

Nigeria's Troubled History with Demobilizing, Deradicalizing and Reintegrating Armed Non-State Actors: An Assessment of Operation Safe Corridor

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Abstract

The study examines the prospects and challenges of Operation Safe Corridor (OSC), Nigeria's prison deradicalization program, as part of broader efforts to counter the influence of Boko Haram and lessons from earlier attempts at deploying DDR. Experience from the Biafran separatist movement, and that of the Niger Delta militants highlights the limitations of DDR in affording alternative exit for combatants and in fostering sustainable peace agreement. Noticeably, OSC unlike previous attempts has limited scope and coverage, OSC takes a cue from the traditional model of DDR, which focuses on DDR of ex-combatants. A review of OSC's implementation framework show, women and children associated with Boko Haram are considered secondary, despite constituting a major source for suicide bombers. In addition, communities where repentant combatants are to be reintegrated have also been left out of the process. The narrowly conceived program not only puts to question the genuineness of the program, there is also no evidence to suggest OSC has been able to entice combatants to voluntarily defect. As with earlier programs, the success ratio of the OSC could be hampered by its lack of inclusion, flawed implementation, and vague reintegration strategies amongst other challenges. To maximize the potentials of the OSC, the study recommends a widening its scope; and commitment of resource to alleviate the plight of Boko Haram victims and receiving communities. Given the high cost of running a prison-based deradicalisation program, there is need to foster accountability and transparency to attract development partners, expertise and donor funds to guarantee continuity.

Keywords: Armed Non-State Actors, Demobilization, Deradicalization and Reintegration, Biafra Separatist, Niger-Delta Militants, Boko-Haram, and Operation Safe Corridor

Introduction

The advancement of terrorist ideologies and armed militias continue to spread in Africa like wildfire, with several groups exploiting the fragility of the continent (Dodeye, 2016). Estimated figures suggest around 500,000 individuals in a fusion of armed conflicts scheduled to undergo various demobilization, deradicalization, and Rehabilitation (DDR) programs across the continent (Prosper, 2013). A review of Nigeria's conflict management

approach suggests a seeming preference for the use of military force, a tested and trusted approach. Contrary to expected outcomes, the deployment of the military to counter the rising influence of Boko Haram, a radical religious sect, failed to yield desired outcomes. A decade after militarization, Boko Haram has seemingly increased its capabilities to carry out deadlier attacks while growing its ranks at the same time

Against the growing influence of Boko Haram, the Nigerian state explored non-military strategies to counter their influence. The broadening of counter-insurgency efforts reflects a shift in strategy from a military inclined approach to a more inclusive framework that emphasizes the need to counter the insurgents on multiple fronts. This reorientation invariably derives from on-going efforts to stabilize fragile communities affected by the insurgency by managing persons in conflict areas and the need to contain imploding humanitarian emergencies while creating an exit route for combatants to undergo demobilization deradicalization and reintegration (Saibou, 2019). In the context of unconventional wars like insurgencies, separatist movements, amongst other violent intra-state conflicts, DDR, which draws on the leniency of the non-militarized approach for conflict management, has been championed as a viable addition to conventional military interventions (Cornelis, 2017).

Research Objectives

Against the backdrop of Nigeria's troubled history with managing armed conflicts, the study's objectives are two-fold. The first is to locate Nigeria's prison program and prior efforts within the mainstream models of DDR. The second is to examine DDR not only in the context of challenges of Operation Safe Corridor (OSC) beyond the broader efforts to tackle Boko Haram but also of lessons from historical Reconciliation, Rehabilitation and Reconstruction (3R) and the Presidential Amnesty Programs (PAP) program designed to demobilize armed non-state actors in Nigeria.

For this analysis, armed non-state actors refer to rebel groups, militias, terrorist organizations, insurgents, and other groups who take up arms against the state or opposing groups, intending to gain control over territory or resources. This broad conceptualization affords the study room to examine the implementation of DDR for three distinct armed groups, the Biafran separatist movement, Niger Delta militants, and Boko Haram insurgents. All of them have been involved in armed struggles against the state.

