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Community Acceptance of Former Boko Haram Affiliates

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MANAGING EXITS
FROM ARMED CONFLICT

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KEY FINDINGS

- People in and around Maiduguri, Nigeria, are very receptive to having former Boko Haram affiliates - both male and female, and child and adult - return to their communities.
- Most people believe that their fellow community members and community leaders are supportive of reintegration, but there are indications they could be less receptive if they felt their neighbours and community leaders were against the return of former affiliates.
- The data shows that reintegration is already happening. Many people know of former Boko Haram affiliates who have returned and are “good” community members; fewer have heard of those who have “been a problem”.
- When actually confronted with returning family and community members, willingness to accept is even higher than acceptance levels in response to hypothetical scenarios.

This Findings Report, and the research that supported it, were undertaken as part of UNU-CPR’s Managing Exits from Armed Conflict (MEAC) project. MEAC is a multi-donor, multi-partner initiative to develop a unified, rigorous approach to examining how and why individuals exit armed conflict and evaluating the efficacy of interventions meant to support their transitions. While the Findings Report benefited from feedback from MEAC’s donors and institutional partners, it does not necessarily represent their official policies or positions.

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Background

About MEAC

How and why do individuals exit armed groups, and how do they do so sustainably, without falling back into conflict cycles?

These questions are at the core of UNU-CPR's Managing Exits from Armed Conflict (MEAC) initiative. MEAC is a multi-year, multi-partner collaboration that aims to develop a unified, rigorous approach to examining how and why individuals exit armed conflict and evaluating the efficacy of interventions meant to support their transition to civilian life. MEAC seeks to inform evidence-based programme design and implementation in real time to improve efficacy. At the strategic level, the cross-programme, cross-agency lessons that will emerge from the growing MEAC evidence base will support more effective conflict resolution and peacebuilding efforts. MEAC is supported by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Switzerland's Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA), the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), Irish Aid, and the UN Development Programme (UNDP), and is being run in partnership with the UN Department of Peace Operations (DPO), UNICEF, the International Organization for Migration (IOM), and the World Bank.

About this Series

The MEAC findings report series seeks to put evidence about conflict transitions and related programming into the hands of policymakers and practitioners in real time. The reports present short overviews of findings (or emerging findings) across a wide range of thematic areas and include analyses on their political or practical implications for the UN and its partners.

About this Report

This report is based on data collected from December 2020 to March 2021, as part of a phone survey with a representative sample of 2,963 community members from key locations in and around the Maiduguri metropolitan area (MMC) in Borno State, Nigeria.¹ It presents data around community receptivity to and perceptions about individuals who exit Boko Haram. This data may be useful to UN and NGO partners working in the region to bolster their prevention and reintegration programming, as well as efforts to support the communities who receive former Boko Haram associates. This brief will focus on how people feel about someone returning to their community and will set the stage for subsequent briefs that will focus on social reintegration, and transitional justice and reconciliation preferences. These insights are unique as this data is collected in ongoing conflict, while reintegration is actively happening, and communities in and around Maiduguri are receiving

¹ The sample size noted here is different from the one cited in prior findings reports based on the same phone survey. This adjustment was made in October 2021 to reflect changes in the data set related to the experiment that was embedded in the survey, and which is the subject of this and several briefs that follow. The analysis in prior reports was not affected by this adjustment as it was not focused on variables related to the experiment.

those who exit Boko Haram and other armed groups. The report ends with an examination of key policy and programmatic implications of these findings.

Community Receptivity Toward Former Boko Haram Affiliates

Overview

Between December 2020 and March 2021, UNU-CPR and one of its local implementing partners in Nigeria – Innovations for Poverty Action (IPA) – conducted a randomized phone survey with 2,963 people representative of the population from Maiduguri Metropolitan Council (MMC), Jere, and Konduga.² Respondents were asked a set of questions about whether they would be generally comfortable with those who exit Boko Haram returning to their communities.³ One set of these questions focused on a generic “man” or “woman” who had left Boko Haram, while other questions provided a more detailed fictional profile of a “repentant” former affiliate, and varied his/her gender (“Usman” or “Fatima”) and age (12 or 28 years old). In the specific scenario, interviewers either provided no additional information, or detailed that the formerly affiliated person had either been cleared by the government after completing a reorientation (reintegration) programme,⁴ or that he/she expressed a willingness to publicly apologize and ask the community for forgiveness. This series of questions was designed to measure differences in people’s willingness to receive different types of former Boko Haram associates into their community and to ascertain whether receptivity is influenced by various programmatic interventions. An analysis of the resulting data follows. It demonstrates that reintegration of former Boko Haram associates is already happening, and communities appear very receptive to their return, more so than might previously have been thought.

Findings

There has long been significant concern about potential stigmatization of the thousands of children, women, and men who seek to return to their communities after having been associated with Boko Haram. Difficulty reintegrating and the potential for rejection poses a humanitarian concern, as well as a potential security challenge if it impels former associates to return to Boko Haram, switch to

² This research was conducted in partnership with several researchers, spearheaded by Dr Rebecca Littman, University of Illinois at Chicago, in partnership with Dr Zoe Marks, Harvard Kennedy School, and conducted and facilitated on the ground principally by Innovations for Poverty Action (IPA), with support from Mobukar Consultancy. More information on MEAC partners and donors is available on <https://cpr.unu.edu/research/projects/meac.html#outline>.

