The reintegration enigma
Interventions for Boko Haram deserters in the Lake Chad Basin

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In the Lake Chad Basin area, waves of Boko Haram members have deserted the violent extremist group since August 2016.[1] Those who voluntarily leave the group are often referred to as deserters, returnees or repenters. While these three categories are not mutually exclusive, creating clear distinctions between them presents a conceptual challenge with potential policy implications for the region.

Key findings

▶ The context and the ongoing structural and operational dynamics in the Lake Chad Basin area mean that community-sensitive desertion, de-incentivisation, rehabilitation and reintegration (DDRR) interventions are needed – specifically tailored to Boko Haram deserters.

▶ Country-specific DDRR approaches, although essential, need to be coordinated with regionally strategic frameworks to safeguard against opportunistic enrolment.

▶ A focus on rehabilitation through de-radicalisation would offer a rather narrow and limited intervention approach to Boko Haram deserters for reintegration because not all deserters are radicalised.

▶ Regionally coordinated and nationally comprehensive desertion, de-incentivisation rehabilitation and reintegration strategies are needed to help counter and prevent violent extremism in the area.

Recommendations

▶ Empirical research into the phenomenon of desertion, deserters' life histories and the Boko Haram's impact on communities' livelihoods in the Lake Chad Basin area needs to provide the basis for context-specific DDRR policy-making.

▶ Effective policies to address desertion of Boko Haram members and the demilitarisation and demobilisation of community auto-defence groups must be multilevel – incorporating community, national, regional and continental stakeholders; and multisectoral – across development, transitional justice and reconciliation and development spheres.

▶ The Lake Chad Basin Commission should lead and coordinate the development and implementation of a comprehensive regional strategic framework for rehabilitation and integration with support from the African Union.

▶ The Commission should collaborate with national institutions with the legal mandate to work on issues of desertion, de-incentivisation, rehabilitation and reintegration, given their institutional and programmatic position in the Lake Chad Basin area.

▶ Trust-building between communities and security forces (including those from the Multinational Joint Task Force) is central to effective and durable de-incentivisation and/or countering recidivism.

▶ Clarifying eligibility criteria and categorising deserters in the region would provide the framework for nationally designed DDRR programmes. These programmes should be context-specific, but remain adaptable and integrative, and avoid being bogged down in bureaucratic mazes.

Operational successes achieved by the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF)[2] in the Lake Chad Basin area, deepening rivalry between the Shekau and al-Barnawi factions of Boko Haram and growing disillusionment, have contributed to waves of members deserting the violent-extremist group.[3] This report explores the factors underlying desertion from the group, as understood by community, development and security actors in the region. It emphasises the importance of processing and categorising the various kinds of deserters within the broader context of preventing and countering violent extremism. Specific contextual challenges make new-generation desertion, de-incentivisation, rehabilitation and reintegration (DDRR) approaches emerging from the demobilisation and disengagement of violent extremists particularly relevant in the area.

Thus far, post-desertion intervention in the region has been limited to detention, encampment and processing along three main channels – judicial processing, de-radicalisation programmes and return to either recipient communities or communities of origin from which deserters were enrolled into or kidnapped by Boko Haram.

Although DDRR interventions are largely carried out at a national level, the phenomenon that warrants these interventions is regional. The interventions are performed in a complex conflict environment in which Boko Haram continues to recruit and coerce communities. In the absence of a ceasefire, it is difficult to safeguard against resources earmarked for DDRR seeping into the broader political economy of violence in the region. The Lake Chad Basin is a highly volatile area, with civilian communities constantly targeted by violent-extremist tactics. This raises important questions about the transitional social justice dimensions of DDR processes.

Introduction and background

According to the MNJTF, some 3 500 members of Boko Haram have voluntarily surrendered in the four countries that converge in the Lake Chad Basin area.[4] Deserters and returnees often turn themselves in without weapons to local vigilante groups, or official administrative authorities. The various forms of surrender that have been observed in the region – categorised, broadly, as desertion, return and repentance – signal a shift in conflict dynamics and raise significant policy questions about how to deal with ex-combatants and deserters.

Traditional disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) processes have tended to be

