



NIGERIA NORTHEAST CONNECTION QUARTERLY CONFLICT ANALYSIS (FY22 Q1)

Borno, Yobe, Adamawa States

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

ACLED	The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project
BAY	Borno, Adamawa, Yobe States
BH	Boko Haram
BH-ISWAP	Boko Haram-Islamic State West Africa Province
CJTF	Civilian Joint Task Force
CVE	Counting Violent Extremism
DDRR	Demobilization, Disassociation, Reintegration and Reconciliation
ECOMOG	Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group
EDF	European Development Fund
EU	European Union
FDG	Focus group discussion
GON	Government of Nigeria
ICRS	Information, Counselling, and Referral Services
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
IED	Improvised Explosive Device
IOM	International Office for Migration
IP	Integrated Programs
ISWAP	Islamic State in West Africa Province
KII	Key informant interviews
LGA	Local Government Area
NGO	Nongovernmental Organization
NOA	National Orientation Agency
NSAG	Non-State Armed Group
OPSC	Operation Safe Corridor
ORB	Opinion Research Business International
OTI	Office of Transition Initiatives
RUGA	Rural Grazing Area Plan
SCRIP	Social Cohesion and Reconciliation Platforms
SEMA	State Emergency Management Agency
UNICEF	United Nation's Children Fund
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
VEO	Violent Extremist Organization

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In April 2021, Opinion Research Business International (ORB) was commissioned to conduct a sectoral conflict analysis of the Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe (BAY) states of Northeastern Nigeria as a continuance of previous desk reporting in February 2021. ORB submitted a follow-up report in July 2021 specifically on the relationships between host communities, internally displaced persons (IDPs), and humanitarian integrated programs (IPs) in the BAY states. An additional report in October 2021 explored farmer and herder conflicts in Adamawa, the impact of Islamic State West African Province's (ISWAP) expansion in Borno, and ethnic conflicts in Yobe. This report focuses on three themes, one specific to each of the states surveyed, including: reintegration of former Boko Haram (BH) and other non-state armed group actors into host communities in Borno; impacts of the Shila Boys in Adamawa; and the perspectives of Fulani herders in Yobe.

In Borno State, the FY22 Q1 Conflict Analysis aims to assess experience and attitudes towards the reintegration of former BH and other Non-State Armed Group (NSAG) associates into host communities. As defection continues to rise in Nigeria, concerns about the future of reintegration have become increasingly salient. Government-run programs such as Operation Safe Corridor (OPSC) were created to support defectors of NSAG through demobilization, disassociation, reintegration, and reconciliation (DDRR), and considerable advances have been documented since OPSC's inception. USAID-funded research has highlighted a number of programmatic achievements, including improved community perceptions of former associates in host communities, very low rates of documented recidivism, and relatively humane treatment of program beneficiaries in military-run transition centers which correlates with successful reintegration outcomes upon graduation.¹ Nevertheless, the DDRR process remains controversial; OPSC has come under criticism for alleged human rights violations in government-run facilities, material deficits, prolonged rehabilitation timeline, and use of unsafe materials in vocational training activities.² Furthering obstacles to reintegration, quantitative data from ORB's Northeast Nigeria Year 1 Quarter 3 report shows that a majority of residents in NE Connection's local government areas (LGA) of intervention areas are "not at all" in favor of reintegration.³ To assess stakeholder experiences and community attitudes, ORB conducted 34 key informant interviews (KIIs) and 26 focus group discussions (FGDs) with DDRR stakeholders. Qualitative data sources were triangulated with ORB International's survey data collected in Borno State in October 2020 under a separate study commissioned by USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) via Creative Associates for an external evaluation of OPSC's reintegration outcomes.

In FY22 Q1, our research in Adamawa state focuses on how local communities are interpreting the ongoing threat posed to them by the Shila Boys, one of the most notorious criminal gangs currently operating in the state. With an estimated 70 percent of youth in Adamawa unable to secure gainful

¹ "Demobilization, Disassociation, Reintegration, and Reconciliation (DDRR) in Northeast Nigeria: Public Report," USAID's Bureau for Conflict Prevention and Stabilization (CPS) Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) in partnership with Creative Associates. Accessed December 9, 2021, pp. 16-17.

² "We Dried our Tears": Addressing the toll on children of Northeast Nigeria's Conflict," Amnesty International. Index no. AFR 44/2322/2020, May 27, 2020.

³ Variances in data is related to the nature of the samples. Exposure to pro-DDRR messaging varies widely in program and non-program communities (which we observed by comparing treatment and control groups in the 2020 dataset) and by state. The Year 1 Q3 report figures were collected in NE Connection LGAs where concentration of DDRR programming was generally limited at the time of data collection (with the exception of Maiduguri). This includes LGAs in Adamawa and Yobe (Mubi North, South, Damaturu, Demsa, and Potiskum) as well as Biu and Maiduguri in Borno State. Data collection for the 2020 Public Report was carried out exclusively in Borno and split between program and non-program communities.

employment, many youth in the state are now involved, voluntarily or involuntarily, in criminal gangs such as the Shila Boys.⁴ Although the Shila Boys engage primarily in acts of petty theft, locals are shocked by the ease at which the Shila Boys escalate the violence and commit more serious acts such as kidnapping, murder, mutilation, and rape—acts often associated with the region’s VEOs.⁵ To further examine the Shila Boys’ impact on their communities and explore possible connections with extremist organizations, ORB conducted 6 KIIs divided between community and security leaders and 6 FGDs with young adult males aged between 15 and 20 in Adamawa.

In Yobe State, the FY22 QI Conflict Analysis explored perceptions and experiences of Fulani herders in the state. The Fulani generally have a tense relationship with farming communities in Yobe State. In recent years, Fulani herders have carried out violent attacks against farming communities in the state, as well as school kidnappings. Current research in the academic community is divided over the intent behind these attacks and is also missing the perspectives of the Fulani. As many Fulani herders integrate into communities across Yobe, our research explored how Fulani herders, integrated Fulani, and farmers of other ethnicities interact with and perceive one another and what conflicts and challenges they experience. In total, ORB conducted eight KIIs with religious and community leaders, and 12 FGDs with Fulani herders, integrated Fulani, and farmers of other ethnicities in Yobe.

⁴ Owonikoko, Shaheed Babajide. “Beyond Proscription: Rethinking Government Response to ‘Yan Shilla’ Gang Violence in Yola Metropolis of Adamawa State, Nigeria”. *NUST Journal of International Peace & Stability*. 2020.

⁵ Possible VEOs commonly associated with such acts include, but are not limited to, BH and Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), and Ansarul Muslimina Fi Biladis Sudan (Vanguard for the protection of Muslims in Black Africa) (Ansaru).

FY22 Q1 CONFLICT ANALYSIS TAKEAWAYS

BORNO STATE

Major successes revealed through triangulation of data sources include successful socio-economic and psychosocial reintegration outcomes for some beneficiaries, involvement of community-based stakeholders in the reintegration process, leveraging of community leaders as advocates for forgiveness, and effective sensitization efforts. Notable shortcomings include material and logistical deficits in OPSC facilities, difficulties reaching persons with disabilities, and persistent rejection of the DDDR process in Biu LGA communities. Complementary findings featured in the *USAID DDDR Public Report (2020)* that appear in the FY21 Q4 research and are relevant to NE Connection's programming include successes (ample political will among GON officials and a shift towards a human-centered approach to DDDR) as well as shortcomings (lack of opportunities for women to engage in the process, both as OPSC enrollees and at the community level).

Reintegration communities—especially those in Biu LGA—continue to express concerns over DDDR despite reported programmatic achievements. Among these, we note that sentiments of unfairness prevail in areas underserved by the government of Nigeria, there is remaining hostility stemming from the gravity of atrocities committed by BH, and communities are skeptical about the effectiveness of rehabilitation.

The risk of recidivism is unanimously recognized as the main security threat relating to reintegration. Fears of repeat offenders inform community attitudes, give rise to conflict, and worry security sector personnel. Survey data shows that, while many former associates continue to live productive lives years after their reintegration, socio-economic benefits appear to wane as time passes.

A majority of the stakeholders interviewed believe that former BH leader Abubakar Shekau's death has facilitated the government-led rehabilitation process and encouraged defection. However, there is little evidence that the same positive impact has been observed in reintegration communities. In Biu LGA, a zone not yet reached by extensive messaging and outreach campaigns, rejection of DDDR remains prevalent. Specific communities in question include Biu Dam, Jugwal, Garbula, and Galdimare.

ADAMAWA STATE

Respondents in Adamawa continue to report ongoing Shila Boys activity in Demsa, Mubi North, and Mubi South. The most prevalent crimes associated with the Shila Boys, according to the respondents, continues to be the theft of cell phones. The youth respondents believe that the Shila Boys prefer to target victims commuting on roads outside of urban areas rather than their previous tactic of targeting victims at the entrance of local markets. All respondents, however, acknowledge that the Shila Boys continue to terrorize their communities by also committing more severe crimes. Respondents have an overwhelmingly negative view of the Shila Boys. However, the respondents believe young males are susceptible to the group's recruitment efforts due to the lack of local employment opportunities. The respondents do, however, express doubt that BH and the Shila Boys share any tangible connections or that BH recruits directly from the Shila Boys.

YOBE STATE

Respondents in Yobe describe a disconnect between how Fulani herders are perceived within their communities versus how they are perceived throughout the rest of Nigeria. While many Fulani herders have successfully integrated into communities in Yobe in recent years, throughout the rest of the country, Fulani continue to be viewed as violent and uncivilized. Negative depictions of Fulani on the radio and on social media exacerbate these perceptions. Respondents also describe how negative perceptions of Fulani are often generational and not as prominent among youth in the region. Conflicts between farmers and herders persist in Yobe. However, many respondents describe productive agreements that have been made between farmers and herders to share and manage herding and farming land. Access to public services in Yobe is varied across communities, and Fulani herders are least likely to report having access to services such as electricity, drinking water, public schooling, and hospitals.

CONFLICT PATERNS

2021 saw an overall decrease in the number of violent events. According to Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), the organization identified a total of 504 conflict-related events in the BAY states in 2021, with 416 of the events located in Borno State, 59 in Yobe State, and 29 in Adamawa state. This amounts to a 29% decrease from 2020 in reported conflict-related events. Most of the events in FY22 Q1 resulting in fatalities were reported as armed clashes, with the majority occurring between ISWAP and the Nigerian Armed Forces. In October 2021, two separate ISWAP roadside IED attacks on Nigerian military convoys led to the deaths of twenty soldiers. In part, events like these may account for an increase in respondents reporting that they are not willing to accept DDRR reintegrees. This is also consistent with the *2020 USAID DDRR Report* highlighting that increased degradation of BH-ISWAP will increase defections, placing further stressors on the DDRR process.

The decrease of conflict-related events mirrors the overall decrease in the number of conflict-related deaths in the BAY states. In 2021, ACLED reported a 15% decrease in conflict-related deaths in 2021 in comparison to the previous year, with a total of 2,938 conflict-related fatalities reported in 2021. This marks a positive trend for the northeast of the country. In the final quarter of 2021, there were a total of 480 conflict-related deaths in the BAY states.

Figure 1. Violent Events in BAY States, ACLED

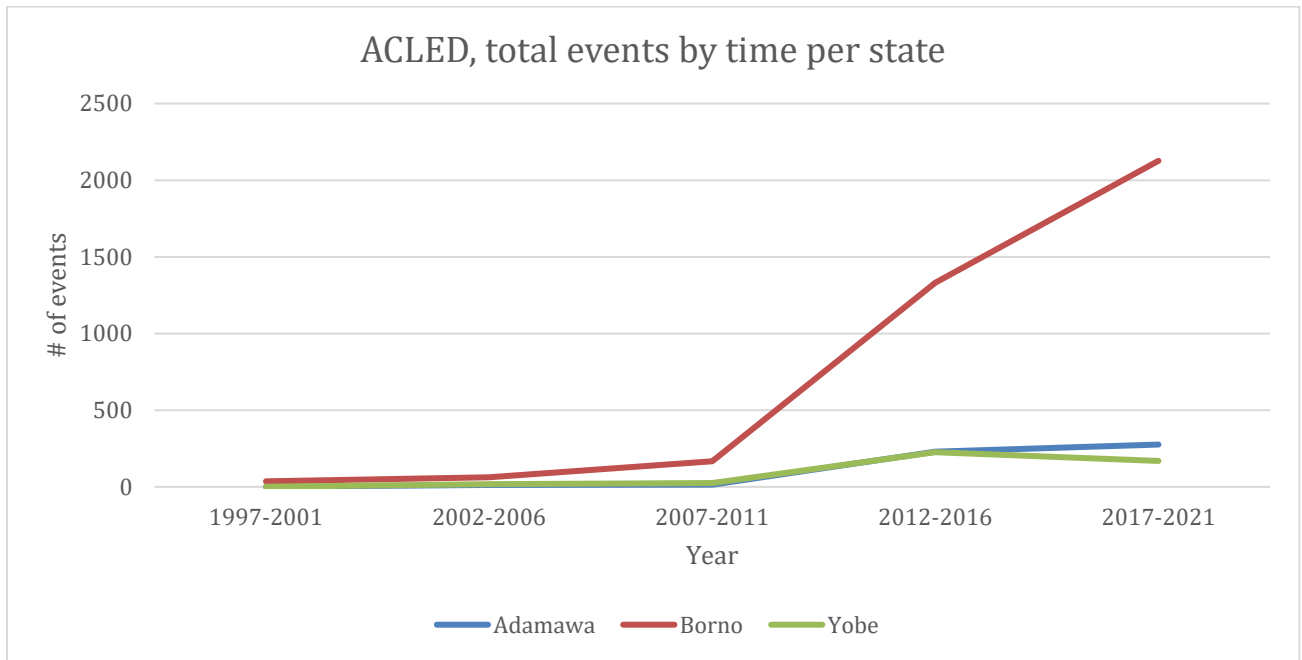
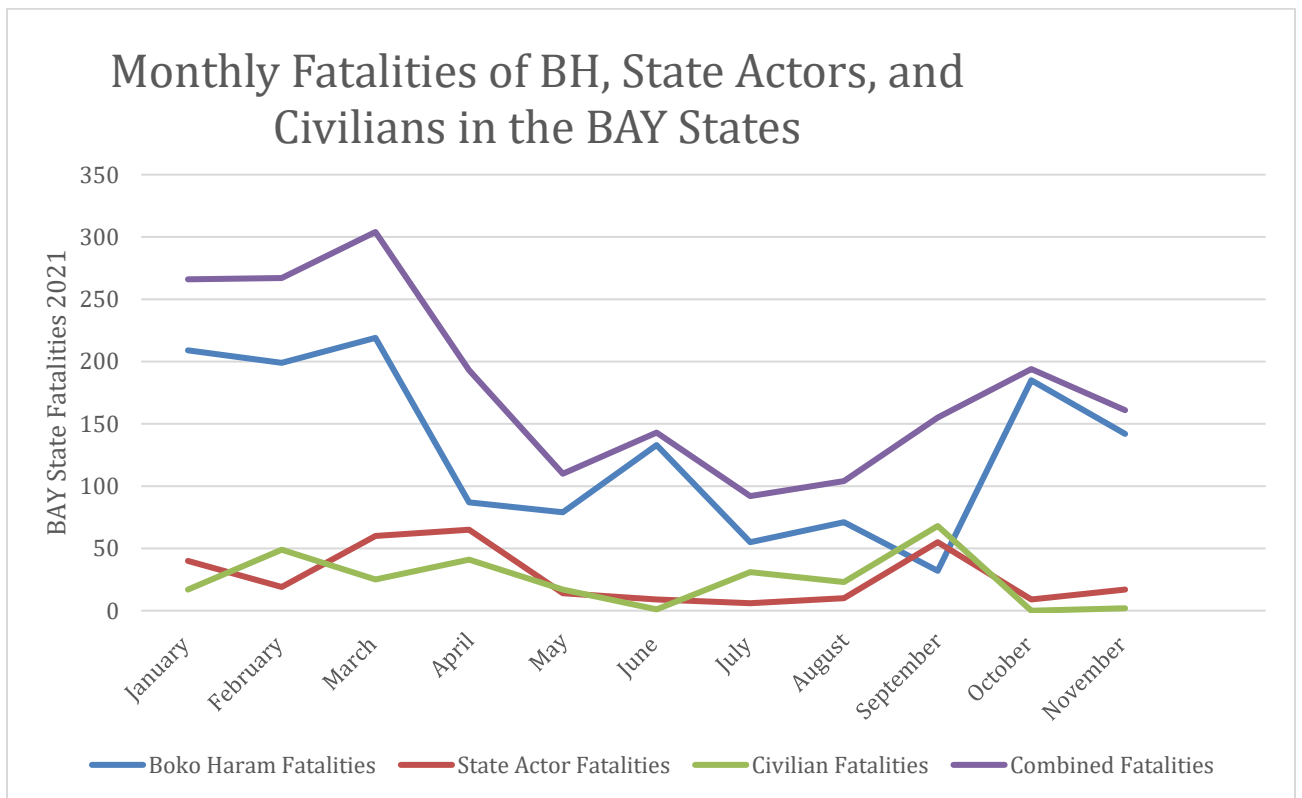


