Operation Safe Corridor and the Path to Sustainable Reintegration

A SWOT assessment of rehabilitation and reintegration in Nigeria



Taiwo Adebayo, Sheikh Kubenubu Sati
and Dengiyefa Angalapu

October 2026

Centre for Democracy & Development
Centre pour la Democratie et Developpent

Table of Contents

	Acknowledgements	03
	About the authors	04
	List of abbreviations	05
I	Executive summary	06
01	Introduction	08
02	Methodology	11
03	Strengths	13
04	Weaknesses	18
05	Opportunities for sustainable reintegration	26
06	Threats to sustained reintegration	30
07	Strategic assessment	33
08	Conclusion	35
09	Recommendations	36
	References	39

Acknowledgements

We thank Dr Dauda Garuba, Director of the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD-West Africa), for his support for this research. We acknowledge Brigadier General Yusuf Ali, Coordinator of Operation Safe Corridor (OPSC), for the programme's engagement with the study. We are also grateful to Titilayo Olaniyan of CDD-West Africa for her contribution to the research and validation process.

We thank the participants in the validation workshop held at CDD-West Africa's Abuja office on 16 September 2026. Their comments and discussion helped us refine the analysis and recommendations. We acknowledge Jonathan Saba and Moses Segun Abolade of PEPNET; Dr Obodo Nneamaka and Dr Abdulrazak Ibrahim of Nile University; Halimat Musa of FES/Feminism Lab; Dr Edward Lenshie of Taraba State University; Dr Joshua Akintayo of the University of Bayreuth; Captain Kingsley Omaka Agha of OPSC; Malik Samuel of Good Governance Africa; and Prof Al Chukwuma Okoli of Federal University of Lafia.

We also acknowledge the contributions of CDD-West Africa colleagues, namely: Mary Okpe, Esther Yusuf, Ruth Gyet, Chibuike Mgbeahuruike, Alechenu David, Muyildeen Abdulazeez, Abdulazeez Olatunji, Valeria Ogide, Ahmad Aluko, Zara Ahmad Salkida, Wright David, Elizabeth Abiodun, Diane Ocheikwu, Cecilia Benjamin and Blessing Bala.

We are grateful to the current and former programme participants, community interlocutors, programme personnel and partners who shared their experiences and insights. Their accounts provided the foundation for this assessment.

We thank the MacArthur Foundation for its support through Phase II of the Nigeria Anti-Corruption Agencies Strengthening Initiative Project (NACASIP II). The views expressed are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the Foundation.

About the authors

Taiwo Adebayo

Taiwo Adebayo is an award-winning investigative journalist, researcher and policy professional. As a researcher at the Institute for Security Studies, he specialises in conflict dynamics and security governance in West and Central Africa, particularly the Lake Chad Basin. His research provides evidence to inform national and transnational institutions involved in regional security and stabilisation. A former correspondent and editor with the Associated Press and Premium Times, he holds an MA in International Development from the University of East Anglia, United Kingdom. He participated in a 2019 UK Global Challenges Research Fund project on the humanitarian crisis in Northeast Nigeria.

Sheikh Kubenubu Sati

Dr. Sati, Sheikh Kubenubu is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Political Science at Gombe State University. He holds a PhD in Defence and Strategic Studies from Nigerian Defence Academy Kaduna and trained in DDRR at KAIPTC Accra Ghana, Dr. Sati's research interest include: Security Studies, Terrorism and Insurgency and Peace and Conflict. He has published many articles in peer reviewed journals related to his area of research interest., he was also a guest lecturer at the Martin Luther Agwai International Leadership and Peacekeeping Institute (MLAILPKC) Jaji, Kaduna State, where he presented a paper on the Deradicalization and Rehabilitation of willingly surrendered Insurgents at the Operation Safe Corridor (OPSC) DRR Camp, Malam Sidi Gombe State. Dr. Sati currently serves as a consultant Program Officer at the Deradicalization and Rehabilitation Camp in Malam Sidi Gombe State where he conducts trainings on international best practices and policy matters. Dr. Sati's future research interest aims to understand the dynamics and complexities associated with conflict narratives and interpretations of such narratives and the intended and non-intended consequences as they relate to peace building initiates.

Dengiyefa Angalapu

Dengiyefa Angalapu is a Research Analyst at the Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD-West Africa) and a PhD candidate at the University of Groningen, Netherlands. His research focuses on security governance, environmental peacebuilding, and extractive industries in Africa. He uses decolonial approaches to examine how citizens interpret (in)security, environmental change, and governance, and how these interpretations shape their responses to institutional authorities. He has served on the OPSC Advisory Committee since 2022.

List of abbreviations

Abbreviation	Full expression
CDD	Centre for Democracy and Development
DDR	Disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration
DHQ	Defence Headquarters
DRR	Deradicalisation, rehabilitation and reintegration
DSS	Department of State Services
FMoJ	Federal Ministry of Justice
IOM	International Organisation for Migration
IPOB	Indigenous People of Biafra
JAS	Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-Jihad
MDH	Misinformation, Disinformation and Hate Speech
NCoS	Nigerian Correctional Service
NCTC	National Counter-Terrorism Centre
NDE	National Directorate of Employment
NEMA	National Emergency Management Agency
NOA	National Orientation Agency
ONSA	Office of the National Security Adviser
OPSC	Operation Safe Corridor
SOGN	Standard Operating Guidance Note
SWOT	Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats
TOWS	Threats, opportunities, weaknesses and strengths

I Executive summary

Operation Safe Corridor (OPSC) addresses a central challenge in Nigeria's response to the Boko Haram insurgency: supporting individuals to disengage from armed groups and return to civilian life while meeting affected communities' needs for security and justice. Military pressure may encourage surrender, but it cannot, on its own, address the effects of coercion, violence and detention on participants or alleviate the fears of receiving communities.

This study assesses OPSC through interviews with current and former participants, programme officials, experts, partners and community interlocutors, alongside observation and documentary research. One author's observation of the 11th phase of terrorism and related offences prosecutions provided additional insight into the justice processes that shape perceptions of return. Expert review at a validation workshop helped refine the interview-based findings.

The assessment identifies three principal strengths: an institutionalised exit route, the complementary capacities of 17 government institutions, and a structured rehabilitation curriculum. Participants particularly valued psychological care, religious engagement and vocational training. The programme combines military coordination and protection with specialist rehabilitation and assigns responsibility for reintegration to state governments. In May 2026, the coordinator reported that more than 3,000 participants had been reintegrated during its first decade.[1] Sustained civilian life beyond the camp remains the more demanding test of its effectiveness.

The principal weaknesses stem from the uneven fulfilment of shared institutional responsibilities. Defence Headquarters carries a disproportionate operational and financial burden, supplemented by development partners. Contributions from participating agencies are insufficiently institutionalised and can depend on the commitment of individual officeholders. Funding constraints, staff shortages and weak state ownership outside Borno limit care and support after graduation. Fragmented follow-up and inadequate livelihood and family assistance compound these difficulties. Limited community participation in investigations and access to court proceedings also weaken confidence in the legal decisions preceding return. Despite expanded public engagement, persistent misinformation about recruitment, legal review, financial benefits and renewed violence continues to undermine trust. Conflation with other exit arrangements and the risk of identity-based hostility add to this challenge.

Opportunities include trusted defector intermediaries, community and partner networks, additional professional and digital capacity, and the development of a national DDR framework. Giving practical effect to the statutory Victims Trust Fund would strengthen the place of victims in this wider response. Institutional competition, political withdrawal, regional fairness disputes, economic pressures and continuing violence threaten progress. The priority is to make the existing division of responsibilities dependable, link rehabilitation to sustained support in receiving states, and ensure that victims and communities can see how security and justice are being addressed.

[1] Yusuf Ali, interview by Daniel Ayantoye, "Demand for Names of Reintegrated-744 'Repentant Terrorists' Misplaced – Safe Corridor Coordinator, Brig Gen Yusuf Ali," Punch, May 10, 2026, https://punchng.com/demand-for-names-of-reintegrated 744-repentant-terrorists-misplaced-safe-corridor-coordinator-brig-gen-yusuf-ali/.

Operation Safe Corridor at a glance

2016
Began operating



Following a 2015 National Security Council decision.

17
Participating institutions



Services, ministries, departments and agencies

3,000+
Participants reported as reintegrated



Cordinator May 2026 account of the first decade

6 Months
Envisaged programme duration



Duration in OPSC guidance: actual stays may vary

01

Introduction

Nigeria's experience of providing routes out of armed groups predates Operation Safe Corridor (OPSC). In the Niger Delta, President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua's amnesty proclamation of 25 June 2009 offered pardon for militancy-related offences on condition of disarmament and renunciation.[2] The resulting Presidential Amnesty Programme brought rehabilitation and reintegration into national debates about ending armed violence. It also raised a question relevant to subsequent interventions: how can support for those leaving armed groups contribute to recovery in communities that have suffered violence? The Niger Delta and Northeast conflicts have different histories and legal arrangements, but both require attention to this relationship.

In the Northeast, the Boko Haram insurgency created a sustained need to combine military operations with opportunities for disengagement. The movement's evolution into a transnational insurgency devastated communities, displaced people and disrupted livelihoods across the Lake Chad Basin.[3] Leaving armed groups, however, involved people with different histories, including voluntary association, forced recruitment and abduction. Nigeria's initial responses included prison-based deradicalisation. A programme developed by the Office of the National Security Adviser (ONSA) and the then Nigerian Prisons Service was publicly launched in January 2015 and began implementation at Kuje prison in March that year, within the criminal justice system.[4]

[2] Umaru Musa Yar'Adua, "The Proclamation," June 25, 2009, Presidential Amnesty Programme, https://osapnd.gov.ng/the-proclamation/.

[3] Francesca Batault, Malik Samuel, and Celestin Delanga, with Mohammed Bukar, Fatima Yetcha Ajimi Badu, Fanna Abdu Muhammad, Fatima Ajimi, Sani Boubacar, and Siobhan O'Neil, Prospects for Dialogue and Negotiation to Address the Conflict in the Lake Chad Basin (United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research, 2024), 9–10, https://unidir.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/UNIDIR_ISS_Prospects_Dialogue_Negotiation_Address_Conflict_Lake_Chad_Basin.pdf.