Methodology

In lieu of the objectives mentioned earlier, the study employs Secondary Data Analysis to ascertain the objectives of the research. Secondary Data Analysis (SDA) involves research where data collected for a prior study is analyzed, mainly by different researchers to explore new questions or use different analysis strategies that were not a part of the primary analysis (Szabo et al., 1997). For research involving quantitative data, SDA, and the process of sharing data for the purpose of SDA, has become conventional. Albeit its limitations, Hinds et al. (1997) argue that it is a becoming accepted and cost-effective approach to maximizing the usefulness of collected data. Scholars encourage the practice of sharing data for the purpose of SDA, asserting that it may answer new research questions, as well as increase sample sizes and statistical power (Perrino et al., 2013). Sharing data also allows for the generation of new knowledge without the costs of administration and implementation of

additional data collection. Against which researchers and database institutions have fostered and encouraged the use of prior that enabled by advancements of archiving technology (Ruggaino et al., 2019). The choice of methodology is informed by the inability of the researchers to conduct direct observation of on subject matter and lack of access to persons of interests (repentant sect members) and stakeholders (government officials, leaders of affected communities, the Nigerian Army, and other government agencies working with ex-combatants under the umbrella of OSC).

Research Structure

In what is to follow, the study assesses the various models of DDR as obtain in the mainstream literature. This is done in line with the objective of locating Nigeria's prison program and prior efforts vis-à-vis pre-existing DDR models. Subsequent section examines Nigeria's seeming troubled history with implementing DDR in its bid to manage arm carrying non-state actors. This is followed by a review of the structural design, implementation guidelines, challenges and prospects of Nigeria's prison program, Operation Safe Corridor. The study then concludes by summarizing the key findings, against which policy recommendations are proffered in line with the wider objectives of promoting non-military strategies to counter the influence of Boko Haram.

Demobilization, Deradicalization, and Reintegration, a Model for Analysis

DDR as a practice has its roots in alternative dispute resolution, which capitalizes on the strengths of diplomacy, mediation, and repluralization has been around for quite some time. However, the rise in intra-state wars arguably credited DDR modeled programs in the past few decades to meet the demands of fragile and emerging conflict environments. In the traditional sense, DDR programs are designed to suit the dynamics of post-conflict peace accords targeted at addressing grievances of armed groups. In this traditional setting, DDR is structured in a sequence that involves disarmament-demobilization-reintegration, respectively.

To effectively manage protracted intra-state wars like insurgencies and ethnic conflicts, the second-generation DDR model was designed to afford combatants conflict exit strategy while conflicts could be on-going. Proponents argue the second generation model is beneficial when the probability of reaching sustainable peace agreements seems unlikely, or in conflicts involving multiple armed groups, and when the lines between combatants and civilians are blurred. Unlike traditional DDR, which is designed exclusively for DDR combatants, the second generation DDR program is a community-centric approach that could also be designed to resemble peace-building intervention. The model outlines the significance of periodic conflict assessment, which serves as the framework for designing context-specific DDR programs. Second-generation DDR programs are also flexible and can be implemented at different stages of conflict. Besides, they do not necessarily follow the sequence of disarmament-demobilization-reintegration (Iffat, 2016).

Further to which, (Muggah et al., 2016) presupposes the emergence of 'next generation which permits the use of force, covers a broad scope and emphasize national development goals as well as security sector reform and transitional justice; and, most importantly, they are negotiated based on the local context rather than following a set DDR formula. It is not unexpected altogether that DDR interventions witnessed a significant shift in paradigm from

its earlier preoccupation with reintegrating ex-combatants to a much broader goal of fostering environments conducive for building sustainable peace (Muggah, 2005). The implications of this reorientation are dramatic. For one, DDR was now expected to serve as foundations for reconciliations between erstwhile combatants and the communities they once terrorized, foster reconstruction of social and physical infrastructure, and promote economic livelihood for recivilized combatants (Muggah, 2009).

In recent years DDR programs are increasingly designed as stabilizing agents alongside counter-insurgency operations. They are increasingly deployed alongside development and reconstruction agendas of humanitarian aid agencies, even though they may not always be explicitly stated. While, in principle, this can reinforce broader peace-building and development goals, it can also generate contradictions. In some cases, DDR is pursued parallel with counterterrorism and counter-narcotics initiatives, as in Afghanistan, Colombia, Nigeria, and Mali. DDR is thus connected, even if unintentionally, to a broader geopolitical agenda. In the process, expectations of what DDR can reasonably accomplish are expanding beyond what is realistically feasible. DDR is thus tantamount to social, economic, and political engineering (Muggah et al., 2016 and Colleta et al., 2009).

OSC is a brainchild of the Office of the National Security Adviser. In this prison DDR program, participants undergo various treatment programs such as psychotherapy, psycho-spiritual counseling, religious counseling, and therapy. Religious leaders conduct lectures seeking to alter violent religious narratives by elucidating Islamic teachings that forbid violence. Within the context of OSC, this is done to derive violent tendencies (extreme interpretation of Jihad) as the unitary means to enforce their version of Islam on society. OSC's structural design and implementation take its cue from Daniel Koehler's repluralisation model of deradicalization, which seeks to repopulate the participants' worldview by affording those alternative interpretations (Bukarti, 2019). The model seeks to alter the cognitive capacity of individuals or groups to reprioritize problems and choose from a variety of socially acceptable solutions. It also seeks to foster reflections on whether the use of violence is necessary, providing room for further intervention (Koehler, 2015). Worthy of note is, Koehler's repluralisation takes a cue from the traditional DDR model, designed exclusively for combatants to undergo the process of DDR.

