



Centre for Democracy & Development

Centre pour la démocratie et le développement

SULH-ALHERI NE:

Replacing Evil with Something Better:
Promoting Alternative Peacebuilding Narratives



SERIES

1

52
EPISODES
equally split between
Hausa and Kanuri



Executive Summary

The Sulhu Radio Program forms part of the Centre for Democracy and Development's (CDD) efforts to promote initiatives that resolve unaddressed grievances, support forgiveness, healing, reconciliation, and reintegration at the community level across affected communities in north-east Nigeria and the Lake Chad region.

The project has involved rendering support and engagement to state and non-state actors to develop Sulh Alheri Ne alternative narratives; peacebuilding training and capacity building for relevant actors; and the airing of 52 episodes of live and audience phone-in programs on educating, enlightening and disseminating peacebuilding narratives to victims and their families. These programs – equally split between Hausa and Kanuri - took place between 10 May 2020 and 1 November 2020 and focused on restoring peace and encouraging reintegration and reconciliation through messages of forgiveness, healing and peace.



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and self-defence groups claimed over**

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LAST DECADE**

CONTEXT AND SCOPE OF THE PROBLEM

Attacks launched by Boko Haram and other extremist and self-defence groups in northern Nigeria has claimed over 30,000 lives in the last decade. The rise of the Boko Haram insurgency has also led to the destruction of communities, resulting in gross human rights violations, mass atrocities, disappearance and forced displacement. Restoring peace and rebuilding the communities ravaged by the Boko Haram insurgency must include a justice component. When legitimate grievances are not redressed timely, justly, and fairly, then impunity and injustice can become formidable obstacles to restoring peace and rebuilding communities. In fact, unaddressed grievances have been identified as one of the major push factors towards violent extremism.

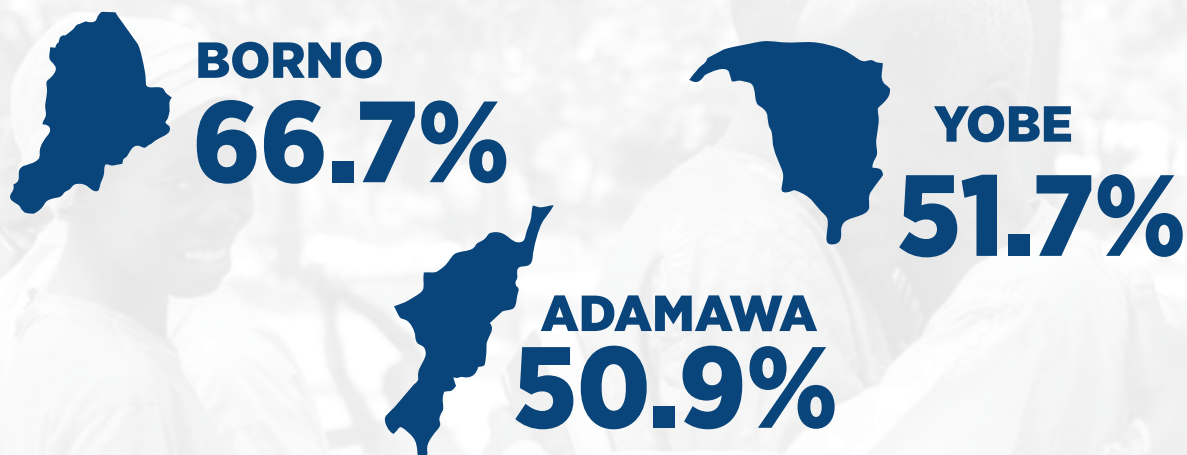
However, the scale and complexity of the atrocious crimes and violations of human rights committed in the context of the Boko Haram insurgency makes it very hard, if not totally impossible, to prosecute all the perpetrators through the already overburdened criminal justice system. The duration that criminal cases take to be concluded, and the resources, expertise and personnel needed to prosecute thousands of criminal complaints are too daunting to contemplate. Furthermore, the evidence

and the circumstances of each murder, and the identities of the murderer and the murdered are not all available because of the chaotic context of the insurgency in which the crimes were committed. Even prosecuting the thousands of the alleged Boko Haram combatants already incarcerated may be too great a task.

The insurgency and other forms of conflict and crimes it has birthed has had adverse impacts on the victims and the communities at large. A [telescoping study conducted by CDD](#) revealed that "distrust pervades community relationships on different planes, including distrust between Christians and Muslims, citizens and government, citizens and security agents, and amongst community members".

There is also the case of stigmatisation, endured by individuals with family ties to known members of Boko Haram, but who are not themselves members, and coerced members of Boko Haram. This is also a predicament for young girls and women who were victims of sexual and gender-based violence, such as "forced marriages" and "enslavement as concubines". These realities dictate the need to explore other avenues of reconciliation and transitional justice as more appropriate and feasible alternatives.

willingness of victims/ communities to forgive



Facilitating Peacebuilding through Narratives

CDD has initiated a series of peacebuilding interventions aimed at promoting forgiveness, healing, and reconciliation in response to state and non-state actors' focus to address conflict and emerging issues.