Map 1: Lake Chad region
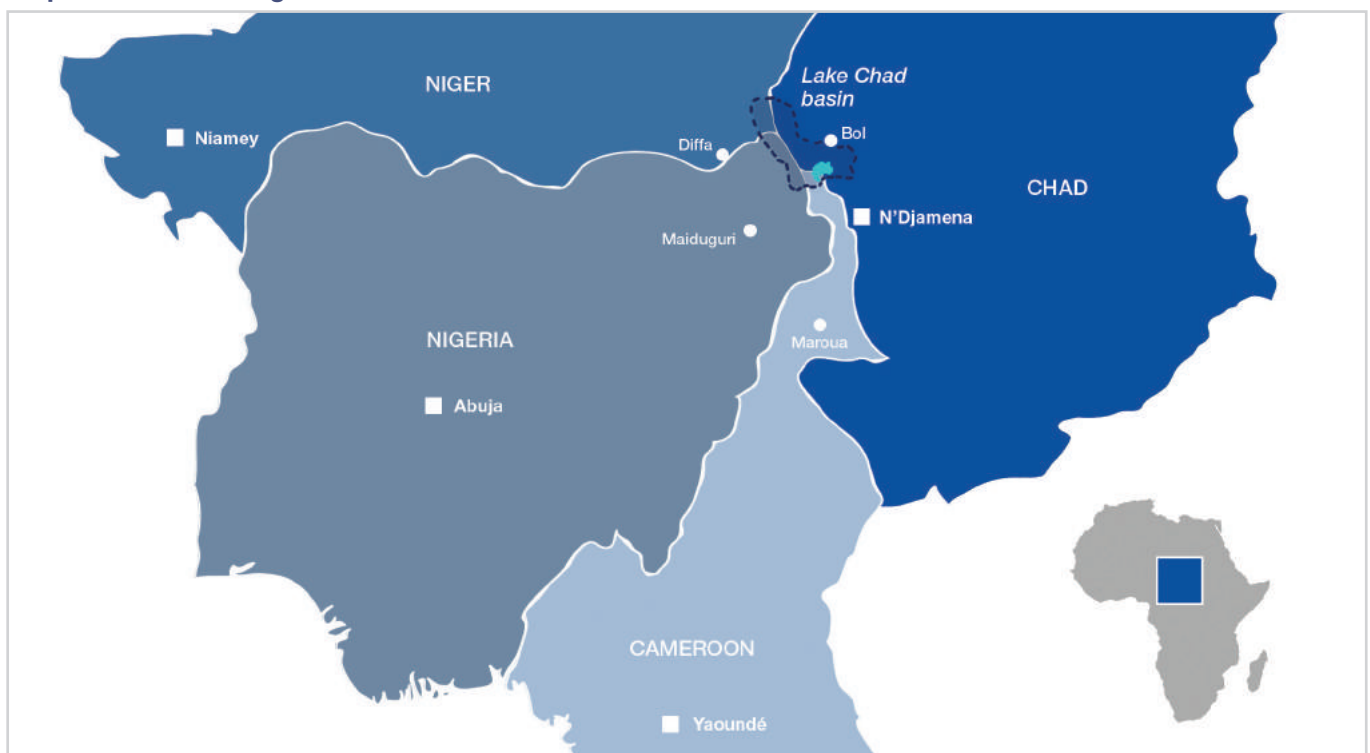
incorporated into peace deals as part of post-war stabilisation and peacebuilding. In the absence of a peace deal in the Lake Chad area, however, attrition through voluntary desertion is an important factor in combating the influence of Boko Haram. Security actors believe that wearing down Boko Haram through attrition from within its ranks will degrade the group to the point of collapse. Within this context, the policy focus on Boko Haram deserters needs to integrate security and development responses to violent extremism.

This report, which is the product of engagement with community, development, humanitarian and security actors working in the Lake Chad Basin area, builds on previous research conducted by the Institute for Security Studies.[5] It explores the potential contribution achievable by, and the challenges to, context-determined DDRR programming in interim stabilisation operations in the area.

Based on an understanding of this specific context, the report provides recommendations informed by previous generations of DDR programmes that have been carried out both inside and outside of United Nations peacekeeping operations.

It also contributes to continental DDRR discourses that reflect changing conflict dynamics, as evidenced in the case of the Lake Chad Basin area.[6] While identifying Boko Haram deserters as the main targets for DDDR interventions, it also encourages broader approaches, designed to complement community-sensitive rehabilitation with efforts to de-incentivise recruitment and prevent forced enrolment. Meanwhile, rehabilitation and reintegration should also take into account cross-cutting individual, communal and contextual factors.

The Lake Chad Basin area: a complex conflict environment

Geostrategic, humanitarian and ecological factors combine to make the Lake Chad Basin area a complex conflict environment. The area includes the peripheries of four countries – Cameroon, Chad and Niger and Nigeria, and incorporates two regional economic communities: ECOWAS[7] and ECCAS.[8] The political geography of the area, bounded, as it is, by four converging countries, means that it experiences specific human-security and service-delivery vulnerabilities.[9]

These four countries have developed counter-terrorism strategies largely shaped by their own particular experiences with and understandings of violent extremism.

Furthermore, changes in climate conditions in the region have resulted in increased food insecurity, social tensions and poverty, which have contributed to growing levels of internal displacement.[10] A political legacy of ineffective and often contested state authority in the area, together with deteriorating ecological conditions and human-development dynamics, contributed to the emergence of Boko Haram. These factors also account for the embedded and resilient nature of the violent-extremist group.

Boko Haram continues to rely on communities in the Lake Chad Basin area for combatant recruits

Since 2009, violent extremism perpetuated by Boko Haram, which originated in north-eastern Nigeria, has spread across the Lake Chad Basin area, simultaneously preying upon and relying on this ecologically vulnerable space for its survival and expansion. As the group's capacity to wage asymmetric combat operations wanes owing to factionalism and disillusionment in its ranks, military operations and a concerted international effort to support affected communities, it increasingly and more ferociously targets civilian populations. As a result, Boko Haram has wrought Africa's worst ongoing humanitarian crisis.

As of October 2017, over 21 million people had been directly affected by this crisis, which has internally displaced over 2.6 million across the four Lake Chad Basin countries.[11] Meanwhile, Boko Haram continues to rely on these communities for combatant recruits, who are either forcefully enrolled or politically, ideologically and socio-economically enticed to join the group.[12]

The region struggles with overlapping ecological, security and humanitarian emergencies, making it a highly complex geopolitical conflict environment. Boko Haram emerged against this backdrop of interwoven ecological and human-development crises on the peripheries of several states, launching assaults on the countries' sovereignty and territoriality. Through the

MNJTF, the countries opted for a security-first approach in dealing with what they perceived to be the most potent of the regional threats – Boko Haram.

From collective security to security development: adapting responses to violent extremism in the Lake Chad Basin area

The MNJTF was established as an offensive and stabilisation force to combat Boko Haram and other terrorist groups operating in and around the Lake Chad Basin.[13] In 2015 the MNJTF was given an additional mandate specific to the Boko Haram insurgency.[14] Since then, its successful military operations have helped degrade Boko Haram in the Lake Chad Basin area.