In the context of Boko Haram, when combined with tolerant religious reorientation, repluralisation not only adjusts problem-solving approach, solutions, and goals but restructures individual worldviews by exposing them to the alternative meaning of political systems and concepts, such as 'freedom,' 'honor,' and 'justice.' As a result of their disdain for constituted authority and western values, violence for them is not only rational but necessary, especially if notions of human inequality are inherent in the underlying ideology. In specific ideological contexts like insurgency or terrorism, de-pluralisation creates a tension between a rapidly decreasing number of alternatives to solve a given problem and the increasing intensity of ideological calls for action, a tension that violence ultimately becomes the only way to resolve (Koehler, 2015).

Although affording combatants an exit strategy seems like a positive addition to Nigeria's counter-insurgency framework, the exclusive emphasis on male combatants' means women and children associated with Boko Haram are not catered for by the program. Also, communities, where recivilisation is intended have been conspicuously left out of the

program. As it stands, victims of Boko Haram's reign of terror are forced to live side-by-side with their tormentors; a decision for which their consent was not sorted (Bukarti, 2019). Prior experience elsewhere suggests that reconciliatory programs and conflict management strategies must attain considerable levels of social cohesion that will bring together opposing together; otherwise, reconciliatory efforts could end up being counterproductive. In Africa, for instance, three decades after DDR was embraced, reintegration remains the Achilles Heel of DDR programs; the only fraction of ex-combatants is sustainably reintegrated into their communities (Antole, 2021).

Arguably, Nigeria's preference for an exclusive prison program exemplifies the prevailing state referent counter-insurgency approach. It derives from the conception of Boko Haram as a threat to Nigeria's sovereign integrity before the millions of civilians it has and continues to terrorize. The model pays little attention to the imploding humanitarian crisis. Within the frameworks of the state referent security approach, security threats are perceived in the context of preserving a nation's sovereign integrity. The state is the unit of analysis, thereby informing the impregnability of state security as a fortress. Over time, national security overwhelms and often dominates non-military security concerns individuals are faced with; common amongst them are socio-economic and political security threats. It is often used to justify all that which brings conflict, violence, dislocation, and underdevelopment (Kiszely, 2008). Such an approach is challenging to the military doctrine, notes that counter-insurgency "necessitates, the military to gain some decidedly un-military-like traits, such as emotional intelligence, subtlety, sophistication, nuance and political adroitness (Mahendra, 2018).

While the study acknowledges the significance of incapacitating the military might of the insurgents, a conspicuous DDR program will likely remain counterproductive. For many, memories of Boko Haram atrocities are still freshly etched into the collective conscience, and victims find it hard to move on. Millions, who have witnessed the horrors of Boko Haram, displaced by their attacks or losing their means of livelihood as a result of the protracted insurgency, have received little to no psychological help, nor any other government assistance to foot the medical bills of the injured and sufficient empowerment to help millions get back on their feet. Perceived leniency toward the perpetrators of such barbarity feels like an insult to the millions of their victims who depend on humanitarian aid for sustenance (Bukarti, 2019).

In response to critics, the spokesperson of the Presidency claims through the OSC government intends to save lives lost to suicide bombing. Resources meant for the procurement of weapons could be easily channeled to the reconstruction of the Northeast (Asadu, 2018). Four years after the inauguration of Nigeria's prison program, there is no workable data to suggest the OSC has influenced the defection of combatants; if anything, Boko Haram has strengthened its capacity to carry out deadlier attacks. The study problematizes the exclusivity of Nigeria's prison program for been narrowly conceived in terms of reducing the cost of the war and targeting Boko Haram combatants, with little attention been paid to the human security implications of the insurgency. In what follows, the study examines Nigeria's previous attempts at implementing DDR in the management of armed non-state actors.

Nigeria's History with Implementing DDR

Despite its reliance on military interventions to enforce social order and counter armed non-state elements, the Nigerian state has at different times adopted or considered a non-militarized approach to manage armed non-state actors. Nigeria's strategy for countering violent conflicts can be summed up to include policy, legislative and punitive measures (Isiodore, 2013). Policy response often involves redistribution or reallocation of resources such as oil fields, and the legislative approach tends to set up commissions or funded programs, while punitive involves military offensive. However, the deployment of the military remains amongst the immediate response to counter-armed groups.