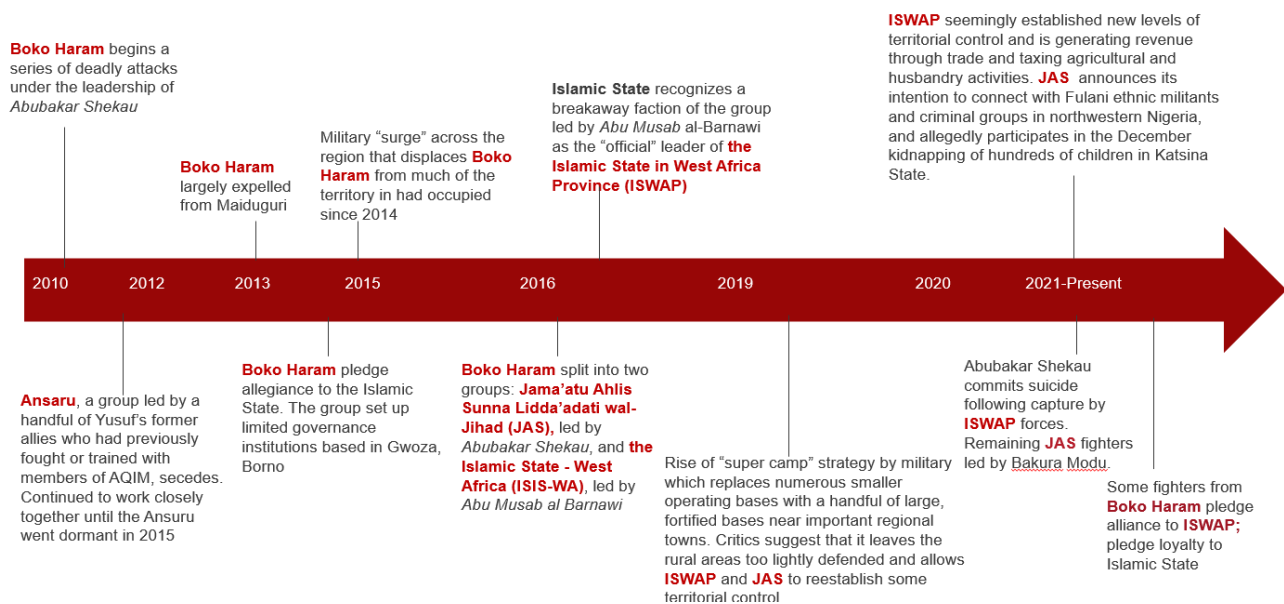
Figure 2. Nigeria Conflict Tracker, Monthly Death Count by Victim-type



From late September 2021 to present, ORB has been collecting and reviewing Nigerian media for events related to conflict and VEO activity in Adamawa, Borno, and Yobe States.⁶ Of the 22 reports collected, it appears a disproportionate amount of VEO activity occurs in the state of Borno (16 events reported) as compared to Yobe (4 events reported) and Adamawa, where there was no VEO activity reported. Many reports of VEO activity were attempts by either BHBH or ISWAP to gain territory that was not controlled by the Nigerian military. There was a relatively even split of these events between Borno and Yobe, and between the two VEOs. Along with territorial control, there were many reports describing violence against the military by VEOs, all in Borno State. These events could also contribute to respondents reporting an unwillingness to accept DDR reintegrees, which is consistent with findings from the *2020 USAID DDR Report*.

Other notable types of violence by VEOs were abductions (of civilians), destruction of property (both civilian and military), and stealing/looting. With regards to general conflict, ORB found no articles relating to political, ethnic, or religious violence, however, there were two events recorded of farmer-herder conflict occurring in Adamawa. These two examples of clashes between farmers and herders were the only reports of general conflict found this quarter.

Figure 3. BH Timeline



⁶ It is important to note that media reports are not a perfect reflection of conflict or VEO activity in any region, as some events may go unreported, or are misconstrued. However, they are helpful in gaining a general understanding of the current conflict climate within these states.

Figure 4. Map of KII Locations FY22 Q1

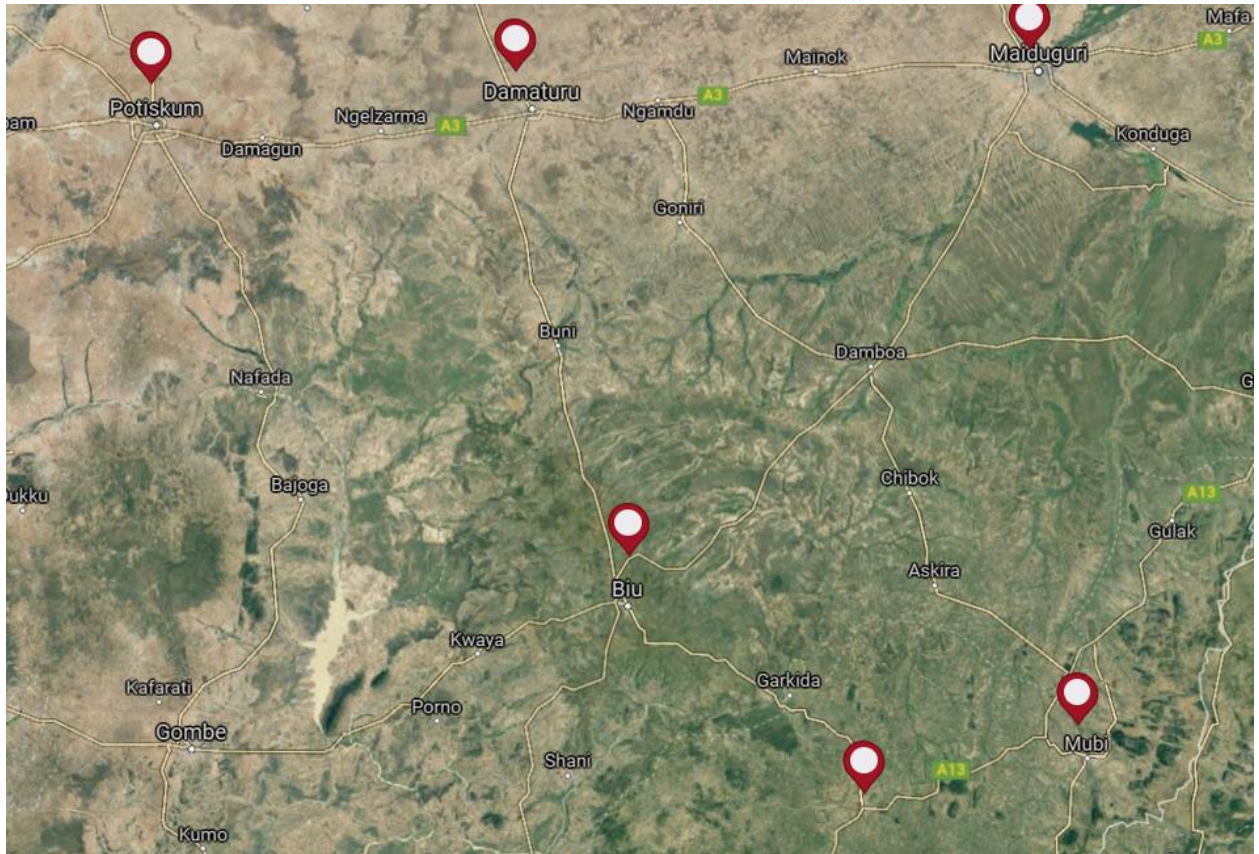


Table I. Nigeria Media Tracker

Category	Type of Event	Adamawa	Borno	Yobe	Total
Conflict	Ethnic	0	0	0	0
	Farmer-Herder	2	0	0	2
	Political	0	0	0	0
	Religious	0	0	0	0
	Total New Conflict Media Reports	2	0	0	2
VEO	Abductions - aid workers	0	0	0	0
	Abductions – children	0	0	0	0
	Abductions - other civilians	0	2	0	2
	Destruction of education centers/ School attacks	0	0	0	0
	Destruction of electrical grid	0	0	0	0
	Destruction of property - against civilians	0	2	0	2
	Destruction of property - against military	0	1	1	2
	Stealing/Looting	0	2	1	3
	Suicide bombers – female	0	0	0	0
	Suicide bombers – male	0	0	0	0
	Territory control - Military property	0	0	0	0
	Territory control - non-military	0	3	2	5
	VEO Influence /Tactics	0	0	0	0
	Violence against civilians – farmers	0	0	0	0
	Violence against civilians - local leaders	0	0	0	0
	Violence against civilians - mass killings	0	0	0	0
	Violence against civilians – other	0	0	0	0
	Violence against civilians - religious leaders	0	0	0	0
	Violence against military	0	6	0	6
	Total New VEO Media Reports	0	16	4	20
Total		2	16	4	22

BORNO: EXPERIENCES WITH AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS DDDR

INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

In light of the recent rise in defections from NSAG and VEOs in Northeast Nigeria, this quarter's Conflict Analysis for Borno State focuses on attitudes towards and experiences with the government-run DDDR process. The objectives of this component of FY22 QI research are as follows:

1. *Determine successes and shortcomings in the existing DDDR process*
2. *Learn about community perceptions of former associates and attitudes towards reintegration*
3. *Determine security threats relating to reintegration*
4. *Learn about changes in the reintegration process since the death of Shekau*

OPSC is a rehabilitation program administered by the Government of Nigeria (GON) and supported by the international community. The program aims to establish appropriate off-ramping conditions for former associates to disengage and dissociate from VEOs active in Northeast Nigeria, including BH and ISWAP.⁷ Rehabilitation activities take place in formal establishments run by the GON and supported by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), its donors, and an array of local and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs).⁸ These include a rehabilitation facility for male ex-associates (OPSC Center in Gombe), a transit center in Maiduguri (Shokari Center), and a centre for women and children who were associated with VEOs (Bulumkutu Center).⁹

The GON and its partners support low-risk former associates through the rehabilitation process, and also in their transition to civilian life upon graduation from OPSC. For instance, community-based support systems sponsored by IOM include an extensive array of information, counselling, and referral services (ICRS) that range from livelihood support to mental health and psychosocial services, and beyond.¹⁰ In effect, the 2020 USAID DDR Report commissioned by USAID-OTI highlights a number of programmatic achievements from improved community perceptions of former associates in host communities, to very low rates of documented recidivism, to effective and humane treatment of program beneficiaries in military-run transition centers.¹¹ However, the DDDR process in Northeast Nigeria has created controversy, fueled by denunciation of human rights violations in Giwa Barracks (a military detention center where former associates reside prior to enrollment in OPSC facilities), insufficient food and infrastructure to house enrollees, prolonged duration of stays in transition centers, and unsafe equipment used in vocational training activities.¹² Moreover, at the community level, data from NE Connection's Q3 Community Vulnerability Survey shows that nearly two thirds of residents of project areas in the BAY states (63%) are "not at all in favor" of reintegration of BH associates, with 57% saying that their community members would not at all accept former affiliates even after a rehabilitation program. The 2020 USAID report noted community willingness to accept OPSC reintegratees increased sharply based on knowledge of the program through public information and outreach.

⁷ DDDR Public Report, USAID CPS OTI and Creative Associates, 2020.

⁸ Ibid. pp. 4.

⁹ Ibid, pp. 11-12.

¹⁰ "Gendered Dimensions of Disengagement, Disassociation, Reintegration, and Reconciliation in the Lake Chad Basin Region." International Organization for Migration, 2021.

¹¹ DDDR Public Report, USAID CPS OTI and Creative Associates, 2020, pp. 16-17.

¹² "We Dried our Tears": Addressing the toll on children of Northeast Nigeria's Conflict," Amnesty International. Index no. AFR 44/2322/2020, May 27, 2020.

The stakes are high for the various parties involved in the DDDR process, from international donors and implementing partners to the affected communities of Nigeria’s Northeast. On the one hand, substantial international investments in DDDR are ongoing. The European Development Fund (EDF) has allocated EUR 15 million to continue supporting DDDR programming across the BAY states from November 2019 through November 2022. The large-scale EU Action supports a consortium of actors, including IOM, UNDP, and UNICEF, and largely focuses on facilitating reintegration at the community level. The intervention aims to reduce rejection and stigmatization of low-risk associates, increase community healing and reconciliation and decrease sense of injustice, enhance social cohesion and sustainable alternatives to violence, disarm and demobilize non-state security providers, and strengthen trust between citizens and government.¹³ What is more, the EU is not alone in its continued investment in DDDR. With the financial support of USAID, NE Connection’s proposed Year 2 activities reinforce those of peer donor agencies. In Y2, NE Connection will support the GON in its efforts to address community grievances and, in turn, strengthen the DDDR process in Borno State through dialogue and radio programming (Activity 1.1.C.3 “Work with communities to support reintegration of rehabilitated former terrorists”). These initiatives pave the way for a smoother reintegration experience for stakeholders at all levels—one that may become an increasingly critical priority for the BAY states as defections have proliferated following the death of former leader Abubakar Shekau.¹⁴

The GON coordinates reintegration of OPSC graduates with its international partners across the BAY states, but it can be argued that the DDDR process is most advanced in Borno. LGAs of Borno State such as Maiduguri, Konduga, and Bama have hosted a large number of reintegrees, and state government agencies such as the Borno State Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development (MWASD) have served as committed partners in supporting former associates as well as communities through reintegration.¹⁵

In this section, qualitative data sources collected in FY22 Q1 are triangulated with survey data collected by ORB International in partnership with USAID/OTI and Creative Associates in October 2020. The survey data originally served to evaluate Creative’s technical and material support to the Shokari Transit Center—one of the primary OPSC facilities—located in Maiduguri.¹⁶ The quantitative component consisted of two elements: a Community Survey designed to assess attitudes towards reintegration in Borno State, and a survey with former associates of BHBH and other NSAG that graduated from OPSC (Table 2). *When presenting comparison across groups to analyze survey findings, only statistically significant results are observed, unless otherwise indicated.*

- **Community Survey.** Community survey interviews (n=551) were equally allocated across three host communities identified in consultation with IOM (Maiduguri, Bama, and Konduga)

¹³ “Description of the Action: EU Support for Reconciliation and Reintegration of Former Armed Non-State Combatants and BH Associates (S2R).” European Commission, 11th European Development Fund. Revised September 2019.

¹⁴ Campbell, John. “BH Defections Spike in Nigeria and Cameroon.” Council on Foreign Relations, August 18, 2021; White, Debbie, “BH fighters defect en masse.” *The Times*. September 24, 2021; Samuel, Malik, BH desertions could be the tipping point.” Institute for Security Studies, August 18, 2021.

¹⁵ DDDR Public Report, USAID CPS OTI and Creative Associates, 2020.

