However, 2021 marked a turning point. With a significant 77 percent decline in deaths attributed to the group from the previous year, Boko Haram-related deaths recorded their lowest number since the intensification of the group’s violent operations in 2011. Borno State, in particular, witnessed a 71 percent decrease in Boko Haram-related deaths. This decline succeeds years of immense hardship and destruction caused by Boko Haram’s terrorist activities in Nigeria, rendering them one of the deadliest terrorist groups around the world. In 2019 alone, the group was responsible for the death of 1,245 persons, amounting to 9 percent of the global terrorism deaths.

In dealing with the growing complexity of the terrorism threat specifically in response to Boko Haram’s development, as well as the rise of the Islamic State of West Africa Province (ISWAP), Nigerian officials realized that security measures alone cannot holistically respond to the contemporary challenges posed by terrorist groups. Anchored in a belief that the response to terrorism must be multidimensional, a presidential directive established Operation Safe Corridor (OPSC) in 2016: a national rehabilitation, reintegration and reconciliation program for male repentant, surrendered individuals formerly associated with Boko Haram. The program was initially configured to incentivize Boko Haram members—and, subsequently, ISWAP members—to defect, and rehabilitate those who were captured and found eligible for undergoing the DDRR program at OPSC.

However, the terrorism landscape in Nigeria witnessed a critical juncture following the death of Boko Haram’s leader in May 2021, instigating waves of mass defection as thousands fled the group as a response to the changing leadership. Tens of thousands of men, women and children surrendered themselves to security forces, marking the largest wave of defections since the group emerged in 2009, and further burdening national, local and communal institutions and resources.

The Borno State government seized this shift to dismantle Boko Haram and ISWAP’s operational and recruitment capacity. Accordingly, the Borno State government propagated messages of reassurance that surrendering individuals will not be harmed or ill-treated, to catalyze more defections and maintain the momentum achieved over time.
Nigerian officials were forced to devise innovative solutions and responses—giving rise to the Borno State Model—to absorb such unprecedented numbers of surrendering individuals. According to the Borno State government, a significant portion of the current caseload falls under the category of “farmers”—commoners who live in areas under the control of Boko Haram but are not directly affiliated with the group. For this category of individuals, Borno State has designed an expedited verification process to allow for their swift rehabilitation and reintegration back into communities, thus creating space for other repentants to surrender. At its core, the Borno State Model is a localized approach that emerged to meet unprecedented and rapidly evolving dynamics and terrain.

The reality of what unfolded since May 2021, and the sheer volume of surrendering individuals formerly associated with Boko Haram and ISWAP, has surpassed any expectations or predictions. This, in itself, ought to be viewed as a positive development in Nigeria’s ongoing efforts to incentivize defections. However, the more pressing and important question now becomes: What comes next?

What is clear for now is that the current wave of defections should be sustained; recidivism and relapse should be prevented and mitigated; and an even greater number of individuals should be encouraged to defect. Key to sustaining defection rates and incentivizing further defections is ensuring that those who have already defected become part of a systematic and comprehensive process of screening, prosecution, rehabilitation and reintegration (SPRR). While Nigeria adopts a similar approach through its DDRR program on the national level, gaps still remain, especially in dealing with the recent waves of mass defections.

While the role of the federal government is crucial, the role played by state governments and local authorities as first responders and the interface for delivering integrated solutions is equally critical. In this regard, delegating responsibility should go hand-in-hand with bringing authority and resources to the local level, where both problems and opportunities exist. Therefore, it is crucial to view ongoing efforts at the federal and state levels not as two parallel processes but rather as mutually reinforcing and complementary models that draw on each other's strengths and expertise.

In this vein, a more “hybrid model” of dealing with these individuals should be adopted, requiring not only a change on the operational level, but also the political will to modify existing mandates at the federal and state levels to be able to deal with the mounting caseload. This “hybrid model” should ultimately weave together elements of each of the existing models—OPSC and the Borno Model; building a bridge between these mutually reinforcing and complementary processes. This model will serve to capitalize on OPSC’s well-established and existing expertise in programmatic interventions, while simultaneously instrumentalizing Borno State’s localized approach, and longstanding experience in community-based rehabilitation and reintegration processes.
In recent years, sub-Saharan Africa has witnessed a surge in terrorism, hosting seven of the ten countries with the largest increase in terrorism.\(^3\) A mixture of vast untapped resources, climate change, established organized criminal networks, and growing youth populations render these regions especially susceptible to terrorist encroachment. The contexts within which these factors interplay has also paved the way for homegrown terrorist groups to emerge and expand, such as Boko Haram in Nigeria, which later evolved to become one of the deadliest terrorist groups on the African continent.

According to the 2020 Global Terrorism Index, there has been a shift in the global epicenter of terrorism and violence.\(^4\) As the self-proclaimed Islamic State (IS) began to lose momentum in the Middle East and North Africa, it started to enhance alliances in sub-Saharan Africa and expand through its newly found provinces in the region: ISWAP; the Islamic State of Central Africa Province (ISCAP) with factions in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Mozambique; and the Islamic State of Greater Sahara (ISGS). The “breakout capacity” of these groups and possibility of conquering territory resembles what IS had achieved previously in Syria and Iraq.\(^5\) Clearly, these groups were able to reassert influence, mobilize and gain resources, exploiting the evident transnational nature of the terrorism landscape. In addition to the proliferation of IS-affiliated groups, Africa has also bore witness to a growing rivalry between IS-affiliated groups and Boko Haram, as well as al-Qaeda-affiliated groups, such as al-Shabaab in Somalia and Jama’at Nasr al-Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM) in the Sahel region– exacerbating drivers for conflict and fragility across the continent.

Against this backdrop of a growing nexus between armed conflict, organized crime, and terrorism across Africa, as well as the persistent challenge posed by terrorist groups such as Boko Haram and ISWAP, Nigeria is faced with a terrorism challenge that “gravely undermines economic development, social progress, political stability, national and human security, and peaceful coexistence in the country.”\(^6\) Terrorist groups operating in Nigeria are becoming increasingly involved in rural banditry, cattle-rustling, and ransom kidnappings.
This rapidly unravelling terrorism landscape is further complicated by a mounting caseload of defecting individuals formerly associated with Boko Haram (and to a lesser extent ISWAP), which instigated following the death of Boko Haram leader in May 2021. Tens of thousands of men, women and children have surrendered to the security forces, marking the largest wave of defections since the group emerged in 2009, and further burdening national, local and communal institutions and resources.

In the context of collaboration between Egypt and Nigeria in the fields of (i) preventing and countering extremism conducive to terrorism (P/CVE), and (ii) Screening, Prosecution, Rehabilitation and Reintegration (SPRR), the Cairo International Center for Conflict Resolution, Peacekeeping and Peacebuilding (CCCPA) conducted a field mission in Nigeria (Abuja, Maiduguri, and Gombe), in December 2021.
CCCPA Field Mission

Against this backdrop, and as part of the ongoing preparations for the third edition of the Aswan Forum for Sustainable Peace and Development, CCCPA conducted its field mission to Nigeria, in December 2021 with the purpose of holding a series of consultations at the national, federal, local, and state levels to engage with relevant stakeholders, community representatives, as well as international agencies and partners. These consultations provided insights into the Nigerian context and the ongoing efforts from a Nigerian lens, while ensuring that the opportunities and challenges identified are presented in a manner that is faithful to the opinions shared by the various Nigerian stakeholders with whom meetings were conducted.

The field mission sought to unpack the current situation in Nigeria in light of the above-mentioned developments and challenges to inform the design of tailored capacity building and research programs and improve their effectiveness in a manner that better meets the needs and practice gaps as identified by Nigerian stakeholders, specifically within the fields of DDR, SPRR and terrorism prevention.

The mission also aimed to outline Nigerian endeavors in dealing with the increasing caseload of individuals formerly associated with Boko Haram and ISWAP, especially through efforts to pioneer nationally owned programs – such as Operation Safe Corridor (OPSC)– to confront challenges of terrorism, address root drivers of violence, and anchor responses in whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches; while recognizing the opportunities in addressing persisting challenges at the operational level. These efforts ultimately resonate with ongoing debates across the Lake Chad Basin, and the African continent at-large on the pressing need for a comprehensive and integrated response to the threat of terrorism, one of the key messages reiterated at the Aswan Forum for Sustainable Peace and Development since its launch in 2019.
The Aswan Conclusions on Sustainable Peace and Development in Africa emphasize that the response to Africa’s terrorism challenge cannot solely rely on security-based measures, but rather through the adoption of a humanitarian-development-peace nexus approach. The conclusions further shed light on the imperative of investing in prevention efforts and resilience-building; the significance of national ownership and adopting a whole-of-government approach; and the central role played by local communities, including women and youth, in curbing the spread of terrorism.

Accordingly, this report will examine and take stock of the operational opportunities in addressing the challenges expressed by the relevant stakeholders, as well as the different models being implemented in the Nigerian context. Additionally, it will highlight the importance of holistic, whole-of-government, and whole-of-society approaches in confronting the threat of terrorism in Africa; and examine good practices and lessons learned from the Nigerian experience, and how it can be emulated in other contexts.

The first chapter of this report provides an overview of the context in Nigeria, including a background on the evolution of Boko Haram and ISWAP, as well as the development of counterterrorism measures in response to growing challenges. The second chapter portrays a step-by-step roadmap of the evolution of the federal model–OPSC– since its inception in 2016 up until the recent waves of mass defections. The third chapter of the report illustrates the situation unraveling in Borno state, and how recent waves of mass defections have shaped Borno state’s model and response in light of persisting challenges posed by the mounting caseloads of returning individuals and geographic proximity to Boko Haram and ISWAP operations. The fourth chapter presents the role of international partners in the Nigerian context, providing an international perspective on the challenges posed by the rapidly-evolving context. Finally, the report will end with an analysis of the broader implications posed by the recent on-ground developments and the potential synergies between the various models being implemented in order to provide concrete and actionable recommendations for the situation.
Methodology

Data and analysis presented in this study are grounded in a series of on-the-ground consultations conducted by the CCCPA field mission to Nigeria, in December 2021, with various Nigerian stakeholders at the federal and Borno State level. Upon completion of the field mission, the CCCPA team engaged in various rounds of virtual consultations with different stakeholders and officials to inform the drafting and elaboration of the report. In essence, this report represents the culmination of a robust consultations process, in an effort to bring to light the challenges and opportunities as seen and experienced from a Nigerian lens.