The initial documented attempt at implementing a non-militarized approach was the Reconciliation, Rehabilitation, and Reconstruction (3Rs), a DDR modeled program set up by the then military administration of General Yakubu Gowon in the terminal days of the Biafran civil war. The unilateral decision of the Igbo's of the Southeast to secede was greeted with a declaration of war. After over two years of sustained military campaigns, Biafran combatant surrendered, leading the government to declare the war 'a no vanquish no victory' (Adaobi, 2020). The 3R policy according to Ogbogu (2016) was a comprehensive framework designed to ease the DDR of ex-separatist combatants and enable the reconstruction of the war-ravaged Southeast. The decision to readmit seceding Biafran's back into Nigeria was a thought-out strategy for resolving lingering animosities combined with other factors to make the war inevitable (Ukaogu, 2017). The significance of the 3R program cannot be downplayed; given ex-combatants expertise in the use of weapons, in the absence of a viable alternative to generating income, there is a likelihood that their knowledge of combatant and weapon handling could be used for criminal activity in the absence of a comprehensive Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration process (Chukwuma et al., 2015). The framework of the 3R program released by the military government in 1968 was built around crucial agendas of healing the wounds of war, affording medical care for victims; rehabilitate soldiers who fought on both sides; compensate returning Biafran's who lost property in the war; and to reconstruct the war ravaged-region. A close examination of the blueprint of the 3R vis-à-vis existential realities on the ground becomes doubtful if the laudable principles outlined in the blueprint were pursued comprehensively (Nwaokocha, 2020).

Within the mainstream DDR models, Nigeria's 3R policy arguably resembles a second-generation DDR. The focus of Second Generation programs looks beyond the demilitarisation of ex-combatants and targets larger communities affected by armed violence. These sets of DDR programs include several activities that can be deployed when the prerequisites for traditional DDR are not in place to support the peace process, build trust, contribute to a secure environment and help build the foundation for longer-term peace-building. Further to which second-generation DDR is an evidence-based approach. These efforts, reinforced by regular assessments, enable practitioners to more effectively and quickly adapt to new developments (United Nations, 2010). If DDR is to achieve sustained peace and development goals effectively, it must be linked to broader reform efforts and development programs. Three aspects are particularly relevant: linking DDR to national development strategies and programs, linking it to security sector reform, and linking it to transitional justice initiatives (UNDP, 2013).

Five decades after the 3R policy was rolled out, renowned Nigerian political economist Professor Ebere Onwundiwe delivered the keynote address at a conference themed "*Memory and Nation Building: 50 years after Biafra*". Professor Ebere claims the resurgence of ethnic-

separatist agitations in the Southeast fifty years after the Biafra Civil War exemplifies the challenges of implementing the government's 3Rs reconciliatory program. He ascribes the failure of the program to a lack of political prudence and poor implementation. Although the height of separatist agitations exemplified in the Nigerian Civil War, Awofeso (2017) argues them to have assumed a new dimension that is not unconnected to the national question. That is to say that they continued to serve as a veritable tool in the hands of the agitators for the expression of discontents with the Nigerian state and a platform for demanding adequate political inclusion (Alumona et al., 2017). In part, these challenges form the nucleus for renewed aspiration for secession championed by the movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) and Independent People of Biafra (IPOB) (Gordi, 2017).

Although MASSOB has generally adopted a political route to addressing the challenges of systematic exclusion of the region, IPOB tends to be often insightful and provocative in their approach. In response, the Nigerian state secured a judgment from a competent court that declared IPOB a terrorist organization, signaling a return to a military offensive against the group (Okakwu, 2018). It is thought that, for many Nigerians, the civil war is still an unfortunate chapter in Nigeria's history and, as such, best forgotten. For the Igbo who tried to fight their way out of Nigeria, it still is a life-defining episode (Adaobi, 2020). Continued agitations highlight the limitations of reconciliatory efforts to address grievances bothering on injustice, marginalization, and deprivation in Nigeria's flawed federal system (Ukaogo, 2017). Against this, it is evident that the failure of the 3R program to address the pre-war grievances of marginalization and systematic disenfranchisement remains a keenly contested issue in the ongoing discussion on Nigeria's flawed federalist structure.