[4] Atta Barkindo and Shane Bryans, "De-Radicalising Prisoners in Nigeria: Developing a Basic Prison Based De-radicalisation Programme," Journal for Deradicalization, no. 7 (Summer 2016): 4–6, https://cve-kenya.org/media/library/Barkindo_and_Bryans_2016_Deradicalising_prisoners_in_Nigeria.pdf.

OPSC emerged from a National Security Council decision in September 2015 and became operational in 2016. It established a residential pathway towards rehabilitation and civilian life for eligible individuals assessed as low risk, whom the programme calls "clients". Operating under Defence Headquarters, it draws personnel from 17 services, ministries, departments and agencies.[5] Its establishment reflected recognition that military pressure could encourage surrender but could not, on its own, address the psychological, social and economic consequences of association with armed groups. Those who leave may require support to recover from violence and detention, develop livelihoods and rebuild relationships with their communities. These transitions take place while the insurgency continues, leaving returnees and receiving communities exposed to further violence.

The programme describes its work as deradicalisation, rehabilitation and reintegration (DRR), within the wider field of disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR). Disengagement concerns withdrawal from participation in violence, while deradicalisation addresses beliefs used to justify it. Rehabilitation supports recovery and preparation for civilian life; reintegration develops through rights, relationships and livelihoods in the community.

The Standard Operating Guidance Note for Operation Safe Corridor (SOGN) distributes responsibility accordingly: the armed forces lead security, the Nigerian Correctional Service (NCoS) leads deradicalisation and rehabilitation with specialist teams, and state governments and local institutions are responsible for reintegration.[6] The National Steering Committee, chaired by the Chief of Defence Staff, provides the overarching coordination structure.[7] Admission also involves institutions outside the residential camp. Operation Hadin Kai receives and initially screens surrendered associates, while the SOGN identifies referral routes through the Joint Investigation Centre, the correctional service after completion of sentences, Sulhu and other sources approved by the Chief of Defence Staff.[8] The coordinator's public account specifies low-risk classification and a Federal Ministry of Justice recommendation of legal eligibility as conditions for admission.[9] Further assessment within the camp informs treatment and service planning.[10] These stages serve different purposes: a risk assessment or Ministry of Justice recommendation is distinct from a court determination of criminal responsibility, and completion of rehabilitation does not confer general immunity from prosecution for other alleged crimes.[11]

OPSC has developed alongside other arrangements for leaving armed groups, making its institutional boundaries important to the assessment of its performance. Sulhu, led by the State Security Service, commonly known as the Department of State Services (DSS), uses negotiated defections to engage senior commanders and other influential figures. Some participants have received rehabilitation at Malam

[5]Martha Obi, "Defence Chief Reaffirms Commitment to Reintegration," Voice of Nigeria, February 20, 2026, https://von.gov.ng/defence-chief-reaffirms-commitment-to-reintegration/; Operation Safe Corridor, Standard Operating Guidance Note for Operation Safe Corridor, n.d., para. 2, document supplied for this research.

[6]Operation Safe Corridor, Standard Operating Guidance Note, paras. 8–13, 19(c) and 40.

[7]Operation Safe Corridor, Standard Operating Guidance Note, paras. 4–5; Operation Safe Corridor, "About Operation Safe Corridor," accessed October 31, 2026, https://opsc.gov.ng/about.

[8]Operation Safe Corridor, Standard Operating Guidance Note, paras. 8(s) and 17.

[9]Yusuf Ali, "General Yusuf Ali: Operation Safe Corridor Not Designed to Prioritise Ex-terrorists over Victims," interview by Linus Aleke, ThisDay, April 11, 2026, https://www.thisdaylive.com/2026/04/11/general-yusuf-ali-operation-safe-corridor-not-designed-to-prioritise-ex-terrorists-over-victims/.

[10]Operation Safe Corridor, Standard Operating Guidance Note, para. 19(a).

[11]Nigeria, Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999, secs. 34–38, 42, especially sec. 36(9) on prior trial and acquittal or conviction, https://nigeriarights.gov.ng/files/constitution.pdf; Operation Safe Corridor, Standard Operating Guidance Note, paras. 17–19.

Sidi, but the programme's negotiated commitments and institutional responsibilities remain distinct from those of OPSC.[12] Shared facilities therefore do not mean that the same authorities have made identical assurances or followed the same route to admission. The Borno Model widened this range of arrangements after Abubakar Shekau's death in 2021 and the mass departure of people from territory controlled by his Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-Jihad (JAS) faction. Developed by the Borno State Government, it receives men, women, children and family groups, including non-combatants, through surrender and state-managed reception and screening. A prior court hearing is not a condition of admission.
Its provision for family accommodation also differs from the primarily male residential population at Malam Sidi.[13] These differences in purpose, population and procedure need to be recognised when interpreting programme totals or attributing outcomes to a particular intervention.

The coexistence of these pathways means that reintegration depends on decisions and relationships that extend beyond any single programme. Public discussion can nevertheless conflate their activities, leaving communities uncertain about how a person returned, what conduct was examined and which institution remains responsible for support or accountability. OPSC's expansion into the Northwest, including a camp at Tsafe in Zamfara State, adds different conflict histories to this coordination challenge.[14] A clear account of the programme's mandate and responsibilities is therefore necessary to assess what it can achieve and which outcomes depend on other institutions. A study in 2019 found that participants valued aspects of rehabilitation while receiving communities raised concerns about justice, participation and screening.[15] Subsequent research likewise identified limited public understanding of the programme.[16] Some residents remain uncertain whether returnees have disengaged or retain links to armed groups, while unmet victims' needs can reinforce perceptions of unfairness. These concerns suggest that completion of residential rehabilitation is only one stage in a longer transition. Its significance depends on the support available after return and on communities' confidence in the decisions that preceded it.

This study therefore examines that transition through a qualitative SWOT assessment of OPSC, focusing on the camp at Malam Sidi in Gombe State and experiences of return in Maiduguri. It asks how the programme's institutional arrangements and rehabilitative services support civilian life, where delivery falls short, and which wider conditions create opportunities or threats to sustained reintegration. By bringing together the perspectives of officials, current and former participants, partners and community interlocutors, the study assesses how responsibilities are fulfilled across the transition from camp to community. Its central argument is that the benefits of rehabilitation depend on sustained support after return and the credibility of the process to those expected to receive former participants.

[12]Batault et al., Prospects for Dialogue, 35; Obi Anyadike, "EXCLUSIVE: Nigeria's Secret Programme to Lure Top Boko Haram Defectors," The New Humanitarian, August 19, 2021, https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news/2021/08/19/exclusive-nigerias-secret-programme-lure-top-boko-haram-defectors; Operation Safe Corridor, Standard Operating Guidance Note, para. 17(c).

[13]Taiwo Adebayo and Abi Watson, Managing Armed Group Defections: Lessons from the Borno Model (Global Public Policy Institute and Institute for Security Studies, 2025), 6–9, 13–17, https://gppi.net/assets/AdebayoWatson_PolicyBrief_ManagingArmedGroupDefections-LessonsfromtheBornoModel.pdf.

[14]Obi, "Defence Chief Reaffirms Commitment."

[15]Idayat Hassan and Laura Routley, Operation Safe Corridor: The Deradicalisation and Reintegration of Ex-combatants (Centre for Democracy and Development and Newcastle University, 2022), 6–7, 10–18, https://eprints.ncl.ac.uk/file_store/production/287017/B8E45ED0-9D78-4607-B9DC-83A74A402B5D.pdf.

[16]Sheikh Kubenubu Sati, Ishaku Yakubu Mshelia, and Adigwe Austin Ndubuisi, "Community Perception of the Deradicalization and Rehabilitation Program for Surrendered Insurgents in Malam Sidi Camp, Gombe State," Kashere Journal of Politics and International Relations 3, no. 3 (July 2025): 238, 245–247. https://journals.fukashere.edu.ng/index.php/kjpir/article/download/708/601/2478.

02

Methodology

Who Contributed to the assessment?

Qualitative fieldwork in Malam Sidi and Maiduguri, supplemented by other research.



18
TOTAL INTERVIEWS

+2 Written expert responses

3 Days
Court proceedings observed

This SWOT analysis uses a qualitative approach to examine how OPSC's institutional arrangements and residential rehabilitation relate to reintegration. Primary research focused on Malam Sidi Camp in Gombe State and experiences of return in Maiduguri, Borno State. The 18 interviews comprised four programme officials and four resident clients interviewed at the camp in April 2026; five former clients and three community or civil society leaders interviewed in Maiduguri; and two International Organisation for Migration (IOM) officials interviewed virtually in June 2026. Written WhatsApp responses from two deradicalisation experts supplemented these interviews and are counted separately. Researchers also observed clients and trainers in the camp's vocational workshops.

Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed using Trint Live Mobile automated transcription software, with assistance in local languages for the translation of Hausa and Kanuri materials into English. Field notes supplemented the transcripts. Documentary research covered Nigerian legislation, official programme statements, the Standard Operating Guidance Note for Operation Safe Corridor (SOGN), research on armed group exits and relevant investigative reporting. The SOGN establishes assigned responsibilities; interviews and observations inform the assessment of their implementation. Consultations with practitioners and civil society provided contextual insight. A validation workshop in Abuja on 16 September 2026 enabled stakeholders to review and refine the findings. One of the authors also observed sessions across three days of the 11th phase of the terrorism and related offences prosecution process at the Federal High Court in Abuja in October 2026. The observations informed our analysis of access to proceedings, the presentation of allegations and the treatment of claims of coercion. They concern the sessions attended and do not represent an assessment of every case in that phase. The trial observation supplements the interview material and is not included in the interview count. The research also draws on the institutional knowledge of an author who serves on the OPSC Advisory Committee, including programme-governance observations current to October 2026.

Thematic analysis combined an initial focus on deradicalisation, rehabilitation and reintegration with themes emerging from the material, including staff welfare, livelihoods, gender, community reception and public perception. We compared programme design with accounts of implementation and life after return, examining differences between officials' and participants' experiences. The SWOT framework takes OPSC and the institutions responsible for its delivery as the unit of analysis. Strengths and weaknesses concern capacities and limitations within these arrangements; opportunities and threats concern the wider environment. The threats, opportunities, weaknesses and strengths (TOWS) approach informs the strategic assessment by connecting these factors to possible action.[17] Interview quotations are attributed by respondent category, with identifying details withheld.

