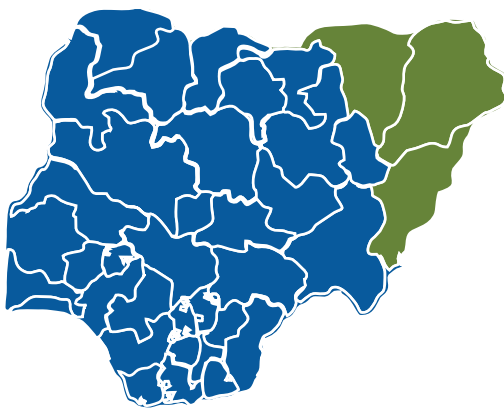




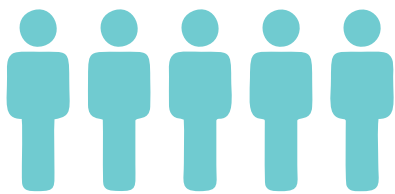
**DERADICALIZING,
REHABILITATING
AND REINTEGRATING**

Building Peace in Nigeria's North East.

Background



BORNO
YOBE
ADAMAWA



DEATH OF OVER
30,000
civilians

Since 2009, Boko-Haram's violent activities have ravaged Nigeria's north-east - primarily Borno, Yobe and Adamawa states - leading to the death of over 30,000 civilians and the forceful recruitment of youths, women, young girls, and school children among other human rights violations. These events have destroyed affected communities' social fabrics, traditional institutions and impacted on the regions socio-economic reality.

In response in 2016, the Nigerian government launched two initiatives to address the challenges of the victims and perpetrators. The North East Regional Initiatives (PCNI), which became the North East Development Commission (NEDC) in 2019 and the Operation Safe Corridor Programme (OPSC), a key part of its counter-terrorism and peacebuilding strategy. It was designed to "encourage defection within the ranks of Boko Haram Islamic State of West Africa Province through the corridor of the opportunity offered by the DRR Program as part of the Federal Government of Nigeria's overall efforts to end the insurgency in the North East".

OPSC is a joint multi-stakeholder/multi-agency operation that includes Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs) of the state, the Armed Forces of Nigeria and security agencies. Coordination of its activities is provided by the Office of Chief of Defense Staff (CDS) with technical and some funding support from the non-state actors like the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD). The program was mandated to facilitate the deradicalization, rehabilitation and reintegration (DRR) of repentant ex-combatants. A timely initiative that from inception required the trust, acceptance and participation of local actors including victims, the wider members of affected communities and religious leaders.

In November 2016, CDD supported and facilitated the first Community Dialogue and Strategy Session in Maiduguri, Borno State. This provided the initial opportunity for the state and OPSC to engage with local actors on the approach and their participation in the DRR Program. At this session the local actors outrightly rejected the intervention, and in some extreme responses mentioned that the ex-combatants should be murdered or moved to North Korea as they are not in any way welcome back in the communities. They first wanted peace to return and for victims to recover from their socio-economic status before DRR of ex-combatants commenced.

While the findings and outcome of this initial community dialogue and strategy session were not encouraging, it laid the necessary foundation towards understanding the views, and dynamics of the challenges to be addressed in the design of the DRR program.

Summary of CDD's Support to OPSC DRR Program



Annual Strategic Retreats

From 2016 to 2019, CDD supported and facilitated annual OPSC DRR Strategic Retreats to review, explore lessons learned, and update the content, approach, and expected results of the DRR programs.



Community Engagement and Sensitization

From 2017 to 2020, CDD funded and facilitated a series of Community Engagement interventions, including 12 dialogue sessions with victims, affected communities, state and non-state actors through town hall meetings across Borno, Adamawa and Yobe states.



Advocacy and Consultation with Stakeholders -

From 2018 to 2020, CDD sponsored, facilitated, and participated in over 30 advocacy engagements and consultations to relevant state and non-state actors, including community, religious, and traditional leaders, the governments of Adamawa, Borno, Bauchi, and Yobe states, and the leadership of relevant federal and state MDAs.

Capacity Building

From 2017 to 2019, CDD sponsored and facilitated annual capacity building and training sessions for DRR Program staff as well as the Advisory Committee on DRR, countering violent extremism, and strategic communication.

Facilitating Innovation and Institutionalization -

From 2017 to 2020, CDD enabled and sponsored the initiation, development, and implementation of the following innovations, that have been adopted and adapted as core components of DRR Program.

Infrastructural Support

From 2018 and 2020 CDD supported the construction and furnishing of three classroom blocks and a teacher's office space at the DRR camp, the renovation of the Psychological Services Unit and purchased educational and sporting materials, such as 20 sets of football boots, 500 white canvas, t-shirts, and tracksuits.

01

The development of the DRR Policy Framework, which has now been adapted and adopted as a Standard Operational Guideline for DRR's day-to-day activities and interventions.