In the wake of oil exploration in the Niger Delta region dating as far back as the 1960s, several developmental policies and programs in response to agitations for resource control and or payment of royalty to oil-producing communities. These projects and programs speak of the desire of the Nigerian state to reduce violent agitations and appease the growing agitation amongst the populace. Notable amongst others are establishing the Niger Delta Development Board in 1961, Niger Delta River Basin Development Authority in 1976, Special Fund for Oil Producing Areas by Revenue Act (1981). Others are the Presidential Taskforce for Oil Producing Areas in 1989, Niger Delta Development Commission in 2000, and the Ministry of Niger Delta Affairs in 2008 (Nexitier, 2020). All of which have failed to serve as pathways to sustainable peace.

Sometime around 2007-09, armed agitations and militancy peaked in oil producing communities resulting in a sharp decline in production from 2.2 million barrels per day (BPD) to as low as 500,000 BPD. This decline cost Nigeria an estimated loss of oil revenue to the tune of \$58m daily for over two years (Nexitier, 2020). Several militia groups appeared under the banner of the Movement for Emancipation of Niger Delta, targeting oil corporations and installations, hostage-taking, illicit oil bunkering, and outright mayhem, which resulted in human casualties. The first response of deploying military forces turned out to be counterproductive. The militants strengthened their capability for deadlier attacks and gained the empathy of their communities. After years of indiscriminate violence, the Nigerian government constituted the Presidential Amnesty Committee, culminating in the Presidential proclamation of amnesty on June 25, 2009 (Oscar, 2013).

The Presidential Amnesty Program (PAP) was able to get militants to turn in their arms in exchange for amnesty, it also restored pre-agitation oil production capacity, reduced militancy, and oil bunkering to barest minimums, however, the major talking points of the program was the decision of the Nigerian government to pay millions of dollars to ex-militant leaders for handing in their weapons. The Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation in 2011 began the payment of \$9m annually to a former militant leader to draft his foot-soldiers to protect the same oil installations they once attacked. Another such questionable contract was the payment of \$22.9 million annually and \$3.8 million monthly over the period 2011-2015 to three former militant leaders (Nexitier, 2020 and Drew, 2012). A report published by the National Bureau of Statistics on poverty and inequality from September 2018 to October 2019 shows over 40 per cent of the Nigerian population lived below the poverty line. The payment of millions of dollars to ex-militant does not only defy logic; it reflects the inability of the government to police its territory and afford security to civilian populations effectively (Aljazeera, 2020).

In a troubling revelation, the Host of Oil Producing Communities in Nigeria accused the militants turned defense contractors for fuelling crisis in the Niger Delta region to securing their juicy government paycheques. Although PAP was able to restore short stability in the Niger Delta, it did not reduce the long-term probability for violence, nor did it address the nuisance of the conflict issues (Michael, 2020 and Chris, 2012). Amongst other challenges, a considerable number of ex-militants who acquired vocational skills under the program were unable to secure job placements, intricate issues bothering on development remains unresolved, the disarmament process was not holistic, and there was a resurgence of criminal activities in the region. More appalling, the regions continued to experience an alarming rate of oil bunkering. Conservative estimates show the loss of 300,000 BPD a day to bunkering amounts to a loss in oil revenue to the tune of approximately \$1.7 billion a month (Campbell, 2015).

Evidence suggests that Shell Corporation paid the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) \$136.6 million (m) in 2019, \$76.6m in 2018, \$79.6m in 2017, and \$125.14m 2016. Shell is one of 15 Multinational oil-producing firms in the Niger Delta. It has also been observed that reconciliatory efforts cost huge state sums, and none has led to pathways for sustainability. According to former Governor of Nigeria's apex bank, Sanusi Lamido Sanusi II, between 2009 and 2012, US\$1 billion was spent on the Amnesty Program (Business Day, 2020 and Nigerian Stability Reconciliatory Program, 2014). While in the case of Biafra, the decision of separatist combatants to lay down their arms may have significantly informed the constitution of the 3Rs policy. The comprehensive outlook of the 3R policy which includes, DDR for combatants and reconstruction of the war-torn region, suggests the structural design of the 3R policy fit the description of the second-generation deradicalization model.

While the structural design and implementation framework of the 3R locates within the doctrine of the second generation DDR program, arguably, its implementation was highly flawed. Ex-combatants, including child soldiers, were not successfully reintegrated. For instance, the success ascribed to Rwanda's DDR experience derives from the successful absorption of over 35 000 ex-combatants, including 2,500 child soldiers out of an estimated 60 000 into the National Army (Chukwuma, 2015). In Sierra Leone, the DDR policy was accompanied by several policies, strategies, and robust institutional frameworks were constituted. Further to which the emphasis was not on national ownership but the essential

partnership with international donor agencies and partners who were a crucial part of the structural design of the program as a part of a broader post-conflict peace initiative (Osakwe et al., 2014). Specifically, the constitution of the Niger Delta Ministry alongside its various departments exemplifies the resolve of the government to pardon militants and move to address underlying factors that informed militancy in the first instance. Regrettably, government agencies set up to fast-track development in the oil-rich region have since become prebends for the primitive accumulation of Nigeria's commonwealth.