The sample offers detailed perspectives rather than representative estimates. Its concentration in Malam Sidi and Maiduguri limits conclusions about other receiving states and the Northwest camp. No women were interviewed, which limits the assessment of gendered experiences and family arrangements. The research could not independently establish a programme-wide recidivism rate or isolate OPSC's effect on later behaviour. Findings therefore concern institutional practice, reported experience and the conditions under which rehabilitation may support sustained reintegration.

[17]Clive Kerr and Rob Phaal, "Management Tools and Toolkits: The Good, the Bad and the Ugly," IfM Review, no. 3 (March 2015): 10–12, https://www.ifm.eng.cam.ac.uk/uploads/IfM_Review/Issue_3/IfM_Review_Issue_3.pdf; Heinz Weihrich, "The TOWS Matrix—A Tool for Situational Analysis," Long Range Planning 15, no. 2 (1982): 54–66, https://doi.org/10.1016/0024-6301(82)90120-0.

03

Strengths



Participants at the Operation Safe Corridor deradicalisation, rehabilitation and reintegration facility in Malam Sidi, Gombe State.

Photo credit: Bamas Victoria and Judd-Leonard Okafor / ICIR, reproduced by HumAngle, 2020.

OPSC's principal strengths lie in its institutionalised exit route, multi-agency arrangements and rehabilitative services. Military protection enables the camp to operate during active conflict, while specialist personnel support recovery and preparation for civilian life. Their contribution is most valuable when receiving states and communities can sustain the transition beyond graduation.

An institutionalised route out of violence

A critical strength of OPSC is that it gives the federal government an institutionalised non-kinetic response to the insurgency. Rather than treating all armed group associates solely through punitive or military measures, the programme recognises the strategic importance of defections, disengagement and rehabilitation. It provides a structured route towards civilian life for eligible people with markedly different histories of involvement in the conflict. This distinction matters strategically. Insurgent membership is heterogeneous rather than ideologically uniform. Many clients and former clients interviewed in Gombe and Maiduguri described abduction, coercion and moral disillusionment with violence. A former participant explained that people could "run away and go to military checkpoints to raise their two hands", knowing that they might eventually live peacefully again.[18] The availability of a credible exit can weaken armed groups' hold over people who wish to leave. It also offers a means of addressing trauma and grievances among people referred after prolonged detention.

Linking security screening, legal review and camp assessment offers an important safeguard when the procedures are consistently applied and eligibility decisions documented. Referrals can then be considered against the individual's legal status and assessed risk, while further assessment after admission informs treatment. This protection matters in a programme receiving people through different routes and with different experiences of armed group involvement.[19]

Complementary capacities of 17 government institutions

Deradicalisation and rehabilitation require a mix of services that no single agency can supply. The programme brings together 17 government institutions, combining defence and intelligence capacities with correctional expertise, legal guidance, psychological care, social work, vocational training, humanitarian assistance and public sensitisation. This hybrid design is a substantive strength. The participating institutions have responsibilities that extend from the camp to the communities in which former clients will live.[20] The division of labour gives this architecture practical value. The National Directorate of Employment is responsible for vocational training and links to further training in receiving states. The National Orientation Agency is responsible for social rehabilitation and community sensitisation. The National Emergency Management Agency and its state counterparts are assigned relief responsibilities, while the relevant ministries provide legal, humanitarian and social welfare support.[21]

Civil society and international partnerships complement these government capacities. The International Organisation for Migration (IOM) supports training, starter packs and aspects of return and follow-up, and maintained a liaison presence at the camp during the research.

The Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD), alongside other partners, contributes policy engagement and programme support. These relationships bring expertise and resources into a programme whose needs cross security, health, livelihoods and social recovery.[22]

[18] Former programme participant, interview by the researchers, Maiduguri.

[19] Ali, "Operation Safe Corridor Not Designed to Prioritise Ex-terrorists"; Operation Safe Corridor, Standard Operating Guidance Note, paras. 17–19.

[20] Operation Safe Corridor, Standard Operating Guidance Note, paras. 7–9; Operation Safe Corridor, "About Operation Safe Corridor."

[21] Operation Safe Corridor, Standard Operating Guidance Note, paras. 4–5 and 8.

[22] Researchers' observations at vocational workshops and interviews with programme officials, OPSC camp at Malam Sidi, Gombe State, April 2026; Operation Safe Corridor, Standard Operating Guidance Note, para. 8(u).

Military leadership in an ongoing conflict

The case for Defence Headquarters' leadership is rooted in the conditions under which OPSC operates. The insurgency is ongoing, and the armed forces are at the forefront of receiving surrenders and protecting the residential camp. Former associates and staff require protection from the armed groups whose fighting strength the programme seeks to reduce. The security component also conducts debriefing and intelligence analysis, and information obtained from former associates can support the understanding of insurgent networks and continuing military operations.[23] Military involvement also matters to institutional confidence. The forces bearing battlefield losses need to regard rehabilitation as part of the wider effort to end the conflict. A wholly separate release process could sharpen perceptions that the military undertakes the dangerous work while another institution returns alleged adversaries to society. Defence Headquarters' leadership gives the armed forces ownership of a complementary route out of violence, while legal eligibility remains the responsibility of the appropriate justice institutions.

Military coordination operates within an explicit division of labour. The SOGN assigns security leadership to the armed forces, deradicalisation and rehabilitation to the Nigerian Correctional Service (NCoS) working with specialist teams, and community reintegration to state governments and local institutions.[24] This arrangement enables OPSC to combine protection with professional care. Its effectiveness depends on respecting the technical responsibilities of psychologists, social workers, religious facilitators and vocational instructors. Intelligence requirements should be managed in ways that protect therapeutic confidentiality and enable participants to speak openly during rehabilitation.

A structured rehabilitation curriculum

The programme follows a structured curriculum addressing the psychological, religious, social and economic dimensions of rehabilitation. Assessment and counselling, religious engagement, vocational training and civic reorientation are delivered by a multidisciplinary team. The SOGN envisages a six-month programme, beginning with reception and assessment and continuing through rehabilitation and preparation for return.[25]

Many clients arrive carrying the psychological consequences of years of coercion, violence and detention. One resident, abducted as a child and later able to escape, described his distress:

At times, I would just sit alone and be sad and beating myself for what I was made to do.[26]

His expression of guilt illustrates the need to distinguish what a person was compelled to do from what he chose to do. Others described years in detention and insisted that they had never been insurgents. Their immediate needs concerned institutional injustice and the restoration of dignity. Operation Safe Corridor therefore often bears the challenge of inherited trauma, rather than encountering it as an occasional complication of rehabilitation. For these clients, care involves preparing for return after prolonged absence and possible stigma, as well as addressing the effects of violence.[27]

[23]Operation Safe Corridor, Standard Operating Guidance Note, paras. 8(e)–(h), 12 and 19(a)(4).
[24]Operation Safe Corridor, Standard Operating Guidance Note, paras. 9, 19(c), 22–28 and 40.
[25]Operation Safe Corridor, Standard Operating Guidance Note, paras. 6 and 19.
[26]Resident client describing childhood abduction and later escape, interview by the researchers, OPSC camp at Malam Sidi, Gombe State, April 2026.
[27]Programme officials and resident clients, interviews by the researchers, OPSC camp at Malam Sidi, Gombe State, April 2026; former clients, interviews, Maiduguri.

A psychologist described a five-point ideological assessment scale used during the programme to record changes in clients' beliefs. Such assessments provide a way of following progress within the camp.[28] Former clients' accounts give further insight into what they found useful. The psychological component received particularly strong endorsements across the interviews. A former client, now working in fish trading in Maiduguri, explained:

The best I enjoyed was the psychology aspect. The deradicalisation process was really helpful and should continue. It changed me and got me to where I am today.[29]

These endorsements carry weight because they emerged in conversations that also contained criticisms of other programme elements, including post-release livelihood support. The same participant could value the psychological intervention and describe difficulties after leaving the camp. His testimony identifies a meaningful rehabilitative benefit within a more demanding process of civilian return.

The religious component reinforces and extends this work. Three imams and a pastor were part of the team recorded during the research. For participants whose involvement had been justified through extremist religious teaching, credible engagement with that teaching offered a basis for reconsidering violence. One former client described the change in his understanding:

We left due to fatigue and fear that we could be killed, but the mallams [OPSC imams] convinced us with evidence from the Quran and true practices of the Prophet (SAW) that we were wrong in our understanding of the jihad. For example, we took some verses out of context: there is no compulsion in matters of religion; Islam allows war only if war is brought against you and you need to defend yourself. Even removing a dangerous stone to prevent harm is a good act, and restraining yourself from what is bad or sinful is jihad, but our old belief is that it is all violence and blood.[30]

The account distinguishes the exhaustion that prompted departure from the religious reasoning developed afterwards. Leaving an armed group did not end the process of making sense of that involvement. Psychological support and religious discussion addressed related but different needs. Their contribution is strongest when facilitators have the time and credibility to engage with individuals, within a programme that respects voluntary participation and freedom of belief.

Vocational preparation for civilian life

Employment is important to sustaining disengagement. Many clients joined armed groups when they were young and had not acquired a trade. The camp's vocational workshops offer carpentry and furniture making, tailoring, vehicle repair, construction, bread baking, welding, shoemaking and fisheries. Clients and trainers were observed at work, and the researchers saw furniture, iron gates, bread, shoes, clothing and building blocks produced in the workshops.[31] The learning and production activities give clients a civilian routine and opportunities to exercise choice and responsibility. Products are sold to customers outside the camp and to staff, with proceeds retained for sharing among clients on graduation. IOM supports starter packs related to the skills acquired. This combination of training, production and equipment provides a more substantial preparation for work than a one-off cash payment alone.[32]

[28]Programme officials and resident clients, interviews by the researchers, OPSC camp at Malam Sidi, Gombe State, April 2026; former clients, interviews, Maiduguri.
[29]Former client working in fish trading, interviewed by the researchers, Maiduguri.
[30]Former client, interview, Maiduguri (English translation). SAW abbreviates the Arabic blessing sallallahu alayhi wa-sallam (peace be upon him).
[31]Researchers' observations at vocational workshops and interviews with programme officials, OPSC camp at Malam Sidi, Gombe State, April 2026.
[32]Researchers' observations at vocational workshops and interviews with programme officials, OPSC camp at Malam Sidi, Gombe State, April 2026; former clients, interviews, Maiduguri.