At the community level, the national armies are supported by ad hoc and volunteer security configurations known as auto-defence or vigilante groups,[15] which are often armed with artisanal weapons.[16] These have become part of the security landscape in the area, frequently mounting checkpoints across the territory. By controlling movements, on the one hand, they constitute an initial dissuasive line of defence for communities and, on the other hand, they are intelligence-gathering assets for state security institutions in the fight against Boko Haram.

Nevertheless, Boko Haram has proven to be a tenacious and resilient opponent in the face of both national military forces and community auto-defence groups. This is partly due to its geostrategic positioning – its members are embedded in communities at the Lake Chad Basin area, where the presence of state authorities is both limited and often contested.[17] Being able to operate in these geographical margins has been a factor in the group's ability to carry out both forced and voluntary recruitment among the communities living in the Lake Chad Basin area.

Interim stabilisation in the prevention and countering of violent-extremism operations

With only about a fifth of the MNJTF's area of operations left to be cleared of Boko Haram, mainly in north-eastern Nigeria, the fight against the group is entering a new phase.[18] The mandate of the task force is shifting from predominantly combat operations, aimed at depriving Boko Haram of territorial control, to implementing stabilisation programmes.[19] It is a factor inherent in the region that although the effective territoriality of states

is threatened by Boko Haram in and around the Lake Chad Basin area, their central authority, functionality and capacity to wage military operations endures.

The stark difference between post-war contexts and countering violent extremism (CVE) contexts is an important one to consider in the development of DDR interventions. CVE operations do not often benefit from the types of ceasefire reprieve that peace accords offer local, national and international actors to establish stabilisation operations. Hence states would individually and collectively take the lead in what would be more aptly described as 'interim stabilisation'.[20]

Interim stabilisation is a phase of combined humanitarian, development and security interventions in regions that continue to be under imminent threat of violent-extremist attacks. The prime objective during this phase is to reduce immediate security threats while addressing prevailing human insecurity and delivering interventions that target root causes of and enduring vulnerabilities resulting from complex conflict dynamics. Interim stabilisation is therefore a preparatory phase for full stabilisation and sustainable transition once the terror threat has been considerably diminished. Given the volatility of certain contexts, programming during the interim stabilisation phase should be flexible and adaptable enough to meet changing threats.

> The MNJTF's military operations have helped degrade Boko Haram in the Lake Chad Basin area

DDRR during interim stabilisation goes beyond merely focusing on mechanisms for dealing with ex-combatants.[21] It should also address desertion 'push' and recruitment 'pull' factors that continue to coexist within the complex conflict environment. As ex-combatants desert the violent-extremist group, conditions that attract new recruits remain, while the degradation of the group itself does not prevent the kidnapping and forced recruitment of new members.

Stabilising the status quo, therefore, is untenable in the long run and would only provide Boko Haram with an opportunity to regroup and resurge.[22] There is growing international attention on the humanitarian consequences

of violent extremism in the Lake Chad area, and the African Union's Peace and Security Council has taken the lead in prescribing that development projects should supplement military action at both community and individual levels.[23] The African Union (AU) envisions interventions that would focus on socio-economic development of communities liberated from Boko Haram, so as to deprive the terrorist group of its support and recruitment grounds.

However, the nagging political problem of both limited and contested state authority remains, especially in a region where the four countries have had varying encounters with Boko Haram.[24]

DDRR – connecting security and development interventions

There needs to be careful consideration given to how to socio-economically rehabilitate and reintegrate deserting Boko Haram combatants amid ongoing counterinsurgency operations. Thinking around this issue has largely been within the broad framework of innovating DDR programmes in a way that development interventions build upon security considerations.

While first-generation DDR focused on combatants present within military structures, second-generation programmes have incorporated communities more broadly affected by armed conflict into policy planning.[25] A third generation of context-sensitive DDR interventions targets the demobilisation and disengagement of violent extremists. This approach integrates lessons learnt from DDR and CVE operations to develop a heuristic framework for demobilising and disengaging combatants within contexts of violent extremism.[26]

The four countries in the Lake Chad basin area have so far approached the issue of deserters in different ways. While it is beyond the scope of this report to look at these disparate ad hoc responses, it does advocate the need for regional baseline harmonisation that emphasises synergies and information sharing, while at the same time guarding against one-size fit all national approaches and methods. A uniform approach will not respond to the specific drivers of recruitment and manifestations of Boko Haram in the four countries in question.

Although it is important to gain a deeper understanding of desertion patterns and flows from the current pool of deserters, the immediate focus should be on developing DDR strategies and approaches in sync with the objectives of interim stabilisation.

Despite the sporadic and haphazard nature of desertion, it is necessary to approach de-incentivisation both individually and collectively. Processes of de-incentivisation hence simultaneously provide the basis for preventing and countering violent extremism during interim stabilisation. Meanwhile, rehabilitation and reintegration are complex interactive processes. With the support of their community and social networks, rehabilitation and reintegration processes seek to transition an individual or a group from combatant status to one that implicitly denounces violent extremism, and to work towards their emotional, socio-economic and psychological stability on a path of re-entry into their community and society at large.

Desertion: push and pull factors

Operations aimed at preventing and countering Boko Haram's violent extremism seek to pre-empt and react to the group's resilience and adaptability. However, understanding how the push factors result in desertion from the group is as important as understanding the pull factors that continue to lure recruits, including the potential for recidivism. This is especially important, as both conditions coexist within the complex conflict environment in the Lake Chad Basin. Understanding these should help deal with dilemmas that state and non-governmental actors face when confronting the phenomenon of desertion.