¹⁶ Creative Associates and USAID-OTI granted permissions for data sharing between projects and evaluations prior to the drafting of this report. Unless otherwise specified, descriptive statistics presented throughout this section are derived from the same dataset used to draft the DDDR Public Report (USAID CPS OTI and Creative Associates, 2020).

and two non-intervention communities (Mafa and Jere) for comparison. Host communities have received extensive DDDR programming and are established destinations for former VEO associates who graduated from OPSC. Control group communities have not received extensive programming but may have been exposed to messaging about DDDR through radio programs or other media outlets.

- **Reintegrated Former Associates Survey.** A total of 150 interviews were conducted with reintegrated former associates who had graduated from OPSC prior to data collection. The survey instrument for former associates was designed to measure frequency and effectiveness of IOM’s services and to collect information on personal experiences with reintegration. Former associates were randomly sampled based on entries in IOM’s ICRS database. They were located across four LGAs in Borno State (Konduga, Maiduguri, Gwoza, and Bama) and graduated from OPSC in one of the program’s first three cohorts (October 2018, 2019, or 2020).

Table 2. Quantitative Interview Allocation

Type	Community	Target sample size	Achieved sample size
Control	Jere	100	122
Control	Mafa	100	100
Program	Konduga	100	110
Program	Maiduguri	100	107
Program	Bama	100	112
TOTAL: 551			

Building on survey data, FY22 Q1 Conflict Analysis allocates qualitative interviews with DDDR stakeholders to Borno State program LGAs, including Maiduguri and Biu. In total, the research team conducted 28 interviews across six distinct respondent groups, summarized in Table 3.

Table 3. DDDR Stakeholders - Borno State - Qualitative Interview Allocation

State	LGA	KII Security Personnel	KII DDDR Program Staff	KII Community Leaders	KII Religious Leaders	FGD Community Members	KII Reintegrees
Borno	Maiduguri	2	4	2	2	4	4
	Biu	2	0	2	2	4	0
Total		4	4	4	4	8	4

MAIN FINDINGS

OBJECTIVE I: SUCCESSES AND SHORTCOMINGS IN THE EXISTING DDDR PROCESS

Major successes revealed through triangulation of data sources include successful socio-economic and psychosocial reintegration outcomes for some beneficiaries, involvement of community-based stakeholders in the reintegration process, leveraging of community leaders as advocates for forgiveness, and effective sensitization efforts. Notable shortcomings include material and logistical deficits in OPSC facilities, difficulties reaching persons with disabilities, and persistent hostility in certain host communities. Complementary findings featured in the *USAID DDDR Public Report (2020)* that appear in the YI Q3 research and are relevant to NE Connection’s programming include successes (ample political will among GON officials and a shift towards a human-centered approach to DDDR) as well as shortcomings (lack of opportunities for women to engage in the process, both as OPSC enrollees and at the community level).

To assess both strengths and areas for improvement in the existing DDDR process, KII and FGD respondents were asked to describe best practices and challenges encountered based on their observations and experiences with reintegration in Borno State. This section relies heavily on KIIs with DDDR program staff and community-based stakeholders.

SUCCESSSES

REINTEGRATION SUPPORT TO FORMER ASSOCIATES

OPSC’s support of low-risk former associates entails a multipronged curriculum of psychosocial services, religious counseling, livelihood training, and other assistance for those enrolled in government-run facilities. Survey data show that more than nine in ten reintegrated former associates who had passed through the Gombe and/or Shokari centers rank each reintegration service as either “very” or “extremely” helpful in preparing them for a successful transition to civilian life (Figure 5).¹⁷

Qualitative testimonies support that reintegration preparation outcomes have been achieved for many OPSC graduates. Community members in Maiduguri cite the existence of successful businesses run by reintegrees, and anecdotes of healthy working relationships between former associates and community members are not uncommon. While the provision of socio-economic support risks triggering feelings of injustice among communities in financial duress—a point detailed in the following section—others believe vocational training and capacity-building may help reduce the risk of recidivism among reintegrees:

You know idleness is what is causing them to join these groups, but if they are taught good trades/crafts he wouldn’t give any attention to all those things, is that not so? Lack of work to do is what brings about all these vices more than you think. Whoever is doing a business/trade that has to leave in the morning to attend to his business will not get involved with such violent groups. So, those former affiliates that were isolated are being trained, it will give them time to acquire skills and those community members who are angry with them, by the time they come around, their anger may have calmed down. (FGD, Male, Maiduguri, Transcript 25).

¹⁷ Figure 5 presents aggregate statistics on beneficiary perspectives across the first three batches of OPSC cohorts (October 2018, 2019, and 2020). Perceived effectiveness of government-administered DDDR services is remarkably high across the board. Considering the dire socio-economic circumstances of former associates who enroll in OPSC, it stands to reason that any and all assistance would be most welcome, helping explain the positive ratings of support services.

Figure 5. Perceived Effectiveness of Government-Administered DDDR Services

Effectiveness of Government-Administered Services

Rehabilitation and Transit Centers



Percentage reporting extremely/very helpful among those who received each service
 N=97–150; percentages calculated out of totals that include up to 1% DK/Ref.
 Note: Categories with fewer than 10 respondents omitted.

The psychosocial component is another oft-cited area of positive impact. A program staff member observes that counselling effectively prepares former associates for the reality of life upon reintegration. He goes on to suggest that, while their paths may not be easy, patience and peaceful conflict resolution mechanisms such as reporting to community leaders can help deescalate tensions:

“The psychosocial aspect has taught them how to live with members of the community and how to process their anger issues when they get angry, because community members must definitely provoke them.” (Kil, DDDR Program Staff, Maiduguri, Transcript 5)

INVOLVEMENT OF COMMUNITY-BASED STAKEHOLDERS.

Involvement of community-based stakeholders in the reintegration process is often observed as a programmatic strength. IOM has developed community platforms to promote reconciliation, known as Social Cohesion and Reconciliation Platforms (SCRPs). SCRPs are designed to manage dialogue and foster deep listening about issues related to DDDR, which, over time, creates a space where community grievances can be discussed and addressed in a public space. SCRPs are composed of a diverse members, including women, youth, traditional leaders (referred to as Bulama), and religious leaders.

Survey data from affected Borno State LGAs show that several of these community-based stakeholders are among the most influential when it comes to serving as role models for forgiveness, pointing to the

relevance of said platforms in the community context. When asked to state the three most influential community members in promoting forgiveness, community members look towards religious leaders (66% reporting) and government leaders (57%), and—albeit to a lesser extent—towards other groups represented in IOM’s SCRP: male community leaders (28%), youth (26%), and female community leaders (9%) (Figure 6).¹⁸ In this regard, SCRP leverage the perceived influence of established community leaders while creating a platform for traditionally marginalized segments of society, such as women and youth. For NE Connection’s programming purposes, it is important to note that direct family members are also among the most influential champions of forgiveness. About 44% of respondents cited “my mother” when asked whose forgiveness of reintegrees would be most important for influencing whether or not they would forgive reintegrees themselves.¹⁹ This is particularly important as the *2020 USAID DDR Public Report* determined most people go to their mothers when undecided on whether to support reintegration. This indicates mothers are frontline influencers for DDR and should be leveraged for reintegration support.

Program staff attribute programmatic achievements to participatory development practices, such as those adopted through the establishment of SCRP. A field staff member who participated in an IOM-sponsored peacebuilding workshop notes,

Before, communities were not satisfied with the return of ex-combatants, but this has improved. They are satisfied with IOM engaging them in the community reconciliation and visibility. I remember I attended one of their workshops last month in Ayon on peacebuilding and reconciliation and all the people in the community were involved in that workshop. The communities are happy with IOM because they involve them.” (KII, DDDR Program Staff, Maiduguri, Transcript 4).

LEVERAGING OF COMMUNITY LEADERS IN THE DDDR PROCESS

There is a general consensus among KII and FGD respondents that traditional leaders act as community gatekeepers; all activities and decisions related to reintegration must pass through them. As such, their support of the DDDR process is framed as a prerequisite to general acceptance within the community. One community leader states that formal endorsement of DDDR by traditional kings—even more so than the Nigerian government—compelled him to take a public stance and advocate for the acceptance of returnees:

We believe in the traditional chiefs more than the political elected leaders, so whatever our leaders say—particularly the Shehu of Borno—we must accept it. Because when all of this reintegration first started, the Shehu called a meeting of first-class community leaders of which I was fortunate to be part. He told us that we should accept the idea of the government and the NGOs concerning the reintegration process, we in turn told other community leaders. (KII, Community Leader, Maiduguri, Transcript 7)

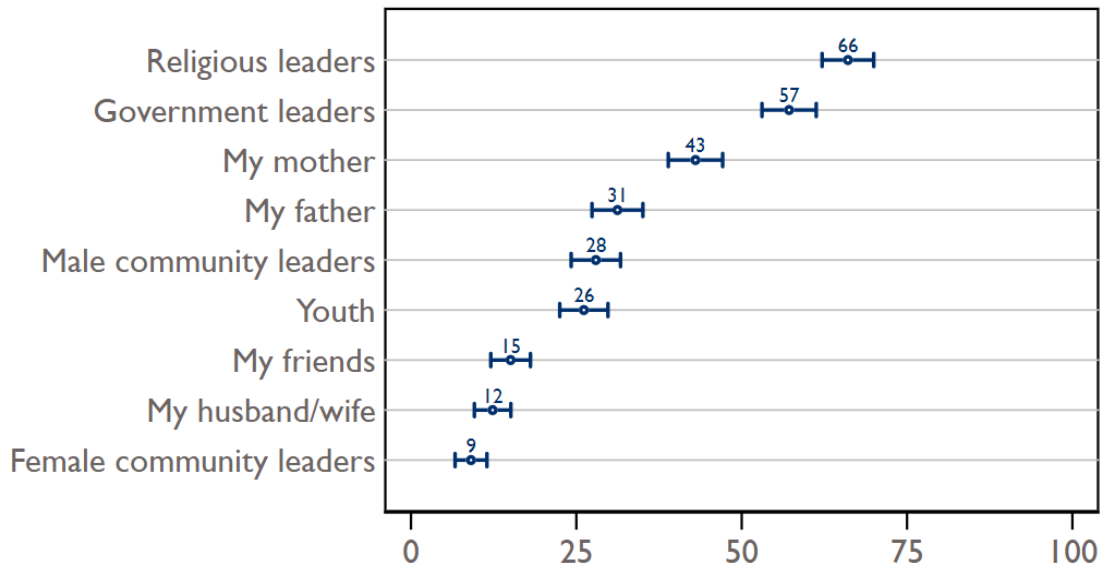
¹⁸ Question 31, Community Survey. “Forgiveness is an important part of reintegration. Thinking about the influence of other community members, whose forgiveness of rehabilitated and deradicalized former associates is most important for you to be able to forgive them yourself? Whose forgiveness is the second most important? What about third?”

¹⁹ DDDR Public Report, USAID CPS OTI and Creative Associates, 2020, pp. 33.

Moreover, community leaders play a mediation role between reintegrated former associates and community members by spreading messages of peace and tolerance. There are several reports of leaders welcoming reintegrees in public or in private settings to mitigate the potential for conflict. An interviewee suggests that direct engagement of this sort helps to ensure the safety and wellbeing of reintegrees while laying the foundations for peace within the community: *“The process will not go well when [former associates] are entering into the village without the knowledge of any community leader or an elder; some people will use the opportunity to hurt them. But when they tell a community leader about it, he will announce to the community, and they will be safe.”* (KII, Community Leader, Maiduguri, Transcript 7)

Figure 6. Influential Figures in Fostering Forgiveness - Community Survey

Champions of Forgiveness Community Survey



Percentage indicating given response
N=551; percentages calculated out of totals that include less than 1% DK/Ref.
Note: Categories with fewer than 10 respondents omitted.

COMMUNITY SENSITIZATION

As implied above, much of the work carried out in reintegrating communities is discursive in nature. Positive messaging about DDDR stems from a variety of sources, from community mobilization officers employed by the Nigerian National Orientation Agency (NOA) to community-based actors and platforms, to radio programs supported by international partners. Sensitization campaigns are largely predicated on the principles of: (1) conflict prevention and resolution; (2) normalization of the presence of reintegrees; (3) assurances of rehabilitation through OPSC; and (4) forgiveness through unity. These principles, according to one traditional leader, are an attempt to combat stigmatization:

I play a lot of roles. I stop people from accusing or insulting the reintegrated people; we educate the people and let them know that the reintegrees are the same as us. We also let them know that since the reintegrees graduated from training, that the training has

changed their character from bad to good. We also preach to the reintegrees to not be ashamed of their past as they are now part of our family and that they should be proud. We try as much as possible to encourage them so that they will not feel stigmatized and then feel like leaving the community. (KII, Community Leader, Maiduguri, Transcript 8.)

Public messaging efforts have a positive impact on fostering acceptance and forgiveness, according to residents of Maiduguri who believe sensitization has contributed to their generally positive experience with reintegration.

Respondent 1. *Before I hated the reintegration process, and I didn't listen to them. But due to the awareness they create I have come to like the program. And I have come to accept them.*

Respondent 2. *If it were before they started the programs that you came here, I don't think that anyone will listen to you here. [...] They will say that there is an ulterior motive you came with into the community. But with the programs and sensitization that organizations and the government are doing now, people in the community now understand that [DDRR] is a good thing. (FGD, Male Community Members, Maiduguri, Transcript 17)*

Anecdotes of successful reintegration in Maiduguri suggest that sensitization is crucial to preparing communities for the arrival of former associates, especially when spearheaded by influential individuals and institutions. Several years of programming have taught important lessons, and stakeholders are enthusiastic to share what they believe has worked well. Some assert that participatory radio panels bolster messaging campaigns as they give community members the opportunity to call in and seek answers to DDRR-related questions. Moreover, radio programs are often seen as one of the best ways for DDRR advocates to reach a wider audience (KII, Community Leader, Maiduguri, Transcript 7). For their part, DDRR program staff argue that messaging campaigns ought to precede the arrival of reintegrees and continue upon their return to promote sustainable peace. (KII, DDRR Program Staff, Maiduguri, Transcript 5). USAID and its partners could effectively expand sensitization efforts with these best practices in mind to reach underserved or isolated communities—in particular, in planned reintegration areas that will host current and future waves of defectors.

Data show that strategic messaging may support defection to the same extent that it encourages acceptance of former associates. Conclusions drawn from the *USAID DDR Public Report (2020)* support that knowledge of the DDRR program is becoming “increasingly influential” as a reason for defection. Interestingly, despite 59% of respondents reporting knowing nothing about OPSC with 86% feeling they have insufficient knowledge of the program, almost two-thirds (64%) were somewhat or very supportive of reintegrees returning to their communities, with 69% ready to accept reintegrees. This indicates that feeling informed is not a necessary condition for community acceptance; however, it increases the

likelihood of support²⁰. Meanwhile, among the former associates who had heard about OPSC prior to their disengagement, 36% said they heard about it on the radio—more than any other source.²¹

SHORTCOMINGS

MATERIAL AND LOGISTICAL CHALLENGES IN OPSC FACILITIES

For the rehabilitation aspect of DDDR, reintegrated former associates cite material and logistical deficits in OPSC facilities as a major challenge. These include but are not limited to reports of prolonged periods in transition centers, isolation from friends and loved ones, and overcrowding due to unexpected delays in implementation.

It is worth noting that OPSC has been operational through the duration of the Covid-19 pandemic, an unforeseen circumstance which disrupted several aspects of the GON's proposed rehabilitation timeline. While family and community visits were a central feature of reintegration preparation for some program enrollees, others faced frustration due to isolation from loved ones. As one graduate recalls, *“they said some things that were untrue, like they said that when we stay for a month more we will go home. And then they delayed us. And when the time came, we were not able to come home”* (Reintegrated Former Associate, Maiduguri, Transcript 13). A peer concurs that lengthy stays in Gombe center were among the most difficult aspects of OPSC: *“The challenge we faced there, was not being able to see our parents, we only saw people we don't know, and we didn't see our parents.”* (Reintegrated Former Associate, Maiduguri, Transcript 14).²² He goes on to explain that isolation paired with inactivity in government-run camps can damage morale, which may contribute to mounting frustration among the perpetually idle: *“Sitting idly sometimes may affect one's brain, you just seat in a particular place, seeing what is coming and what is going. This can kill the morale of the person.”* (Ibid.).