This built on a Needs Assessment and Scoping Study, which assisted in identifying the needs and challenges of victims and affected communities; gaps and dynamics of the conflict, pre-conflict peacebuilding narratives and traditional justice mechanisms that are deeply rooted in the people's culture and religion; and, most importantly, the opportunities and willingness of victims/communities to forgive.

66.7% of respondents - comprised of affected victims and communities - expressed a willingness to forgive in Borno State. These figures were 51.7% and 50.9% in Adamawa, and Yobe States, respectively. The study's findings included the designation of Sulhu Alheri Ne as the most appropriate mechanism and narratives for conflict resolution and peacebuilding in the region. The goal of the Sulh Alheri Ne radio program was to provide more evidence-based alternative

narratives that promote forgiveness, healing, and reconciliation for victims, survivors, and peacebuilders through narratives that are relevant, validated, and deeply rooted in people's culture, religion, and values.

On the Sulhu Radio Program, CDD partnered with Peace FM and Radio Nigeria, in Borno State, to bring over 40 guest speakers, including religious and community leaders, Islamic scholars and experts and academicians from the University of Maiduguri. A total of 405 listeners - 209 in Hausa and 194 in Kanuri - called and participated actively in the radio program during the 50 live phone-in episodes, airing their views and making active contributions through complaints, questions, and suggestions to enrich the discussions.

The episode that introduced and defined the concept of Sulh, along with compensation/reparation, women, widow's, and girl child protection, and the acceptance and reintegration of repentant Boko Haram ex-combatants elicited the greatest audience participation.

Major findings

The following were reported as a result of contributions and comments made during the above-mentioned live phone-in radio sessions:

- 1** The concept of Sulhu is a better approach in dealing with the situation across the affected communities as it is widely accepted. It is viewed as a tool to progressively address the conflict issue and bring healing and peace to the victims. The state is therefore encouraged to explore the concept of Sulhu towards negotiating peace with Boko Haram and ending the conflict.
- 2** There were demands for accountability and prosecution over the destruction of life and properties and advocacies for Islamic Scholars and Ulama's to prioritize the practice of teaching Sulhu narratives in their messages.
- 3** Suggested implementation of Sulhu across communities in Konduga and Bama (Borno State) as a tool for reconciliation, reintegration and promoting social cohesion, as a result of the testimonies of its success in reintegrating repentant ex-combatants.
- 4** Rejection of the concept of Sulhu, especially with the ex-combatants, is rooted in the ex-combatants' lack of respect for human life and properties, a lack of respect for elders, and the community's belief that a radicalized Boko Haram member cannot be deradicalized.
- 5** There is a major trust gap between young people and elders (traditional, religious and community leaders), and between the state and young people. This has continued to affect acceptance and practice of such narratives by the youths.
- 6** Advocacy for further sessions of Sulhu focused on classification of victims and issues around beneficiaries; compensation and reparation for victims; and the need for justice on human rights violations, torture, and extra-judicial killings for husbands captured by the military.
- 7** There was advocacy for the establishment of a functional Sulhu mechanism at the community level to reduce the burden of cases that has flooded the courts in Maiduguri.

Lessons learned

The following are major takeaways and lessons learned:

Acceptance for Sulhu – Repelling evil with something better

Despite the issues raised by the callers, most of them accepted the concept of Sulhu, the need for reconciliation, and the potential for the application of Sulhu in addressing the challenges of reintegration as it relates to the acceptance of the repentant ex-combatants back to the affected communities. The contributors also identified the radio program and the concept of Sulhu Alheri Ne narratives and mechanism as timely and appropriate at this stage of the conflict.

The need for Peacebuilding Mechanisms and Narratives

The Sulhu Alheri Ne radio program provided an opportunity and platform for the listeners and callers to complain and speak about issues affecting them. This highlighted the need for mechanisms and platforms that facilitate victim engagement with the issues in order to promote healing, forgives and reconciliation. The use of local language and local actors as guests was well appreciated and recommended for subsequent sessions.

The Role of Religious leaders

The relevance of engaging more religious leaders in the programme was identified. Participants reiterated the need to engage indigenous Ulama's from the affected communities, including communities returning to their ancestral homes to further speak on the issues and how Sulhu narratives and mechanism can address their challenges.

Participation of women in peacebuilding

In recognition of women's contribution to peace and security, there were various advocacies for inclusion the of women leaders and Ulama's as guest on the radio program, especially women from the Federation of Women Association of Nigeria.

Fake News

The dissemination of false information has negatively influenced people's beliefs and actions. The need to address the issues surrounding fake news as it relates to Boko Haram was raised.

Youth Empowerments, inclusion and participation in peacebuilding

Emphasis was laid on the need to include youths in peacebuilding. To this end, the callers advocated the need for functional education and skill acquisition programs that will help empower children and youths as a major tool towards ending the conflict and promoting a peaceful post-insurgency. They raised the issue of youth exclusion in decision making as a major issue driving the conflict, and the need for the state to address the growing challenge of gangs among youths in the IDP camps and host communities.

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