Despite the growing inclination of African states to include DDR modeled programs in managing violent conflicts, evidence from earlier campaigns shows that these programs have run into several complications and produced mixed outcomes (Campbell, 2020 and Prosper, 2013). Considering the existing inadequacies of both military operations and DDR interventions to foster sustainable peace agreements, what prospect for peace do Operation Safe Corridor presents? What did the government learn from its predecessors? These questions readily come to mind after the government made public its decision to enrol certified combatants who can consider 'low-risk and repentant Boko Haram fighters in its prison-based deradicalization program.

Countering Boko Haram Influence, Prospects, and Challenges of Nigeria's Prison Program

Their logic of militant religiosity is still unexplainable for many, yet associated challenges have been profound and distressing globally (Juergensmeyer, 2003). Groups like Boko Haram are complex to deal with; mainstream arguments suggest that religious terrorists have fanatical aims that tend to be totalitarian-like, uncompromising, idealistic, often void of political or economic logic are known to be hostile to negotiations (Jereon et al., 2014). Since the transformation of Boko Haram to a militarized religious terrorist sect in 2010, the Nigerian government has responded by increasing its defense budget from \$625 million in 2010 to over \$1 billion in 2012 (Campbell, 2014 and International Crisis Group, 2009),- and continue to rise in that order. The military has also trained civilians under the aegis Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF), and Joint Military Operations with neighboring Chad and Niger have all been drafted into the conflict. The fundamental doctrine of conventional warfare is the obliteration of the enemy. This framework has been termed the "kill-capture" approach to victory, given its emphasis on killing or capturing the enemy's forces until the enemy is vanquished or gives up (Clausewitz, 1976). The counterproductive outcome of the kill-capture approach invariably informed efforts to stabilize the Northeast region and counter the influence of Boko Haram using a non-military approach. Drawing on the experience of Saudi Arabia and Indonesia, the pioneers of incarceration-based deradicalization programs, the study problematizes Nigeria's choice of implementing the traditional DDR model, which informs the on-going efforts to use incarceration to deradicalize 'low-risk and 'repentant' Boko Haram defectors.

The classification of radicalized extremist or insurgents that could undergo prison-based deradicalization include those who arrive in prison as hardcore insurgents have been convicted for some terrorist-related act, to those who simply shared in insurgent ideals for opportunist reasons or material benefits. The hardcore also includes those who actively propagate the ideology and have been intimately involved in terror operations: strategists, recruiters, and combatants (Speckhard, 2011).

Beyond the need to reintegrate repentant low-risk fighters alongside continued military offensive as pathways for sustainable peace, the case of Boko Haram differs significantly from any other armed group Nigeria has met. By their extremist and fanatical religious beliefs and worldview, Boko Haram fighters see those who do not share in the sect's doctrines as infidels who must be slaughtered, even if they identify as Muslims. The element of religiosity and sense of obligation gives little room for meaningful dialogue. For this research, the two significant challenges that may arise from dealing with which such groups arguably remain their ideologies deeply rooted in propaganda and distortion of theological scriptures. To what extent can deradicalization be guaranteed? How do we know if they are reformed?

Since 2016, the Nigerian government has also operated Operation Safe Corridor, an indigenous government-funded program coordinated by the military to deradicalize low-risk, "repentant" Boko Haram fighters. Under the OSC, captured-suspected Boko Haram combatants or members are subjected to a highly secretive internal military screening process. Those considered high-security risk are placed in military detention. At the rudimentary stage of OSC the correctional and military officials in charge of the program collaborated with the International Organisation for Migration (IOM). Worthy of note is the limited nature of this collaboration, IOM is not involved in the delivery of the deradicalisation program nor is it involved in the assessment of participants or evaluation of the program (Bukarti et al., 2019). The program officials ran point on all the aforementioned areas despite having no practical experience.

The problematic status quo of the OSC exemplifies in the vague criteria and evidence used to detain suspects Boko Haram combatants or members. Human rights groups claim security forces often arbitrarily arrested villagers in areas suspected of harboring Boko Haram fighters (Brechenmacher, 2018). Over a hundred civil servants, including Islamic scholars' social workers, educators, artisans, and drug counselors from 13 government ministries and agencies, help ex-combatants shed violent ideas, recover from trauma, acquire primary education, and learn crafts (Bukarti, 2019).