While delays due to unexpected changes—such as COVID-19, or the fragile security situation in Northeast Nigeria more broadly—surpass the international community's locus of control, DDDR program staff note that backlogging of beneficiaries compromises effective and efficient implementation. A staff member explains, *“The shortcoming is coming from the issue of feeding there [in the OPSC facilities]. For instance, now for each room there is 6 or 7 people which is not conducive [to a positive rehabilitation experience].”*

DIFFICULTIES REACHING PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

OPSC's struggles to adequately serve persons with disabilities is a recurrent theme throughout the FY22 QI dataset, stated in both implicit and explicit terms. When asked if vulnerable groups were systematically excluded from DDDR program activities, one staff member affirms, *“Yes. The people with disabilities – they are very important, but they were excluded. There is need for them to be included.”* (Reintegrated Former Associate, Maiduguri, Transcript 14).

²⁰ DDDR Public Report, USAID CPS OTI and Creative Associates, 2020, pp. 26.

²¹ Ibid, pp. 28.

²² Ibid. Reports of prolonged stays in transition centers were also among the most notable shortcomings documented in the USAID DDDR Public Report (pp. 19).

If not accounted for in program design, cognitive, developmental, or physical disabilities may influence the achievement of reintegration outcomes. Video footage of the Gombe center released on *TVC News Nigeria* in March 2020 depicts enrollees suffering from severe physical handicaps, which may have been sustained as captives of BHBH or other non-state armed groups.²³ Considering the most widely discussed socio-economic support services (training in welding, carpentry, and tailoring), it is worth examining if enrollees living with physical disabilities benefit from socio-economic support services to the same extent as their able-bodied counterparts. The same goes for enrollees with comparatively lower levels of education or cognitive capacity. When asked about difficulties in OPSC, a reintegrated former associate explains that some aspects of skills training were not accessible for the average beneficiary:

In the work aspect, among those that were taught to do the work, only a few of them got to do the work effectively. Because some of them did not understand the work they learnt, they did not get anything from there, so that those that understood can put them into practice. It means that they were just going there to pass time and come back. If these people are released, how will they be able to teach another person? (KII, Reintegrated Former Associate, Maiduguri, Transcript 11)

More so, the presence of cognitive or developmental disability may impede the effectiveness of sensitization, literacy, and awareness-oriented activities, all core components of OPSC's rehabilitation curriculum. It is well documented in NE Connection's Y1 quarterly reporting that VEOs in the BAY states target vulnerable populations with little to no formal education. Among these are individuals who may or may not live with undiagnosed learning disabilities, exacerbated by an array of other social challenges. For one program staff member, it is essential to tailor messages of peace in accordance with education level and situation on the ideological spectrum:

The programming that I would change is the issue of religious counseling [...] You have to look at the level of their education and ideology. They adopt certain ideas according to the level of their thinking or ideology or knowledge because, if you give them more than what is above them, they won't understand it. [...] If you consider all these then you can change the subject matter to their level. Maybe they know only one verse in Quran then you can teach them or add another verse in 2 months' time. So, with time they will come to understand it. (KII, DDDR Program Staff, Maiduguri, Transcript 4).

Finally, while not stated in explicit terms, it stands to reason that reintegrees with certain disabilities may face social stigmatization upon their return, making them all the more vulnerable to discrimination and, in the worst cases, aggression. Indeed, USAID and its implementing partners are sensitive to the existence of disabilities among program beneficiaries, reflected in NE Connection's Y1 and Y2 programming. Activity 2.1.B.1. "Actively engage IDPs, persons with disabilities, and cultural minorities to increase social bonds and decreased perceived marginalization" aims to provide safe spaces and empower marginalized groups

²³A March 2020 interview with *TVC News Nigeria* depicts OPSC enrollees in routine activities at Gombe rehabilitation center. One former associate visible in the footage is missing a left hand, a possible sign of mutilation or VEO extortion. 'Operation Safe Corridor is a huge success' – General Bamidele Shafa," *TVC News Nigeria*, March 3, 2020, accessed at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DWiDKrhtRDQ>

to engage in community interventions to combat violent extremism. Rehabilitation and reintegration outcomes can be further advanced by a continued commitment to disability-inclusive development.

PERSISTENT HOSTILITY TOWARDS FORMER ASSOCIATES

By and large, the most notable shortcoming in the DDRR process concerns persistent hostility and rejection of former associates in underserved communities of the BAY states. Nearly all of the qualitative data sources collected reference various manifestations of hostility despite progress made, ranging from perceptions of favoritism to feelings of injustice to skepticism about the effectiveness of the GON's rehabilitation agenda.

Persistent hostility constitutes the greatest threat to programmatic outcomes if left unresolved. Acceptance of ex-combatants has reportedly improved a great deal in the Maiduguri metropolitan area following years of national and international investment in DDRR. However, much work remains to be done in other areas of the BAY states. The following section focuses on barriers to sustainable acceptance and forgiveness.

OBJECTIVE 2: LEARN ABOUT COMMUNITY PERCEPTIONS OF FORMER ASSOCIATES AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS REINTEGRATION

Reintegration communities—especially those in Biu LGA—continue to express concerns over DDRR despite reported programmatic achievements. Among these, we note that sentiments of unfairness prevail in areas underserved by the government of Nigeria; there is remaining hostility stemming from the gravity of atrocities committed by BHBH; and communities are skeptical about the effectiveness of rehabilitation.

Attitudes towards reintegration vary by location, with communities in Maiduguri being far more open to the idea of DDRR than those residing in Biu LGA. In previous sections, we highlight the central role of leaders and institutions on fostering acceptance and forgiveness among communities. In this section, we shift focus to lingering concerns that future programming can address to advance reintegration outcomes in the BAY states.

PREFERENTIAL TREATMENT (GOVERNMENT FAVORITISM)

The most common grievance in host communities is the belief that the government offers preferential treatment to former associates. As detailed above, the GON supports reintegrees from the moment of their enrollment in OPSC through the reintegration process, with international partners such as IOM supporting direct beneficiaries up to years after their rehabilitation. While this continued support has been deemed necessary to mitigate the risk of recidivism among returnees—an issue discussed in the following section—it leads many communities to question the government's intentions.

At its best, DDRR contributes to stabilization of the BAY states; at its worst, the process exacerbates feelings of abandonment and neglect among impoverished communities. Indeed, survey data from 2020 show that 52% of intervention area residents agree with the statement that “DDRR benefits the perpetrators rather than the victims” (Konduga, Maiduguri, and Bama). DDRR program staff interviewed in FY22 Q1 explain that international partners are aware of this concern and have adapted their programming accordingly. For example, vulnerable community members and reintegrees are provided with socio-economic support on a 2:1 ratio; for each start-up kit distributed to former associates, two

are delivered to targeted residents of reintegration areas (KII, DDDR Program Staff, Maiduguri, Transcript 5). However, concerns over inequality and preferential treatment remain common throughout the FY22 Q1 qualitative dataset. This said, it may not address grievances against the government that are projected on OPSC reintegrees.

GRAVITY OF ATROCITIES COMMITTED

The BH crisis has resulted in a monumental loss of life in the BAY states. Community members directly affected by violence and personal loss are among the most resistant to the idea of DDDR. A program staff member summarizes this ubiquitous challenge by stating that:

“It’s not easy seeing someone who killed your father and mother in your presence living in the same community with you, and they are telling you that you have to forgive them. It’s a very difficult task because of that.” (KII, DDDR Program Staff, Maiduguri, Transcript 4).

A female FGD participant from Biu agrees, arguing that:

“Some people lost all their family members and now he is seeing the person who killed the whole of his family, would you ask that person to come and live with the same person that killed his entire family? He will not accept that.” (FGD, Female Community Members, Biu, Transcript 27.)

One of her peers goes on to explain that because *“youths suffered the insurgency more than any other person did”* in terms of recruitment, abduction attempts, and loss of livelihoods, young people may be among the least willing to accept former associates (Ibid.). An FGD with young men in Biu adds nuance to this statement, as one participant explains that victims of abduction and coercion would be welcome in their community, while violent offenders will face perpetual rejection (FGD, Male Community Members, Biu, Transcript 25). In so doing, he forges a distinction between “low-risk” former associates and “high-risk” ex-combatants.

SKEPTICISM ABOUT REHABILITATION OUTCOMES

A final, major barrier to successful reintegration is general skepticism about the sincerity of rehabilitation. Some community members are deeply convinced that rehabilitation for high-risk offenders is not possible.²⁴ A traditional leader from Maiduguri explains how this belief is widespread among his constituents, but the support of Nigerian and international actors has helped change the narrative:

Most people don’t believe that these people are psychologically rehabilitated [...] No, they didn’t accept willingly; it was like a force on them, because the emotional belief is there, the emotional feeling of killing my own brother, killing of my own father, then you will come back to me and say you are being rehabilitated... If not for the government support, the security support, and the international community support we will not accept. (KII, Community Leader, Maiduguri, Transcript 7).

²⁴ This finding is concurrent with the 2020 USAID DDR Public Report, pp. 14, pp. 49.

Assurances of successful rehabilitation are critical to convincing communities that former associates do not pose a major security risk. As a female FGD participant from Biu puts it, the arrival of former associates who had *not* undergone adequate training and rehabilitation “would have been disastrous.” (FGD, Female Community Members, Biu, Transcript 27). In light of recent waves of defection and reports of overcrowding in OPSC facilities, the GON is faced with a dilemma: material realities put pressure on the government to either expedite the rehabilitation process or establish alternative trajectories for reintegration, yet communities insist that sincere and thorough rehabilitation is an essential condition for acceptance and forgiveness.²⁵

OBJECTIVE 3: DETERMINE SECURITY THREATS RELATING TO REINTEGRATION

The risk of recidivism is unanimously recognized as the main security threat to reintegration. Fears of repeat offenders inform community attitudes, give rise to conflict, and worry security sector personnel. Survey data shows that, while many former associates continue to live productive lives years after their reintegration, socio-economic benefits appear to wane as time passes.

The risk of recidivism—i.e., former associates returning to BH/ISWAP or other VEOs after rehabilitation—is widely recognized as a risk factor by interviewed stakeholders and constitutes an important debate in the DDDR process.²⁶

To measure the risk of recidivism among OPSC graduates, reintegrated former associates were asked to indicate whether certain conditions for recidivism prevention have been met.²⁷ Figure 7 depicts the percentage of returnees reporting which conditions have *not* been achieved in their case, a proxy measure for recidivism risk. When disaggregating by cohort, we find that graduates of the 2018 and 2019 OPSC batches struggle to fully mitigate risk factors compared to the Shokari center cohort released in October 2020.

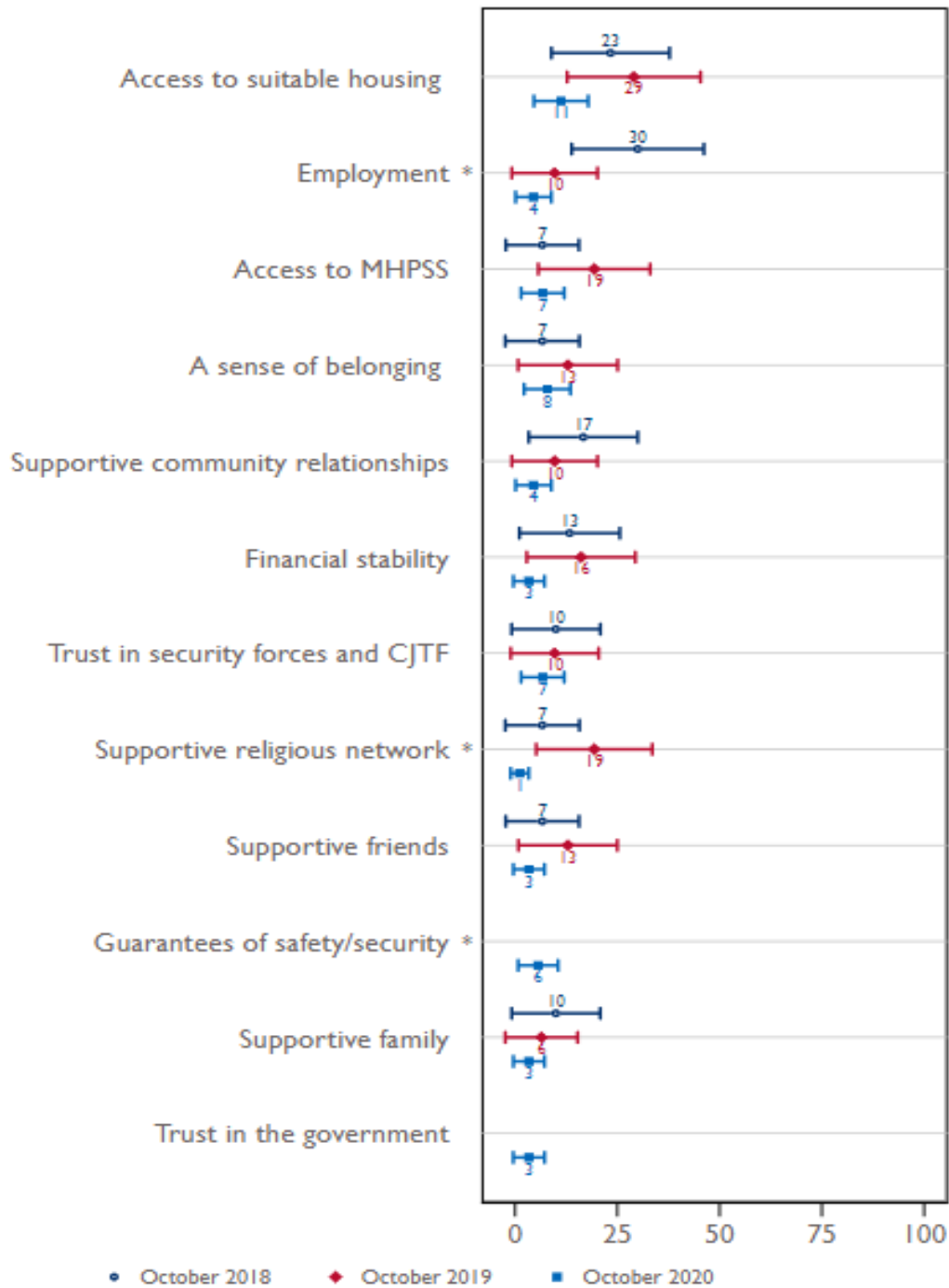
²⁵ This conclusion echos a word of caution noted in the final pages of the DDDR Public Report: “Defections along with the DDDR caseload may dramatically increase. These will further stretch OSC and other actors, while placing even more stress on communities accepting OSC clients. This has the potential to derail initial gains in the DDDR process.”

²⁶ “Disengagement, Disassociation, Reintegration and Reconciliation: Eligibility Conditions and Practices.” International Organization for Migration, 2021. Accessed at: <https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/DDRR-Eligibility-Conditions-and-Practices.pdf>

²⁷ Question 32, Former Associates Survey, “Which of these elements do you think have been achieved in your case? (Read all).”

Figure 7. Risk of Recidivism - Former Associates Survey

Risk of Recidivism
Former Associates Survey



Percentage reporting they have NOT achieved each
N=100-150
** p<0.01, * p<0.05 for equality of means
Note: Categories with fewer than 10 respondents omitted.

The most notable finding concerns the challenge of unsustainable employment. A substantial number (30%) of former associates from the 2018 cohort do not have adequate employment, though this number is much lower for the 2019 cohort (10%) and almost negligible for the 2020 cohort (4%). These figures correlate with lower rates of financial stability for OPSC's earlier graduates. While conditions for successful socio-economic reintegration are being met in most cases, a considerable share of beneficiaries struggle to maintain benefits over time.

By virtually all other measures, graduates of the October 2020 Shokari cohort are faring better than their counterparts who graduated in 2018 and 2019. About one in five reintegrees from the 2018/2019 cohorts have not achieved access to suitable housing, compared to just 11% of the 2020 cohort. Earlier cohorts are also less likely to maintain social and emotional support, including positive relationships with friends and religious networks (Figure 7).