> A third generation of context-sensitive DDR interventions targets the demobilisation of violent extremists

In this context, desertion implies the act by individuals or groups of disengaging from violent-extremist groups without having been discharged by higher command. When engaging with deserters, however, there is the need to establish whether they were forcefully or voluntarily recruited into the group and the roles they played in the organisation. These factors are important considerations throughout the entire socially negotiated and validated DDRR processes.

Given the societal and relational implications of people joining violent-extremist organisations, opting out of these groups also has far-reaching consequences for affected communities and society at large. Understanding the complex coexistence of push and pull factors influencing Boko Haram members is therefore an important aspect of DDDR processes in the area.

Push factors

Two interrelated structural factors seem to explain the push phenomenon underlying Boko Haram desertion. Firstly, on a strategic level, military successes achieved by the MNJTF in its operations have inflicted combat losses on the violent-extremist group. This has resulted in a large number of captured ex-combatants. Boko Haram's territorial losses have brought both areas and populations under the control of national armies.

At the same time, high-profile internal rivalry between the Shekau and al-Barnawi factions within Boko Haram has altered the group's strategy and tactics. Both pledged allegiance to Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS), although ISIS recognised al-Barnawi as the leader of its West Africa Province. This ideologically, economically and strategically rooted rivalry, which came to a head in August 2016, provides insight into the factionalised nature of the group, and a wave of desertion seems directly attributable to it.[27]

Strategic and organisational contexts may have shaped individuals' reasons for deserting, but the implications of deserting are determined by which side of a national borderline deserters end up on. Although Boko Haram's main bases of operation are in north-eastern Nigeria, deserters have turned themselves over to state authorities in all the Lake Chad Basin countries. This means that dealing with deserters is both a national and a regional issue.

Secondly, and on the individual level, whether they were forced or voluntarily recruited into joining Boko Haram, disillusionment within the group – borne of unfulfilled promises – and fear of death on the battlefield have been the main push factors for deserters.[28] Many of them were promised economic opportunities for which they did not need a formal education, but they did not sign up to die.[29] With its loss of territory, the caliphate that Boko Haram promised its recruits appears as a metaphorical mirage rising out of the Sahelian heat.

Security and development actors in the Lake Chad Basin area are acutely aware that despite their interventions, desertion push factors from Boko Haram continue to coexist with influences that pull combatants into the group's ranks. Looking at kidnappings, for example, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs noted that the number of children forcibly recruited to participate in violent attacks had reached 83 by September of 2017.[30]

Pull factors

Preoccupation with desertion, however, often occludes the more pernicious problem of active and ongoing Boko Haram recruitment on the islands of the Lake Chad Basin as well as the structural conditions that led to the mushrooming of the group in the first instance. Some security-focused state responses to the group have had the effect of thwarting local economies, exacerbating economic vulnerabilities in the area.

> Internal rivalry between the Shekau and al-Barnawi factions within Boko Haram has altered the group's strategy and tactics

The continuous presence of Boko Haram sympathisers among communities in the Lake Chad Basin area also preoccupies state and local authorities, and their humanitarian and development partners, vigilante groups and development actors. The group's resilience is largely linked due to its adaptability, given its rootedness within communities in the area. Said one participant: 'It is impossible to tell who is Boko Haram and who is not Boko Haram on the islands. There are a lot of people who are fishermen, traders or farmers by day, and Boko Haram by night.'[31] This poses a problem in terms of trying to identify the threat among communities.

It also remains extremely difficult to accurately capture changing levels of voluntary Boko Haram enlistment within the communities around the lake. Another complex problem, and one with strategic implications, is understanding how alliances between Boko Haram and al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, in the region, and ISIS globally, have contributed to attracting foreign fighters to, or deterring them from, the Lake Chad Basin theatre.

Accurately mapping these coexisting push and pull factors is important in terms of understanding how to complement military successes with winning the hearts and minds of communities in the region.

Desertion: categorising deserters, stragglers and family units

While the MNJTF puts the number of deserters across the Lake Chad Basin area at around 3 500 as of November 2017, they also note three observations relating to categories of deserters that may skew these numbers. Firstly, after deserters turn themselves in and are taken into custody by state authorities, they are supposed to go through a sorting process.[32] However, the only country in the area where this seems to occur systematically at the moment is Niger.

> The very nature of this sorting process remains shrouded in the opacity of national security

The purpose of the sorting process is to categorise people according to their degree of involvement and their role within the terror group. Those considered to have deliberately targeted civilian populations are supposed to face prosecution through a special judicial system.[33] However, the very nature of this sorting process remains shrouded in the opacity of national security.

There are also legal loopholes pertaining to where individuals confess to have committed attacks. There are cases, for example, of individuals who were sent back to their communities in the Lake Region of Chad after having confessed to taking part in Boko Haram attacks in Nigeria.[34] These people, who are neither reintegrated nor prosecuted, despite being welcomed in their communities as 'returnees', largely elude accountability for crimes committed while with Boko Haram.

Meanwhile, in Diffa, Niger, the Goudoumaria repentants' camp, set up by the High Authority for Peace Consolidation (HACP), holds voluntary Boko Haram returnees locally referred to as '*repentis*' (to use the French term). The camp holds these individuals for DDR processing. This discrepancy in the way Boko Haram deserters are treated poses a challenge that states in the region need to resolve.

Secondly, while among the deserters there are ex-combatants, there are also women and children – many of whom are under 10, who were most likely born to spouses of Boko Haram combatants.[35] Gender-sensitive eligibility for participation in interim stabilisation DDRR programming should incorporate this category of deserters. Such programming should be gender- and age-sensitive, while seeking as far as possible to maintain the integrity of family units and counter the stigmatisation of this particular group of individuals.