At the federal level, consultations were conducted with the Office of the National Security Advisor (ONSA); the Federal Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs, Disaster Management & Social Development (FMoHADMS); the National Orientation Agency (NOA); the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC); and OPSC Mallam Sidi Camp officials in Gombe. At the state level, consultations took place with Prof. (Engr.) Babagana Umara Zulum, Governor of Borno State; Hon. Zuwaira Gambo, Commissioner for Women Affairs and Social Development; Hon. Abatcha Bukar, Commissioner for Religious Affairs; Brigadier General Abdullahi Ishaq, Special Adviser on Security Affairs to Borno State Government; the International Organization for Migration (IOM) Social Cohesion Platform Members (community, religious, women and youth leaders from Borno State); Former Members of Boko Haram reintegrated back into Borno; and OPSC graduated clients. Additionally, consultations with international community and donors included the Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator in Nigeria; IOM representatives in Abuja and Maiduguri; the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) representative in Nigeria; and the European Union delegation to Nigeria.
To complement consultations with the various aforementioned stakeholders, the CCCPA mission team also conducted field visits to internally displaced persons (IDP) camps in Maiduguri where meetings were held with community representatives and Demobilization, Disassociation, Reintegration, and Reconciliation (DDRR) champions, as well as former OPSC clients who have completed their program and were reintegrated back into Borno State. Additionally, the mission team conducted visits to the Bulumkutu Rehabilitation Center, and the Hajj Defection Camp in Maiduguri, currently accommodating defectors and their families. The CCCPA team also conducted a site visit to OPSC Camp in Mallam Sidi Gombe, where they met with OPSC clients and were briefed on the camp activities.

Finally, it is worthy to note that data and charts presented henceforth throughout the report were obtained from the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project’s (ACLED) curated dataset on Africa dated May 31, 2022, as well as from Nigerian authorities. The ACLED dataset was subsequently analyzed and filtered by the authors of this report to extract relevant information on violent incidents in Borno State between 2009 and 2022, as well as generate trends on the trajectory of attacks launched over time by Boko Haram and ISWAP, respectively, to assess the impact thereof through examining civilian fatalities associated with such attacks during different periods. Other charts illustrating the breakdown of the total caseload of individuals formerly associated with Boko Haram and ISWAP are grounded in data provided by Borno State officials, giving a full representation of individuals (men, women, boys and girls) residing in camps and those reintegrated back into communities.
In northeast (NE) Nigeria and across the Lake Chad Basin at-large, terrorist group Boko Haram poses one of the most serious threats. Ever since the group’s inception as a homegrown, local Islamist movement in the early 2000s and for almost two decades later, it has grown more radical and extremely violent. The group strongly opposes Western ideals and the secularization of the Nigerian state, reflecting the literal meaning of the group’s name: the Hausa word “boko” meaning Western education and the Arabic word “haram” meaning forbidden or sin. Boko Haram carried out their first major violent attack on 26 July 2009, targeting police stations in several parts of northern Nigeria. The attack resulted in hundreds of deaths and the killing of Boko Haram leader Mohamed Yusuf after being captured by security forces and held in police detention.

Yusuf’s successor, Abubakar Shekau, shortly declared jihad in order to establish Islamic rule in Nigeria by imposing Shari’a law and seek vengeance for Yusuf. He became the public face for the group, utilizing audio and video content to disseminate the group’s ideology and objectives. Shekau also created the “official name” for the group: Jamaat Ahl al-Sunna lil-Dawa wal-Jihad (JAS), asking for loyalty of his followers after declaring himself Imam. He developed tactics for Boko Haram to capitalize on social vulnerabilities, increase recruitment among at-risk communities, and manipulate individuals with low literacy levels. The group has also exploited ethnic and tribal affiliations in order to mobilize resources and support for the group.

Boko Haram’s indiscriminate attacks against civilians in schools, markets, mosques and churches, as well as high profile attacks in the capital Abuja and densely-populated Kano, rendered the group one of the deadliest terrorist groups around the world. Between April 2011 and June 2017, an estimated 434 bombers led to the death of 2,200 civilians in attacks across markets and places of worship. Additionally, the cumulative total of Boko Haram-related deaths over the years accumulates to over 85,000, with Borno state in the NE—the epicenter and main flashpoint for Boko Haram’s insurgency—witnessing almost 35,000 Boko Haram-related deaths and spilling over into nearby Yobe and Adamawa states.
To confront this growing threat, Nigeria intensified its military efforts as part of its strategy to counter terrorism and suppress Boko Haram’s activities. This strategy included the establishment of a joint military task force in 2009, known as Operation Restore Order, to carry out large-scale military operations in the states of Borno and Yobe, while putting in place two permanent military units in both states. This was complemented with the enactment of the Terrorism Prevention Act in 2011, which was later amended in 2013. This Act appointed ONSA as the coordinating office for Nigeria’s counterterrorism efforts in charge of implementing Nigeria’s national security agenda. It also established measures for preventing, prohibiting, and combating acts of and funds for terrorism.

However, despite the considerable military efforts exerted, Nigeria nevertheless continued to witness an increase in conflict and fatalities attributed to Boko Haram. The crisis continued to worsen as the social and economic infrastructure disintegrated. Local vigilante groups began to form in NE Nigeria to combat the threat of terrorism. Boko Haram advanced its tactics to start acquiring territory and securing control over Borno State’s borders with Niger, Chad and Cameroon. This exacerbated the threat posed by Boko Haram, intensifying cross-border attacks, displacing individuals and increasing the transnational threat of the group. Following these developments, Nigeria published its National Security Strategy in 2014, outlining the then-present security environment and defining means of addressing the challenges. The strategy was later revised in 2019.

Since 2014, the security environment has continued to evolve, paving a way for new threats and changing the nature of the security challenges Nigeria is presented with. The context became more complex when Boko Haram pledged its allegiance to ISIL in March 2015—leading to the creation of ISWAP. The following year, internal rivalry and conflicting power dynamics further divided the group, resulting in two factions: ISWAP under the leadership of Abu Musab al-Barnawi and Boko Haram remaining under the leadership of Shekau. This divide exacerbated the existent threat, with a new dimension of inter-factional conflict arising between ISWAP and Boko Haram. Although ISWAP grew in number, surpassing Boko Haram, it was still considered a splinter group from Boko Haram—with news and reports often using the two names interchangeably.

Subsequently, ISWAP continued to expand its operations beyond Nigeria and into the Lake Chad Basin. It, alternatively, focused on targeting security personnel and “hard targets” unlike Boko Haram who had been targeting civilians. With this change, ISWAP promoted itself in many areas as an alternative to the government; providing services, healthcare, resources and infrastructure developments to the territories under its control. For example, the group dug wells to supply potable water, facilitated cattle rustling and agricultural activities for livelihoods, and provided security in some areas where it extended its control. Through this strategy, it was able to mobilize, gain resources and recruit more members, reaching an estimate of 3,500 to 5,000 fighters by 2019.

Figure 1.1 demonstrates an overview of violent incidents across Borno State since the emergence of Boko Haram in 2009, up until the present period. It outlines the trajectory of various incidents of violence launched by Boko Haram or ISWAP, including attacks against civilians, suicide martyrdom attacks, IED attacks, and battles and clashes with the government. The figure also shows the corresponding fatalities during the same period, as a result of such incidents of violence.
This ever-evolving security landscape, and especially the splintering of the two factions, compounded the complexity of the threat of terrorism in Nigeria. Additionally, with the apparent nexus with transnational organized crime, there had been a significant increase in the groups’ financial and operational capabilities. Accordingly, it became increasingly clear that security measures alone cannot holistically respond to the contemporary nature of terrorist groups. Anchored in a belief that the response to terrorism must be multidimensional and should not be confined to the security realm, Nigeria adopted a new government approach upon launching its National Counter-Terrorism Strategy in 2016. The strategy combined a hard military approach with a softer approach that addresses the root causes of violence in Nigeria.
Building on the Terrorism Prevention Act, National Security Strategy, and the National Counter-Terrorism Strategy, in 2017, Nigeria adopted a multi-sectoral Policy Framework and National Action Plan for P/CVE, and a National Action Plan for DDRR, that together underscore the importance of combining kinetic with non-kinetic approaches in order to address the terrorism threat. ISWAP and Boko Haram had remained resilient in the face of ongoing counterterrorism efforts, and although Nigerian authorities had adopted successive approaches to dealing with the gravity of the challenge posed by terrorism, they have not been able address the root causes of the problem.

Accordingly, the national action plans highlight (i) the imperative of addressing the root drivers of violence; (ii) the need for enhancing efforts aimed at safer and resilient communities able to prevent and counter extremism; (iii) a need for adopting measures for the treatment of victims and persons associated with Boko Haram; and (iv) the strengthening of the justice system. They also emphasize the need to anchor these efforts in whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches. This is largely attributed to the complexity and peculiarities of the situation ultimately prescribing “the appropriate mix of measures and programs that should be applied, using the various tools as circumstances dictate.”

In an effort to implement non-kinetic approaches to addressing terrorism, and building on Nigeria’s National Counter-terrorism Strategy, a presidential directive along with the federal government pioneered a nationally owned program in 2016 to confront the challenges posed by an increasing caseload of individuals formerly associated with Boko Haram: OPSC. The program aims to encourage willing and repentant Boko Haram insurgents – referred to in OPSC as “clients” – to surrender and embrace peace, while providing them with deradicalization instruction, education, vocational training and psychosocial support to be able to reintegrate back into their communities.

Notwithstanding the considerable efforts exerted by Nigerian stakeholders at different levels of governance, challenges still persist. The rapidly unravelling terrorism landscape has recently been further complicated specifically in the wake of the death of Boko Haram Leader Shekau in May 2021. While ISWAP has been able to recruit a number of Boko Haram members post-Shekau’s death, the incident triggered waves of mass defections from Boko Haram as thousands decided to flee the group in response to the changing leadership. Tens of thousands of men, women, and children have surrendered to the security forces, marking the largest wave of defections since the group emerged, further burdening national and communal institutions and resources, and posing serious challenges to peace and development.