Laudably, OSC is the only authorized instrument for combatants to exit the group. Men who are thought appropriate submit to more than a few weeks of religious reorientation, psychosocial support, and vocational training at a military-run facility in Northeast Gombe State. In Maiduguri, another Boko Haram stronghold, the government has also set up a holding center for low-risk women, children, and elderly individuals associated with Boko Haram (Brechenmacher, 2018). Office of the National Security Adviser, which runs point of Nigeria's prison program, clarified that the goal of the program should invariably be driven towards altering the beliefs, views, values, and attitudes of the violent extremist prisoners (deradicalization) rather than only changing their behavior (disengagement from violence).

Hence, interventions were focused on changing prisoners' radical or extremist beliefs and views and guaranteeing that prisoners renounce violence as a means to their ends. Further to which the program on the basis of its implementation framework targets individual deradicalization, as opposed to convincing violent extremist leaders to agree to collective disengagement from violence (Barkindo et al., 2016). Those in the know claim the program is seemingly male centric, the women and children associated with Boko Haram are preferably made to live in displacement camps with little or no efforts to deradicalize or de-traumatize

them (Brechenmacher, 2018). This could be counterproductive, considering between 2014, when Boko Haram is thought to have deployed its first female suicide bomber, and 2018, about 468 women and girls have been involved in or arrested for 240 suicide related attacks, the most by any terrorist movement in the world. These attacks have reportedly resulted in the death of a conservative estimate 1,200 individuals and injuring another 3,000 according publications of the Counterterrorism Center (Campbell, 2020). In an interview with former female Boko Haram member named 'Amina' who now lives in a camp for displaced persons, the respondent states, there was limited opportunity to work and earn a living to meet their needs, which informs rising spate of sexual exploitation by the security forces that are drafted to secure them. The respondent went on to claim, "most Boko Haram women regret coming here, because life is just so hard (Azadeh, 2019).

At this point it is imperative to state that, Nigeria's approach differs from that of exit Sweden, which deliberately left out religious ideology considering the difficulty in measuring a change in behavior, skepticism about the role of ideology in radicalization, and concerns that such an approach may foster sensitivities of Islamophobia. Although, Middle Eastern and South Asian countries such as Malaysia (Hamidi, 2016), Saudi Arabia, and Indonesia (International Crisis Group, 2007), identify reorientation of ideology as a nucleus of their deradicalization programs, as Nigeria does (Bukarti, 2019). A Review of Nigeria's Operation Safe Corridor (OSC) program will suggest the program applies the logic of crime and place by focusing on deradicalization efforts that seek to amend behavior, intending to reintroduce ex-combatants into communal life. While the OSC seems like a promising addition to Nigeria's counter-insurgency framework, given Indonesia's prison-based deradicalization program (International Crisis Group, 2007), Nigeria's prison program has been the subject of controversy since its implementation for apparent reasons. From the inception, Operation Safe Corridor generated controversy. For instance, it is imprecise what measures the military uses to classify individuals as "low-risk" versus "high-risk," a criterion that governs who is cleared for rehabilitation, who is kept in detention, or who is informally released. As a result, Boko Haram members have no way of knowing whether they will be considered eligible after surrendering, may be turned off by the uncertainty. Those familiar with the program suggest that it has a very narrow scope, as the military is cautious in categorizing any suspected Boko Haram affiliates or devotees as low-risk (Brechenmacher, 2018).

Furthermore, in low-income countries like Nigeria, meeting these basic infrastructural requirements may pose significant challenges in instances where prisons are overcrowded, often than not the sad reality (UNODC, 2016). In other times, deradicalization programs are seemingly conceived based on intuition and implicit expectations about how certain interventions can achieve specific desired outcomes. Established explications of the ideas behind these programs are rare. Hence, it often remains unclear what objectives such policies precisely aim to achieve and how the instruments are supposed to contribute to achieving these objectives, let alone how the success of these policies can be evaluated (Tinka, 2012). Furthermore, the crucial role of the military in the day-to-day operations of the OSC raises questions of legality and expertise. Opinions from legal experts states, the military lacks legal legitimacy to coordinate a deradicalisation program, therefore making the OSC an extra-legal, if not illegal. On their part the military counter such claims, stating OSC is a component of Nigeria's counter-insurgency operations against Boko Haram and legally falls

within its jurisdiction, only that it is a softer approach than military exercises (Bukarti et al., 2019).