Thirdly, the sorting process has turned up stragglers who claim to be members of Boko Haram so they can benefit from the food, shelter and clothing available in the ex-combatant holding areas.[36] This is especially the case when stragglers believe that by turning themselves in to the authorities, they will also benefit from rehabilitation and reintegration programmes.[37] The fact that some pretend to be part of the terror group so that they can receive aid draws attention to the dire socio-economic conditions that continue to prevail in communities vulnerable to both Boko Haram attacks and recruitment.

Demilitarising and demobilising anti-Boko Haram vigilantes

During interim stabilisation, national and regional stakeholders must make plans for the demilitarisation and demobilisation of the vigilante groups that have become an integral part of the counter-Boko Haram security landscape. Although these groups emerged to protect vulnerable communities in areas of limited state security presence, operationally they skirt a fine line between community protection and predation. Some of them have been complicit in human-rights violations committed by state armies in the fight against Boko Haram. In the context of complex conflict, these groups have also developed alternative modes of territorial authority and control.

Their rise and continued presence highlights both the persistence of the state's limited efficacy in these borderland spaces and the omnipresence of the Boko Haram threat. This occurs despite the MNJTF's successes in the area. As operations phase into interim stabilisation, organised vigilante groups are concomitantly developing the capacity, means and legitimacy within the local communities to potentially supplement or contest state authority.

Focusing solely on deserters and ignoring vigilante groups would have long-term consequences for peace and security in this region. These groups offer alternatives to the state's monopoly over the legitimate use of violence, for which plans need to be made during interim stabilisation and beyond. Catering to these groups would fall within a supplementary DDR track to that dedicated to deserters.

De-incentivising individuals and communities – a multi-level approach

In the complex conflict environment of the Lake Chad Basin area, desertion, de-incentivisation, rehabilitation and reintegration naturally overlap to create an integrated DDRR framework. Such overlapping is essential when designing DDRR programmes that complement security and development interventions specifically targeting Boko Haram deserters. Thus far, post-desertion intervention responses have been limited to detention and processing, leading down three main pathways – judicial processing, de-radicalisation programming and returning deserters to the communities from which they had been kidnapped.

Civil-society actors envisage a multifaceted strategy that targets deserters, the reinsertion communities and communities where incentives remain for people to voluntarily join Boko Haram.[38] This de-incentivising process involves a set of inclusive, interactive and multi-level strategies that, while eroding inducements for new violent-extremist recruits, also facilitates the rehabilitation and reintegration of deserters, and prevents recidivism. To get these strategies right at the outset, there is a need to take into account interconnected individual and community outcomes in the de-incentivisation process.

De-incentivisation of individuals

At the individual level, resolving problems around how to categorise ex-combatants is fundamental to the establishment of gender aware DDRR eligibility criteria and processing dynamics. When sorting and categorising deserters and captured ex-combatants for processing, it is unclear whether there is appropriate sensitivity applied in how categories are differentiated – e.g. voluntary recruits, forced recruits, combat support actors and those who provided support under duress. Distinctions should also be made in terms of the gravity

of the offences committed and to what degree deserters and ex-combatants were radicalised, if at all.

If one starts out from a premise of guilt by proximity when dealing with deserters, it may well deepen communities' mistrust of security forces, while, on the other hand, exercising leniency in dealing with known perpetrators of violence would deepen people's mistrust in justice systems.[39] Therefore, during interim stabilisation in the area, treating the issues linked to the categorisation of ex-combatants with gender-sensitivity and formulating clear eligibility criteria for DDRR would be key determinants for successful de-incentivisation processes.

> Taking community preferences seriously is central to building the trust needed to win hearts and minds

Differentiating the categories would necessitate the disaggregation, non-linear sequencing and fine-tuning of DDDR interventions during phases of interim stabilisation. Meanwhile, being aware of micro-categories amid macro-process dynamics will help calibrate appropriate interventions in terms of ex-combatants' gender, their roles within violent-extremist groups, and their commitment to rehabilitation and reintegration within communities.

De-incentivisation in the community

Boko Haram's continued capacity for forced and voluntary recruitment within the Lake Chad Basin area poses an enduring security threat to previously affected communities, while contributing to the group's resilience and adaptability. This capacity invariably undermines the possible rehabilitation and reintegration of deserters – hence the importance of linking de-incentivisation strategies within DDR programming with the broad-based community de-incentivisation of potential recruits.

Taking community preferences seriously by providing civil protection and shoring up human development is central to building the trust needed to win hearts and minds, and breaking down Boko Haram's base of potential voluntary recruits. Civil–military coordination units within the MNJTF are already emphasising the deployment of quick impact projects (QIPs), which are designed to have an immediate impact on livelihoods, even if doubts remain about their sustainability.[40]

QIPs focus on the provision of basic services, such as drinking water, makeshift school classrooms, basic healthcare, and support for agriculture and animal husbandry.[41] However, the MNJTF is well aware that the political will at the national government level to deliver on sustainable development must accompany these QIPs to help begin restoring relationships between states and these communities.