Furthermore, federal and state initiatives have been on the rise to incentivize even more defections, increasing the caseload of individuals formerly associated with Boko Haram (and to a lesser extent ISWAP) who require comprehensive SPRR processes. Grounded in the Regional Strategy for the Stabilization, Recovery & Resilience of the Boko Haram affected Areas of the Lake Chad Basin Region and outlined in the African Union Operational Guidance Notes (OGN) on the overlap between DDR and P/CVE, SPRR has been adopted as a regional approach in handling individuals formerly associated with terrorist groups. It is important to note that SPRR processes resemble – to a great extent – the DDRR approach, yet with different stages to account for the complex caseload of individuals formerly associated with terrorist groups. These processes should ideally result in the reintegration of eligible individuals back into societies, while minimizing the risk of recidivism and providing support to host communities.
CHAPTER 2

Chapter Two: The Federal Model – OPSC

Under the auspices of the presidential directive in 2016, the federal government of Nigeria established OPSC as a national rehabilitation, reintegration and reconciliation program for male repentant, surrendered ex-combatants formerly associated with Boko Haram. OPSC offers a political exit strategy for individuals formerly associated with terrorist groups to disengage from terrorism and reintegrate back into their original communities, while providing them with vocational training and psychosocial support to help them become productive members of society once again. The program was initially configured to incentivize Boko Haram members- and ISWAP members at a later stage–to defect, and also to rehabilitate those who were captured and eligible to undergo the DDRR program. In addition to OPSC, the national initiative also includes two other transit centers in Maiduguri, the Bulumkutu transit center for women and children, and the Shokari Transit center. These centers are managed by the Borno State with the support of international partners.

The OPSC camp is located in Mallam Sidi, Gombe State and has a capacity to accommodate up to 700 clients every six months. Since its inception, OPSC has graduated 1543 ex-Boko Haram/ISWAP members categorized as low-risk –referred to as “clients”—to ensure that stigmatization is meticulously avoided. Another batch of clients (33 clients who have recently commenced) are currently undergoing programming at OPSC camp, and expected to graduate within a six-month timeframe. OPSC mobilizes resources and partners from the Nigerian federal government, the armed forces, civil society, and international organizations in a coordinated framework under the directorship of ONSA. The Mallam Sidi Camp has 320 personnel drawn from 17 different services, ministries, departments and agencies of the federal government. The personnel are divided into two teams: deradicalization and security. The former includes counselors, clergies, interpreters, psychologists, social workers, educationists, and medical therapists, while the latter includes security personnel/officers and members of intelligence units. The implementation of OPSC thereby presents a nationally-owned model that hinges on a whole-of-government approach, guided by collaborative efforts for strengthening national resilience to terrorism.
The journey to OPSC begins once surrendered individuals start fleeing areas controlled by Boko Haram or ISWAP and turn themselves to security authorities at specific checkpoints across NE Nigeria. These individuals undergo preliminary investigation at the designated point of control—either checkpoints or barracks in the field—after which they are transferred to Giwa Barracks in Maiduguri for a more detailed investigation. At Giwa, individuals formerly associated with Boko Haram and ISWAP are screened by the Joint Investigation Center (JIC), which consists of intelligence officers from various security services in Nigeria. At this point, the JIC interrogators conduct vetting, screening and categorization to determine the individual’s level of involvement in the insurgency. Those identified as high risk are referred to detention facilities in Giwa, Kainji or Kuje to undergo the judicial track, while eligible individuals deemed as low-risk are sent to the OPSC camp in Mallam Sidi for DDRR programming.

It is worth mentioning that women who are categorized as “low-risk” are often directly released back into communities for reintegration, without benefiting from DDRR opportunities and services. Nonetheless, some basic rehabilitation programming was made available for women and girls formerly associated with Boko Haram and ISWAP at the Bulumkutu Rehabilitation Center in Maiduguri. Although the Bulumkutu center was primarily set exclusively as a rehabilitation center for women and children, recent waves of mass defections have pushed state authorities to accommodate some male defectors within the center, to confront the growing caseload.
Upon arrival at the OPSC camp in Gombe, clients are subjected to initial documentation, medical tests, profiling, categorization, blood samples and biometrics capturing for future references. Clients undergo the DDRR program where they are expected to spend around six months at the OPSC camp, with this period sometimes extending to up to 24 months for certain batches of clients. During this time, clients receive various types of education and services, including vocational training, psychosocial support, drug abuse intervention, as well as literacy and deradicalization classes. Throughout this period, clients learn and acquire multiple skills to ease their reintegration. Among other things, they are provided with training on tailoring, barbing, shoemaking, furniture making, welding and farming.

According to OPSC graduates, vocational training and business counseling have contributed greatly in preparing them for productive lives and thereby easing their reintegration process back into communities. This was also reflected by community members, indicating that OPSC graduates come back with skills that not only benefit them, but the community as well. Equally so, psychological support has been a paramount aspect of clients’ rehabilitation at OPSC as it helps them recover from distorted concepts, violent ideas and trauma, and teaches them how to live peacefully and abide by the common rules of society.

Furthermore, and in an effort to further encourage and promote community acceptance, OPSC organizes visits to the camp in Gombe. On the one hand, these visits allow families and community members to witness firsthand the rehabilitation process, and thus can spread messages of reassurance among their respective communities. On the other hand, these visits alleviate the clients’ fears of not being forgiven and accepted back into their communities. Other visits have also included government officials to sensitize them about the process and further facilitate reintegration.
Upon completing the program at Mallam Sidi, OPSC graduates subscribe to an Oath of Commitment/Allegiance before a quasi-judicial panel constituted by the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of the Federation. In essence, the Oath of Commitment/Allegiance denotes that graduates stand to forfeit whatever privileges they enjoy under OPSC, should they be found liable for any other crimes committed after the program.

Once they are reintegrated back into their communities, OPSC graduates continue to receive business development and psychological support. While former associates returning to their communities might pose security concerns, communities, more often than not, perceive OPSC graduates as being properly rehabilitated. This comes as a result of the efforts exerted by the states, in conjunction with partners and community leaders, in providing constant sensitization and awareness campaigns for communities to accept rehabilitated former associates. To further foster community acceptance, representatives from OPSC and the Borno State government initiated awareness campaigns on radio and television about the program and its positive impact on OPSC graduates. Moreover, the Borno State Commissioner for Women Affairs and Social Developments conducts regular visits to communities and meetings with local leaders for briefings to provide updates on OPSC graduates’ reintegration process.

Although OPSC does not reintegrate, it sets the stage for the process to be conducted by the state based on existing dynamics. In addition to states’ roles, OPSC is supported by several federal ministries and agencies, including the National Orientation Agency (NOA), the Federal Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs, Disaster Management and Social Development (FMoHADMS) and the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC). NOA, in particular, is one of the main partners in the reintegration process. They have offices in all 36 states and all 738 local government areas—where they are heavily involved with deradicalization and community sensitization with the aim of creating a more secure and peaceful society. They also support the provision of behavior modification sessions for OPSC clients.

In principle, the OPSC program has undoubtedly yielded substantial success. Most importantly it has created a window of opportunity for Boko Haram and ISWAP recruits to defect from a group which some were forced to join, and a fight they have grown to consider futile. Notwithstanding, the program is still young and fresh, with room to improve and evolve. As such, this evolution may also serve to accommodate the recent developments and increasing caseload of individuals formerly associated with Boko Haram and ISWAP. Since its inception, OPSC has been dealing with a relatively small number of individuals formerly associated with Boko Haram and ISWAP in comparison to the large numbers of the current waves of mass defections. It has also been, to an extent, concerned with low-risk repentants. Now with the different mix of associated individuals, varying from low, medium to high risk former associates—and the very different kind of DDRR each category would need—OPSC needs to tailor its strategy and capacity to adjust to the unprecedented circumstances.
Situated in the heart of NE Nigeria, Borno State is bordered by Yobe to the west, Adamawa to the south and Gombe to the southwest. It is also the only Nigerian state to border three foreign countries: Cameroon, Niger, and Chad. This geopolitical composition situates Borno State at the core of an incredibly volatile region. Considered the epicenter of Boko Haram-related violence, Borno State accounts for over 80 percent of total deaths inflicted since 2011, and contributes to spill-over effects to neighboring Adamawa and Yobe States, as well as neighboring border countries.\(^2\)

The map below (Figure 3.4) illustrates the weighted distribution of attacks against civilians, as well as civilian fatalities, across local government areas in Borno State between 2009 and 2022.
Since 2016, the Borno State government has played a pivotal role in the federal government’s endeavor to incentivize defections from Boko Haram by allowing for the rehabilitation and reintegration of repentant and willing Boko Haram insurgents—through the hallmark program OPSC. The Borno State government has been part and parcel of OPSC through various mechanisms, but primarily on two predominant fronts: 1) reintegration of graduates of OPSC after completion of their program at Mallam Sidi Camp in Gombe; and 2) rehabilitation and reintegration of females and children formerly associated with Boko Haram.

Borno State houses the Bulumkutu Rehabilitation Center, run by the Borno State Ministry for Women Affairs and Social Development and supported by the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF). The center was initially designed to host women and children formerly associated with Boko Haram, as well as provide them with requisite rehabilitation, medical services, and psycho-social support prior to their reintegration back into the community. It is important to highlight, in this regard, the integral role that the Bulumkutu Center plays in accommodating women and children formerly associated with Boko Haram who would otherwise be ineligible to receive DDRR support through OPSC, which is solely designed for male repentants.

The Borno State government also plays a pivotal role in the reintegration of male OPSC clients upon their completion of the rehabilitation and deradicalization program at the Mallam Sidi Camp in Gombe. During this phase, the Borno State Government carries out a number of functions including most notably, assisting with family tracing for OPSC clients, facilitating family visits to the Mallam Sidi Camp in Gombe to promote community acceptance of the rehabilitation process. Additionally, the Borno State Commissioner for Women Affairs and Social Development regularly travels to communities and hosts meetings with local government representatives to provide information and updates on the OPSC reintegration process. Borno State is also host to the Shokari Transit Center, which was established in 2019 to become a transitory facility for OPSC graduate boys and men prior to their final reintegration back into their communities.

In this sense, the Borno State is considered both the epicenter of Boko-Haram-related violence, as well as the end point and final station that rehabilitated OPSC clients have to pass through prior to their reintegration back into the community. It is where the cycle both begins and ends, and thus needs to be considered as part and parcel of the response strategy.
A shift in May 2021 marked a critical juncture and turning point that redrew conflict dynamics, with ramifications that continue to ripple across NE Nigeria and beyond until today. On 19 May 2021, longtime leader of Boko Haram Abu Bakr Shekau was reported dead following clashes with the group’s rival ISWAP. Shekau purportedly detonated a suicide vest, killing himself and those around him, as his rivals were approaching him in hopes of capturing him alive. Shekau’s death triggered waves of mass defections from Boko Haram, amounting to thousands of individuals leaving the group including ex-combatants, women, children, as well as commoners and farmers who lived in areas that previously fell under the group’s control.