The former participant who valued psychological care continued to use a skill acquired at the camp: "I still do the fish business that I learnt from the camp."[33] His experience shows that vocational preparation can lead to work after return. Whether this happens depends on the local market and the assistance available to establish or sustain a business, issues examined among the programme's weaknesses.



An official engages a tailoring trainee at the Malam Sidi rehabilitation camp, illustrating the role of vocational preparation in supporting transitions to civilian livelihoods.

Photo credit: Photograph published by Zagazola Makama, October 2023.

Early indications of civilian reintegration

Former clients encountered in Maiduguri were pursuing civilian livelihoods, and community interlocutors described cooperation by returnees. A district head estimated that "80 per cent of ex-clients" in his community were cooperating well.[34] These accounts show that former association with an armed group need not prevent participation in ordinary community life. Wider community evidence is also encouraging. In a 2025 survey, 93 per cent of respondents who knew former Boko Haram associates in their community said they had welcomed them back. The population covered different exit pathways, providing evidence about the social possibilities of return across the region.[35] Familiarity and everyday contact can create conditions in which people are received as neighbours and relatives.

The positive experiences reported in this study are important indications of what rehabilitation can help make possible. Their longer-term significance depends on how consistently such experiences are sustained across clients and receiving communities. The interview sample and internal camp assessments do not provide a programme-wide recidivism rate or establish the independent effect of OPSC on subsequent behaviour.

[33]Former client, interview by the researchers, Maiduguri.
[34]Community leader, interview by the researchers, Maiduguri.
[35]Kato Van Broeckhoven, Francesca Batault, Mohammed Bukar, and Fatima Yetcha Ajimi Badu, Building Bridges: Community Acceptance of Former Boko Haram Associates in the North East of Nigeria (United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research, 2025), 2, https://unidir.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/UNIDIR_Building_Bridges_Community_acceptance_former_boko_haram_associates_North_East_Nigeria.pdf.

04

Weaknesses

APPROXIMATE CASELOAD

1:78

One psychologist for approximately 78 resident clients

≈ 627
Resident Clients

8
Psychologists

3
Professional social workers

3 + 1
3 imams and 1 pastor

A fieldwork snapshot, not a clinical rating or current staffing benchmark

The programme's weaknesses concern resources, institutional commitment, the continuity of support after rehabilitation and public confidence in how it operates. The collective responsibilities established in the programme's design have not become equally dependable contributions in practice. This places pressure on Defence Headquarters and camp personnel, while leaving important parts of reintegration insufficiently supported. Persistent misinformation compounds these difficulties by obscuring admission procedures, assistance and outcomes, despite the programme's increased public engagement.

Uneven commitment across participating institutions

Although 17 government institutions participate in OPSC, membership has not ensured dependable contributions across all agencies. Defence Headquarters continues to carry much of the operational burden. Securing personnel, resources and services from participating institutions remains difficult even where responsibilities are assigned. The result is a programme whose day-to-day continuity depends disproportionately on its defence leadership. The National Steering Committee is responsible for coordination, funding requirements and the allocation of responsibilities. According to the authors' programme-governance knowledge, it had not met by October 2026. The separate OPSC Advisory Committee is expected to meet quarterly, and the OPSC Stakeholders' Forum should meet at least twice during each camp cycle to prepare for transfer and reintegration.[36] These bodies have different functions: a meeting of stakeholders cannot replace sustained strategic oversight by the national committee.

Political support is also vulnerable to changes in office. An agency head or minister may agree to provide personnel, resources or services, only for the commitment to be reopened when a successor arrives. Programme managers must then rebuild support for work that the institution has already undertaken to deliver. This dependence on individual champions weakens continuity and makes specialised services harder to sustain. The weakness is therefore consequential for the core intervention. Psychological rehabilitation may be valued while social welfare, humanitarian assistance, public sensitisation or longer-term vocational support remain weak. When these responsibilities are not fulfilled, the resulting dissatisfaction is directed at OPSC as a whole, even where the missing service falls within another institution's mandate. Effective coordination requires those institutions to deliver their assigned work and account collectively for the consequences.

Weak state ownership of reintegration

State governments occupy a decisive place in the programme's design. Reintegration is assigned to state governments and traditional and religious institutions as a long-term responsibility. States are expected to prepare for return, receive graduating clients, arrange appropriate assistance and sustain community-based follow-up. Their role begins before graduation, rather than at the moment clients are handed over.[37] This is one of the programme's most serious implementation weaknesses. Beyond Borno, political support for reintegration has often remained hesitant and practical state ownership has been weak. Receiving clients has not consistently been followed by dependable arrangements for their livelihoods, welfare and acceptance in communities. The political cost of appearing sympathetic to former insurgents makes sustained public support difficult, particularly where victims' needs remain visibly unmet.[38]

Borno stands out for the extent of its political ownership and the development of state-led reception and community arrangements. Its separate model demonstrates what an engaged state government can mobilise, while also illustrating the importance of protection, local relationships and continuing livelihood assistance.[39]

[36]Operation Safe Corridor, Standard Operating Guidance Note, paras. 4–5 and 10–11; Operation Safe Corridor, "About Operation Safe Corridor."
[37]Operation Safe Corridor, Standard Operating Guidance Note, paras. 8(t), 19(c) and 28(g); annex C.
[38]Saskia Brechenmacher, "Achieving Peace in Northeast Nigeria: The Reintegration Challenge," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, September 5, 2018, under "Tackling (De-)radicalization," https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2018/09/achieving-peace-in-northeast-nigeria-the-reintegration-challenge.
[39]Adebayo and Watson, Managing Armed Group Defections, 6–9, 13–17.

The lesson for OPSC concerns the responsibilities of receiving states: federal rehabilitation cannot, by itself, substitute for the services and political engagement required where people actually live. Weak state engagement leaves the programme caught between completion inside the camp and uncertain support outside it. It can delay transfer, weaken community preparation and make starter packs or brief assistance carry expectations they cannot meet. Responsibility for the next stage needs to be accepted by a named state institution, with resources and relationships sufficient to carry it through.

Staff shortages and conditions of care

During the April 2026 visit, eight psychologists were responsible for approximately 627 resident clients, a ratio of roughly one psychologist to 78 clients. Three professional social workers served the same population, alongside three imams and a pastor. For a programme whose core intervention depends on psychological care and individual engagement, these staffing pressures are substantive.[40]

Clients arrive carrying trauma from conflict, coerced participation in violence and prolonged detention. Therapeutic engagement, assessment and support require time, as do supervision, documentation and referral. Staff confirmed that some clients had to wait before commencing interventions and remained in the camp beyond the anticipated programme period. Waiting in a securitised residential setting can compound distress and place further pressure on food, accommodation and the professionals available to provide care.[41]

Funding constraints and staff welfare

Funding constraints reinforce these difficulties. Officials described pressure on overheads, workshop inputs and the cost of sustaining services.[42] Rising food, fuel and transport costs reduce what nominal allocations can purchase. Successive cohorts can continue to enter while staff time and resources per client decline. The SOGN assigns staff maintenance obligations to participating institutions and operational allowances to Defence Headquarters. Fulfilling these shared responsibilities is essential to retaining the workforce.[43]

Staff welfare is directly entangled with service quality. One official expressed the relationship plainly: "Environment, namely welfare and wellbeing of staff, can affect the delivery of duties which affect impact on the clients."[44] Accommodation was described as inadequate for a remote residential posting. These conditions make it harder to retain qualified psychologists, social workers and other specialists, affecting the quality and continuity of care.

[40]Programme officials, interviews and staffing information recorded during the researchers' visit to OPSC camp at Malam Sidi, Gombe State, April 2026.
[41]Programme officials, interviews and staffing information recorded during the researchers' visit to OPSC camp at Malam Sidi, Gombe State, April 2026.
[42]Programme officials, interviews by the researchers, OPSC camp at Malam Sidi, Gombe State, April 2026.
[43]Operation Safe Corridor, Standard Operating Guidance Note, paras. 30–35.
[44]Programme official, interview by the researchers, OPSC camp at Malam Sidi, Gombe State, April 2026.

Limited livelihood assistance after graduation

The vocational facilities are a strength, but turning a skill into a livelihood requires more than completing training. Officials described a Defence Headquarters graduation payment of ₦50,000 and, in some cases, smaller sums for assembling equipment. These accounts concern the cohorts discussed during the research. Transport, premises, tools, working capital and household needs place demands on assistance before a business can begin earning.[45]

A senior official explained the intended limits of support:

It is not a silver bullet to richness. The point is that the ex-clients can use the environment devoid of attacks to pursue a livelihood.[46]

This is a reasonable distinction between supporting return and promising prosperity. The question is whether the assistance is sufficient to make the acquired skill usable. A client may have equipment but lack electricity, a secure workplace, customers or money for materials.

Someone who spent years in an armed group or detention may also be unfamiliar with financial and commercial practices now taken for granted. Training and assistance need to be connected to the conditions of the place of return. The programme's design envisages more than a graduation payment. It assigns further vocational enrolment, starter-pack support and relief responsibilities to relevant federal agencies, state counterparts and partners. The gap lies partly in whether those commitments follow clients beyond the camp.[47] Sustainable livelihood support is therefore a shared delivery responsibility, whose failure can undermine the value of otherwise functioning workshops.



A trainee develops sewing skills at a Norwegian Refugee Council education centre in Maiduguri. Practical skills, equipment and access to markets can help conflict-affected people rebuild sustainable livelihoods.

Photo credit: Beate Simarud / Norwegian Refugee Council, 2018.

[45]Programme officials, interviews, OPSC camp at Malam Sidi, Gombe State, April 2026; former clients, interviews, Maiduguri.
[46]Senior programme official, interview by the researchers, OPSC camp at Malam Sidi, Gombe State, April 2026.
[47]Operation Safe Corridor, Standard Operating Guidance Note, paras. 8(n)–(p), 19(c)(5)–(6) and 27(f).

Fragmented follow-up after return

Officials, former clients and community interlocutors described an incomplete picture of life after graduation. A district head in Maiduguri said:

There's no post-return tracking, no monitoring, and no follow-up.[48]

His account conveys the absence of visible follow-up in his experience. IOM officials described monitoring through social cohesion arrangements involving community stakeholders and workers on the ground, while identifying insecurity and movement beyond the main return states as obstacles. Together, the accounts point to a fragmented and unevenly understood system, with information held by different actors insufficiently connected to programme decisions.