Invariably the reservations towards the OSC derives from the opacity of crucial issues such as the modalities for implementing the program, various issues such as where defecting BH members will be reintegrated, and frustrations of the Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and other victims of Boko Haram insurgency. Until these criticisms are addressed, OSC is less likely to gain popular support and will ultimately be difficult to implement in the Northeast or any other part of Nigeria (Centre for Democracy and Development, 2017). More so, the secrecy shrouding the implementation of the OSC and the inability of civil societies and independent researchers to monitor and evaluate the program calls for concern. The absence of a centralized national database further complicates and puts to question the viability of the program. The lack of a centralized identity management system makes it almost impossible to track re-civilized ex-combatants.

There seems to be no consensus among in the literature if prison-based deradicalization or any other form of deradicalization is effective in the long term. Evidence from Nigeria suggests it effective in bringing about immediate and mid-term stability, given resources is redistributed, and critical stakeholders are appeased. Like other counter-insurgency strategies, the adoption of DDR in Nigeria is not without its limitations. DDR modeled programs have also been meeting with hostility by Nigerians and several lawmakers, who feel there were no far-reaching consultations when the program was developed. If anything, affected communities, after enduring years of BH attacks, are cynical of reuniting with their now repentant tormentors (Campbell, 2020). On a general note, there is also confusion about whether the deradicalization program necessarily undertakes rehabilitation. Measuring success has only proved to be difficult (Aljazeera, 2020), and post-civilization assessment remains seemingly non-existence.

Conclusion

It is assumed that the number of individuals who voluntarily turn themselves in for deradicalization will determine the success of the policies designed to manage associates of Boko Haram, as thousands of young people are reported to have joined the organization. In the absence of variable data or estimates on the actual number of active Boko Haram combatants, it is difficult to measure success on this basis. Furthermore, authorities handling surrenderees are likely to encounter the challenge of differentiating, low-risk from high-risk and from those captured on the battlefield or those who voluntarily turn themselves in for deradicalisation (Saibou et al, 2019). More so, the secrecy shrouding the operation of the program makes it difficult to independently ascertain whether those in holding were captured or turned themselves in. The unpleasant butchery of unarmed rice farmers by BH on November 28, 2020, paints a gory picture of the capacity of Boko Haram to carry out deadly attacks (Aljazeera, 2020). There also seems to be no end in sight given the recurring nature of attacks. Further to which the OSC currently lacks a clearly outlined reintegration strategy and a post-reintegration monitoring. In part, these could be ascribed to the reluctance of politicians fear being seen as lenient toward extremist groups, while their victims languish in make shift displacement camps. Reintegration of former combatants is mainly aspirational because communities are generally unwilling to accept them back, and there is no institution designated with the task of preparing communities. Furthermore, most of the participants in

Nigeria's OPSC are men, yet women and children are also fighting for Boko Haram (Bukarti et al., 2019).

On their part, the government has done little to build popular support for the scheme or clarify the misconceptions surrounding it (Brechenmacher, 2018). Furthermore, the decision of the Nigerian state to negotiate with a group that has fanatical and rigid ideologies is also problematic, given the difficulty in measuring deradicalisation in the absence of theoretical frameworks to guide such an endeavour. Beyond the need to bandwagon of countries adopting prison-based deradicalization programs, DDR initiatives should be designed about existential realities. Arguably, it does not seem like Nigeria's prison program have established ends for participants.

Although OSC seems like a laudable addition to Nigeria's framework for countering the influence of Boko Haram, its in-excusable fraught design and implementation framework exemplifies in its vague screening criteria, lack of clearly outlined reintegration strategy, and numerous other uncertainties shrouding its implementation. Invariably, deradicalization of former Boko Haram combatants, regardless of approach, will likely fail if the broader contours of the conflict are not dealt with satisfactorily. Specifically, a more comprehensive justice and reconciliation package that convinces prepares, and equips communities to receive former fighters and sustained pressure from the military is needed (Bukarti, 2019). If DDR is to be really effective in achieving the goals of sustained peace and development, it is important that it is linked to wider reform efforts and development programmes. Three aspects are particularly relevant: linking DDR to national development strategies and programmes, linking it to security sector reform, and linking it to transitional justice initiatives (UNDP, 2013).

Against the backdrop we recommend, a shift in strategy from deradicalisation counter-radicalization. As opposed to what is obtainable, the government should embrace the guidelines of the more inclusive second-generation deradicalisation given its conviction of the viability of running a prison program for Boko Hara combatants. Secondly, poverty seems to be a recurring decimal in the list of factors driving armed groups. Hence, the government should enact policies that will ensure funds set aside for rural development; education, healthcare, and social infrastructure are not diverted fraudulently. We also suggest measures be put in place to find radical religion preachers early enough. As for OSC, there is a need to address secrecy shrouding its operations, communities should be carried along, and measures put in place to track and monitor re-civilized Boko Haram defectors.

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