According to the Borno State government, as of 10 June 2022, a total of 58,893 individuals formerly associated with Boko Haram and ISWAP (though a much smaller proportion) have defected and surrendered to the Borno State authorities since 16 August 2021, with an average rate of 200 to 300 defectors per day. These numbers are still on the rise. It is worthy to note in this regard that, while the common literature attributes these waves of mass defections primarily—and almost exclusively—to Shekau’s death, this view offers a rather simplistic explanation of a far more complex and multilayered phenomenon.

A critical aspect that has not been adequately discussed does not just relate to the event of Shekau’s death, but more importantly how he died and the gravity of what it symbolizes for his Muslim followers. Shekau was not killed by the enemy and hailed a martyr, nor did he embark on a suicide martyrdom operation with the aim of annihilating state forces. Rather, he deliberately took his own life and detonated himself out of fear of being captured by his rival foes. To his followers, Shekau’s death not only signaled cowardice and fear, but more importantly, it cast doubt on the whole religious basis of his cause—even Muslims with less than average knowledge of Islamic principles.
understand the gravity of such an act, and this left a huge impact and propelled many followers to leave the group. This elevates the discussion regarding Shekau’s death beyond mere simplistic arguments of leadership decapitation, to take into account the nuances and complexities pertaining to ideological dimensions and group self-identification.

Another element that played a huge catalyzing role not only in incentivizing further waves of mass defections, but more importantly in maintaining and sustaining the momentum over time, has been the message of reassurance by the Borno State government, ensuring that surrendering individuals will not be killed or wrongfully treated. Faced with the choice of either defecting to ISWAP (where Boko Haram members would be enslaved and treated as second-class citizens) or the alternative of surrendering to state authorities, thousands of individuals have opted for the latter option; given reassurances that their predecessors have not been killed or mistreated after turning themselves in.

A close examination of figures 3.1 to 3.3 holds resonance to the aforementioned elements’ role in incentivizing defections and decreasing the operational capacity of Boko Haram and its adverse impact on civilian populations. As demonstrated in Figures 3.1, the aggregate yearly data of attacks against civilians and civilian fatalities by Boko Haram and ISWAP, respectively, shows a relative decline in the overall number of attacks against civilians and associated fatalities by both groups. A closer look at the quarterly data during the last two years (3.2 and 3.3) highlights the critical juncture around the second quarter of the year 2021, whereby attacks against civilians and associated fatalities by Boko Haram nearly flatline, with a simultaneous upward trajectory in the same category by ISWAP. This corresponds to the shift instigated by Shekau’s death, followed by sustained waves of mass defections from the group; further diminishing its operational capacity and reducing its violent impact on civilian populations across Borno State.

Civilian Fatalities in Borno State as a result of Boko Haram & ISWAP Attacks

![Figure 3.1](image-url)
Attacks against Civilians in Borno State as a result of Boko Haram & ISWAP

2009 - 2022

![Graph showing the number of attacks by Boko Haram and ISWAP from Q1 2019 to Q4 2022.](Figure 3.2)

Civilian Fatalities in Borno State as a result of Boko Haram & ISWAP Attacks

2009 - 2022

![Graph showing the number of civilian fatalities by Boko Haram and ISWAP from Q1 2019 to Q4 2022.](Figure 3.3)
This weighted map outlines the density of Boko Haram and/or ISWAP operations across the various local government areas in Borno State.

2009 - 2022
The Borno State government’s approach perceives this critical juncture in the state's trajectory as an opportune moment that must be leveraged and seized to dismantle Boko Haram and ISWAP's capacity, restore law and order, allow people to go back to their homes and villages and finally rebuild the state. Borno State Governor Prof. Babagana Umara Zulum has laid out an elaborate 10-point agenda with a vision to improve security and develop infrastructure; in hopes to bring Borno state back to its former legacy of being heralded as the “home of peace.”23 His vision is to position Borno once again as one of the top Nigerian states engaged in cross-border trade and a key part of the Lake Chad Basin’s economy.24 Unfortunately, since the rise of the Boko Haram insurgency in 2009, total trade between Nigeria and Cameroon, Chad and Niger is estimated to have declined by over 70 percent; disrupting businesses and livelihoods and leading to a severe loss of income.25 Accordingly, dismantling Boko Haram and ISWAP, and depleting their human resources, has become of utmost importance as a mechanism to promote peace and order. Doing so can also accelerate the economic revival of not only Borno State, but also neighboring states and the Lake Chad Basin region at large.

Needless to say, the recent waves of mass defections have led to the overstretched of state resources and overwhelmed state officials who were forced to devise innovative solutions and responses to absorb such unprecedented numbers of individuals leaving Boko Haram and ISWAP. To facilitate the defection process, Borno State has set specific reception areas and checkpoints for those individuals leaving Boko Haram and ISWAP. The process starts with surrendered individuals reporting to the Military Intelligence Commanders (MIC) at designated reception areas identified across Borno State. As it stands, there are eight reception areas within Sector One, including in Bama, Banki Junction, Banki, Gwoza, Konduga, Dikwa, Mafa and Maiduguri, whereas Sector Two has just one reception area located in Damboa.26 Reception areas in Sector Three are yet to be established, as it is in northern Borno, where ISWAP has an active presence. It is often the case that particular facilitators would report on repentants’ movement towards any of the military reception areas mentioned above, and commanders would prepare and make adequate logistical preparations to receive them if needed. Upon being taken into custody, surrendered individuals are subjected to initial profiling by the MIC before the local government chairmen arrange for their movement to Hajj Camp in Maiduguri.
CHAPTER 3

The process starts with surrendered individuals reporting to the Military Intelligence Commanders (MIC) at designated reception areas at nine reception areas including in Bama, Banki Junction, Banki, Gwoza, Konduga, Dikwa, Mafa and Maiduguri, Damboa.

During this initial phase, surrendered fighters would identify “farmers” upon their arrival, particularly those in their areas of operation.

A second round of identification and verification is conducted by local government authority representatives, Bulamas, and the Civilian Joint Task Force.

During this phase, narratives provided by “farmers” along with their pictures/photos--are verified by with their local communities of origin.

Once their identities are confirmed, they are invited to pledge an Oath on the Qur’an that they are in fact farmers and to also signal their repentance—after which they are returned back to communities.
As part of Borno State’s response measures, the Shokari Transit Center and Bulumkutu Rehabilitation Center have both been reinforced to host some of the surrendered individuals, in addition to the primary populations already residing in these camps (graduated OPSC clients prior to reintegration in Shokari, and women and children in Bulumkutu). Additionally, a new camp—Hajj Camp—which was previously used by Muslims making the pilgrimage to Mecca, has been transformed to become a hosting facility for surrendered individuals.

According to the Borno State government, a significant portion of the current caseload falls under the category of “farmers”. This category of surrendered individuals refers to ‘Awam’ or commoners who live in areas under the control of Boko Haram but are not directly affiliated with the group. Out of the caseload of 58,893 individuals, 48,324 are women and children, representing 82 percent of the caseload.

Breakdown of total caseload of individuals formerly associated with Boko Haram & ISWAP

August 2021 - June 2022

Individuals Currently Residing in Hajj Camp, Bulumkutu Center and Shokari Transit Center

- Female Children: 28%
- Male Children: 25%
- Male Adults: 18%
- Female Adults: 29%

Individuals Already Reintegrated

- 82%
For this category of individuals, Borno State designed an expedited screening process to allow for their swift rehabilitation and reintegration back into the communities, creating space for other surrenderers. The process consists of multiple stages, including an initial phase of identification where surrendered fighters identify “farmers” upon their arrival, particularly those in their areas of operation. A second round of identification and verification is conducted by local government authority representatives, Bulamas, and the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF). Following this screening, the narratives provided by these “farmers” – along with their photos – are verified by their local communities of origin. Once their identities are confirmed, they are invited to pledge an oath on the Quran that they are in fact farmers and are signaling their repentance; after which, they are sent back to their communities. According to the state government, local communities act as an integral component of the process and are deliberately included in the verification process to ensure community acceptance of reintegrated individuals upon their return. As of June 2022, a total number of 48,184 individuals have undergone the Borno verification process and subsequently reintegrated back into communities. (See Figure 3.6 for a detailed breakdown)
The remainder of the caseload, encompassing 10,709 individuals, consisting of former members and fighters as well as their wives and children, are housed at Hajj Camp and Shokari Transit Center, with a small portion in Bulumkutu Rehabilitation Center where some receive rehabilitation support including religious teachings and vocational training. Borno State, with the support of IOM and UNICEF, is embarking on an effort to establish additional shelters within the camps, designed to accommodate incoming waves of defections. It is worthy to note that this mixed caseload of surrendered individuals—farmers, former fighters, women and children residing in the same camps constitutes a great challenge. According to the Borno State government, more support is needed to build shelters, provide medical assistance and expand infrastructure to accommodate the increasing caseload. Additional support is needed in the form of trained social workers, to be able to effectively disaggregate this massive caseload and meet their differentiated needs. Such modalities of support must be provided in a way that ensures sustainability of interventions, noting that the Governor of Borno has signaled a dire need to shift from providing immediate aid and assistance towards longer-term peacebuilding, reconstruction and development projects.

The Borno State model represents, at its core, a localized approach that emerged to meet unprecedented and rapidly evolving dynamics and terrain. Since the beginning of the Boko Haram insurgency, no one could have imagined the sheer volume of defections that has been underway for the past months, and therefore it was virtually impossible to have prepared in advance for such a scenario to unfold. Accordingly, one’s examination of the current situation must be grounded in a deep understanding of the complexities and nuances involved, zooming in not only on the gaps and challenges that surely persist, but more importantly the opportunities presented for innovation and creating more sustainable and long-term solutions.
REHABILITATION ACTIVITIES AT BULUMKUTU CENTER

FAMILY SHELTERS AT HAJJ DEFECTION CAMP
Chapter Four: The Role of International Partners Amidst Shifting Dynamics

Against the backdrop of the context laid out above, as well as the challenges and opportunities of the several initiatives and models being currently applied in Nigeria, several UN agencies, international organizations and donors are involved and engaged within the Nigerian context. As Nigeria embarks on several opportunities to deal with the ongoing challenges it is faced with, these international organizations provide key support to the Nigerian government, and raise awareness on the impact of these challenges to the international community. Primarily, the UN partnered with the government of Nigeria and engaged in joint efforts through several interventions.

Some of the main agencies with substantial presence in Nigeria include IOM, UNICEF, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and the United Nations Office on Drug and Crime (UNODC). During the field mission, CCCPA conducted consultations with some of these stakeholders to better understand the role of international actors in the Nigerian context, as well as the support provided to the Nigerian government for confronting challenges relating to terrorism.