A supplementary community-related dimension of the AU's broad-based DDR strategy envisages customising civilian (support) programmes that focus on finding solutions through dialogue within countries affected by Boko Haram. These interventions would link humanitarian priorities with sustainable human-development needs, such as health service provision and education.[42]

Civil protection and the return of the state

The AU's DDR strategy for the area proposes bringing cohesion to the programme by encouraging national strategies to devolve from a holistic strategic regional approach. This strategy emphasises cooperation between border units, intelligence, surveillance and civil-society groups to make sure that the insurgents do not cross borders and continue their operations.[43] Meanwhile, the MNJTF is also developing a strategic framework for civil protection in the fight against Boko Haram.[44] These approaches, however, only obliquely address the nagging issue of state–community relations and the overall state absence and contested authority, which are essential ingredients for effective DDRR programme delivery.

Civil protection includes both security and juridical elements. Planning for an effective law-enforcement presence in areas from which Boko Haram has been dislodged by military operations is an important aspect of interim stabilisation. However, the return of the state in this region of historically limited statehood should not amount to authoritarian controls and predation.[45] It should, however, complement pre-existing local governance systems and broader patterns of social cohesion.[46] While it is unrealistic to expect an effective state to appear overnight, progressively improving the utility of the state to affected communities would undermine a central factor in Boko Haram's recruitment strategy.

Reinforcing the state's law-enforcement and administrative capacities in the area is an important part of the sustainable management of DDDR processes in the medium and long term. A framework for processing future deserters from the violent-extremist group would make the process more predictable. But this should be done with the awareness that law enforcement has in the past been complicit in predation within these peripheral spaces where law-enforcement agents have been accused of human-rights violations, gender-based violence, and of preying on communities when their salaries are delayed.[47] When communities begin to trust law-enforcement agencies again, it will be a good indicator that Boko Haram is in decline and a firm step towards eradicating the group.[48]

Programming de-incentivisation

Desertion creates the need to redirect ex-combatants towards civilian livelihoods. This means that communities and states are stakeholders in the interim stabilisation process. De-incentivisation needs to be a systematic process that accounts for categories of deserters and their eligibility for participation in these programmes.

> Progressively improving the utility of the state would undermine a central factor in Boko Haram's recruitment strategy

Currently, in the Lake Chad Basin area, judicial processes and de-radicalisation have emerged as dominant methodologies when it comes to dealing with ex-combatants. Together with vocational training, these provide deserters with the skills needed for economic productivity during reintegration.

Judicial processing often faces a number of complex, challenging issues. Forced or voluntary recruits are often taken to Boko Haram's operational bases, where they are incorporated into the group and then deployed for internal and cross-border terrorist attacks. These dynamics call for investigative and administrative collaboration among the countries in the Lake Chad area. Legal frameworks ought to be adapted to challenges posed by jurisdiction, extradition and sentencing.

Pre-trial detention for deserters who have been assessed as a high-security risk often occurs in capital cities, far from where the terrorist acts were committed. However, for those low-priority deserters who remain in holding areas within the administrative headquarters in the lake region, the question remains as to what forms of alternative justice mechanisms should be applied to them during their transition to civilian life.[49] This calls for some serious thinking about the kinds of justice mechanisms that are appropriate for dealing with different categories of deserters as part of the de-incentivisation process.

The focus on de-radicalisation needs some rethinking too, especially when premised on a path-dependent assumption about individuals' radicalisation processes. One of the problems here is that it is difficult to gauge an individual's level of radicalisation. And, even if this were possible, de-radicalisation is an individual commitment that is even harder to measure.[50] Nevertheless, de-radicalisation is gaining much attention as a means of preventing and combating violent extremism. So, there is a need to look beyond a one-size-fits-all de-radicalisation process as part of DDR programming because different categories of individuals encounter Boko Haram in varying ways.

The vocational training option mentioned above is often advanced as a rehabilitation and reintegration pathway for deserters. The challenge with vocational training, however, is that it is often ill-suited to the job requirements of the communities in which deserters are expected to reintegrate. It is not unheard of in contexts of violent extremism either, for recipients of vocational training to use their skills in the service of violent-extremist groups. Furthermore, many communities scourged by Boko Haram have experienced high levels of unemployment – hence the need to dispense with preconceived notions that vocational training will make deserters economically productive, as the complex conflict environment has transformed economic livelihood patterns.[51]

Rehabilitation and reintegration

Rehabilitation and reintegration of deserters is a two-way process: it needs to engage both deserters and communities. As there is no structured rehabilitation and reintegration of deserters taking place as yet in the Lake Chad Basin area, this section of the report highlights important general considerations at both individual and community levels.

Deserters' commitment to de-incentivisation programmes provides a basis for negotiating their productive re-entry into communities. Communities, in practice, often set their own rules of belonging. However, rehabilitation and reintegration processes would also benefit from being tailored to the eligibility criteria and categories of deserters, thereby providing multiple potential entry options. Some deserters, for example, might be suited to reintegration within their own communities of origin, whereas it may be more appropriate for others to be reintegrated into neighbouring communities.

> One of the problems here is that it is difficult to gauge an individual's level of radicalisation

Broadly-speaking, the sociological environment of the Lake Chad Basin area should facilitate processes of rehabilitation and reintegration, whether in communities of origin or others. Communities around the lake have become accustomed to human and material mobility. This historical movement of people and goods in this region has generated norms by which individuals negotiate entry, passage and positionality within these communities. Given that they are used to welcoming traders, agriculturists, fishermen and cattle herders from as far as Mali and Senegal, who come to try their luck in the lake area, welcoming rehabilitated Boko Haram deserters should not prove particularly disruptive, even if it means moving them to new communities.[52]

The caveat here, however, is that this history of acceptance and inclusion has been tested and challenged by Boko Haram's ongoing tactics in their violent quest for territorial control. This alters the response and traditional openness of communities in the area. Hence the need for reintegration processes that focus as much on the communities as they do on ex-combatants in a context where Boko Haram continues to kidnap and recruit. Hence a comprehensive community engagement strategy, in which communities play a central role in shaping the terms and conditions by

which deserting Boko Haram members negotiate entry and belonging, would be essential.