The SOGN assigns post-camp monitoring responsibilities to police, security, correctional and other agencies, alongside state governments and local institutions. It provides for at least six months of government monitoring; annex C specifies monthly contact for one year and twice-yearly assessment visits.[49] These provisions offer a basis for evaluating implementation. Without connected follow-up, the programme struggles to identify who is sustaining a livelihood, who needs assistance and which difficulties recur. Incomplete information weakens care, institutional learning and the evidence available to support requests for resources.

Family needs and gender inclusion.

The residential population at Malam Sidi was primarily male during the field visit. This arrangement creates difficulties when a client's departure from an armed group or return to civilian life is intricately connected to relatives who have different needs and receive services elsewhere. Women and children may have experienced abduction, forced marriage, violence or prolonged separation, and require access to support. The SOGN provides for women to receive rehabilitation and psychosocial support through the Bulumkutu Rehabilitation Centre in Maiduguri, while minors are to be transferred to civilian child-care arrangements coordinated with UNICEF and the relevant state authorities. Although OPSC provides for family visits, research interviews, consultations and the validation workshop indicated that implementation remained heavily dependent on development partners and insufficiently regular to sustain family relationships.[50] A model centred on male participants also risks treating women and children primarily as dependants, obscuring their distinct experiences, agency and protection needs. Sustainable reintegration depends on the wider relationships into which participants return, alongside independent support for family members. Treating male participants in isolation can therefore undermine the transition beyond the camp.

The Borno Model provides comparatively stronger arrangements for maintaining family connections, which can make it attractive to defectors. Research on the model documents dedicated services for women and children, while identifying continuing barriers to access and risks to women's autonomy and protection. Assurances that families will remain together can place women alongside former captors or partners from forced marriages.

[48]Programme officials, interviews, OPSC camp at Malam Sidi, Gombe State, April 2026; former clients and a community leader, interviews, Maiduguri; IOM officials, virtual interviews by the researchers, June 2026.
[49]Operation Safe Corridor, Standard Operating Guidance Note, paras. 8(f), 8(h)–(j), 8(m), 19(c)(7) and 28(g); annex C.
[50]Operation Safe Corridor, Standard Operating Guidance Note, paras. 19(c)(1), 19(c)(4), 20 and 27(b); programme officials and civil society interlocutors, research interviews and consultations; validation workshop, Abuja, September 16, 2026.

Family preservation should therefore not override an independent and informed decision about whether a relationship is safe or should continue. Women's access to rehabilitation and reintegration support should reflect their own needs, preferences and protection concerns, irrespective of their relationships with male participants.[51] These experiences highlight the need for OPSC to strengthen family engagement while ensuring that women and children receive support in their own right. Women require independent assessments of protection and rehabilitation needs, meaningful participation in decisions about family reunification, and access to services irrespective of their relationships with male participants. Children require a distinct civilian-led protection response that reflects their specific vulnerabilities and developmental needs. Nigeria's September 2022 handover protocol provides an existing framework, establishing a seven-day period for transferring children allegedly associated with armed groups from military or security custody to the Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development.[52] OPSC should strengthen coordination so that rehabilitation for male participants is complemented by appropriate services for women and children, with family reunification guided by individual circumstances, informed consent and protection considerations.

Transparency of admission and legal review

An early negotiated exit described by a former commander illustrates the programme's formative period, before its admission arrangements had become established. Intermediaries and security agencies facilitated his departure, accommodation in Kaduna and subsequent transfer to Malam Sidi. This early arrangement should be understood in its historical context rather than treated as a description of OPSC's current admission procedure. The interviewee said that promised housing and business assistance had not materialised; these reported promises could not be independently verified. He later worked with the Borno Model and reported helping mobilise approximately 1,200 departures.[53] His account shows how trusted relationships can facilitate exit, while unmet expectations can undermine the credibility of future assurances.

Earlier fieldwork in 2019 found unclear screening criteria and difficulty corroborating detainees' accounts.[54] The current SOGN identifies multiple admission routes, while the coordinator's public explanation specifies low-risk classification and Ministry of Justice eligibility review.[55] OPSC therefore needs to communicate clearly and transparently the pathways through which individuals are admitted into its camps, the eligibility and exclusion criteria, and the legal and procedural basis for each admission.

Limited community participation in justice

The evidence considered in this study points to limited opportunities for affected communities to participate in investigations and follow the proceedings that determine criminal responsibility. During the 11th phase of terrorism and related offences prosecutions, one author encountered restrictions on observation despite having authorisation. This experience illustrates how formal permission may not translate into predictable access.

[51]Adebayo and Watson, Managing Armed Group Defections, 7–9, 16–17.
[52]UNICEF, "Government of Nigeria, UNICEF Sign Handover Protocol to Protect Children Encountered during Military Operations," September 30, 2022, https://www.unicef.org/nigeria/press-releases/government-nigeria-unicef-sign-handover-protocol-protect-children-encountered-during.
[53]Former commander and former programme participant, interview by the researchers, Maiduguri.
[54]Hassan and Routley, Operation Safe Corridor, 18–19.
[55]Operation Safe Corridor, Standard Operating Guidance Note, paras. 17–19; Ali, "Operation Safe Corridor Not Designed to Prioritise Ex-terrorists."

Hearings at Kainji and the Federal High Court in Abuja also take place far from many affected communities. Earlier and separate monitoring by Human Rights Watch identified barriers to scrutiny and concerns about trial procedures.[56] Selected national and international observers provide valuable scrutiny, but their presence cannot substitute for accessible arrangements for affected people.

Limited access to proceedings can make even lengthy custodial sentences appear lenient. When communities hear that a person described as a "terrorist" has received, for example, 20 years, they may judge the sentence against the atrocities associated with Boko Haram. Yet the conviction may concern concealment of information rather than participation in those atrocities. Without an explanation of the specific offence, the conduct established and the reasons for sentence, the public cannot assess what the court actually decided.

The sessions observed for this study highlighted the circumstances that can be lost from such accounts. Defendants described life in communities controlled by armed groups, coercion, compulsory levies and the absence of security personnel to whom they could report. These were defendants' accounts, not independently established findings about each allegation.[57] Reporting only the offence and sentence can obscure both the degree of choice available to a defendant and how the court considered claims of coercion or inability to report. Separate examples appear in Human Rights Watch's July 2026 report on the ninth and tenth trial phases. One defendant received 25 years after pleading guilty to providing material support by rearing goats for Boko Haram; his lawyer said that the group had compelled him to work after invading his village. Another received concurrent ten-year sentences for failing to disclose information, calculated from his 2017 arrest, after stating that no security forces were present in his community.[58] These examples show why public explanations must distinguish a conviction for support or non-disclosure from direct participation in atrocities and explain how defence accounts were assessed.

When an individual later enters OPSC after completing a sentence, the visibility of rehabilitation can overshadow the prosecution and time already spent in custody. Communities may consequently interpret admission or graduation as evidence of amnesty. Other participants have different legal histories, including acquittal or a decision not to prosecute. Because OPSC receives people through several routes, general assurances about screening cannot explain the basis of every return.

Accessible explanations should make these distinctions clear, so that rehabilitation is understood in relation to the legal decision that preceded it rather than assumed to replace accountability. Community knowledge may also help investigators corroborate accounts and distinguish forms of involvement, provided that witnesses can contribute safely. Human Rights Watch's separate monitoring of the 2026 proceedings raised concerns about evidential foundations and legal representation.[59] These responsibilities extend beyond OPSC, but their consequences follow participants into the camp and the communities expected to receive them. Trust depends partly on whether affected people can contribute to, observe and understand the decisions that precede return.

[56]Human Rights Watch, "Nigeria: Flawed Trials of Boko Haram Suspects," September 17, 2018, https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/09/17/nigeria-flawed-trials-boko-haram-suspects; Human Rights Watch, "Nigeria: Boko Haram Trials Ineffective, Flawed," July 22, 2026,
[57]Author's observation of sessions across three days of the 11th phase of terrorism and related offences prosecutions, Federal High Court, Abuja, October 2026.
[58]Human Rights Watch, "Nigeria: Boko Haram Trials Ineffective, Flawed."
[59]Human Rights Watch, "Nigeria: Boko Haram Trials Ineffective, Flawed."

Misinformation, disinformation and hate speech (MDH)

OPSC's increased public engagement has not yet overcome an entrenched information problem. Earlier limited public explanation left space for the perception of a covert operation whose procedures and outcomes were poorly understood.[60] OPSC now has a website and social media accounts, while its coordinator has participated in X (formerly Twitter) Spaces and media interviews.[61] The weakness lies in the persistence of misleading narratives despite these efforts and in the difficulty of reaching audiences who do not follow official channels. Historical distrust means that making more information available does not automatically make it credible.

One recurring claim is that the Nigerian military recruits Boko Haram members through OPSC. The coordinator has publicly rejected that account and distinguished civilian rehabilitation from military enlistment.[62] Claims that graduates receive large monthly salaries similarly blur the distinction between transitional assistance and continuing remuneration. The fieldwork documented reports of a ₦50,000 graduation payment for the cohorts discussed, alongside uneven access to tools and other support; these findings do not substantiate a salary scheme.[63] Exaggerated accounts of financial rewards can deepen perceived inequity when victims and receiving communities see their own needs unmet. Another narrative presents OPSC as bypassing court processes and accepting participants without legal review. This obscures Ministry of Justice involvement and the different legal histories of those referred. OPSC graduates have also been accused of recidivism, but such claims are difficult to assess when accounts do not identify the person, original programme or route of return. OPSC can be conflated with the Borno Model, Sulhu, other state initiatives and community-led peace agreements. Alleged renewed violence by someone returning through another arrangement does not establish recidivism among OPSC graduates. Conversely, the coordinator's May 2026 statement that no community had reported problems remains an official account, which needs to be considered alongside the fragmented follow-up discussed above.[64] Reliable assessment requires verified cases, a defined observation period and information on graduates who could not be traced.