As noted above, IOM is one of Nigeria’s main partners, providing technical and operational support at different levels. IOM established a DDRR program that supports the Nigerian government to devise legal, policy and operational frameworks which facilitate positive “off-ramping” options for individuals seeking to separate from Boko Haram or ISWAP. It has also piloted and established twelve social cohesion community platforms which are used as catalysts to promote peace, social cohesion, and reconciliation. Members of the social cohesion community platforms are key community influencers that play a critical role in community reconciliation and reintegration. This is all done in close coordination with the Borno State government, which plays a pivotal role in promoting community acceptance in the reintegration process.

Additionally, IOM has served as a key partner for government-led rehabilitation programs and transit centers, with the support of various international donors. IOM has provided human capacity, infrastructure development and material support to OPSC, as well as Shokari Center and Hajj Camp. As such, it has built and equipped several facilities including centers for data management, vocational training, and sporting facilities. It also provides training on rehabilitation-related topics and PVE techniques. Furthermore, and in response to the more recent caseload of defectors, IOM has been extending support to the Borno State government in its ongoing efforts to establish additional shelters within the camps, designed to accommodate incoming waves of defections. This support has taken the form of infrastructure development within the camps, as well as humanitarian assistance.
IOM is also a principal partner in the reintegration process. IOM supports both OPSC and Borno State in ensuring a smooth transition from rehabilitation to reintegration, namely through community reintegration preparedness via individual and family counseling (psychosocial support for reunification and business counseling), community sensitization and preparedness, as well as family reunification. Following a three-month probationary period and after verifying the community’s preparedness, IOM often provides male and female former associates with some basic needs in the form of socio-economic reintegration kits. This follows a 2-for-1 approach, whereby programs benefit two civilians in the receiving community for every kit issued to a former associate.

UNICEF has also been supporting Nigerian state authorities, to help with reintegration programs for all children formerly associated with non-state armed groups, and other children affected by the conflict in NE Nigeria. UNICEF handles the Child Care Programme (CCP) in conjunction with Borno State Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development, which takes place at the Bulumkutu Rehabilitation Center in Maiduguri. Since its establishment, CCP has treated about 110 willingly surrendered minors and ensured their reunion with their biological parents or UNICEF-appointed foster parents. UNICEF’s support also includes an initial assessment of the children’s well-being, psychosocial support, education, vocational training, informal apprenticeships, and opportunities to improve livelihoods in order to tailor age- and sex-appropriate community-based reintegration interventions.

As for UNDP, and to support the implementation of the Regional Strategy for the Stabilization, Recovery & Resilience of the Boko Haram-affected Areas of the Lake Chad Basin (RSS), it established the Regional Stabilization Facility (RSF) in Borno State with the aim of achieving immediate stabilization in the Boko Haram-affected areas of Lake Chad Basin Region—including the states of Borno, Adamawa and Yobe in the country’s NE region. Through the provision of integrated support, UNDP aims to offer a resilience-based approach through a localized and integrated program of activities in three interrelated areas: security and the rule of law, livelihoods, and basic services—zooming in on ways to address root causes, build confidence and provide preventive measures.

Last but not least, UNODC, through its projects aims to support Nigeria to prevent and counter terrorism through human rights-compliant criminal justice measures against terrorism by strengthening Nigerian capacity to effectively investigate, prosecute, and adjudicate terrorism-related offenses. It also provides support through rebuilding and refurbishing prisons in Nigeria. Additionally, UNODC currently implements the European Union-Nigeria-UNODC-CTED Partnership Project III: Support for Criminal Justice Responses to Terrorism and Violent Extremism. It has also established a partnership with the UN Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT) and the UN Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED) to implement the project: Supporting Lake Chad Basin Countries to Develop and Implement Strategies for the Screening, Prosecution, Rehabilitation and Reintegration of Boko Haram-Associated Persons.
Grounded in the aforementioned challenges and rapidly-evolving context, various UN agencies and donors have emphasized the need for greater synergies between the Borno State Model and the Federal Model (OPSC), as international stakeholders sometimes perceive them to be two parallel processes. Improving synergies between the two models will leverage the expertise and knowledge of OPSC’s model, anchoring future processes in practices and lessons learned over the years. This could also enable the state-led model to adopt a clear mechanism and framework that conforms to the already-established and ongoing process of OPSC, while also enabling it to handle the unprecedented waves of defections.

On account of the increasing caseload, and as outlined in previous chapters, screening processes have been expedited to account for the mass defections. Surrendered individuals are being profiled and their identities verified quicker than usual so that those eligible—mostly farmers—can be swiftly reintegrated back into their communities. Meanwhile, international partners highlighted the imperative for adopting consistent standards or standard operating procedures (SOPs) to ensure the adequate handling of these defectors and that high-risk individuals are not mistakenly being reintegrated within the larger caseload.

Some agencies have also highlighted the possible curtailment of the role of international organizations as a result of Borno State Governor Zulum’s announcement and decision to close all official IDP camps in Maiduguri in October 2021.28 This cast a sense of uncertainty over their role as partners to the Nigerian government and the direction to pursue forward—with regards to DRRR. Given the new approach proposed by Governor Zulum, and as laid out in the Ten Point Agenda, Zulum paves the way for the gradual return and resettlement of IDP camp residents. The government’s urge to resettle falls on the premise of providing safety, support and sources of income to the resettled individuals—providing them a semblance of life before the insurgency. This was pushed by the government as a response to dire conditions within some of the camps, including poor shelter, congestion and sanitary conditions, as well as an initiative to build resilience, build self-reliance, and return relative peace to the communities.29

The UN Secretary-General António Guterres has urged the international community to invest in what he referred to as the "BORNO OF HOPE" during his recent visit to Nigeria in May 2022.
In addition to the above, Zulum has also banned food and non-food humanitarian aid to the resettled communities, or required that such aid be cleared by the Borno State government first. This ban was announced in a letter, signed by Zulum, addressed to humanitarian organizations and development partners through the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. Accordingly, food distribution is only permitted in IDP camps and IDPs in host communities. However, many who have resettled are grappling with lack of adequate humanitarian assistance, with little to eat at times and difficulty securing livelihoods. Short, medium and long-term measures to support those resettling have been put in place as palliative measures to strengthen the movement and stability after relocation, such as distributing cash and food items, as well as agricultural material for farming.

This shift was further reinforced at the federal level, when President Buhari announced the creation of a Presidential Committee on the Repatriation, Return, and Resettlement of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in NE Nigeria, signaling a shift from managing the situation to establishing a permanent solution for effective restoration. This committee is tasked with the development of an action plan for the restoration of peace and development—including most prominently a plan for the repatriation, return, and resettlement of IDPs and the restoration of livelihoods through the collaboration with key donors, development partners, and private sector. This could pave the way for different forms of collaboration between international agencies and the Borno Government, with support being channeled directly to the state rather than through the federal government.

In a similar vein, the UN Secretary-General António Guterres has urged the international community to invest in what he referred to as the “Borno of Hope”, during his recent visit to Nigeria in May 2022. The Secretary-General praised the efforts exerted and the reconciliation and reintegration policies that have been put forth on the state level, calling for international partners to support the projects of the government of Borno in creating the conditions for real and sustainable development. All these initiatives signal a willingness on the part of the international community to take concerted steps in shifting from crisis response and relief towards peacebuilding and longer-term sustainable development and reconstruction.

In this light, Nigeria has been continuing on a growth track, with ongoing counterinsurgency efforts as well as non-kinetic approaches that can promote a holistic approach to dealing with the threat of Boko Haram. Within these approaches, international partners and UN agencies have been key to defining the elements and support needed for the Nigerian government. They have also provided technical support and humanitarian assistance when needed. Yet, within the changing dynamics taking place, the role of these agencies could be either curtailed or adjusted. As Nigeria focuses on ways to prioritize prevention, development, growth, and collaboration between the different stakeholders, the UN and international agencies should still collaborate on addressing the root causes and providing technical support—be it in the form of institutional and capacity building as needed by the Nigerian stakeholders and as necessary to respond to the increasing caseload of defections.
Prior to delving deeper into analysis of the challenges and complexities arising from the recent waves of mass defections, and how to best confront them, it is important to reflect on the progress that has been achieved thus far. When OPSC was launched in 2016, it was intended to become a channel for incentivizing a very specific—and rather limited—subset of low-risk, male, repentants associated with Boko Haram in an attempt to diminish the group’s operational capacities.

The OPSC program is structured to accommodate a maximum of 700 clients, which means it can graduate, at maximum, 700 to 1,400 clients a year—granted that the camp is operating at full capacity and granted that the period the clients spend for rehabilitation remains within the time frame of 6 months. Since 2016, the camp has graduated 1,543 clients. Indeed, this demonstrates the need to upscale OPSC’s capacity to respond to the increasing number of defectors, notably by adapting the approach adopted thus far to the realities and needs imposed by the recent waves of mass defections.

The reality of what unfolded over the course of recent months since May 2021, and the sheer volume of the caseload of individuals formerly associated with Boko Haram and ISWAP that have surrendered to State authorities, has surpassed any expectations or predictions initially placed. This, in itself, ought to be viewed as a positive development in Nigeria’s ongoing efforts to incentivize defections. However, the more pressing and important question now becomes: What comes next?

Existing approaches at the federal and state levels, despite the differences between these approaches, have succeeded in incentivizing defection and surrender to government authorities by individuals formerly associated with Boko Haram and ISWAP. However, it has also become evident that in light of recent developments, there is a pressing need to reassess and rethink the extent to which existing approaches are still fit for purpose in confronting the challenges posed by mass defections. Accordingly, Nigeria finds itself at crossroads, which dictates an evolution in strategy and approach to leverage this opportune moment in time, and, more importantly, to confront a unique challenge requiring a correspondingly nuanced response.
CHAPTER 5

It is imperative for the current wave of defections to be sustained, recidivism and relapse prevented and mitigated, and an even greater number encouraged to defect. Key to sustaining defection rates and incentivizing further defections is ensuring that those who have already defected become part of a systematic and comprehensive process. Even if such a process is still in development, it will serve as an incentive and a pathway for these defectors to return back to their communities, promising them with a viable alternative, and encouraging more individuals to follow. But what would such a comprehensive process look like? And what are the key pillars that must anchor any strategy moving forward?

NIGERIA FINDS

MSF
Outlining the Parameters of a Comprehensive Process to Handle Individuals Formerly Associated with Boko Haram & ISWAP: Screening, Prosecution, Rehabilitation & Reintegration (SPRR)

Disaggregating the Caseload

Screening represents the foundation upon which all subsequent steps of the process are based. It is the single most important step according to which the profile of an individual and the degree of their former involvement with a terrorist group is determined, as well as the level of risk that such an individual poses to the community. Screening is also crucial because it identifies individuals who have committed crimes during their involvement with the group. A sound and comprehensive screening process allows authorities to make informed decisions on the appropriate action to be taken which would then result in either the direct release of individuals back into the community, referral to adequate rehabilitation and reintegration programming, or referral to criminal investigation for possible prosecution.