These figures do not suggest that reintegration outcomes are unsustainable, nor do they suggest that OPSC graduates are returning to BH in droves. However, they do validate concerns over recidivism that emerge in skeptical communities, and at least one case of recidivism has been observed in Borno State.²⁸ According to a female community member in Biu LGA, persistent hostility, and lack of productive activities in communities could drive some returnees to reenlist in VEOs:

If they are not welcome and they were left alone without any business or source of income, they will rather prefer to live in the forest where they will have something to live on. They will say, they do not get anything here and the community member dislikes them. Honestly this will make them want to go back to rejoin the group again. (FGD, Female Community Members, Biu, Transcript 27).

Like community leaders, both civilian defense groups and formal security forces play a role in conflict mediation; there are several reports of security officers "keeping the peace" when conflict arises. A security officer stationed in Maiduguri reiterates concerns that distrust over the DDRR process can lead to disgruntled community members who identify as victims of violence and conflict to verbally abuse former associates upon their return. Security forces serve to deescalate tensions in such scenarios , .

There is a big threat; not everyone understands the importance of rehabilitation. You know we are dealing with repentant BH members, most of the ordinary civilians and lay people do not believe in this rehabilitation. There are many threats; some are saying whatever they want, but as a security officer you have to always control yourself and calm people down not to retaliate. FGD, Female Community Members, Maiduguri, Transcript 15).

Indeed, reducing hostility and discrimination towards reintegrated former associates should feature as a critical priority for NE Connection's Y2 program activities. It is unrealistic to expect that all socio-economic outcomes can be sustained over time, especially considering the scarcity of job opportunities in Borno State and the logistical challenge of monitoring OPSC graduates for years upon their return. On the other hand, support to communities, including continuous dialogue and persistent sensitization

²⁸ A traditional leader from Maiduguri tells of his experience with recidivism: "There was even a case that one of the repented happens to be an agent, giving information of the community's up and down to his members in the bush, so when it was discovered the security men came and apprehended him and till date we do not know where he is. So, the fear is there sometimes." (KII, Transcript 7).

campaigns, can work to address the root cause of distrust and intolerance—a major contributing factor to recidivism risk. To illustrate, female focus group participants from Maiduguri explain how inclusive dialogue that brings together security personnel, reintegrees, and community stakeholders have helped bring about peaceful coexistence.

Even the community leader holds dialogue and invites them [returnees] to input their own suggestions, and when youths or vigilantes are discussing about the security of the community they call them, too. You will see them being happy that they were deemed worthy to be part of such and that they are forgiven.

These findings ultimately point to a need for increased investment in reconciliation programming to strengthen the initial reintegration gains made in transition centers and host communities.

OBJECTIVE 4: LEARN ABOUT CHANGES IN THE REINTEGRATION PROCESS SINCE THE DEATH OF SHEKAU

Numerous stakeholders believe that former BH leader Abubakar Shekau's death has facilitated the government-led rehabilitation process and encouraged defection. However, there is little evidence that the same positive impact has been observed in reintegration communities. In Biu LGA, a zone not yet reached by extensive messaging and outreach campaigns, rejection of DDDR is prevalent.

Shekau's death spurred unprecedented waves of defection from BH. There are numerous reports across FY22 Q1 data sources that Shekau's death has encouraged defection, and those familiar with the DDDR process assert that news of the leader's collapse facilitated the process of rehabilitation. According to a program staff member, Shekau's death led many program enrollees to realize that they had been misled by violent extremism ideology:

Yes, the death of Shekau has helped in so many ways. If not for his death, the way they are coming out to surrender [...] they have now come to realize that they were given a wrong ideology. The wrong ideology led them to commit all the dastardly acts. (KII, DDDR Program Staff, Maiduguri, Transcript 3).

A peer familiar with OPSC's religious counseling agenda adds that reports of Shekau's death, while initially contested, rendered many enrollees more open to VEO counternarratives once authorities had confirmed the news. This, in turn, helped foster trust between program staff and former associates..

Rapidly, it has changed because at first, they didn't believe that Shekau is dead. Some of them have given up and they are supporting but some are not because they are not confident in the first place. When we started this religious counseling, many [former] BH [members] calmed down but despite that the rest of them didn't. Then, when they realized that Shakau was truly dead they give in their support and cooperation. [...] First and foremost, it has increased understanding between the ex-convicts and the people working at rehabilitation centers. (KII, DDDR Program Staff, Maiduguri, Transcript 4).

Yet there is little evidence that Shekau's death has had the same positive effect on reintegration, especially among communities that continue to face daily existential threats and lack significant concentration of reintegration activities, such as Biu. Community members, security forces, and local leaders alike contend

that the regional security situation remains dire, and that, while BH may have lost traction, other factions such as ISWAP still constitute serious threats to daily life. Summarizing a common view in the wake of Shekau's death, an FGD participant in Biu states,

My opinion [about reintegration] has not changed, if Shekau has been killed, does he not have a deputy or other leaders who fill his shoes? There are still leaders, and that has not changed anything (FGD, Community Member, Male, Biu).

RECOMMENDATIONS

These findings can be leveraged to contextualize and, in some cases, inform development of reintegration-oriented grants and activities in Y2. Below is a summary of key takeaways:

1. *Continue community engagement.* Direct involvement of key reintegration actors, including religious and government leaders (whom our data suggest are the most influential “champions of reintegration”), community gatekeepers, youth, women, and the security forces, is widely hailed as an effective means to engage communities on decisions related to reintegration. These platforms should be established, expanded, and/or supported in all major host communities. In support of these efforts, research on best practices and scalable strategies for designing and implementing these dialogues should also be considered.
2. *Women—especially mothers—and other immediate family members of affected individuals should be included in reconciliation platforms and reintegration planning.* Mothers are positive influencers in reintegration for OPSC, especially for those ‘undecided’ on whether to support reintegration.
3. *Involve youth in the DDDR process.* Because young people have shown to suffer disproportionately in terms of VEO recruitment, abduction attempts, and loss of livelihoods, it stands to reason that this demographic group may be among the least willing to accept former associates. Reintegration and reconciliation initiatives should strive to target youth for a breadth of relevant activities, such as skills training, livelihood support, peace forums, and reconciliation structures.
4. *Promote community-building through collective projects.* Activities that put willing community members in direct collaboration with former associates may be particularly helpful to promote acceptance and forgiveness (e.g., collective cash-for-work or local infrastructure projects, peace forums, community-wide cultural events, etc.). Such efforts may be more effective at addressing perceived unfairness in resource allocation to former associates than simply promoting existing efforts to balance financial assistance to local residents.
5. *Commitment to OPSC timeline.* Camp officials and administrators are urged to be transparent with beneficiaries about OPSC's timeline to resolve feelings of disappointment or distrust in the event of delays. Moreover, the GON is strongly encouraged to take all measures necessary to avoid excessive or prolonged stays in military-operated compounds.
6. *Tailor programming to physical and cognitive capacities of beneficiaries.* Rehabilitation and reintegration outcomes can be further advanced by a continued commitment to disability-inclusive development, from skills training tailored to individuals with physical disabilities, to tailored educational curriculums for those lacking formal education or living with cognitive disabilities.

7. *Continued support to communities.* Continued humanitarian and socio-economic support to communities may help quell beliefs that DDRR benefits perpetrators rather than victims; especially those where a significant number of returnees have settled. Additional research on the most effective strategies for messaging the impact (or non-impact) of DDR programming on the resources available to local residents in the most impacted communities would also be useful in addressing these beliefs.
8. *Continue providing assurances of rehabilitation.* Assurances of adequate rehabilitation figure among the top conditions for return according to host community residents, yet OPSC facilities are reported to be operating at maximum capacity. The GON is faced with the challenge of accommodating an increasing number of defectors while ensuring that communities feel safe and secure living among former BH and NSAG associates.²⁹ Should the number of defections in the BAY states continue to rise, the establishment of additional OPSC facilities or alternative rehabilitation mechanisms may help resolve this dilemma. In particular, focusing resources on earlier cohorts of former associates, which have generally suffered from greater economic challenges related to obtaining employment and housing, could address issues of system capacity as new defectors enter rehabilitation.
9. *Gender sensitivity.* While this study was not designed to investigate the “gendered” aspects of DDRR, it is well documented that women and girls lack opportunities to engage in the reintegration process at both the community-level and in OPSC facilities. Further efforts can be made to foster inclusion of women in community-based reintegration and reconciliation activities, while formerly associated women ought to be adequately screened to qualify for support services in Bulumkutu rather than directly released into host communities.

²⁹ This recommendation is complemented by one sketched out in the 2020 USAID DDRR Report, which suggests shifting focus from government-led post-reinsertion case management to community-driven support systems as OPSC scales up: “**Develop a model for post community-driven reintegration and reconciliation follow-up:** As DDRR ‘goes to scale’, pre-release resources will be stretched, outstripping the needs for individual case management in post reinsertion phases of reintegration and reconciliation. To address this, communities should be trained to track, monitor, and treat OSC reintegrees.” (pp. 46)

ADAMAWA: SHILA BOYS PERCEPTIONS AND CONCERNS

INTRODUCTION

One consequence of the ongoing conflict, which has subjected the population of Adamawa to periods of insecurity, disrupted schooling—a BH objective—and stymied economic development, has been the creation of an environment in which gangs and criminal networks can operate. There are many of these groups across northern Nigeria, varying widely in their tactics, objectives, and capacity to project insecurity and violence. The Shila Boys are one of the most notorious of these criminal gangs in Adamawa, and they have come up repeatedly in previous quarters as a major local concern in Adamawa. FY22 QI research seeks to understand the perceptions of the group from the local population’s point of vulnerability. To this end, FY22 QI qualitative fieldwork (6 KIs and 6 FGDs) in Adamawa was conducted in the urban area of Demsa, which lies on the Benue River, Mubi North, and Mubi South, near the border with Cameroon.

Adamawa has been badly affected by the BH insurgency and continues to be susceptible to VEO activity, and FY22 QI research suggests that the Shila group is a considerable additional cause of stress and trauma for the local population. Engaging with the Adamawa youth, who are most often the victims and the perpetrators of criminal acts committed by the Shila Boys, is crucial to understanding how networks like the Shila Boys operate, recruit, and their potential for involvement with VEOs.

METHODOLOGY

To investigate the impact of the Shila Boys on the lives of those in Adamawa, we combined several FGDs with young males between the ages of 15-20 and KIs with local leaders, including youth and security leaders.

State	LGA	FGD – 15–20-Year-Old Males (6-8 participants per group)	KII – Community Leaders	KII – Security Leaders
Adamawa	Demsa	2	1	1
	Mubi North	2	1	1
	Mubi South	2	1	1
Total		6	3	3

BACKGROUND

Since 2017, the capital of the Adamawa region of Nigeria, Yola-North and Yola-South, has seen the ascendance of a new criminal group: Yan Shila, or the Shila Boys. Specializing in petty theft (the snatching of cell phones, purses, backpacks, etc.), this criminal gang predominantly made up of young men has sparked public terror. In May of 2019, fear of the group was on the rise, and the governor of Adamawa State, Ahmadu Umaru Fintiri, banned the group and carried out a series of arrests, an act that formally marked Yan Shila as a security threat.³⁰

It is no accident that Yan Shila originated in the low-income areas of Yola-North and Yola-South and

³⁰ Owonikoko, Shaheed Babajide. “Beyond Proscription: Rethinking Government Response to ‘Yan Shilla’ Gang Violence in Yola Metropolis of Adamawa State, Nigeria”. NUST Journal of International Peace & Stability. 2020.

continues to draw its membership from these areas. Nigerian youth, and youth in Adamawa in particular, face an economic crisis. An estimated 70 percent of the youth population of Adamawa who are willing and able to work cannot find suitable employment.³¹ On top of this, the poor of Nigeria are confronted every day with visible reminders of the wealth of a select few. Urban structuring around the country places the luxurious, heavily guarded homes of the wealthy right next to slums and shantytowns. Given the dearth of licit employment opportunities combined with the transparent economic inequality, it is no surprise that so many young people turn to crime to make money.

The lack of schooling resources also contributes to youth gangs like Yan Shila. Nigeria has one of the largest populations of out-of-school children of any country in the world, with an estimated 13.2 million children who do not attend school.³² Adamawa State has one of the highest rates in the country. On top of this, many states have failed to implement Nigeria's Child Rights Act that prohibits using children to panhandle for food or money.

While overall perceptions of the Shila Boys are negative, the perceptions among members who might be more vulnerable to the group's recruitment strategies are more difficult to parse out.³³

ANALYSIS

SHILA BOYS' CURRENT ACTIVITIES IN ADAMAWA

Both FGDs and KIs in Adamawa strongly associate the Shila Boys with petty theft, especially pickpocketing and the theft of cell phones at knifepoint. Additionally, the respondents continue to associate the Shila Boys with more egregious criminal acts that continue to traumatize local communities. Though most accounts of the Shila Boys fit the pattern of behavior associated with the Shila Boys in the media and academic studies, it is nearly impossible to discern between factual events and urban myths. Nonetheless, the accounts remain crucial in understanding how locals come to understand the threat posed by the Shila Boys, even if such accounts are uncorroborated.

Many of the youth respondents acknowledged that the Shila Boys' recently changed their tactics of committing crime to auto-rickshaws (Keke-NAPEP) on the road between urban areas as opposed to their previous method of targeting people leaving local markets. This shift enables the Shila Boys to target victims in areas without the threat of law enforcement. However, aside from the Shila Boys' engaging in petty theft and burglary, all respondents recognize the ease with which the group carries out acts of extreme violence. Of the violent acts described, they involve but are not limited to murder, mutilation, torture, and rape. One of the most frequent descriptions of violent encounters involves the severing of hands, as one respondent illustrates:

They [Shila Boys] have attacked a friend of mine when he was coming from Yola where he went to buy a phone, they even cut off his hands" (FGD, Youth, Male, Demsa).

According to the participants, the Shila Boys resort to acts of brutality when their intended victims fail to

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

concede to their initial demands. According to one respondent:

When they [Shila Boys] see you, they can come brandishing a knife so that you will give them what they are demanding for, and if you don't, they can kill you and do away with your property. (FGD, Youth male, Demsa).

Most respondents claim that Shila Boys tend to target victims indiscriminately, only targeting those believed to have something worth taking. Although cell phones were the item most sought after by Shila Group members, according to most respondents, one youth in Demsa describes how easily one can become a victim of the Shila Boys:

Shila Boys/criminal attacks are indiscriminate. Victims are diverse, men or women. Only thing in common is whether they perceive you as having something worth stealing. Everybody is vulnerable because they target you as soon as they see you holding something, either a nylon bag containing food, phones, handbags etc. (FGD, Youth male, Demsa).

All respondents acknowledge, however, that women and children are particularly affected by the presence of the Shila Boys in Adamawa, describing to the moderator how the Shila Boys engage in sexual violence:

They [the people of Demsa] have witnessed people being robbed of their phones and their motorcycles. Married women and little children are being raped in this area. That is what I have to say (FGD, Youth male, Demsa).

From the accounts provided to the moderator, children were repeatedly the victims of Shila Boys-related crimes. Often, respondents provided details on child kidnapping occurring at school or during school commutes, frequently describing the security provided at the schools as insufficient. The victims are said to have been subjected to sexual violence or held for ransom to elicit payments from their parents, as one respondent testifies:

Sometimes they [Shila Boys] rape the little girls and sometimes even sodomized the little boys. In fact, they are animals. They may even kidnap the children coming back from school to take little change from their parents or even kill the child (FGD, Youth male, Demsa).

Another respondent:

...even in Mubi, I do know of a girl that was abducted from school...it was done by the Shila Boys...She was caught from school, and she was a student also, then they raped her (FGD, Youth Male, Mubi North).