02

The development and implementation of a transitional justice mechanism through the Quasi-Judicial Panel, with the goal of eliciting remorse/guilt from ex-combatants, as well as allegiance to the state and commitment to the affected communities.

03

The inclusion of Sulhu and western education as core elements of the DRR Program.

04

The use of sports, including football, as a tool for deradicalization, facilitating civil-military relationships, and victims-perpetrators reconciliation and reunion prior to their reintegration into the affected communities.

Piloting of the DRR Initiative

The DRR initiative commenced in 2016 with the design of its 12-week program that was piloted with six repentant ex-combatants. Following this successful pilot, the DRR Camp in Malam-Sidi, Gombe State was established in February 2017 as a classified initiative. With funding support from the North East Regional Initiative (NERI), CDD organised and facilitated the first DRR program design and implementation strategy session with the 17 MDAs and security actors.

The strategy session provided an opportunity for the different state actors to deliberate on the content and implementation of the DRR initiative, narratives and strategic communication. It enabled discussions about community participation and engagement that defined the next steps of the DRR program. Following the strategy session and successful pilot phase, the DRR program identified a couple of lessons learned, issues raised and despite local actor's opposition proceeded with the first batch of 95 repentant ex-combatants at the DRR Camp in Gombe in June 2017.

Deradicalizing, Rehabilitating and Reintegrating the First Batch

As the deradicalization and rehabilitation intervention was ongoing, the affected communities and local and even some of the north east state governments were outraged at the initiative. Local media awash with the grievance of the victims, misinformation and in extreme cases, fake news about the DRR program. This presented a significant challenge when it came how to reintegrate the 95 repentant ex-combatants at the end of the program.

In response to these issues, the OPSC program organized its first advisory committee meeting with members drawn from the 17 MDAs, security agencies who are members of the DRR programs and CDD as its technical partner to deliberate on the issues of how the reintegration of the ex-combatants could be achieved. This was followed by an expanded stakeholder meeting involving the state governments in the North East on the possible way forward towards building community trust, acceptance of the repentant ex-combatants, reconciliation, and their eventual reintegration back to host communities. Between October and November 2017, CDD

supported and facilitated the engagement of local actors including victims, community, religious and traditional leaders, non-state security actors, the state security agencies, the state governments and OPSC officials on these issues through holding community dialogues and town hall meetings. These were used to deliberate on reconciliation and reintegration of the repentant ex-combatants back to their host communities.

These initiatives aimed to enlighten the relevant bodies and people on the activities, outputs, and outcomes of OPSC and to gather the victims and local actors' perspectives and conditions for forgiveness, reconciliation and reintegration of conscripted repentant ex-combatants back to the affected communities. The town hall meetings helped to gradually shift community perspectives away from outright rejection of reintegration to identifying and putting up the conditions, challenges and needs to be addressed before reconciliation and reintegration of the ex-combatants could begin. Three key areas were identified.

01

Traditional leaders and their institutions, especially in Borno State, were still being displaced. They placed their return to their communities as a major condition for forgiveness and reconciliation.

02

In states like Adamawa and Yobe where extremist violence has subsided and victims have returned to their communities, they placed reparation for victims as immediate concern and condition for reconciliation and reintegration.

03

Attendees questioned the criteria for establishing that the repentant ex-combatants were conscripted to join Boko Haram before being admitted into the DRR program and the capacity of the OPSC to deradicalize the repentant ex-combatants. These perceptions were driven by the local actor's belief that a Boko Haram combatant would not deviate from their extremist beliefs.

These findings led to the design and structure of a DRR reintegration approach that mainstreamed the participation of the state and community leaders as the lead actors for ex-combatant's reintegration. Starting in 2018, the first batch of 95 repentant ex-combatants were gradually reintegrated back to their host communities across the affected states via a transit camp in Maiduguri.

Expanding and Innovating the DRR Initiative.

Following the successful transfer of the first batch to state authorities and their gradual reintegration, the OPSC team commenced the processes for the second batch of the DRR program with a three-day DRR capacity building for Camp Staff and the Advisory Committee organized by CDD and NERI and facilitated by the Kofi Annan International Peacekeeping Training Centre (KAIPTC) in March 2018. This was followed by the DRR Program Review and Strategy Retreat organized and facilitated by CDD with funding from the MacArthur Foundation in May 2018.

Following the strategic retreat and review sessions, and by the time the second batch of 156 individuals arrived in June 2018, OPSC's DRR program had been extended from 12-weeks to 52-weeks. It also mainstreamed different elements of innovations and expansion that included:



Community engagement intervention such as family visits and state and community leadership visits.



The introduction of a Quasi-Judicial Panel to give a platform for the repentant ex-combatants to formally renounce their membership of the Boko Haram, confess their wrongdoings, swear an oath of allegiance to the Nigerian state and commit to not returning to the sect nor engage in any form of crime



A DRR Program Standard Operational Guideline (SOG) was introduced that detailed the rules and responsibilities of each stakeholder and participatory agencies, mandate, values, timelines, and processes involved in running the program. The SOG defined and detailed the core values of the OPSC DRR program: accountability, confidentiality, cooperation, humanity, neutrality, and patriotism.