When it comes to families who have deserted Boko Haram as a unit, it is important to consider keeping family units together as far as possible, without losing sight of the juridical and informal social justice impositions of accountability. Balancing rehabilitation and reintegration of family units with imperatives of retributive justice, although potentially challenging, can provide a familiar psychosocial reference that helps in the transition back into the community.

Rehabilitation and reintegration is a two-way process: it needs to engage both deserters and communities

Rehabilitation and reintegration in an environment of violent extremism ought to show community sensitivity, flexibility and adaptability to changing contexts.[53] It is important to centralise the agency of reintegrating communities and the contextual factors that shape their desire and capacity to facilitate or resist reintegration.[54] Internally and externally displaced communities coexist with settled and transhumant communities in the complex social configuration of the lake region. Adding to this the complex dynamics of violent extremism necessitates approaches to DDDR that address community vulnerabilities and build upon foundations of community resilience. This is especially important, as these communities would be expected to reintegrate deserters. Such an approach could help reduce the stigma attached to deserters and their families, and facilitate their reintegration.

The challenges of DDRR

Developing DDDR programmes during the ongoing process of interim stabilisation in the Lake Chad Basin area is bound to face a number of challenges:

- Resources: Substantial financial and capacity resources are needed to make sure that DDRR is well implemented in both the military and civilian sectors.[55] Given that even humanitarian agencies are having difficulty meeting funding requirements,[56] it remains to be seen how the countries in the Lake Chad Basin area

will martial the resources needed specifically for DDDR for Boko Haram deserters.

- Coordination and collaboration: The area's geostrategic position, which includes four adjacent countries and two African regions, is a gift to violent-extremist groups that take advantage of the numerous borders. Meanwhile, for the centralised bureaucracies of the four countries, it is a curse. While the MNJTF has fostered military collaboration between these countries, non-state humanitarian and development actors that work on DDR issues would have to adapt to individual state requirements while programming for cross-border challenges, especially the potential for reprisals from Boko Haram.

- Suspicion: While all the countries in the lake area show common purpose in wishing to eliminate the threat posed by Boko Haram, the deployment of national defence forces for cross-border raids poses both justice and accountability challenges while processing deserters is ongoing. This stokes suspicion not only between communities and their states, but also between some of the countries in the region.[57]

- Boko Haram's adaptability and the prevalence of structural vulnerabilities mean that the threat of violent-extremist attacks persists, even as DDR processes are put in place.

Conclusion and recommendations

Desertion, de-incentivisation, rehabilitation and reintegration of Boko Haram deserters are essential interventions in the security–development nexus as operations against the violent-extremist group move into the interim stabilisation phase.

However, to bolster the conceptualisation, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of integrated DDR programmes in the Lake Chad Basin area, the abovementioned challenges ought to be taken seriously.

- Conceptually, there is a need for further research on the phenomenon of desertion based on the life histories of the deserters. A better understanding of desertion push factors would contribute to refining DDR programming as security operations also progress beyond interim stabilisation.

- Regionally, the Lake Chad Basin Commission should take the lead by providing strategic counsel and support to governments on issues of desertion, de-incentivisation, rehabilitation and reintegration, given their institutional and programmatic position in the area.

- The MNJTF should start restructuring to raise its civil–military affairs profile by providing guidelines for the interaction between communities, military personnel and other police and gendarme institutions in regard to protecting communities. This should be accompanied by rebuilding the relationship between communities and state security institutions.

- Programmatically, clarifying eligibility criteria and categorising deserters at the regional level would provide the framework for nationally designed DDR programmes. Meanwhile, these programmes should be context-specific while remaining adaptable and integrative, and avoid becoming bogged down in bureaucratic mazes.

- The states in the Lake Chad Basin area should show the political will to own and manage DDR programming, thereby determining the type of assistance they might need from the international community to actually put these programmes in place.

Notes

1. 'Waves' of desertion cannot be overemphasized, although the numbers remain fuzzy, as Vanda Felbab-Brown argues in Under the hot Sahel sun: 'Post'-Boko Haram challenges in Niger and Nigeria. See Brookings Order from Chaos blog, 8 September 2017, https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2017/06/08/under-the-hot-sahel-sun-post-boko-haram-challenges-in-niger-and-nigeria/. It is also impossible to gauge the implications of such desertion on Boko Haram's battlefield capacity.

2. The MNJTF, a collective security arrangement, comprises military units from Nigeria, Niger, Cameroon and Chad (the countries that border on the Lake Chad area) plus Benin. W Assanvo, EJ Abatan and WA Sawadogo, Assessing the Multinational Joint Task Force against Boko Haram, ISS West Africa Report, Issue 19, 2016, https://issafrica.org/research/west-africa-report/assessing-the-multinational-joint-task-force-against-boko-haram.

3. V Felbab-Brown, Under the hot Sahel sun: 'Post'-Boko Haram challenges in Niger and Nigeria, Brookings Order from Chaos blog, 8 September 2017, https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2017/06/08/under-the-hot-sahel-sun-post-boko-haram-challenges-in-niger-and-nigeria.

4. Interview, 9 October 2017, MNJTF Headquarters in N'djamena.

5. OS Mahmood, More than propaganda: A review of Boko Haram's public messages, ISS West Africa Report 20, 2017; M Ewi and U Salifu, Money talks: A key reason youths join Boko Haram, ISS Policy Brief 98, 2017; see also W Assanvo, EJ Abatan and WA Sawadogo, Assessing the Multinational Joint Task Force against Boko Haram, ISS West Africa Report, Issue 19, 2016, https://issafrica.org/research/west-africa-report/assessing-the-multinational-joint-task-force-against-boko-haram.