HOW YOUTH, YOUTH LEADERS, AND SECURITY LEADERS PERCEIVE THE SHILA BOYS

Respondents hold overwhelmingly negative views of the Shila Boys. A clear majority of respondents believe that the lack of local employment opportunities and other activities to keep the youth occupied causes young males to be susceptible to the influence of gangs. Such views mirror the way community leaders

have spoken in the past about youth vulnerability to recruitment into violent extremism and points to a widespread belief across the region that youth are especially vulnerable to participation in violence, whether through gang violence or acts of violent extremism.

YOUTH PERCEPTIONS OF THE SHILA BOYS

Youth. In accordance with the views of other KII participants (Community and security leaders), youth perceptions of the Shila Boys are overwhelmingly negative, with most respondents freely sharing their fears and anxieties over the presence of Shila Boys in their area:

They make people walk in fear and not able to sleep at night due to fear (FGD, Youth male, Demsa).

One respondent describes the Shila Boys as “heartless,” citing the group’s capacity to disrupt the livelihood of locals:

[Shila Boys] ...can steal your tricycle (auto-rickshaws) that you use to put food on the table of your family (FGD, Youth male, Demsa).

Despite the youths’ strong disapproval of the Shila Boys, many of the respondents agree with the diagnosis that the group’s emergence is a symptom of the current economic conditions in Adamawa. Many youth describe how challenging it is to gain employment in Adamawa due to the lack of companies offering gainful employment opportunities in the area. In addition, many young adults believe that the job market is unfair, with nepotism and connections the most influential factors in securing employment. In addition, several respondents cite having to pay thousands of naira upfront to secure a position, as one respondent describes:

...it is until you are the son of so and so (has connections) before you get a job, they will tell you that you have to come with some thousands of naira (FGD, Youth male, Demsa).

One respondent states that the employment prospects for the young are so dire in Adamawa that many consider leaving the area to find menial work elsewhere in the country. Those that stay, however, often become “idle.” According to the discussion groups, there is now a generation of “idle youths” in Adamawa, and it is this condition of “idleness” that enables the Shila Boys to recruit new members:

Like they [Shila Boys] come to you and tell you not to be sitting idle. They say they are making money snatching phones and valuables. They even tell you that the guy you see there counting money just made money in the act. They count money in front of you to entice you into the group. (FGD, Youth Male, Mubi South).

One respondent describes how idle youth seeking a higher standard of living in the area are vulnerable to recruitment after seeing Shila Boys’ members in flashy attire or showing off their wealth:

For example, I have some needs that I want to meet but I cannot meet them because of my financial issues, I have no other option and I also want to live a lavish lifestyle like the way he is living. You see, I have to join him. I must associate with him (FGD, Youth male,

Demsa).

Such accounts support one author's view on Shila Boys recruitment in that "party culture" is a strong appeal for potential recruits. It also supports a previous interviewee's thoughts on the subject that mentioned gang members' ability to buy socially desirable displays of wealth, like fancy shoes, as a draw for potential recruits.³⁴

In Q1, using data collected in Adamawa between March 8-April 28, 2021, ORB identified "idle youth" as the most common source of conflict in Mubi North and Mubi South and only two percentage points behind farmer and herder conflicts in Demsa. Although the issue of idle youth decreased in Mubi South and Demsa in subsequent waves, dropping from 71% to 27% in Mubi South and from 64% to 18% in Demsa. The emergence of idle youth as a core theme behind Shila Boys recruitment shows how respondents frequently view this demographic as responsible for their ongoing hardships in Adamawa.

In addition to idleness, many youth acknowledge the role that drugs and alcohol play in influencing individuals to join the group and engage in criminal acts:

When they [Shila Boys] see you sitting idle, they come to you and ask you to follow them, and they tell you when you do you will get a lot of money. And they say you are not supposed to be idle. And when you follow them, you will see that they are the ones snatching phones from people, and they are the ones stealing plenty money from people. And with that they show you money and you now start to follow them also. They also give you drugs to take so you can be high and have the courage to collect money and snatch phones from people (FGD, Youth Male, Mubi South).

One group of youth respondents state that children, especially between the ages of 10-15, are the most vulnerable to Shila Boys recruitment methods. According to one self-declared member of the Shila Boys,

We [Shila Boys] do recruit boys from our streets. Like those who are 10-13 years old on the street. We call them Kwaro and from there we start to give them drugs, and they now start doing what we want them to do for us. Like we always send them to start looking for trouble. And when you react, we all descend on you and collect all what you have (Youth Male, Mubi North).

The youth respondents also express a lack of faith in law enforcement's ability to handle the Shila Boys threat posed to their local communities. Many youths are frustrated by the inability of law enforcement to distinguish between Shila Boys members and non-members. Many young adults also exhibit disillusionment over the many cases where Shila Boys were released back into the community soon after arrest by security officials, as one participant explains:

It is even better to catch a thief and take him to the authorities than to catch a Shila member. Because a thief will be held under custody in cell for some days, but the Shila member will just call his "Oga" (boss), and he will be released immediately, even before

³⁴ Balogun, Paul. "The Causes and Consequences of Yan Shilla's Street Robbery in Adamawa State, Nigeria". Department of Sociology, Federal University Dutse, Jigawa State, Nigeria.

you that handed over him to the police leave the station (FGD, Youth male, Demsa).³⁵

SECURITY AND COMMUNITY LEADERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE SHILA BOYS

The security and community leaders hold overwhelmingly negative views of the Shila Boys and continue to express concerns regarding the gang's ongoing presence in their communities. One community leader, in particular, seemed to confirm many of the perceptions that young adults had towards the group:

They [the youth] view the Shila Boys as people that are spoiling their name. Those in the community are angry with them because they feel their names are being destroyed so, sometimes, if they see them doing this act, they will tell them to desist and some will listen, and some will not listen to them; but they are angry with the act. They are not happy with what they are doing in the community (KII, Community Leader, Mubi North).

Some KIIs suggest that greed is a motivating factor for those who choose to join the Shila Boys. In response to a question asking what type of youths were attracted to the group, a security leader offered the following response:

Those that are greedy. Someone who has money will not put himself in such situation and loose his life. Most of them are the ones that are suffering from poverty. They will just tell them, let's go and do this, since we don't have what to do, we don't have farm to cultivate. Most of them if they are arrested, you ask them what their work is, they will say nothing; what is your father's work, he will say he is a retired civil servant, or my father is a farmer. If you ask them the reason why they join this group, they will tell you that they are looking for means to meet their needs. (KII, Security Leader, Mubi North).

One KII respondent in Mubi North argues that individual members of the Shila Boys, through community-driven efforts involving public outreach, open dialogue, and continued engagement, were prepared to cease criminal activities and rejoin society. According to the respondent, they successfully engaged several members of the Shila Boys as follows:

What we are doing is that we are doing our best to meet them [Shila Boys] wherever they are sitting to tell them that the things they are doing is not good and that we want them to be part of the community. We try to draw their attention, not making them to go and do another bad thing. We'll tell them this you are doing is not the wish of your parents and the community, we are trying our best to see that nothing bad happen to you, let's come together and if God help us and we are able to cooperate, government will help us if we are able to take our needs to them. Let's get something to do, no matter how small, don't despise any little business so, that you will be able to meet your needs. That is our efforts, in making sure that they desist (KII, Community Leader, Mubi North).

³⁵ The passage concerned is one of the most overt references collected from the youth focus groups on the possible involvement of influential community members with the Shila Boys and suggests that influential individuals may have direct connections to the gang.

According to the respondent, community outreach is generating success in rehabilitating Shila Boys members back into the community to Mubi North: *“They were so many [Shila Boys] at the place where they use to sit, but due to our consistent follow-up, the number has reduced. Some has stopped and some have started doing their own work.”*

CONNECTIONS BETWEEN THE SHILA BOYS AND BH AND/OR OTHER VEOs

While it is posited that Yan Shila has no explicit or official ties with BH, local researchers have often drawn parallels between the two groups, and it has been noted that at least some participants in the BH insurgency had experience in another youth criminal gang like Yan Shila known as ECOMOG.³⁶ However, the youth groups and the community and security leaders were unable to confirm with any significant degree that direct links exist between BH and other VEOs operating in Adamawa. However, several youths did acknowledge that the Shila Boys might provide some support to BH and other VEOs in other ways, for example:

...if these BH members want to operate in town, they can't because of the strong opposition and resistance they meet from security forces so that makes them collaborate with the Shila Group to get information from them about the town and the security forces (FGD, Youth male, Demsa).

Another respondent said that it was feasible that the leadership of BH could target specific members of the Shila Boys for recruitment. However, a security leader expresses doubt over whether VEOs target Shila Boys specifically for recruitment, but leaves open the possibility that certain members of the Shila Boys could join terrorist cells:

There is nothing that brings the terrorist to the Shila Boys. The Shila Boys are just little children that need what to eat from stealing. When they say Shila, I will sit you down and interpret what that means because Shila is a Fulani word which means a hawk that snatches chicks from the hen. And that was why they now use that here in the community, the Shila comes from that. But then when they feel they are grown enough to join the terrorist, they can do that when they want to. But you see the terrorist can never come to the Shila Boys, but the Shila Boys can go to the terrorist. Because the terrorist believes that the Shila Boys don't even know what they are doing (KII, Security Leader, Mubi South).

RECOMMENDATIONS

- *Continue community outreach.* Respondents reported that community-driven efforts to speak directly to Shila Boys members to dissuade them from engaging in criminal activity are having positive impacts. These efforts should continue to reduce the membership to criminal organizations like the Shila Boys and allow former members to engage positively with their local communities. They should also draw on existing best practices and research-informed methods derived from successful DDR experiences with former BH and ISWAP associates, including an emphasis on inclusive dialogues, engaging the most influential community leaders, and addressing the possibility of community resentments towards the reintegration of former participants early in the process.

³⁶ Owonikoko, Shaheed Babajide.

- *Positive programming for youth.* Youth in Adamawa are the most susceptible to joining the Shila Boys and are most often its victims. The lack of professional opportunities in Adamawa is the most cited driver of youth involvement in Shila Boys. Trade schools or craft programs can improve employment prospects and allow youth to find a path to sustainable employment opportunities or self-employment. Employment and training are not the whole story, however. Programming that brings youth into dialogue with community elders, many of whom portray youth as an intrinsic source of community insecurity rather than significant victims of it, should also be developed.
- *Protect those in education.* As outlined in the NE Connections baseline assessment, Adamawa has suffered from a lack of educational resources and persistent disruptions to education provision for at least a decade. According to respondents, Shila Boys' activity is a significant cause of ongoing educational disruption in Demsa, Mubi North, and Mubi. Students must attend full-time schooling without fear of being attacked by the Shila Boys. Adequate security should be provided to students to protect them from abduction, sexual violence, and potential gang recruitment. Similarly, programming in schools to educate students about the hazards of participating in criminal groups and the provision of school-based alternatives are important.
- *Secure the roads.* The Shila Boys take advantage of the lack of adequate security on roads between or on the outskirts of Demsa, Mubi North, and Mubi South to commit crimes. Insecurity on the roads and in rural communities is a long-standing problem in the region, and weakening VE actors does not prevent other groups from capitalizing on the underlying weaknesses in local security provision. Law enforcement should make efforts to secure the roads to ensure the safety of commuters in cooperation with local community leaders and other local peace agents.

YOBE: FULANI & THEIR NEIGHBORS

INTRODUCTION

ORB's first two quarters of research highlighted that Yobe's LGAs Damaturu and Potiskum appear to be the most vulnerable to religiously motivated extremism, as defending one's religion as a justification for violence is substantially more common among ethnic groups in these LGAs than elsewhere (apart from Biu). Quarter 3 research on ethnic conflicts in Yobe explored how the Hausa, Bolewa, Kanuri, and Ngizim ethnic groups relate to one another, showing that ethnic tensions in the state primarily center on territorial control over Potiskum and unequal treatment by security actors. Additionally, research findings from Quarter 3 illustrated that youth are more likely to instigate ethnic conflicts due to the proliferation of ethnic hate speech on social media. FY22 Q1 research explored the relationship between Fulani herders and their neighbors across Yobe, including integrated Fulani³⁷ and farmers of other ethnicities.

METHODOLOGY

Interviews for FY22 Q1 were spread across the Damaturu and Potiskum LGAs. In total, ORB conducted eight KIs with community leaders and religious leaders, and twelve FGDs with Fulani herders, integrated Fulani, and farmers of other ethnicities. In Damaturu, the Dikumari, community was chosen for FGDs with

³⁷ The term 'integrated Fulani', or 'settled Fulani' as they're sometimes described, refer to members of the Fulani ethnic group that have integrated into communities in Northeast Nigeria and either continue to earn their living as herders, or adopt other professions, such as farming, small business ventures, etc.

integrated Fulani as there are many Fulani herders that have resettled in the area. Kaisaia, a rural, farming community, was selected for FGDs with farmers of other ethnicities. Kallalawa, also located within Damaturu town, was chosen for FGDs with Fulani herders, as they make up most of the residents of this community. In Potiskum, the Farafara herder community was chosen for FGDs with Fulani herders, as well as a KII with their community leader. Additionally, the Mamudo community was chosen for FGDs with integrated Fulani as many Fulani herders have relocated there in recent years. Lastly, the Adaya community was chosen as it is mostly occupied by farmers of other ethnicities.

State	LGA	Community	KIIs	FGDs
Yobe	Damaturu	Dikumari	2	2
		Kaisaia	1	2
		Kallalawa	1	2
	Potiskum	Adaya	2	2
		Mamudo	1	2
		Farafara	1	2

BACKGROUND

Members of the Fulani community generally have a tense relationship with farming communities in Yobe State. In recent years, Fulani herdsmen have carried out violent attacks against farming communities in the state,³⁸ as well as school kidnappings.³⁹ Current research is divided over the intent behind these attacks. The Global Terrorism Index argues that Fulani “extremists do not constitute a single terrorist group,”⁴⁰ and terrorist attacks by Fulani militants take place within a larger conflict around climate change and increasingly restricted access to land for pastoralism.

Other domestic Nigerian voices (including many leading southern Nigerian politicians) and international Christian advocacy groups have characterized the violence as far more organized and explicitly religious, targeting Christians for ethnic cleansing in religiously plural communities and threatening the “Islamification” of Nigeria. This narrative has led some state governments in southern Nigeria to mobilize and arm vigilante groups to target and attempt to expel Fulani pastoralists from their communities. In the BAY states, this narrative is further complicated by the fact that occupational and ethnic cleavages (Fulani/non-Fulani or pastoralist/farmer) don’t clearly overlap with religion as in other parts of Nigeria. Most farmers in Yobe are also Muslims.⁴¹

Missing from these arguments are the perspectives of Fulani community. Many Fulani herdsmen live in remote areas where they have limited access to basic social services, including drinking water, healthcare facilities, electricity, and schools.⁴² Additionally, other Fulani ethnic group members own farms or are

³⁸ Olugbode, M. (2020, December 6). Herdsmen, Villagers Fight for Grazing Land in Yobe. This Day. Retrieved October 26, 2021, from <https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2020/12/06/herdsmen-villagers-fight-for-grazing-land-in-yobe/>

³⁹ Orjinmo, N. (2021, March 2). Nigeria’s school abductions: Why children are being targeted. BBC News. Retrieved October 26, 2021, from <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-56212645>

⁴⁰ Institute for Economics & Peace (2021) Global Terrorism Index 2020: Measuring the Impact of Terrorism, 21. Retrieved January 6, from <https://visionofhumanity.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/GTI-2020-web-1.pdf>

⁴¹ “Nigeria’s Pastoralist Conflicts Face More Turbulence.” *Oxford Analytica*. February 16, 2021.