The DRR program introduced psychological support, including the application of psychotherapy and psycho-social support. CDD supported the renovation of the psychological support facilities for such services at the DRR camp in Gombe State.



The program provided services to address and combat extremist ideologies and grievances but it has also taken care of other clients needs such as medical care, drug abuse tests and treatments, and skills acquisition such as carpentry, soap making and shoemaking.

However, while these innovations showed how OPSC was willing to learn and improve its approach, it continued to struggle with community acceptance. Findings and feedbacks from CDD facilitated community engagement through the annual dialogue and town hall meetings with the local actors in 2018 and 2019 revealed that:

1 Local actors now accept the concept and mandate of the DRR program but still query the fact that there is no existing holistic framework for reconciliation and reintegration of repentant ex-combatants at any level.

2 State governments are already overwhelmed and do not have a hold on the entire process of rehabilitation and reintegration of the repentant ex-combatants.

3 Although victims are accepting of an amnesty programme for the repentant ex-combatants, especially those conscripted to join Boko Haram, they believe that there is a need for Boko Haram members who committed gross human rights violations to be held accountable for the offences they committed, regardless of how they joined the group.

4 Ongoing concern and need for balancing the victims-perpetrators response of the state-led initiatives. Victims are struggling to accept the repentant ex-combatants who are now perceived as been treated better by the state while the victims are not being supported financially.

5 There is still a level of mistrust and communication gap between the OPSC program and local actors. This has culminated in a public outrage and media campaigns against the OPSC DRR Initiative across the affected states and at the national level.

Taking the Bold Step: Rehabilitating 600 Repentant Ex-combatants.

Despite the challenges the successes of the DRR program with the second batch of 156 repentant ex-combatants and their reintegration back to the affected communities was very instrumental for the further expansion of the DRR program to 600 individuals. In response to plans for expansion and reception of a larger number of repentant ex-combatants, in October 2019 CDD in partnership with KAIPTC facilitated a four-day capacity building training for the DRR camp staff and the DRR Advisory Committee. This supported further innovation in three key areas:



Introduction and expansion of western education.

Considering that 95% of the repentant ex-combatants going through the DRR initiative, had never been to any sort of formal education program or system, a considerable level of western education, including primary and secondary school curricula, was introduced as part of the deradicalization approach. This was followed by the development of handbooks and training materials for the western education classes including the translation of the materials into local languages - Hausa, Kanuri and Fufude -, the construction and furnishing of a classroom that could hold 500 students and the materials required for learning.

In response to the need for trust-building and bridging the communication gaps between the state and local actors, ex-combatants, their families and affected communities, the DRR program introduced sporting activities like football games between the state security agencies, local actors and the ex-combatants aimed at improving relations.

Introduction of sporting activities.

Consolidated state actor's engagement through dialogue and advocacy visits.

This led to the expansion of the transit camp for further engagement and reintegration of the ex-combatants in Maiduguri, the ongoing plans for the set-up of a similar transit camp in Adamawa state and the successful expansion of the OPSC stakeholder's forum across ten states.

Conclusion

While the OPSC DRR program has made considerable strides, if local actors, impacted populations, and victims do not endorse it, the program's development and accomplishments can be stopped abruptly. As a result, the federal government, as well as the state governments and other state and non-state actors, will need to devote time and energy to the policy proposals and initiatives listed below to facilitate strategies that restore trust, promote local ownership, and enhance strategic collaboration with all relevant stakeholders.

01

To support local ownership, the affected populations – communities, victims, and families of the perpetrators, traditional and religious leaders – should be encouraged to continuously participate in the full cycle of DRR program.

02

Programs should promote a more balanced victims-perpetrators approach to meeting the needs of both victims and perpetrators.

03

Prioritize the creation of effective and evidence-based strategic communication content and the dissemination of these messages through accessible channels to improve understanding about the position and status of reintegrated repentant ex-combatants, as well as the aims of the DRR program.

04

The federal government should facilitate a legislative process that will further institutionalize and enable the DRR program to function as a stand-alone institution. For now, the OPSC DRR program remains a committee driven program under the Office of the Chief of Defence Staff.

05

Prioritize the design and development of an institutionalized multi-stakeholder and holistic regular capacity building program on DRR, counterterrorism, and peacebuilding for the staff, advisory committee, and state government officials.

06

Synthesize the lessons learned, needs identified, and challenges encountered so far in the reintegration phase to create a comprehensive reintegration strategy and policy with local ownership and involvement.

07

Collaboration between civil society organizations, state governments and other relevant state and non-state actors to develop, disseminate and engage local reconciliation and reintegration efforts. Drawing on practices, like Sulhu Alheri Ne, that are integrated into the culture, religion, and socio-economic lifestyle of the affected communities

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