6. This reflects the vision expressed by the African Union in its Progress and practice brief: A review of the African Union Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) Capacity Programme (2013–2015), http://ddr.peaceau.org/uploads/final-ddr-progress-practice-brief-may-2016.pdf.

7. ECOWAS is the Economic Community of West African States, to which Niger and Nigeria, two countries of the Lake Chad Basin area, belong.

8. ECCAS is the Economic Community of Central African States, to which Cameroon and Chad, two countries of the Lake Chad Basin area, belong.

9. Interview at the Lake Chad Basin Commission, 10 October 2017.

10. Africa supraregional: Adaptation to climate change in the Lake Chad Basin: A climate change study jointly published by GiZ and the Lake Chad Basin Commission, 2014, https://www.giz.de/en/downloads/giz2015-en-climate-change-study-africa-supraregional.pdf.

11. Lake Chad Basin: Crisis overview (as of 06 June 2017) United Nations Office for the coordination of Humanitarian Affairs , https://data2.unhcr.org/es/documents/download/57549

12. Interview, 12 October 2017.

13. W Assanvo, EJ Abatan and WA Sawadogo, Assessing the Multinational Joint Task Force against Boko Haram, ISS West Africa Report, Issue 19, 2016, https://issafrica.org/research/west-africa-report/assessing-the-multinational-joint-task-force-against-boko-haram.

14. African Union Peace and Security Council communiqué [PSC/AHG/COMM. 2(CDLXXXIV)] of 29 January 2015.

15. Watchmen of Lake Chad: Vigilante groups fighting Boko Haram, International Crisis Group, Africa report No 244, 23 February 2017, https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/west-africa/nigeria/244-watchmen-lake-chad-vigilante-groups-fighting-boko-haram.

16   *Cameroun: Les 'groupes d'auto-defense' face à Boko Haram*, SlateAfrique, I November 2017, http://www.slateafrique.com/723602/cameroun-les-groupes-dauto-defense-face.

17   Interview with historian from Lac region, Chad, 18 October 2017.

18   Interview with MNJTF deputy force commander, 17 October 2017.

19   African Union Peace and Security Council press statement [PSC/PR/BR.(DCLXXX)], 18 April 2017.

20   Coletta argues that interim stabilization measures focus less on engineering sociopolitical change and winning the hearts and minds of populations than on providing former combatants with an unambiguous 'peace dividend'. See NJ Coletta, Interim stabilisation in fragile security situations, *Stability*, 1:1, 2012, 45–51, DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.5334.

21   NJ Coletta, JS Schjoelein and H Berts, Interim stabilisation: Balancing security and development in post-conflict peacebuilding, Folke Bernadotte Academy, 2015, http://lekiworld.com/AU/docs/156.pdf.

22   Interview with official of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 12 October 2017.

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24   Ibid.

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30   Lake Chad Basin: Crisis overview (as of 18 September 2017), UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, information note, 18 September 2017, https://reliefweb.int/report/nigeria/lake-chad-basin-crisis-overview-18-september-2017.

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32   Interview, N'Djamena, 17 October 2017.

33   Interview, N'Djamena, 11 October 2017.

34   L Caramel, *Au Tchad, dans le village des repentis de Boko Haram, Le Monde*, 1 June 2017, https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2017/06/01/au-tchad-dans-le-village-des-repentis-de-boko-haram_5137023_3212.html.

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36   Interview, N'Djamena, 12 October 2017.

37   Interview, N'Djamena, 11 October 2017.

38   Interview, N'Djamena, 12 October 2017.

39   Interview, N'Djamena, 9 October 2017.

40   Interview, N'Djamena, 20 October 2017.

41   Ibid.

42   Disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration: Regional strategy supporting the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) in stabilising areas affected by Boko Haram, Annex C to the concept note on the Regional Stabilisation Conference.

43   Ibid 34.

44   Interview, 20 October 2017.

45   Ibid.

46   Interview, 16 October 2017.

47   Interview, N'Djamena, 14 October 2017.

48   Interview, N'Djamena, 11 October 2017.

49   Interview, N'Djamena, 14 October 2017.

50   Interview, 14 October 2017.

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52   Interview, 14 October 2017.

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55   Interview, 12 October2017.

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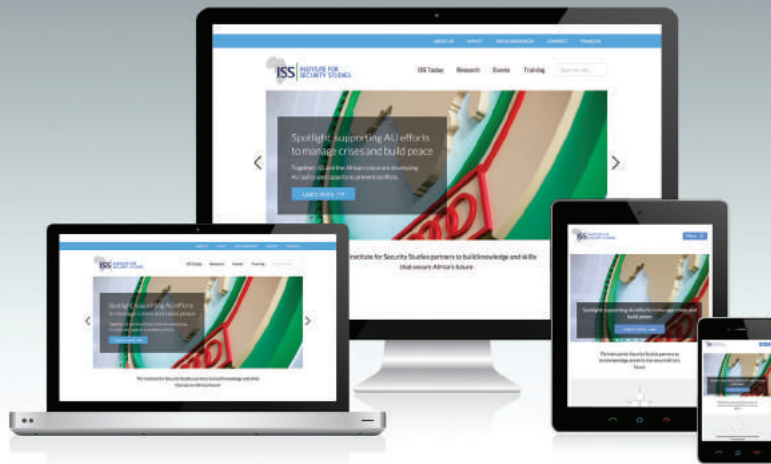
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