⁴² Ochab, E. U. (2018, May 4). Trump may not be wrong on the Fulani herdsmen crisis in Nigeria. Forbes.

integrated into urban communities. However, due to violent attacks carried out by Fulani herdsmen, these integrated Fulani are also assumed to be violent extremists.⁴³

In addition to security concerns, communities in Yobe continue to suffer from other threats, including food insecurity, severe flooding, and inflation. Yobe is one of the poorest states in Nigeria. Over 72% of its citizens live in poverty.⁴⁴ There is widespread unemployment and illiteracy. Many communities don't have access to necessities such as food, clean drinking water, public schooling, and health services.⁴⁵ The COVID-19 pandemic and rising inflation have also increased the price of many necessities in the state, including public transportation.⁴⁶

Although markets in Yobe did not close due to the pandemic⁴⁷, heavy flooding during this year's rainy season destroyed many crops and worsened food insecurity in the state. Some of the communities most impacted by the floods were Tandari, Yindiski, Dadin Kowa, Gadan Talaka, Maisandarai, Usmanti, Guarawa, Kasaisa, Abari, and Nayinawa. All fatalities from the flood occurred within the Potiskum LGA.⁴⁸ The State Emergency Management Agency (SEMA) provided food support to 42% of the estimated 2,899 households in Yobe impacted by the flooding; however, several communities still lack support. Farmer and herder conflicts in eight Yobe LGAs also led to crop destruction and population displacement, further exacerbating the humanitarian crisis across the state.⁴⁹

ANALYSIS

COMMUNITY ISSUES

Economic concerns. Poverty and inflation are the primary economic concerns across communities. Respondents describe how a lack of fertilizer and proper farming equipment in the region makes it difficult for farmers to cultivate their land and support their families. Increased inflation throughout the pandemic has also contributed to the crisis. Respondents describe paying two to three times as much for basic necessities, causing many of them to forgo meals.

Retrieved October 26, 2021, from <https://www.forbes.com/sites/ewelinaochab/2018/05/04/trump-may-not-be-wrong-on-the-fulani-herdsmen-crisis-in-nigeria/?sh=10ba4ae055ef>

⁴³ Fulani herdsmen endure stigma and frustration in Nigeria. (2018, December 9). DW. Retrieved October 26, 2021, from <https://www.dw.com/en/fulani-herders-endure-stigma-and-frustration-in-nigeria/a-45462127>

⁴⁴“Nigeria- Yobe State Humanitarian Situation Analysis .” Humanitarian Situation Analysis, June 30, 2020.

⁴⁵Ibid.

⁴⁶ Nwafor, Arinze. “Nigeria’s Transportation Cost Rises Amid Shrinking Household Wallets.” International Centre for Investigative Reporting, September 24, 2021.

⁴⁷“Nigeria- Yobe State Humanitarian Situation Analysis.”

⁴⁸ “Updated: Over 450 Households Affected, Seven Killed as Flood Ravages Yobe Communities.” Channels Television, August 20, 2021. <https://www.channelstv.com/2021/08/20/updated- over-450-households-affected-seven-killed-as-flood-ravages-yobe-communities/>.

⁴⁹ “Nigeria: Yobe State - Weekly Situation Report No. 11.” ReliefWeb, August 20, 2021. <https://reliefweb.int/report/nigeria/nigeria-yobe-state-weekly-situation-report-no-11-20-august-2021>.

As a farmer from Potiskum puts it:

The major threats we are facing is our belly. Our belly is the major threat we are facing. If we eat and we are satisfied, we will be able to do business, and money will flow in and out (FGD, Farmers of Other Ethnicities, Female, Potiskum).

Unequal provision of public services. The provision of public services varies across communities. Many respondents report having clean drinking water and electricity in their communities, but no schools or functioning hospitals. Other respondents report having schools and hospitals, but spotty electricity and dry boreholes. Farmers of other ethnicities and integrated Fulani are slightly more likely to report having access to reliable public services than Fulani herders.

An integrated Fulani respondent describes the services that members of his community enjoy:

When you take the tarred roads, tap water, education, hospital, and the rest, even the people in Abuja cannot compete with us on that. The government does provide that for us in that regard, things are going on well (FGD, Integrated Fulani, Male, Potiskum).

A community leader from Potiskum provides examples of varied access to services:

Respondent: *Sincerely, what we are enjoying here is water. Water is what we enjoy. They constructed a borehole for us and drinking water is now available. Water is what the government has provided for us.*

Moderator: *What about other services like schools, healthcare facilities, electricity?*

Respondent: *Sincerely, there is school. We have schools. But hospitals...if you have money, there are hospitals. If you don't have money, you might not get good treatment because it is better you go to private hospital where they will take good care of you as it ought to be, unlike the public hospital*

(KII, Community Leader, Potiskum).

A Fulani herder from Damaturu describes the lack of clean drinking water in his community:

Respondent 4: *Yes, like the school and the hospital we do have here. You can even go to the hospital at night when you have ailments. But the other government work is not available.*

Moderator: *But which are the basic needs you want but don't have?*

Respondent 6: *Like the government coming to provide us with boreholes for our cows is not available. We suffer during the dry season here. For one to get water here in the dry season you must dig like 30 feet to get that*

(FGD, Fulani Herders, Male, Damaturu).

One of the most frequent requests made by Fulani herders is to have access to Islamic schooling for both children and adults. Respondents describe a desire for their children to receive religious education after their regular schooling to keep them out of harm's way. They also express a desire for adults to have access to similar religious schooling to promote further cohesion in the community.

As one respondent puts it:

Honestly, we need the Islamic school in this community. Take a look at the children, when they return home from school, by evening they will be doing nothing other than going out to their playgrounds or visiting their friends. Sometimes you will look for the children, but you will not find them around you. And we the adults also want to have the Islamic school as well so that we will have vast knowledge of the religion. And as a result, we can also pass the religious knowledge unto others who does not know what the religion contains (FGD, Fulani Herder, Female, Damaturu).

In addition to reporting less access to public services, Fulani herders are also less likely to report having representation in their local government. They describe feeling neglected by community leaders and local government officials due to a lack of influence and social connections.

A Fulani herder from Damaturu describes these concerns:

Moderator: *Do people in your community feel comfortable expressing your needs to local government representatives?*

Respondent 4: *No, we don't feel comfortable expressing our needs to local government representatives.*

Moderator: *Why?*

Respondent 4: *Because you have to be connected to someone influential (FGD, Fulani Herders, Female, Damaturu).*

Community relationships with NGOs. Respondents across communities report having productive relationships with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the region. They describe how organizations often visit their communities to conduct assessments and meet with local leaders. The organizations most frequently cited are Save the Children and Action Against Hunger. Respondents describe micro-loan programs and peacebuilding programs as some of the most effective programs implemented by NGOs.

Religious leaders from Potiskum describe the success of these programs:

We have Save the Children. We used to send our problems to them and sometimes we do get help from them. In the year past they helped by giving us money to do business, and people enjoyed it. For now, we are getting a little help (KII, Muslim Religious Leader, Potiskum).

There are the NGOs - Save the Children, Action Against Hunger. They organize peaceful programs and always make sure to tell us that living in peace is far better than chaos (KII, Christian Leader, Potiskum).

The relationship between Fulani herders and NGOs is more complex. Some Fulani herders report having productive relationships with NGOs, while others complain that they have never received assistance from outside organizations.

Fulani herders in Damaturu describe this discrepancy:

Moderator: *How about with nonprofit organizations – does your community have contact with them?*

Respondent 7: *Honestly there is because whenever they visit our community, they always create a chance for us to sit and have a discussion among us... There is a hospital they built in this community and we benefited from it. Presently we have evening classes, and it was the NGOs that introduced it... Honestly, we have access to contact and communicate with them comfortably. They even made tap water available for us in the community... They ask us questions about our needs. And sometimes they will call us on phone and ask our leaders to send some of us to attend a workshop and that is where we will begin to tell them about our problems and our needs (FGD, Fulani Herders, Female, Damaturu).*

Moderator: *But do you relate with any NGO here in your community?*

Respondent 3: *No, we don't! One must have a representative for that to be possible. Without a good representative, one is going nowhere. We do hear about NGOs helping in other location, but not here in our community (FGD, Fulani Herders, Male, Damaturu).*

Lingering security concerns. Respondents across communities note significant improvements in security since the height of the insurgency. They report feeling safer in their communities due to the increased presence of security actors in the state, including civilian vigilante groups, the CJTF, and local police. Theft, kidnapping, and rape are ongoing concerns in the region, but farmers, Fulani herders, and integrated Fulani all agree that the situation is less dire than before.

Respondents across LGAs elaborate on these improvements:

Respondent 5: *What I want to say is that on the issue of security, things have changed. Now, children can go and play outside and come back home peacefully.*

Respondent 8: *The major one for me is the insurgency issue. We no longer hear bombings and run all the time again. At least we now have peace and can sleep with our eyes closed (FGD, Farmers of Other Ethnicities, Female, Potiskum).*

I will say God has done it. We have more securities now joined with soldiers and police. We have securities like the hunters and CJTF. They have been joining hands with the soldiers and the police people to make sure there is adequate security. I also think that those in the bush have realized that they are not gaining anything from the insurgency and if you must have heard so many of them are renouncing now and giving up their old and bad ways (Kil, Community Leader, Damaturu).

The most concerning, ongoing security threat in the state is the conflict between farmers and herders. Farmers describe how Fulani herders from outside their communities still invade their farmlands and allow cattle to destroy their crops. Herders describe how farmers have depleted their grazing lands by expanding their farms and constructing roads that block access to certain areas. Both farmers and herders agree that

the conflict will be difficult to solve without intervention from security actors and support from government to delegate land for both farming and herding.

Integrated Fulani respondents describe the motivations behind this conflict:

In the area of farming, that is where we do have insecurity more here. You see as a farmer, you can cultivate your crops and when it's time to harvest the Fulani will come and graze on your crops. All because there's no security and the Fulani feel they can act with impunity. If the security is professional in what they do, they can be proactive enough to arrest all those perpetrators and bring justice to communities. But they have failed (FGD, Integrated Fulani, Male, Potiskum).

My concerns are the lack of grazing lands. We do have a great challenge and concern on that in this community. Some farms on the grazing routes don't even give space for the cattle to pass. Like all the farmlands that use to be grazing grounds, the farm owners will now farm there and there won't be space for cows to graze. All the spaces we use to graze on in the past are now farmlands. Like some of the buildings in the community also use to be grazing routes, but they have all built on that and they fenced their houses all blocking grazing routes. Like all the spaces we do pass in the past to drink water with the cows are now houses. The owners have sold that all out and like the space behind here, you see they have built that. And in the past our parents use to tell us that it's a grazing route that expands down to Cameroun and that has become houses. So, I will say that the farmers and the herders are in a big problem in the country because they don't understand each other (FGD, Integrated Fulani, Female, Damaturu).

Perceptions of security actors are varied across communities and respondent types. Many respondents report having positive relationships with security actors, while others claim that security actors are corrupt. Some go as far to say that security actors collect money from both sides of the farmer/herder conflict to benefit from it.

The following farmers and herders describe positive relationships that they enjoy with security actors:

Respondent 7: *They gave us their phone numbers in case we want to report any situation to them.*

Respondent 5: *They come to our community to advise us and tell us about security and safety.*

Respondent 4: *They told us not to be afraid of them that they are here to protect us.*

Respondent 1: *When you take any issue to them, they judge the matter fairly without being biased, even if you are rich or poor. They do not allow oppression (FGD, Farmers of Other Ethnicities, Female, Damaturu).*

Respondent 5: *We don't have any problem with the security actors because they are doing their job.*

Respondent 6: *Even if they come around, they will only do what brought them and then they will leave. We don't have any problem with the security actors in this community.*

Respondent 2: *They gave us their numbers to always call them when we see something strange or a stranger trying to intrude our community (FGD, Fulani Herders, Female, Damaturu).*

The following respondents describe negative relations with security actors who they claim are corrupt:

Yes, before that again like when you report a case, and the police are bribed, they alter the statements you make. And the altered statement will be what they will use against you. And that is why the police help in fuelling the insecurity we are facing in the country today. That justice you want is not what you get (KII, Community Leader, Damaturu).

And the security agents are the ones making the situation worse because the Fulani's will bring them money and the landowners will also bring them money. So, they collect from both sides and make people fight (FGD, Integrated Fulani, Male, Potiskum).

PERCEPTIONS OF FULANI

Perceptions within communities. Across the region, respondents describe a disconnect between perceptions of the Fulani within their communities and perceptions of the Fulani throughout the rest of Nigeria. Fulani herders, integrated Fulani, and farmers all provide various examples of cohesion among different ethnic groups in their communities, including joint schooling and intermarriages. They describe how conflicts that existed in the past between Fulani and other ethnic groups have since been resolved as Fulani become more integrated into communities in the region.

As one farmer puts it:

In the times past, the Fulani herders could not come to the community, and you did not dare go to their community because they would kill you. But now there is co-habitation. You can go there and they can come here, because I guess they have seen they can't be on their own without mixing with others (FGD, Farmers of Other Ethnicities, Female, Potiskum).

Another farmer emphasizes the impact that joint schooling and the sharing of other public services has had on ethnic relations:

What caused the conflict in the time past is misunderstanding and lack of civilization. Now they also go to school and everybody is exposed. They come to our places, and we go to their places (FGD, Farmers of Other Ethnicities, Female, Potiskum).

Fulani herders also describe solutions implemented with farmers in the region to ease tensions. Many herders communicate with farmers to notify them when they plan to release their animals to graze. They also develop agreements with farmers to rent their farmland after harvests so that their animals can feed on leftover crops.

Fulani herders in Damaturu describe one of these agreements:

Moderator: *Let me start this question with you - is there conflict between your group and farmers in your community?*

Respondent 6: *Here in this community, we don't have any such problem here. We the herders and the farmers grew up together. In this area there's no stranger in our midst. And between us there no conflicts that happen between the farmers and herders.*

Moderator: *You mean to say there's no conflict between you in the community?*

Respondent 2: *You see when the Bagizme tribe harvest their crops, we rent the farm and graze on that after the harvest. And even when the Barebare tribes harvest from their farmlands, we do rent the land and graze on. So, the farmers and the herders here live in peace and we don't have any issues (FGD, Fulani Herders, Male, Damaturu).*

The majority of the respondents recognize the differences in how Fulani are perceived throughout the rest of the country compared to within their communities. While many farmers in the region now enjoy more peaceful relations with Fulani herders, throughout the rest of the Nigeria, Fulani herdsmen are still viewed as violent and dangerous. Fulani herdsmen that live in the bush are often grouped together with Fulani herders that live in more integrated communities.

An integrated Fulani respondent describes these concerns:

The Fulani's in the past were known to be cattle nomads. And they took cows out for grazing. But today they are different and armed. But because we know who they are, we now know how to live with them. But to the people in other parts of the country, it will take longer time for them to trust Fulani's, because they are known as terrorists and kidnapers. Because they are known to be in the act and many southern governors also have banned their activities of open grazing which is causing problems in the country now (FGD, Integrated Fulani, Male, Potiskum).

Another Fulani respondent describes the frustration she feels when Fulanis are accused of violent acts,

Moderator: *What are the perception people have towards the Fulani tribe here in your community?*

Respondent 7: *Then I use to rear animals and I did suffer but now when I hear people accusing the Fulanis of entering people's farms, I get angry. And I know that the Fulanis are really suffering (FGD, Integrated Fulani, Female, Damaturu).*

Fulani herders describe how perceptions of their ethnic group throughout the rest of Nigeria can influence the representation and services they receive within their own communities.

As Fulani herders in Damaturu put it,

Respondent 5: *Those nomads I hear they kill people, and they kidnap which is very bad. Then that makes people look at us, as the Fulanis, like them too.*

Respondent 2: *Sometimes I feel that is why NGOs don't render help to us because they feel we are like those in the bush (FGD, Fulani Herders, Male, Damaturu).*

Generational perceptions. While some ethnic tensions persist across the state, many respondents claim that these disputes are generational. They argue that community elders engage more in ethnic conflicts than youth.

As one integrated Fulani respondent describes,

I am praying that all those that showed us tribalism, we pray for them. I have friends who are not Fulani, they are Karekare tribes, but I have shown them that we are one. We don't show them any tribalism here and when you find me in Karekare house you will think they are the ones that gave birth to me because there is no difference in the way we relate. I don't have any issue with them, but it is the elders that do show us differences in the community. They show tribalism and differences and we the Muslims are not supposed to show any differences like this one is Fulani and the other is Barebare, we are not supposed to show that here (FGD, Integrated Fulani, Female, Damaturu).