The implications extend beyond reputational damage. False or exaggerated accounts of benefits or renewed violence can intensify stigma and hostility towards graduates and receiving communities. Hate speech presents a further protection risk where hostility targets religious, ethnic or other identities, or promotes identity-based hatred and violence towards the graduates. Misinformation may circulate without an intention to deceive; disinformation involves deliberate deception. The evidence reviewed here does not establish the intention behind every misleading claim. These information problems must not be used to dismiss legitimate criticism of admission, spending or accountability.[65] The continuing weakness is therefore the capacity to correct claims consistently and demonstrate how the programme works. This requires accessible explanations of legal referral and support entitlements, timely responses to recurring rumours and independently assessable reporting on outcomes. The existing website and social media activity provide channels for this work, but responses also need local-language radio and dialogue through trusted community actors.

[60]Brechenmacher, "Achieving Peace in Northeast Nigeria," under "Tackling (De-)radicalization"; Adamkolo Mohammed Ibrahim, "Rethinking the Communication Strategy of Operation Safe Corridor," Centre for Democracy and Development, June 16, 2026, https://www.cddwestafrica.org/blog/rethinking-the-communication-strategy-of-operation-safe-corridor/.
[61]Operation Safe Corridor, "Official Programme Portal," accessed October 31, 2026, https://opsc.gov.ng/; "Military Denies Recruiting Ex-insurgents, Rejects Terror Shield Claims," SportsDay, March 31, 2026, https://sportsdayonline.com/military-denies-recruiting-ex-insurgents-rejects-terror-shield-claims/.
[62]Ali, "Operation Safe Corridor Not Designed to Prioritise Ex-terrorists"; "Military Denies Recruiting Ex-insurgents"; Ibrahim, "Rethinking the Communication Strategy."
[63]Programme officials, interviews, OPSC camp at Malam Sidi, Gombe State, April 2026; former clients, interviews, Maiduguri.
[64]Ali, interview by Ayantoye, "Demand for Names"; Operation Safe Corridor, Standard Operating Guidance Note, para. 19(c)(7) and annex C.
[65]International Committee of the Red Cross, "Harmful Information: Questions and Answers," accessed October 31, 2026, under "What Is Harmful Information?," https://www.icrc.org/en/article/harmful-information-questions-and-answers.

05

Opportunities for sustainable reintegration

Despite its structural weaknesses, OPSC operates in an environment that offers concrete possibilities for strengthening its reach and public legitimacy. Many build on relationships and capacities already present in the programme and the communities to which clients return.



Community representatives and peacebuilding stakeholders participate in a dialogue initiative in Maiduguri, Borno State. Community engagement is an important foundation for reconciliation and sustainable reintegration.

Photo credit: Allamin Foundation for Peace and Development.

Proactive defector outreach

Trusted intermediaries can make departure from an armed group possible. The former commander's account showed how personal relationships created an opening for departure and later helped him encourage others to leave. Former commanders and other trusted intermediaries can identify disillusioned associates and communicate credible terms of exit. Security agencies' knowledge of armed group networks can support this outreach, while civilian and religious intermediaries may reach people who would otherwise distrust official assurances.

Credible outreach requires clarity about what authorities can promise and who will honour those commitments. Programme staff, security institutions and civilian intermediaries need to communicate a consistent account of surrender, legal review, rehabilitation and return. Promises that exceed an intermediary's authority can damage the relationships on which further exits depend.[66]

Community participation and continuing support

Communities are already involved in making civilian return possible. A leader interviewed in Maiduguri described the language used to encourage reception:

We are encouraged that they are our children, children of our brothers and sisters.[67]

Kinship provided one way of making returnees recognisable as people with a place in the community. Such language does not remove questions of responsibility or erase harm, but it reveals a social basis on which reintegration can develop.

[66]Former commander and former programme participant, interview by the researchers, Maiduguri; Batault et al., Prospects for Dialogue, 36–38.
[67]Community leader, interview by the researchers, Maiduguri.

Traditional and religious leaders can help explain return, mediate difficulties and connect people with assistance. Their involvement is strongest when it sits alongside women's organisations, young people and those directly affected by violence, rather than making one prominent figure speak for everyone.

Traditional and religious leaders have influence over reception, but some also have limited knowledge of OPSC and the processes preceding return.[68] Their involvement therefore needs to be supported by reliable information and opportunities to influence arrangements. Leaders and residents need opportunities to ask questions before a return, receive understandable explanations and influence the support available afterwards. Their knowledge can also help programme staff understand where assistance is failing. Turning that relationship solely into security surveillance would weaken its value as a source of trust and support.

Public understanding and recognition of victims

OPSC's expanded public engagement provides a foundation for addressing these information gaps. Yet only 10 per cent of unaffiliated respondents in a 2024 survey round knew of OPSC, with particularly low awareness among women and girls.[69] Radio in locally understood languages, community discussion and regular opportunities for questions could extend the reach of existing communication. Explanations need to address actual decisions, available services and recurring rumours. They will be less persuasive if people repeatedly encounter unmet promises or cannot obtain assistance when it is needed.

Victim support is central to public legitimacy. The SOGN's transitional justice provisions combine family linkage and community visits with an oath of allegiance before a quasi-judicial panel constituted by the Federal Ministry of Justice.[70] A fuller process of social repair would enable victims to shape acknowledgement, redress and reconciliation. Earlier research found that perceived unfairness between assistance to returnees and the needs of affected communities complicated acceptance.[71] Receiving communities should be able to see how medical and psychosocial care, livelihood recovery and access to justice respond to the harm suffered. Victims should help shape these services, while participation in reconciliation, forgiveness or contact with an alleged perpetrator remains voluntary.

The existing statutory framework provides a concrete route for victim support. Sections 91–92 of the Terrorism (Prevention and Prohibition) Act 2022 establish a Victims Trust Fund in the Office of the Attorney-General and a Special Victims Trust Fund Committee. The Fund may provide compensation, restitution and damages to victims of terrorism.[72] Giving effect to these provisions through adequate financing, accessible claims procedures and accountable disbursement would strengthen redress alongside rehabilitation. OPSC and receiving states could help connect eligible victims to this mechanism, while decisions on eligibility and payment remain with the institutions designated by law.

[68]Hilary Matfess, Siobhan O'Neil, Kato Van Broeckhoven, and Mohammed Bukar, Community Leaders' Receptivity to Returning Former Boko Haram Associates: Implications for Peacebuilding, MEAC Findings Report 15 (United Nations University, 2022), 12–14, https://unidir.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/MEAC_FindingsReport_15.pdf.
[69]Van Broeckhoven et al., Building Bridges, 6.
[70]Operation Safe Corridor, Standard Operating Guidance Note, para. 19(c)(1).
[71]Hassan and Routley, Operation Safe Corridor, 12–18.
[72]Nigeria, Terrorism (Prevention and Prohibition) Act, 2022, no. 15, secs. 91–92, Official Gazette text hosted by the Nigeria Sanctions Committee, https://nigsac.gov.ng/assets/lawsdoc/terrorism%20prevention%20publication.pdf.

Partnerships

OPSC's partnerships with development partners and non-governmental organisations offer an important opportunity to strengthen its credibility, enhance staff capacity and improve access to equipment needed for effective rehabilitation and reintegration. The Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD-West Africa) and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) have provided valuable support in this regard, creating a foundation for further collaboration. Deepening these relationships and engaging additional partners could expand opportunities for specialist training, technical assistance and the provision of modern DDR equipment.

The national DDR framework

The National Counter-Terrorism Centre (NCTC), situated within ONSA, has a statutory role in coordinating counter-terrorism policies, strategies and plans.[73] This mandate provides an institutional basis for connecting the responsibilities of programmes and agencies involved in disengagement and reintegration. The development of a national DDR framework provides an opportunity to address fragmentation without erasing the differences between conflicts or programmes. The United Kingdom–Nigeria security and defence communiqué published in July 2026 welcomed the framework's development and linked implementation support to formal sign-off. The same month, the NCTC coordinator described a victim-centred roadmap at a workshop to validate standard operating procedures, with pilot implementation discussed for Kaduna, Katsina and Zamfara.[74] These developments provide a practical basis for turning coordination commitments into shared procedures.

For OPSC, common standards could specify the meaning of risk categories, the evidence and legal review required for admission, and the responsibilities of institutions transferring a person between schemes. They should distinguish court decisions from administrative recommendations and retain a documented route for investigating serious offences. Minimum requirements for rehabilitation, safe family arrangements and post-return support would make it easier to identify what each programme delivers and where responsibility passes to another institution. A national framework could also reduce the reputational consequences of conflating programmes. Consistent reporting would identify the pathway followed, services completed and authority responsible for release, enabling allegations of renewed violence to be examined accurately. Coordination should preserve useful state and community ownership while requiring compatible records, victim participation and accountability. Its significance lies in making these commitments deliverable through agreed budgets, responsible institutions and review, rather than adding another policy document to existing arrangements.

[73]Nigeria, Terrorism (Prevention and Prohibition) Act, 2022, secs. 4–6, especially sec. 6(1)–(2).

[74]Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office, "Fourth United Kingdom–Nigeria Security and Defence Partnership Dialogue 2026: Communiqué," July 17, 2026, sec. 4, https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/fourth-uk-nigeria-security-and-defence-partnership-dialogue-june-2026-communique/fourth-united-kingdom-nigeria-security-and-defence-partnership-dialogue-2026-communique; Sumaila Ogbaje, "Nigeria Adopts Victim-centred DDR Roadmap to Strengthen Peace — Laka," News Agency of Nigeria, July 13, 2026, https://nannews.ng/nigeria-adopts-victim-centred-ddr-roadmap-to-strengthen-peace-laka/.

06

Threats to sustained reintegration

Rehabilitation takes place within a wider environment that can undermine its effects. Institutional competition and political withdrawal can weaken cooperation; economic pressures constrain civilian livelihoods; and continuing violence threatens protection and return. These pressures interact with internal weaknesses but require distinct responses. Financial assistance cannot resolve an unsafe return, while security provision alone cannot sustain a household's livelihood.

Competition among exit initiatives

Institutional competition is an important part of this environment. Struggles over authority within the defence establishment, and among institutions managing different exit initiatives, are linked to access to resources, international partnerships and political visibility. These incentives can discourage information sharing and coordinated practice.[75] Competition also concerns the terms on which people are invited to leave armed groups. The Borno Model admits people through surrender and state-led reception and screening, without making a prior court decision a condition of entry. Assurances against transfer to the Joint Investigation Centre and provision for families to stay together in state-managed camps have made that route attractive.[76] This differs from OPSC's stated requirement for low-risk classification and a Ministry of Justice eligibility recommendation.[77] The prospect of avoiding detention, remaining with relatives and receiving assistance can influence which route a person is willing to take.