The current caseload of individuals formerly associated with Boko Haram and ISWAP in Nigeria is one that is highly heterogeneous and complex. It includes “farmers” or commoners who lived in areas under the control of Boko Haram and/or ISWAP, but were not directly affiliated with the groups. It also includes former fighters and group members that played varied roles within the groups, ranging from combat roles, to intelligence gathering, to other supporting roles. Additionally, it encompasses a significant number of women and children, associated with farmers, as well as fighters and members.

Accordingly, the complexity of this caseload must be met with an equally complex and multi-layered screening mechanism that refrains from binary categorizations of either “high-risk” or “low-risk”, “farmers” or “fighters”. Such simplistic categorizations, while they may have worked in the past when dealing with a far smaller caseload, can no longer be relied upon, simply due to the fact that the caseload composition has drastically changed.
When handling individuals formerly associated with terrorist groups, authorities are met with the dilemma of balancing between peace and justice, between restoration and retribution, and reconciling between the short-term objective of incentivizing the greatest possible number of defections from terrorist groups, while also ensuring that due process is in place without discouraging potential defectors. This is an incredibly intricate balance to maintain, especially when authorities are trying to reconcile between the competing priorities of timely rehabilitation and reintegration of individuals formerly associated with terrorist groups to maximize the chances of successful social, political, and economic reintegration back to civilian life, while on the other hand meeting the obligation to ensure justice and accountability for terrorism-related offences through criminal investigation and prosecution.

As Nigerian authorities grapple with the current caseload, it must be underscored that there is no single pathway, mechanism, or blueprint that can be followed to achieve desired outcomes. What is clear is that such a critical juncture in Nigeria’s battle with insurgency represents an opportune moment that must be leveraged upon to dismantle and disintegrate the groups that have terrorized populations for more than a decade, tearing the social fabric, destabilizing communities, and derailing development prospects. What is also clear is that there must be a clear and concrete process for justice and accountability to ensure that individuals who have been proven to be implicated in terrorism-related offences and crimes are held accountable for their actions–only then would communities be willing and open to receive reintegrated individuals.

However, such a process for justice and accountability cannot become overly rigid, and must remain flexible to enable room for maneuverability. An overly rigid or retributive approach can be counterproductive and may threaten to reverse hard-won defections. At the same time, an overly flexible approach can potentially result in grievances and limit community acceptance of, and confidence in, the process, while also hampering the right of victims to justice.

Between “high-risk” and “low-risk” categories, or between “farmers” and “fighters” categories, lies a whole gradient of other risk or association categories that ought to be accounted for, each with a separate pathway towards rehabilitation and reintegration back into the community. Such determination of association or risk categories must be grounded in, first and foremost, robust knowledge of the local context and its peculiarities, and must be carried out by trained local government officials, social workers, healthcare workers and psychologists, according to established and agreed-upon Standard Operating Procedures.

The Balance between Peace and Justice
Accordingly, it remains essential that authorities consider a comprehensive justice framework, as appropriate and in line with applicable legal frameworks. This entails adopting a framework of prosecution, transitional justice and other accountability mechanisms, which may also include providing amnesty for individuals formerly associated with terrorist groups. It must be noted in this regard, that the caseload currently at hand encompasses a wide spectrum of culpability; while the majority are “farmers” and individuals who were implicated by virtue of their residence in areas under the control of such groups, the remainder consists of individuals who have played various support roles and others who have committed grave crimes. Adopting a comprehensive justice framework would ease the unimaginable burden of having to prosecute a caseload as massive as the one currently at hand in Nigeria, while simultaneously ensuring that individuals who are proven to have been responsible for terrorism-related offences and human rights violations are held accountable for their actions.

In this context, transitional justice mechanisms hold the potential of becoming avenues for facilitating communities’ attempts to move beyond collective legacies of abuse, ensuring accountability and justice, and advancing reconciliation and community healing. Such transitional justice mechanisms encompass a wide array of interventions that may include religious oaths of non-recidivism, truth and reconciliation commissions, reparations for victims—which could be used either separately or simultaneously depending on the context and must be anchored in principles of inclusion and local ownership. It is worth noting in this regard, that some of these mechanisms are already in place at the community level across NE Nigeria, however, more work needs to be exerted to ensure the systemic implementation thereof as part of a more comprehensive framework. Transitional justice can play a vital role in lessening the burden on an already-overstretched judicial system in Nigeria grappling with an existing backlog of current and legacy cases. It can also advance social cohesion and restoration of trust across affected communities in NE Nigeria, and particularly in Borno State.
Rehabilitation and reintegration signify the mechanisms through which individuals formerly associated with Boko Haram and ISWAP are provided with viable alternative pathways to return to civilian life and resume their roles as productive community members engaged in social, economic, and political activities. It is of crucial significance to ensure that individuals formerly associated with Boko Haram and ISWAP are referred to tailored rehabilitation and reintegration programming, based on the results of the screening process, and in a manner that best addresses their needs and ensures that their transition back to society is smooth and, ultimately, durable.

Rehabilitation includes a wide array of activities, including medical treatment, vocational training and education, psycho-social support, counseling, and cognitive behavioral programs. There is also a growing and pressing need to consider the ideological and religious dimensions of such individuals’ involvement in these groups, even if their degree of association and involvement was limited. Even with limited involvement in group activities, these individuals have spent years living in close vicinity with and interacting with such groups and their members, thus have been subjected to a sphere of ideological influence and exposure that deserve particular attention.

When dealing with the current caseload in Nigeria, it is important to engage with individuals formerly associated with Boko Haram and ISWAP in theological discussions that challenge the various misinterpretations of religion that are oftentimes conflated with the political narratives propagated by these groups.

Such an endeavor must be driven and led by local religious leaders, as well as credible religious scholars who are able to gain the trust and acceptance of individuals formerly associated with such groups, to ensure that their teachings and alternative interpretations of religion are fully embraced. This is a key aspect of preparing the target individuals for reintegration back into society.

Accordingly, it is essential to underscore that there is no single pathway or approach to be followed. On the contrary, the various overlapping elements of the rehabilitation process represent a “toolbox of interventions” that must be tailored and sequenced in a manner that best corresponds to the individual profiles of the persons being rehabilitated, and their differentiated needs at various points throughout the process. Ultimately, these various tailored pathways lead to the same outcome: preparing these individuals so they can reassume their roles in their respective societies and communities.

It must also be ensured that individuals formerly associated with Boko Haram and ISWAP who have been prosecuted and convicted with a terrorism-related offence also receive rehabilitation in prisons or correctional services facilities. As “high-risk” individuals are sent to prisons and correctional facilities, there comes an increased risk of radicalization due to overcrowdedness. Thus, there is a growing need to understand how to accommodate and build rehabilitation programs for violent extremist prisoners and convicts based on specialized risk and needs assessment instruments. This will serve to ensure that prison settings and correctional facilities do not inadvertently become hubs for radicalization and recruitment, while simultaneously ensuring that these individuals are prepared for community reintegration once they have served their sentences.
Another crucial element to consider throughout the entire SPRR process is the necessity of integrating a gender-sensitive lens and approach. Unfortunately, there has been a common tendency to construe women’s roles in Boko Haram and ISWAP merely as victims, or as passive actors who have been forced into association with these groups either through abduction or marriage to a member/fighter affiliated with the group. However, such assumptions must be challenged to understand the different roles women can occupy in terrorist groups such as Boko Haram and ISWAP, including possible combat roles, surveillance roles, community policing, or a mixture of different supportive roles. Authorities must also be aware of issues of masculinities and how dynamics of masculinity within the broader community can also play out within the terrorist group, with many women joining terrorist groups out of fear or coercion. Many have also been subjected to sexual and gender-based violence; with these violations often resulting in social stigma, economic hardship and discrimination. And so, it must be ensured that they receive adequate and tailored health and psychosocial support. Gender-sensitive dimensions must be factored in throughout the entirety of the SPRR process, and more specifically during screening to ensure that their varied roles within such groups are accounted for.

There is an equally pressing need to include women in rehabilitation programming, especially when some women associated with terrorist groups may sometimes be full adherents to group ideology. Therefore, it must be ensured that they undergo adequate rehabilitation, including a focus on deradicalization and disengagement to prepare them for reintegration back into their communities. Additionally, the reintegration of women associated with terrorist groups should consider their family needs; specific support may be needed to address stigma that women face within their families, or to mitigate economic hardship they face when caring for children. Women, like men, are also subjected to the same conflict drivers and grievances that can propel them to re-join groups after their reintegration into the community.

Similarly, the differentiated needs of children associated with terrorist groups must be adequately considered. When dealing with children associated with Boko Haram and ISWAP, it is important to treat children first and foremost as children, regardless of their association to a terrorist group. Children need very specific treatment, specialized interim care centers, and tailored reintegration processes. Many returning children are likely to be confronted with high degrees of stigmatization by their community members, accused of “having terrorist blood” or similar claims; accordingly, adequate support systems and networks must be made available to help them cope with such issues.
It is crucial that reintegration programs not only provide direct assistance to individuals released from prisons or rehabilitation centers but also include broader community-targeted support in order to create a social and economic environment that can reabsorb those individuals. Parallel to efforts underway to rehabilitate and reintegrate individuals formerly associated with Boko Haram and ISWAP, authorities must simultaneously work at the community-level to secure their acceptance, buy-in, and ownership of the process from the early stages of program design, all the way to implementation.

Adopting such a community-centric and community-driven model necessitates the identification and lobbying of key community leaders that are well-respected. Once such community leaders’ buy-in is secured, it is more likely that they can influence community members into rethinking their established perception of reintegrated individuals formerly associated with terrorist groups. This process entails initiating regular dialogue and briefing meetings with traditional, religious, women and youth leaders, as well as Local Government Authority representatives. This will ensure that these leaders are regularly informed on all aspects of the process, thereby ensuring greater transparency and legitimacy with local partners and communities. The town hall meetings organized by NOA represent an exemplary model for such an approach. These meetings provide a platform for local communities to share their concerns regarding the rehabilitation and reintegration of individuals formerly associated with Boko Haram and ISWAP, while also allowing government authorities to address these concerns and promote the importance of the reintegration process as part of the DDRR/SPRR program.