Integrated schools contribute to the cohesion among youth from different ethnic groups. As more Fulani integrate into communities and send their children to local primary schools, their children naturally form friendships that cut through ethnic divisions.

As one respondent puts it,

Then for the tribes in the community, the elders are at war and the children are educated as well as the youths and they are managing the situation and cooperating. Because they are friends and school mates, the past grudges of our parents are all gone. So, you see that there's peace and they show regards to each tribe that is here in the community (FGD, Integrated Fulani, Male, Potiskum).

Another respondent describes how friendships among children can also encourage ethnic cohesion among parents,

The place is school. And you know that there's no tribe that doesn't attend school in the community. Also, you see that you sit with someone who's not even your tribe or relation, but you gist and laugh together and the person will even assist you. And after enjoying that tomorrow when you have you can even assist someone outside and then you can visit each other homes and the parents know you together and affection starts growing for this tribe, because the person is the friend to your child. That is for the youths (FGD, Integrated Fulani, Male, Potiskum).

Media's negative impact. Nearly all respondents agree that local media sources, including radio, film, and social media, contribute to negative perceptions of the Fulani. Media sources led by Hausas are cited most frequently as contributors to negative perceptions.

As some Fulani herders describe,

Moderator: *In that Hausa radio station do you think they talk about news that makes the Fulanis look bad?*

Respondent 6: *So many times, and those are the nomads. They are always in the bush.*

Respondent 4: *They are the ones that gives the Fulanis a bad name that makes other people think we are bad (FGD, Fulani Herders, Male, Damaturu).*

Another integrated Fulani respondent describes the impacts of the Hausa film industry on perceptions of the Fulani,

The way the Fulanis are being portrayed in the Hausa film industry is that they are more of terrorists. And they are trying to change that perception (FGD, Integrated Fulani, Male, Potiskum).

Social media also contributes to negative perceptions of the Fulani. Respondents describe how only negative news events that involve Fulani get shared on platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp. These posts create the impression that only Fulani commit violent acts, such as kidnapping and destroying farmland.

As a pastor from Potiskum puts it,

Social media is also part of it because it is only the bad things that the Fulanis have done that usually find their way to the media. I think the herders in the bush are the cause of all this because they are very uncivilized, and they can behave like people that do not have a heart. The social media has helped people believe that an average Fulani man is a very wicked man (KII, Christian Religious Leader, Potiskum).

FUTURE EXPECTATIONS

Conflict resolution. Across communities, respondents agree that integrated Fulani can play a major role in mediating conflicts between farmers and Fulani herders from the bush. Many farmers describe instances in which Fulani within their communities successfully negotiated with Fulani herders in the bush to prevent them from destroying their farmland.

As one farmer describes:

We don't have with those that destroy our crops, so what we did is that the ones that are our neighbors in the other community, we liaised with them and when we see the herders destroying our crops, we call them and they warn their fellow Fulani men not to come and graze on our farms again (FGD, Farmers of Other Ethnicities, Female, Potiskum).

Farmers from Damaturu describe similar instances:

Respondent 7: *The security is the same, just that the fighting over farmlands and destruction of crops has reduced.*

Respondent 2: *I think at a time those in the forest were spoken to by those in the community and they stopped destroying farmland. Though they still do that of other communities (FGD, Farmers of Other Ethnicities, Female, Damaturu).*

Respondents across communities also emphasize that community leaders, as well as community forums, are helpful in mitigating conflicts between farmers and herders, in addition to conflicts among different ethnic groups.

A Fulani herder in Damaturu describes one of these platforms:

Moderator: *Okay are there any channels or initiatives in place that will help bring the Fulani and the farmers in this community more close together?*

Respondent 2: *Yes, we do have the Miyyeti Allah in the city that helps the Fulanis each time they have challenges. And if there's any difference that is what it is being settled. And we do see our leaders at Potiskum also that we reach out to when there is problem (FGD, Fulani Herders, Male, Damaturu).*

Economic development. Respondents across the state agree that initiatives to encourage economic development will help alleviate poverty and mitigate conflicts in the region. Several respondents recommend occupational training classes as a method to solve the region's unemployment crisis. Female respondents especially request courses, such as sewing classes and soap-making classes, in addition to micro-loans that would allow them to open their own small businesses.

Female farmers in Damaturu describe a micro-loan program that was previously implemented that they wish to see expanded:

Respondent 6: *We were given equipment that we are using for our businesses, and we are grateful. In a day, I used to earn not less than #500 compared to before when getting one naira was a task for me. But when they provided us with machines, my financial situation improved. Some more organizations should also try and assist us with what we can use to earn money.*

Respondent 8: *Just as she said we are happy with what they provided for us. I was provided with a sewing machine. Before in a week I didn't earn #500, even though I am not an expert in sewing – I am happy because I had the chance of meeting with those that know how to sew. They taught me how to sew as well. We went there for training, and I was happy that I learnt. I used to cut wrapper by myself, and I would take it to another shop and sew. The skill acquisition they taught us was very helpful (FGD, Farmers of Other Ethnicities, Female, Damaturu).*

RECOMMENDATIONS

- *Fund micro-capital programs & occupational training courses.* Many female respondents report positive benefits from similar programs. Investing in training classes and small loans for women and youth in the area would help solve the unemployment crisis and alleviate poverty in the region.
- *Encourage integrated Fulani to engage their counterparts in the bush.* Respondents clearly describe how integrated Fulani can be crucial in mitigating conflicts between farmers and Fulani herders in more rural areas. By continuing and supporting these efforts, integrated Fulani will help mitigate further conflicts in the region.
- *Implement peacebuilding programs within schools to further encourage ethnic cohesion among youths.* Integrated schools have contributed to more ethnic cohesion among youth across the state. However, we know from findings in previous quarters that youth are also more susceptible to believing and spreading hateful, ethnic-based propaganda when they join social media platforms. By engaging children in primary schools with peacebuilding programs, there will be less of a risk of them engaging in ethnic conflicts later in life.
- *Encourage community leaders to incorporate Fulani into positions of leadership in their communities.* Fulani respondents claim that a lack of representation in local government contributes to the inequality they experience when it comes to the provision of public services and support from non-governmental organizations. By encouraging community leaders to include their voices in community leadership, they will better advocate for the needs of their group. These programs can easily co-exist or co-operate with similar efforts to incorporate and recognize youth and women's voices in community leadership, as well.
- *Work with local government to secure the equal provision of public services, especially health services & public schooling.* Ongoing collaboration with the government is needed to encourage them to evenly distribute public services, including public schools, hospitals, clean drinking water, and electricity. This will help alleviate the economic crisis in the region and mitigate conflicts that are caused by inequality. The ongoing national efforts (Rural Grazing Area Plan [RUGA] and the National Livestock Transformation Plan) are extremely politically sensitive and have driven conflict in religiously divided communities in the south, but respondents suggest that more bottom-up, locally initiated efforts are less polarizing.
- *Fund media sources committed to promoting positive ethnic relations.* Fulani respondents consistently mentioned that negative depictions of their ethnic group on the radio and social media contribute to the poor treatment they receive from other ethnic groups and public officials. Funding and supporting media sources that are committed to spreading positive messaging regarding ethnic relations will help combat some of these perceptions.
- *Conduct ongoing research on the evolving farmer/herder conflict in Yobe.* While many respondents noted that positive improvements have been made regarding the relations between farmers and herders in the state, ongoing research is needed to determine which interventions and solutions are considered most successful. Research on perceptions of the RUGA and the National Livestock Transformation Plan would also be beneficial.

CONCLUSIONS, TRENDS, AND RESEARCH RECOMENDATIONS

Findings from FY22 Q1 show an improvement in overall security and stability in Adamawa and Yobe compared to the period of the insurgency. However, serious security threats remain in the region, including farmer and herder conflicts and criminal gang activity. The threat of criminal gang activity is even

more concerning given the recent data from Northwest Nigeria which shows that gang and criminal activity is worsening at a staggering rate. There was a doubling of kidnappings in the region in 2021 compared to 2020. Fatalities resulting from gang violence have rose to almost 1,000 annually. Furthermore, gangs continue to migrate to more urban areas to attack higher value targets.⁵⁰ As criminal activity continues to worsen in the Northwest, it will be important to monitor the presence and level of activity of these criminal groups in the Northeast.

Furthermore, as criminal gangs continue to infiltrate the conflict landscape of the BAY states, it will be important to consider the relationship between citizens and security actors in the region. Respondents in Adamawa and Yobe are divided in their perceptions of security actors. Many respondents in Yobe note improvements in communication and engagement with security actors, while others accuse security actors of corruption and ethnic discrimination. Respondents in Adamawa complain that security actors lack a nuanced understanding of gang activity in the region and that they are unable to accurately identify gang members and bring them to justice.

These trends are consistent with the initial baseline conflict assessment, which emphasized the danger that even as extremist violence from ISWAP and Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'adati wal-Jihad group (JAS) diminished in some communities, other types of conflict and insecurity were likely to take their place. The underlying conflict drivers across the BAY states—poverty, poor service provision, poor inter-communal trust and social cohesion—have not radically changed despite the reduction in VE-related civilian deaths. Communities where VE has been the major security challenge over the past decade have invested few resources in long-term strategies to address other more latent community tensions that are now reappearing. The rise of kidnapping, banditry, and farmer/herder conflict in the BAY states also illustrates that these communities are not isolated from wider Nigerian and regional conflict trends. These types of violence are growing across Nigeria, and particularly in the case of farmer/herder conflict, national political polarization that frames these conflicts in national (religious violence) rather than local (land use, low inter-communal trust) creates new challenges for local-level peace initiatives.

In Borno, reintegration efforts continue to be obstructed by negative community sentiments toward the DDDR process. Furthermore, fear of the risk of recidivism remains high on the minds of community members that live alongside reintegrated former associates, even if actual evidence of recidivism remains low. It will be important to continue to collect and monitor data on the progress and trajectories of former affiliates in the state, but also to identify more effective ways of informing the skeptical public about the real successes of reintegration programs and how they can reduce violence in their communities.

Perhaps the most important new finding for Yobe in FY22 Q1 is the difference in how older and younger generations perceive and experience ethnic conflicts. Respondents claim that youth are less likely to harbor deeply rooted ethnic prejudices. However, research from previous quarters shows that youth are also more likely to engage with divisive ethnic content on social media. With the right interventions—particularly those that ensure that youth voices are heard and recognized by mostly elder community leaders who are often predisposed to see youth as a security threat rather than a community asset—youth could be instrumental in quelling ethnic conflicts and mitigating the rise of criminal gangs.

⁵⁰ Africa Center for Strategic Studies. Memorandum, "Criminal Gangs Destabilizing Nigeria's North West," December 14, 2021.

RESEARCH RECOMMENDATIONS

FY22 Q2 will provide a baseline conflict assessment and analysis in the Year 2 LGAs. This assessment will emphasize the evolving nature of conflict drivers and violence as the daily impact of the BH/ISWAP conflict continues to lessen outside the core Borno corridor, barring unforeseen developments. The Year 1 baseline and previous quarterly assessments have emphasized the need to explore and understand how existing community-level conflict drivers and the sapping of community resilience by the decade-long BH conflict have opened the door to other kinds of violence and threats to community cohesion. Community Vulnerability Survey data from Q3 2021 found that across the target LGAs, fears of criminal activity and communal conflict (theft, kidnapping, robbery, cattle and land use-related conflict) rank significantly higher than fears of VEO attacks. The Q1 baseline will focus on deepening and disaggregating community understandings of the causes and consequences of this violence, with a particular emphasis on better understanding what communities see as the most effective, existing local strategies for preventing conflict.

Given the fluidity of the situation on the ground in all three states, future quarterly research will need to remain flexible and able to pivot based on changes in local security dynamics or Community Vulnerability Survey data. Assuming sufficient security, research should continue to explore the most pressing issues identified to date—the role of youth in driving or mitigating conflict (criminal, religious, and ethnic), the key sources of conflict and mistrust in diverse BAY state communities (ethnically polarized local politics and access to community leadership, farmer/herder tensions, IDP/returnee/local community dynamics), and the rise of criminal gangs and their effects on community perceptions of security. Given how often it has been invoked as a potential conflict driver for youth in previous quarterly research, examining how locals interact with VE and CVE messaging and community conflict on social media should also be a priority.

In Borno, this means a continued focus on what works and does not work to reduce tensions when former VE associates returning and reintegrating into the community, as well as tracking how the evolving VE landscape (including changes in VE groups' strength, strategy, and military deployments) influences community security perceptions. While previous quarters have emphasized these issues, the situation on the ground continues to change rapidly, and there is good reason to anticipate the need for continuously updated local data. In Yobe, progress on understanding the drivers of ethnic conflict in previous quarters calls for more research on how communities are coping with these challenges, including KIs and FGDs with local peace program participants and non-participants as well as further investigation into the role of alternative peace actors, like business leaders. And in Adamawa, a particular focus on youth, who are paradoxically the most likely participants in criminal violence but also among its frequent victims, is important. Better understanding where and how to intervene, who are the most important community interlocutors are for youth work, reducing community fear about “idle youth” as a conflict driver and exploring whether or not existing CVE-style programming can be effective in this context are all important issues to address.

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ANNEX B: LEAD AUTHORS' BIOGRAPHIES

Yuliya Dudaronak is Research Director at ORB International, a social science researcher and evaluator with 15+ of experience in the design and implementation of social science research, as well as expertise in a variety of qualitative and quantitative designs and methods. Yuliya obtained her PhD in Sociology from the University of Virginia in 2014 with a concentration in Politics and Culture. She has extensive technical expertise in all phases of survey and evaluation research, including design, administration, and analysis of complex multi-wave, multi-country projects. In the last few years, she has worked on over 30 studies related to measuring the levels and drivers of violent extremism in locations ranging from Nigeria to Kenya to Syria, in the context of both Target Audience Analysis and monitoring and evaluation of counter-violent extremism programming. As part of her extremism-related research, she worked on developing support for violent extremism, reconciliation, and social trust scales sensitive to extremism research, ways of addressing sensitive questions in complex environments, and how to handle non-response in highly sensitive items and designing new quality control measures.

Nicholas Bader has seven years of research experience in an international setting, including three years of experience in mixed-methods research and Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E). As a seasoned analyst with cross-sectoral expertise in peacebuilding, conflict resolution, and preventing/countering violent extremism (PCVE), Nicholas specializes in mixed-methods research and program evaluation in Francophone Africa. He enjoys engaging with quantitative and qualitative data to draw evidence-driven conclusions and training data collection teams—both remotely and on-site—to build local research capacity. Nicholas holds an MA in French Language and Literature from the University of Virginia and a graduate certificate in Project Monitoring and Evaluation. He is currently pursuing an MS in Measurement and Evaluation at American University.

Emily Churchill joined ORB in August of 2021 after serving various roles in community development organizations throughout Latin America. Her most recent role was Assistant Site Manager for Manna Project International in Quito, Ecuador. As a researcher for ORB, Emily assists in the management of several projects in coastal West Africa. In Nigeria, she oversaw a study on community vulnerability to violent extremist groups which included 1,800 quantitative surveys. She also assisted in a social network analysis of organizations and government organizations in Northeast Nigeria. In the U.S., Emily managed a study on vaccine trust and confidence, which included 3,500 quantitative surveys, 60 key-informant interviews, and 10 focus groups discussions. Emily has educational and professional experience in over five countries, including Ecuador, Chile, Spain, Morocco, and China. She graduated summa cum laude from the University of Richmond in 2019 with a degree in International Studies & Spanish.

Philippe Bone has over five years of experience in project management, data management, and conflict analysis for clients in the private and public sectors including banks, private asset managers, state pension funds, colleges, and socially responsible investors. His expertise has been instrumental in supporting clients navigate complex compliance, operational risk, and ethical challenges related to private sector operations in conflict-affected areas. Philippe holds an MA in Conflict, Security, and Development and a BA in History and International Relations from the University of Exeter. He is a Senior Researcher at ORB International.