Fieldwork in Borno revealed accounts of negotiated exits followed by movement directly from armed group territory into communities without rehabilitation at Hajj Camp.[78] Published research also identifies risks that fighters may present themselves as farmers to avoid parts of the process, alongside uncertainty about accountability and recognition of programme outcomes.[79] These findings concern particular routes and accounts; they do not establish that all Borno Model participants bypass screening. Their wider significance is the need to connect incentives for surrender with credible investigation and documented release decisions.

Fragmentation also creates a reputational risk. Renewed violence attributed to someone released through a state initiative can be treated as evidence of OPSC's failure even where that person never entered an OPSC camp. Where individuals move between schemes, incomplete records make it harder to establish which services they received and who authorised return. OPSC cannot manage this problem through camp performance alone. Programme-specific reporting and connected referral records are needed to make responsibility clear.

Public legitimacy and political risk

Political withdrawal can expose these internal weaknesses. When public controversy makes rehabilitation electorally costly, ministers, agency heads and governors may become less willing to support it. A change in leadership can turn a fragile institutional commitment into a lost contribution. The programme is particularly vulnerable where citizens see support for former associates more clearly than assistance to victims. The programme also faces questions about fairness across regions. Comparisons between rehabilitation for Boko Haram-associated individuals and the treatment of alleged Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) members in the Southeast can generate perceptions of selective leniency. One resident interviewed for this study described detention in connection with an alleged IPOB association.[80] His individual experience illustrates the need for clarity about eligibility; it cannot establish a general admission policy. The Northwest expansion makes a public explanation of regional arrangements still more important. Political identity, ethnicity or peaceful dissent must not substitute for an individual assessment of conduct and legal status.

[75] Joshua Akintayo, Fragmented Approaches, Missed Opportunities: Security Coordination Challenges in Nigeria's DDRR Efforts, Megatrends Policy Brief 42 (Megatrends Afrika, September 2025), 3–8, https://www.megatrends-afrika.de/assets/afrika/publications/policybrief/MTA-Policy_Brief_42_Sep_2025_Akintayo_DDRR.pdf.

[76] Adebayo and Watson, Managing Armed Group Defections, 7, 9, 15.

[77] Ali, "Operation Safe Corridor Not Designed to Prioritise Ex-terrorists."

[78] Researchers' fieldwork, Borno State.

[79] Adebayo and Watson, Managing Armed Group Defections, 15–16; Akintayo, Fragmented Approaches, Missed Opportunities, 8–9.

[80] Resident client describing detention in connection with an alleged IPOB association, interview by the researchers, OPSC camp at Malam Sidi, Gombe State, April 2026.

Economic pressures on civilian livelihoods

Economic pressures affect the programme and the communities to which participants return. Officials described funding constraints during the fieldwork.[81] Inflation reduces the value of nominal allocations for food, fuel, materials and professional services. In receiving communities, limited employment and rising household costs can prevent vocational skills from generating a dependable income. Graduation assistance therefore needs to be costed against local markets and connected to wider recovery. Economic vulnerability may increase susceptibility to material incentives from armed groups, although poverty alone does not explain renewed involvement.

Continuing conflict and threats to protection

Unlike DDR arrangements implemented after a peace settlement, OPSC operates while the insurgency continues. Its task is therefore to sustain individual exits without a general end to recruitment, armed control or hostilities. The coordinator has described this simultaneous use of military and rehabilitation measures as a defining feature of the programme.[82] It also creates a continuing protection problem: participants cannot necessarily return safely when they finish rehabilitation. The camp requires protection from attack or retaliation, a responsibility assigned to the security component by the SOGN.[83] Successful completion inside the camp cannot by itself establish that conditions for safe return exist.

Outside the camp, violence can block return, disrupt work and expose former associates and intermediaries to retaliation. Armed groups may seek to recruit people again through threats, incentives or family networks. Follow-up must therefore connect livelihood assistance to protection and safe options for relocation. A person who moves because of a threat may be trying to sustain a civilian life; movement should not automatically be interpreted as failed reintegration or renewed affiliation.

[81]Programme officials, interviews by the researchers, OPSC camp at Malam Sidi, Gombe State, April 2026.
[82]Ali, interview by Ayantoye, "Demand for Names."
[83]Operation Safe Corridor, Standard Operating Guidance Note, paras. 8(e)–(h) and 12.

07

Strategic assessment

The findings identify a programme with valued rehabilitative services whose longer-term contribution depends on relationships beyond the residential setting. Its institutional strengths create a basis for improvement, but uneven contributions from participating agencies, weak state ownership, staff shortages and uncertain support after return limit what those strengths can achieve. Persistent misinformation further weakens confidence in the transition. The principal strategic question is how to connect the experience of care with a credible civilian future that participants and receiving communities can understand and assess.

The TOWS approach directs attention to how these factors interact.

OPSC's professional teams and institutional partnerships can support community engagement, while the national DDR framework offers a way to clarify responsibilities across programmes. Partner expertise can help strengthen staffing, case management and follow-up. Where internal weaknesses meet external threats, particularly staff shortages under financial pressure or informal commitments during political turnover, institutional continuity becomes urgent. National standards should establish minimum requirements for lawful admission, care, victim support and documented return, while leaving room for state and community delivery. Their value will depend on whether responsibility is clear, and services reach people at each stage.

Table 1 Summary of the SWOT analysis

Dimension	Principal findings	Strategic implication
Strengths	An institutionalised exit route; complementary agency and partner expertise; protection during active conflict; valued psychological, religious and vocational support.	Sustain specialist care and connect it to support in receiving communities.
Weaknesses	Uneven agency contributions; weak state ownership; funding, staffing and welfare pressures; limited livelihood and family support; fragmented follow-up; unclear legal referral; limited community access to justice; persistent misinformation.	Fund assigned responsibilities, document admission, improve care and follow-up, and provide evidence that communities can assess.
Opportunities	Trusted intermediaries and community networks; partner expertise and secure digital tools; development of the national DDR framework; statutory victim redress.	Use shared standards and existing relationships to support credible exits, coordination and victim participation.
Threats	Institutional competition and reputational spillovers; political withdrawal; regional fairness disputes; economic pressures; continuing conflict, retaliation and re-recruitment.	Connect national coordination and institutional continuity to livelihoods, protection and safe return.

08

Conclusion

Operation Safe Corridor has sustained a structured rehabilitation programme during a decade of active conflict. Participants valued psychological care, religious discussion and vocational training, while describing difficulties after departure. Its contribution to lasting peace depends on whether participants can sustain civilian lives and whether receiving communities regard the process as credible and fair.

The gap between formal design and implementation remains central: the combined capacities of participating institutions have not produced dependable contributions, and rehabilitation at Malam Sidi cannot compensate for weak support after return.

A coordinated national framework, accountable state ownership and practical support for victims offer ways to connect the programme's institutional strengths to the conditions required for sustainable reintegration.

09

Recommendations

Defence Headquarters should convene the National Steering Committee, while the advisory committee and stakeholders' forum fulfil their separate functions. Participating institutions should provide their assigned personnel, expertise and services through commitments that survive leadership changes. Public funding should reflect actual staffing and operating costs. External partners should align assistance with these responsibilities and consider how funding influences institutional competition.

ONSA and the NCTC should use the national DDR framework to establish common standards with the Federal Ministry of Justice, security institutions and state governments. These should clarify eligibility, risk categories, legal review, referral and follow-up across OPSC, Sulhu and state initiatives, while defining links to prison-based interventions. Shared standards should preserve local delivery and safe family arrangements, with clear responsibility for investigating credible allegations of serious crimes.

Receiving state governments should commit to reintegration arrangements before OPSC clients graduate. Each state needs an accountable lead institution, funded reception and support arrangements, and sustained engagement with communities of return. The state-level DDR, Peace and Security Committees already inaugurated in Kaduna, Katsina and Zamfara provide a practical opportunity to coordinate these responsibilities and strengthen state ownership. With clear mandates and adequate resources, these committees could bring together relevant state agencies, OPSC and community representatives to prepare for clients' return and monitor their reintegration. Defence Headquarters should secure these commitments through the National Steering Committee and stakeholders' forum, drawing on Borno's experience of political ownership while adapting arrangements to each state's circumstances.
Defence Headquarters and the institutions providing personnel should assess workloads, qualifications, specialist referral needs and staff welfare jointly. Recruitment, secondment, accommodation and clinical

supervision should respond to identified needs, with residential expansion matched to professional capacity. Partners can support secure digital case management and remote specialist consultation, while confidential clinical records remain protected from unnecessary access.

Relevant federal agencies, IOM and other partners should connect training to work, education or apprenticeship, with assistance costed against local conditions. Financial and commercial orientation would help people returning after prolonged absence. Safe family contact and independent access to civilian services for women and children should accompany support for victims and vulnerable neighbours. The Federal Ministry of Justice and relevant security institutions should go beyond announcing convictions and sentences by providing clear explanations of how trials are conducted, the evidence considered and the reasons for judicial decisions. This should be accompanied by consistent access to proceedings by the public, civil society organisations and independent observers, in accordance with court rules. Public communication should also explain how individuals are assessed for and referred to OPSC, identify the institutions responsible for these decisions and clarify the legal basis for admission. These explanations should distinguish eligibility assessments from court referrals, acquittals and completed sentences, enabling the public to understand how prosecution and rehabilitation relate to one another.

Investigators and prosecutors should provide safe, accessible routes for affected people to submit information and follow relevant cases. Court authorities should publish clear access and accreditation arrangements for community representatives, journalists and civil society monitors, with a contact point for resolving access difficulties. Public explanations of case outcomes should identify the offence, the conduct established and the reasons for the sentence, including how claims of coercion or inability to report were considered. Where a person subsequently enters rehabilitation, explanations should also clarify the legal basis of referral and any sentence already served. Victim liaison, legal advice and these explanations should use languages and channels that communities can access, while protecting witnesses, confidentiality and fair trial rights.

Programme management and receiving authorities should build on the website, social media accounts, X Spaces and media engagement through a continuing communications function linked to trusted local organisations and broadcasters. It should track recurring rumours, publish prompt corrections with supporting evidence and explain admission routes, graduation assistance and the limits of available recidivism data in relevant languages. Reporting should distinguish OPSC from state initiatives and community-led agreements, and verify the person and pathway involved before attributing renewed violence. Responses to disinformation and identity-based hate speech should protect safety while preserving legitimate scrutiny. Victims and receiving communities should influence support and reconciliation arrangements, with participation in truth-telling, forgiveness and public contact remaining voluntary.