Furthermore, it must be ensured that authorities are not reintegrating individuals back to the same conditions that propelled them to join or accept association with a terrorist group in the first place. The federal and state governments need to adopt prevention initiatives that target the drivers that propel individuals to join terrorist groups in their unique and context-specific, socio-economic, and ideological environment. Prevention efforts are crucial to ensure that communities are better equipped, not only to receive individuals formerly associated with terrorist groups but to also boost resilience to radicalization and extremism conducive to terrorism. These efforts should aim not only at preventing recruitment and mobilization but also re-recruitment and recidivism. They should also engage different religious figures, community leaders, and the private sector, to capitalize on the different but complementary roles each of them can play.

PREVENTION EFFORTS

are crucial to ensure that communities are better equipped, not only to receive individuals formerly associated with terrorist groups but to also boost resilience to radicalization and extremism conducive to terrorism.
Reconfiguring the Parameters & Modalities of International Support

As the situation and developments continue to evolve in the Nigerian context, so should the responses of all stakeholders involved. Hence, there is a growing need to revisit the parameters and modalities of international support provided. The model of direct humanitarian support and relief has persisted far longer than initially anticipated, and accordingly it no longer presents the ideal form of engagement. Therefore, the mindset of how this support is offered has to change, thus initiating a paradigm shift from crisis response and relief towards peacebuilding and longer-term sustainable development and reconstruction. As such, defining the parameters of such engagement is incredibly important and must be anchored in direct consultation with federal and state stakeholders to meet the needs and priorities identified by the various Nigerian stakeholders themselves. This will increase the chances of ensuring sustained national and local ownership.

Given the current landscape, all efforts and resources should be aligned and exerted towards capitalizing on the progress that has been achieved thus far. Both the federal and state authorities have achieved significant gains through their respective models in incentivizing this caseload of defections. To maintain such momentum, there is an imperative need for international partners and donors to adopt a more flexible approach and develop efficient funding mechanisms that are more attuned to, and in sync with, local and contextual determinations.

NIGERIA IS PRESENTED

with an unparalleled opportunity to present a home-grown model of confronting the challenge of terrorism through a holistic and comprehensive approach—one that is attuned to the specificities and peculiarities of the Nigerian landscape.
For years, Boko Haram and ISWAP have terrorized communities, destabilized societies, and tore across an already frayed social fabric, leading to loss of lives and livelihoods and derailing development prospects—with NE Nigeria bearing the brunt of such developments, and experiencing a disproportionate impact. Today, Nigeria lies at a critical juncture and opportune moment, to reverse decades of violence and terrorism and reclaim ownership of its trajectory. With unprecedented waves of mass defections whereby tens of thousands of individuals formerly associated with Boko Haram and ISWAP are voluntarily surrendering to state authorities, Nigeria is presented with an unparalleled opportunity to present a home-grown model of confronting the challenge of terrorism through a holistic and comprehensive approach—one that is attuned to the specificities and peculiarities of the Nigerian landscape.

To realize this aim, Nigerian ownership at the federal, state, and local levels (community leaders and members) is paramount. They must remain in the driving seat by assuming full ownership of all aspects of the process—from early stages of design all the way to implementation. This requires adopting a whole-of-government approach, which is already underway in Nigeria. However, more work to reinforce existing coordination mechanisms across various government agencies, including the criminal justice system, is required. More specifically, actors at the federal and state levels, as well as local government authorities, must take deliberate steps to leverage each other’s complementary mandates, expertise and resources—in pursuit of collective outcomes.

While the role of the federal government is crucial, the role played by state governments and local authorities as first responders and the interface for delivering integrated solutions, is equally critical. In this regard, delegating responsibility should go hand-in-hand with bringing authority and resources to the local level, where both problems and opportunities exist.

Nonetheless, it is important to view ongoing efforts at the federal and state levels not as two parallel processes but rather as mutually-reinforcing and complementary models that draw on each other’s strengths and expertise. Indeed, as outlined throughout the report, Borno State has been part and parcel of the federal-led process of OPSC, actively contributing to various parts of the process including managing the caseload of women and children, as well as handling the reintegration component of all graduated OPSC clients.

In this connection, the Borno State has accumulated experience, especially in handling the rehabilitation and reintegration of women and children associated with Boko Haram and ISWAP, and such experience is instrumental now more than ever when the current caseload includes a significant number of women and children. Likewise, the Borno State has also been handling the reintegration component’s requisite processes of family-tracing, outreach, and community work to prepare both OPSC clients and receiving communities for reintegration. This type of community-based approach and outreach is becoming increasingly important in light of the thousands of surrendered individuals who fall under the “farmers” category, thus requiring community verification and outreach mechanisms.
In a similar vein, over the course of its evolution since 2016, OPSC has gone through several development phases and adjustments—constantly adjusting its approach and program design to meet the needs of its clients. OPSC developed concrete experience in the design and implementation of programmatic interventions for individuals formerly associated with Boko Haram and ISWAP, including various treatments such as psycho-spiritual counseling, psychological intervention, psychosocial therapy, drug abuse intervention, sport therapy, western education, and vocational training. OPSC also deals with the ideological dimension of the individuals’ association with Boko Haram and ISWAP, offering tailored deradicalization and disengagement interventions to rehabilitate its clients.

This type of concrete and robust programmatic experience—developed over the course of six years—is also instrumental in handling the current caseload of individuals formerly associated with Boko Haram and ISWAP, with OPSC possessing huge potential to assist in the programmatic interventions needed for the subset of the caseload that does not fall under the “farmers”, or women and children categories. It might also be worth considering, to divert an identified—and agreed upon—subset of surrendered individuals requiring more advanced programmatic interventions to OPSC camp in Mallam Sidi. This would serve to lessen the burden on Borno State, which is still in the phase of building up its capacity and resources, while OPSC has a demonstrated record in this area.

It is important to note that this process, which shall entail a “hybrid model” will require not only a change on the operational level, but also the political will to modify existing mandates to be able to deal with the mounting caseload. The waves of defections currently taking place are witness to a “different” type of caseload, one rather distinct than the caseload OPSC was originally designed for back in 2016.

As such, and because of the thorough screening process conducted by the multiagency JIC, which is followed by extensive and sophisticated rehabilitation activities by OPSC, this process could be more appropriate for a caseload who would be defined as “high-risk” and in need of longer durations of handling. This will allow the Borno State to continue to handle individuals who fall under the subset of low-risk or “farmers” through an expedited rehabilitation process that would meet their needs. Ultimately, creating a
“hybrid model” that weaves together elements of each of the existing models—OPSC and the Borno Model—can build a bridge between these mutually reinforcing and complementary processes. As such, this model will serve to capitalize on OPSC’s existing expertise in programmatic interventions, while simultaneously instrumentalizing Borno State’s localized approach, and experience in community-based rehabilitation and reintegration processes.

Nonetheless, in order to effectively implement the proposed “hybrid model”, it is imperative to establish a standardized screening process based on a unified set of standard operating procedures, to be adopted by the different stakeholders involved, such as the current one being conducted by JIC.

In this context, it must be underscored that Nigeria is not suffering from a lack of normative frameworks or policy and operational guidance. On the contrary, the Nigerian government, at different levels, has spearheaded and developed a multitude of tools and mechanisms that are fit for purpose and still hold relevance. What is needed is the adjustment of the current response tool-box to adapt to the present caseload and the challenges it poses. Accordingly, the harmonization, as well as the localized and context-specific operationalization of these tools in a manner that embraces the complexity of the current landscape, rather than attempting to simplify it, is key.

The Nigerian experience has garnered the attention and commendation of international partners, and especially neighboring countries like Chad, Cameroon, and Niger, which are grappling with similar challenges posed by handling individuals formerly associated with Boko Haram and ISWAP. The Nigerian efforts, following a multi-stakeholder, whole-of-government, and whole-society approach possess huge potential to become a blueprint for incentivizing defections and offering individuals formerly associated with Boko Haram and ISWAP with viable and sustainable pathways out of terrorist organizations and towards rehabilitation, reintegration, and acceptance back to communities. Accordingly, all eyes will continue to be focused on Nigeria, as a leader in the region, to provide a holistic, sustainable, and comprehensive model to effectively confront the menace of terrorism that has plagued the region and the African continent at-large.

Nigeria’s existing and ongoing efforts provide fertile ground for different regional and international partners to support and contribute to the Nigerian endeavors in confronting terrorism in a holistic, sustainable, and comprehensive manner. Such support should be formulated in a way that caters to the challenges and needs as expressed by the different Nigerian stakeholders. This will ultimately ensure that the different contributions and resources are harmonized while underscoring the importance of Nigerian ownership.
Since its launch in 2019, the Aswan Forum has offered a high-level platform that focuses on the Africa-specific operationalization of the interlinkages between sustaining peace and sustainable development through action-oriented and forward-looking discussions on the threats, challenges, and opportunities for Africa in the years ahead. Within these discussions, it has especially stressed on the importance of combating terrorism. The Aswan Forum Conclusions on Sustainable Peace and Development in Africa emphasize the importance of investing in prevention efforts, and resilience-building, as well as the imperative of adopting holistic, whole-of-government, and whole-of-society approaches in curbing the spread of terrorism. CCCPA, in its capacity as the Executive Secretariat of the Aswan Forum, has been actively operationalizing the Aswan Conclusions through building African capacities in multiple fields.

Cognizant of the importance of national ownership, the Aswan Forum can provide a substantial opportunity in showcasing the Nigerian case study as an exemplary model in dealing with the terrorist threat through advancing holistic and comprehensive approaches. National ownership is thus key in ensuring that an effective and timely response is underway, ensuring whole-of-government and whole-of-society engagement. Concurrently, it can contribute in drawing visibility to the efforts exerted by the Nigerian authorities and pave a pathway to understand and explore the relevant support that could be provided by international partners.

On its part, CCCPA can provide support to Nigerian authorities in the form of designing and implementing tailored programs on DDR, SPRR and preventing radicalization and extremism leading to terrorism (PRELT) that address and fit the specificities of the Nigerian context. Accordingly, CCCPA—in cooperation with various relevant national, regional, and international partners—can highlight areas within which more support is needed, and further collaboration would be key. Ensuring the national ownership of the Nigerian stakeholders, the different partners can create potential avenues for tailored and contextualized support that addresses the challenges and needs expressed by the Nigerian authorities and augments efforts already in place to combat the threat of terrorism.
CCCPA has been actively building African capacities in the field of preventing radicalization and extremism conducive to terrorism since 2016. The Center is substantially acquainted with the Nigerian context—having trained local community leaders from Nigeria on preventing radicalization and extremism conducive to terrorism, and by engaging with Nigerian officials from the Nigerian Institute for Security Studies (NISS) through CCCPA’s training courses. Accordingly, and as part of its responsibility to oversee the implementation of the Aswan Conclusions, CCCPA can provide training courses that would complement Al-Azhar emissaries—currently in Nigeria—in capacitating community members with the requisite knowledge and skills to deconstruct and refute extremist narratives, and create positive and alternative narratives grounded in peaceful coexistence and moderate religious teachings.