The Attorney-General and the institutions designated under sections 91–92 of the Terrorism (Prevention and Prohibition) Act 2022 should make the Victims Trust Fund operational, adequately financed and accessible. Clear eligibility rules, local-language information, assistance with claims and transparent reporting on disbursements would give victims a practical route to redress. OPSC, receiving states and civil society should facilitate access without making compensation conditional on forgiveness or participation in reconciliation.

Programme management and relevant security agencies should develop proactive defector outreach through trusted intermediaries. Assurances must be authorised and honoured, with protection for those involved. This would connect the programme's rehabilitative capacity to the possibility of further exits.
State, partner and community follow-up should connect participants to assistance and feed recurring problems into programme decisions. A secure case-management system should document referrals, services and contact after return, with access limited according to institutional responsibilities. Independent assessment should include participants, victims and receiving communities, report losses to follow-up and distinguish completed rehabilitation from sustained reintegration.

References

Adebayo, Taiwo, and Abi Watson. Managing Armed Group Defections: Lessons from the Borno Model. Global Public Policy Institute and Institute for Security Studies, 2025. https://gppi.net/assets/AdebayoWatson_PolicyBrief_ManagingArmedGroupDefections-LessonsfromtheBornoModel.pdf.

Akintayo, Joshua. Fragmented Approaches, Missed Opportunities: Security Coordination Challenges in Nigeria's DDRR Efforts. Megatrends Policy Brief 42. Megatrends Afrika, September 2025. https://www.megatrends-afrika.de/assets/afrika/publications/policybrief/MTA-Policy_Brief_42_Sep_2025_Akintayo_DDRR.pdf.

Ali, Yusuf. "Demand for Names of Reintegrated 744 'Repentant Terrorists' Misplaced – Safe Corridor Coordinator, Brig Gen Yusuf Ali." Interview by Daniel Ayantoye. Punch, May 10, 2026. https://punchng.com/demand-for-names-of-reintegrated-744-repentant-terrorists-misplaced-safe-corridor-coordinator-brig-gen-yusuf-ali/.

Ali, Yusuf. "General Yusuf Ali: Operation Safe Corridor Not Designed to Prioritise Ex-terrorists over Victims." Interview by Linus Aleke. ThisDay, April 11, 2026. https://www.thisdaylive.com/2026/04/11/general-yusuf-ali-operation-safe-corridor-not-designed-to-prioritise-ex-terrorists-over-victims/.

Anyadike, Obi. "EXCLUSIVE: Nigeria's Secret Programme to Lure Top Boko Haram Defectors." The New Humanitarian, August 19, 2021. https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news/2021/08/19/exclusive-nigerias-secret-programme-lure-top-boko-haram-defectors.

Barkindo, Atta, and Shane Bryans. "De-Radicalising Prisoners in Nigeria: Developing a Basic Prison-Based De-radicalisation Programme." Journal for Deradicalisation, no. 7 (Summer 2016): 1–25. https://cve-kenya.org/media/library/Barkindo_and_Bryans_2016_Deradicalising_prisoners_in_Nigeria.pdf.

Batault, Francesca, Malik Samuel, and Celestin Delanga, with Mohammed Bukar, Fatima Yetcha Ajimi Badu, Fanna Abdu Muhammad, Fatima Ajimi, Sani Boubacar, and Siobhan O'Neil. Prospects for Dialogue and Negotiation to Address the Conflict in the Lake Chad Basin. United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research, 2024. https://unidir.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/UNIDIR_ISS_Prospects_Dialogue_Negotiation_Address_Conflict_Lake_Chad_Basin.pdf.

Brechenmacher, Saskia. "Achieving Peace in Northeast Nigeria: The Reintegration Challenge." Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, September 5, 2018. https://carnegieendowment.org/research/2018/09/achieving-peace-in-northeast-nigeria-the-reintegration-challenge.

Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office. "Fourth United Kingdom–Nigeria Security and Defence Partnership Dialogue 2026: Communiqué." July 17, 2026. https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/fourth-uk-nigeria-security-and-defence-partnership-dialogue-june-2026-communique/fourth-united-kingdom-nigeria-security-and-defence-partnership-dialogue-2026-communique.

Hassan, Idayat, and Laura Routley. Operation Safe Corridor: The Deradicalisation and Reintegration of Ex-combatants. Centre for Democracy and Development and Newcastle University, 2022. https://eprints.ncl.ac.uk/file_store/production/287017/B8E45ED0-9D78-4607-B9DC-83A74A402B5D.pdf.

Human Rights Watch. "Nigeria: Boko Haram Trials Ineffective, Flawed." July 22, 2026. https://www.hrw.org/news/2026/07/22/nigeria-boko-haram-trials-ineffective-flawed.

Human Rights Watch. "Nigeria: Flawed Trials of Boko Haram Suspects." September 17, 2018. https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/09/17/nigeria-flawed-trials-boko-haram-suspects.

Ibrahim, Adamkolo Mohammed. "Rethinking the Communication Strategy of Operation Safe Corridor." Centre for Democracy and Development, June 16, 2026. https://www.cddwestafrica.org/blog/rethinking-the-communication-strategy-of-operation-safe-corridor/.

International Committee of the Red Cross. "Harmful Information: Questions and Answers." Accessed October 31, 2026. https://www.icrc.org/en/article/harmful-information-questions-and-answers.

Kerr, Clive, and Rob Phaal. "Management Tools and Toolkits: The Good, the Bad and the Ugly." IfM Review, no. 3 (March 2015): 10–12. https://www.ifm.eng.cam.ac.uk/uploads/IfM_Review/Issue_3/IfM_Review_Issue_3.pdf.

Matfess, Hilary, Siobhan O'Neil, Kato Van Broeckhoven, and Mohammed Bukar. Community Leaders' Receptivity to Returning Former Boko Haram Associates: Implications for Peacebuilding. MEAC Findings Report 15. United Nations University, 2022. https://unidir.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/MEAC_FindingsReport_15.pdf.

"Military Denies Recruiting Ex-insurgents, Rejects Terror Shield Claims." SportsDay, March 31, 2026. https://sportsdayonline.com/military-denies-recruiting-ex-insurgents-rejects-terror-shield-claims/.
Nigeria. Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999. National Human Rights Commission text. https://nigeriarights.gov.ng/files/constitution.pdf.

Nigeria. Terrorism (Prevention and Prohibition) Act. 2022, no. 15. Official Gazette text hosted by the Nigeria Sanctions Committee. https://nigsac.gov.ng/assets/lawsdoc/terrorism%20prevention%20publication.pdf.

Obi, Martha. "Defence Chief Reaffirms Commitment to Reintegration." Voice of Nigeria, February 20, 2026. https://von.gov.ng/defence-chief-reaffirms-commitment-to-reintegration/.
Ogbaje, Sumaila. "Nigeria Adopts Victim-centred DDR Roadmap to Strengthen Peace — Laka." News Agency of Nigeria, July 13, 2026. https://nannews.ng/nigeria-adopts-victim-centred-ddr-roadmap-to-strengthen-peace-laka/.

Operation Safe Corridor. "About Operation Safe Corridor." Accessed October 31, 2026. https://opsc.gov.ng/about.

Operation Safe Corridor. "Official Programme Portal." Accessed October 31, 2026. https://opsc.gov.ng/.

Operation Safe Corridor. Standard Operating Guidance Note for Operation Safe Corridor. N.d. Document supplied for this research.

Sati, Sheikh Kubenubu, Ishaku Yakubu Mshelia, and Adigwe Austin Ndubuisi. "Community Perception of the Deradicalisation and Rehabilitation Program for Surrendered Insurgents in Malam Sidi Camp, Gombe State." Kashere Journal of Politics and International Relations 3, no. 3 (July 2025): 238–249. https://journals.fukashere.edu.ng/index.php/kjpir/article/download/708/601/2478.

Strengthening Reconciliation and Reintegration Pathways for Persons Associated with Non-State Armed Groups, and Communities of Reintegration, Including Women and Children, in Northeast of Nigeria. United Nations Secretary-General's Peacebuilding Fund project document, project 00140123 (PBF/IRF-521). N.d. Accessed October 31, 2026. https://mptf.undp.org/sites/default/files/documents/2025-05/post_pac-pbf_nigeria_nw_prodoc_final_nce_un_pbso_gw.pdf.

UNICEF. "Government of Nigeria, UNICEF Sign Handover Protocol to Protect Children Encountered during Military Operations." September 30, 2022. https://www.unicef.org/nigeria/press-releases/government-nigeria-unicef-sign-handover-protocol-protect-children-encountered-during.

Van Broeckhoven, Kato, Francesca Batault, Mohammed Bukar, and Fatima Yetcha Ajimi Badu. Building Bridges: Community Acceptance of Former Boko Haram Associates in the North East of Nigeria. United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research, 2025. https://unidir.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/UNIDIR_Building_Bridges_Community_acceptance_former_boko_haram_associates_North_East_Nigeria.pdf.

Weihrich, Heinz. "The TOWS Matrix—A Tool for Situational Analysis." Long Range Planning 15, no. 2 (1982): 54–66. https://doi.org/10.1016/0024-6301(82)90120-0.

Yar'Adua, Umaru Musa. "The Proclamation." June 25, 2009. Presidential Amnesty Programme. https://osapnd.gov.ng/the-proclamation/.

Centre for Democracy & Development

Centre pour la Democratie et Developpent

The Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD) was established in the United Kingdom in 1997 and subsequently registered in Lagos – Nigeria in 1999 as an independent, not-for-profit, research, training, advocacy and capacity building organisation

The Centre was established to mobilise global opinion and resources for democratic development and provide an independent space to reflect critically on the challenges posed to the democratization and development processes in West Africa, and also to provide alternatives and best practices to the sustenance of democracy and development in the region.

CDD envisions a West Africa that is democratically governed, economically integrated – promoting human security and people-centered development. The mission of the centre is to be the prime catalyst and facilitator for strategic analysis and capacity building for sustainable democracy and development in the West African sub-region.

ISBN 978-978-67-4010-2

9 789786 740102