CCCPA can further support Nigerian authorities by developing a comprehensive SPRR framework that is tailored to the Nigerian context and addresses the complexity of the mounting caseload of individuals formerly associated with Boko Haram and ISWAP. CCCPA’s experience in this field comes in view of its contribution to supporting the AU in developing the first of its kind Operational Guidance Note (OGN) on DDR and Countering Extremism Conducive to Terrorism. The OGNs provide guidance for DDR practitioners on planning, designing, and implementing SPRR programs to deal with the challenge of handling individuals formerly associated with terrorist groups in Africa. Accordingly, in its capacity as author of the African Union OGNs, CCCPA engaged with Nigerian officials from OPSC during the OGN validation workshops in Addis Ababa in June 2019.

Building on this experience, CCCPA has been at the forefront of regional efforts to build the capacities of African countries in the field of DDR, especially as and when it overlaps with preventing and countering extremism conducive to terrorism in complex and asymmetrical environments. The center can offer its Foundational Training Courses on DDR in Asymmetric Contexts, with a focus on SPRR of individuals formerly associated with terrorist organizations as well as create tailored and context-specific DDR training programs for the Nigerian authorities.
Recommendations

The recent waves of mass defections in Nigeria have signaled the constant need to evolve and adapt strategies and responses to a fast-changing conflict-environment. In particular, the increased challenges and complexities in dealing with the unprecedented caseload of individuals formerly associated with Boko Haram and ISWAP signals the need for a comprehensive approach that addresses the root causes of radicalization and extremism, as well as prevents relapse into conflict. This approach should be anchored in a coordination of efforts not only on the state and federal levels in Nigeria but also on the regional and international levels—ensuring that support modalities reinforce and enhance national leadership and ownership of the process as a whole.

As such, the following recommendations will shed light on the opportunities in addressing the persisting challenges on both the strategic and operational levels, in an effort to ensure the sustainable reintegration of individuals formerly associated with Boko Haram and ISWAP, strengthen national and local resilience to terrorism, and enhance contextualized analysis and responses:

**Nigerian authorities should take concerted and deliberate steps to further incentivize and sustain waves of mass defections from Boko Haram and ISWAP.** For the first time in over a decade, unprecedented numbers of individuals formerly associated with Boko Haram and ISWAP are voluntarily surrendering themselves to Nigerian state authorities—this represents an opportune moment and critical juncture that must be leveraged and built upon to dismantle and disintegrate these groups' operational capacity. More specifically, targeted efforts should be geared towards encouraging defections from ISWAP at a larger scale, to diminish the group's operational capacity and prevent its expansion in new territories.

**A prevention paradigm should be adopted with the aim of addressing the root causes and structural drivers of radicalization and extremism leading to terrorism.** Prevention initiatives should equally underscore that journeys to extremism are unique and vary from one context to another, and are crucial to ensure that communities are better equipped, not only to receive individuals formerly associated with terrorist groups but to also boost resilience to radicalization and extremism conducive to terrorism.
It is imperative to crystallize the complementarities between the two existing models–OPSC and the Borno State Model–through cross-sharing crucial and vital elements that already exist in each model, yet are mutually reinforcing. This will give rise to a “hybrid model” that bridges between these complementarities, offering a sustainable and holistic approach that addresses the identified operational challenges.

To more effectively handle the complex caseload of individuals formerly associated with Boko Haram and ISWAP, it is paramount that Nigerian authorities undertake an effort to develop a comprehensive and holistic Screening, Prosecution, Rehabilitation, and Reintegration process, with special emphasis on the screening phase as a vital component that lays the foundation for subsequent steps.

Screening mechanisms should be developed in a manner that corresponds to the complexity of the current caseload rather than simplifies it. The complexity of this caseload must be met with an equally complex and multi-layered screening mechanism that refrains from binary categorizations of individuals as “high-risk” or “low-risk”, but rather accounts for the whole gradient of risk or association categories that lie in between. Such determination of association or risk categories must be grounded in, first and foremost, robust knowledge of the local context and peculiarities, and must be carried out by trained local government officials, social workers, healthcare workers and psychologists, according to established and agreed-upon Standard Operating Procedures. In this regard, state and local authorities must be capacitated with the requisite human resources, including social workers. They must also ensure that the staff is equipped with specialized and tailored training, including training on Structural Professional Judgment techniques.

In dealing with individuals formerly associated with Boko Haram and ISWAP, a balance between peace and justice must be maintained, and accountability must be ensured. Such a process for justice and accountability cannot be overly rigid, and must remain flexible, thus enabling room for maneuverability. In this regard, authorities might consider alternatives to prosecution, as appropriate and in line with applicable legal frameworks.
This entails adopting transitional justice and other accountability mechanisms, which may also include providing amnesty for individuals formerly associated with terrorist groups. It must be noted that such a caseload also encompasses a wide spectrum of culpability, ranging from individuals who have committed grave crimes, to individuals who have played various support roles, to those who were implicated by virtue of their residence in areas under the control of such groups.

On account of the increasing and complex caseload, individuals being rehabilitated assume different levels of association and involvement. As such, rehabilitation processes must be tailored and sequenced in a manner that corresponds to each individual’s profile, and the differentiated needs at various points throughout the process. It is essential to underscore that there is no single pathway or approach to be followed. Nonetheless, the ideological and religious components of the rehabilitation process remain crucial regardless of each individual’s degree of affiliation.

Similarly, the process of reintegration is neither rigid nor unidirectional, and can take multiple pathways based on the specific case of each individual formerly associated with terrorist groups. Ultimately, these various tailored pathways lead to the same outcome—preparing these individuals to reassume their roles back in their respective societies and communities. To ensure that reintegration is sustainable, it must be ensured that individuals are not being reintegrated back into the same conditions that propelled them to join the terrorist groups in the first place—this necessitates working in parallel to create a positive community for reintegration through the involvement of local communities and leaders as partners and owners of the process.

Communities are the recipients of individuals formerly associated with terrorist groups. As such it is imperative to adopt a community-centric approach that sensitizes communities and integrates any concerns they may have. This will help in dealing with stigmas that might be directed at individuals formerly associated with Boko Haram and ISWAP, and possible perceptions that perpetrators of violence are being rewarded. This can be achieved by ensuring that the benefits of reintegration programming trickle down to both community members and individuals being reintegrated. This positive community environment will reinforce resilience for sustainable reintegration that meets the needs of both, the reintegrated individuals and the host communities.
Representing the first line of defense against radicalization and extremism, local community members also need to be capacitated with the requisite skills and tools to craft counter-narratives and alternative peaceful coexistence narratives. Capacity-building efforts should primarily target key traditional, religious, and community leaders that are well-respected and well-acquainted with the specificities and peculiarities of the respective local context. This will ultimately enhance community resilience and raise barriers to the mobilization and recruitment of individuals.

Relatedly, authorities should adopt an inclusive, gender-sensitive and needs-sensitive approach to safeguard reconciliation and prevent cycles of retribution. This approach would entail providing specific and tailored support to ensure that the differentiated needs of women, youth, children, and other vulnerable groups are met and addressed. Within this scope, special attention should be given to the diverse roles that women fulfilled prior to defecting, and therefore need to be offered the same services—especially during rehabilitation—as their male counterparts.

Equally important is the need to develop evaluation and follow-up mechanisms that are coordinated by all relevant stakeholders in the reintegration process to ensure the sustainability of the process as a whole. This mechanism will allow for the assessment and tracking of rehabilitated individuals’ progress, and for accurate documentation of the paths individuals take after reintegration. According to this aggregation of data, stakeholders will be able to take stock of the good practices and lessons learned for subsequent re-evaluation of the process.

Notwithstanding the imperative of national and local ownership, the role of international support cannot and should not be understated, while simultaneously acknowledging the growing need to revisit the parameters and modalities of international support provided. International partners and donors need to reconfigure the parameters and modalities of their engagement in the Nigerian context. As such, it is fundamental to develop support mechanisms that correspond to the current landscape and reality, and are more attuned to, and tailored to meet the needs and priorities as identified by the various Nigerian stakeholders themselves. Therefore, initiating a paradigm shift from crisis response and relief and towards longer-term sustainable development and reconstruction is necessary.
Endnotes

3 Ibid.
4 Ibid.
8 Prominent examples include the group’s first leader, Yusuf, marrying into the family of a wealthy community leader to raise funds, as well as using ties to other wealthy individuals to finance the group’s operations.
9 Bukarti, Violent Extremism, 34.
13 “About CTC – Counter Terrorism Centre.” https://ctc.gov.ng/about-ctc/.
17 It should be noted in this regard that the data for the year 2022 is still incomplete and stops at 31 May 2022, prior to the publishing of this report. Nevertheless, there is an observed downward trajectory in the overall violent incidents across Borno State, which will be unpacked further in subsequent chapters, zooming in on quarterly data to show more detailed trends.
18 Kinetic approaches refer to the hard, security approaches applied to counter-terrorism. These primarily include military operations against Boko Haram. Non-kinetic approaches refer to the soft approaches to counter-terrorism that are implemented by both government and society—with special considerations being given to addressing the root causes of violence, creating jobs, alleviating poverty, and advancing economic development, among others.
21 Inaugurated in September 2020.
22 According to the Nigeria Security Tracker by Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), Borno State accounts for 34,937 out of 41,599 total deaths due to conflict with Boko Haram since 2011.

23 According to the Borno State Official Website, Maiduguri used to represent an epitome of peace and has been worthy of its slogan, “Home of Peace” prior to the rise of the Boko Haram insurgency in 2006.

24 “Ten Point Agenda – Borno State Government”. https://bornostate.gov.ng/ten-point-agenda/


26 “Borno State has three local government administration sectors—Borno Central Constituency (Sector one), Borno South Constituency (Sector two) and Borno North Constituency (Sector three).”


34 The preexisting caseload of individuals previously suspected of association with Boko Haram and/or ISWAP, before the instigation of mass defections in May 2021, are whose cases awaiting review.


36 For instance, the inauguration of the Presidential Committee on the Repatriation, Return and Resettlement of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in the NE of Nigeria by President Buhari in February 2022, emphasized the need to shift from managing the situation to activating a permanent solution for effective and practicable restoration.