³ The questions asked about “Boko Haram” because the local research team has found that community members often don’t make distinctions between different factions (e.g., ISWAP). Indeed, the survey specifically asked whether respondents had ever heard of ISWAP and of the 9 per cent who said they had, whether they thought there was a difference between the groups. Only 32 per cent agreed there were differences. In other MEAC surveys where knowledge of different factions is greater (e.g., with former armed groups associates themselves), distinctions are made between groups.

⁴ The term most often understood locally is “reorientation” even though UN actors describe their programming as reintegration.

another armed group, or dissuade others still with Boko Haram from leaving for fear of negative reintegration experiences.⁵

Despite this concern, people in and around Maiduguri seem very receptive to individuals coming out of Boko Haram returning to their communities. When presented with a generic scenario - “Would you be okay with a man who had been with Boko Haram living in your community?”, 69 per cent of people say yes. When the same question is asked about a woman, 71 per cent say yes. Without much information about potential returnees, there is widespread acceptance for return.

When more specific, fictionalized profiles of former affiliates⁶ are provided – giving them a name, age, and indicating that they are repentant - community members’ willingness to accept those returning increases significantly. As shown below in Figure 1, when presented with specific profiles of Usman and Fatima (repentant former affiliates of Boko Haram, whose ages were either described as 12 or 28), respondents were even more likely to say they would be okay with the individual returning to their community. For both Usman scenarios (12- and 28-year-old), 87 per cent of respondents were willing to accept him. For Fatima, willingness to accept her back into the community was similarly high (85 per cent said yes to the 12-year-old Fatima, 90 per cent to the 28-year-old Fatima). It is important to note that all former associates were described as having been detained⁷ and repentant,⁸ which makes it hard to know whether the specificity of the scenario, or the description of Usman and Fatima as detained and repentant - or both - may have led to the increase in receptivity to return relative to generic questions.

Support for a generic male or female associate may be lower because so little information is offered other than their gender and Boko Haram affiliation, and respondents may be concerned that expressing willingness to receive them may be misconstrued as support for the group. When the profile offered becomes more personalized and concrete, the return may be viewed through the lens of the individual rather than the armed group, and receptivity to return increases.

Figure 1 – Willingness to Accept Former Boko Haram Affiliates Back

	Male affiliate	Female affiliate	Usman, 12-year-old boy	Usman, 28-year-old man	Fatima, 12-year-old girl	Fatima, 28-year-old woman
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⁵ International Crisis Group, “Returning from the Land of Jihad: The Fate of Women Associated with Boko Haram,” *Africa Report* 275 (2019), <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/west-africa/nigeria/275-returning-land-jihad-fate-women-associated-boko-haram>.

⁶ Scenario: “I want to tell you the story of **Fatima/Usman [a 28-year-old woman/man / a 12-year-old girl/boy]** from your community. **Fatima/Usman** spent a year with Boko Haram before escaping and surrendering to the Nigerian Military. **S/He** spent a year in a detention center. **Fatima/Usman** is now repentant and wants to return home.

[nothing]

[Fatima/Usman has been cleared by the government after completing a reorientation programme.]

[Fatima/Usman is willing to apologize publicly and ask the community for forgiveness].

This is the only information I have for you on **Fatima/Usman**.”

⁷ The detention reference is general and meant to ensure comprehension of a respondent sample that is not generally knowledgeable about programming for former armed group affiliates. For example, when asked if they are familiar with Operation Safe Corridor, which is the programming stream for low-risk male adults coming out of armed groups, only 23 per cent of respondents had heard of it.

⁸ It should be noted that the profile provided – which varied by gender and age – was generic so it did not aim to distinguish between the nuances of the actual programmatic landscape on the ground, which varies for different populations. For example, children who are thought to have been associated with an armed group are not supposed to be detained, but rather are to be sent to a transit center for reintegration programming and support. Given the lack of public knowledge about programming in this space, and the time constraints and objectives of the survey experiment, these specific details are not reflected in the profiles.

Okay with them returning to your community	69%	71%	87%	87%	85%	90%
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The Impact of Programming on Receptivity to Return

For the profiles of Usman and Fatima, a randomly selected two-thirds of respondents received one of the following two additional pieces of information about the former affiliate: Usman / Fatima has been cleared by the government after completing a reorientation programme; or, Usman / Fatima is willing to apologize publicly and ask the community for forgiveness. The survey found that, compared to the version with no additional information about programming, levels of acceptance remain the same when respondents hear that Usman or Fatima went through reorientation (referring to the Nigerian Government's reintegration/rehabilitation programme Operation Safe Corridor) and when they hear that Usman / Fatima is willing to apologize publicly. In all cases, acceptance levels range from 86 - 89 per cent.⁹ These results suggest that while former affiliates understood to be **repentant** are very likely to be accepted, specific programming such as reorientation or public apologies may not add additional signals about their level of repentance or readiness to reintegrate. Such interventions thus do not appear to alter the community's receptivity for return.

Increasing Acceptance to Return Over Time

Encouragingly, there is reason to believe that levels of acceptance have risen over the past few years. At the height of the insurgency, stories of rejection were commonplace. Then, in 2018, Mercy Corps conducted a survey with over 3,800 people living in Maiduguri,¹⁰ and asked questions about acceptance of former Boko Haram associates (in a similar manner to the MEAC survey). That survey presented a subset of 797 respondents with specific profiles of a male fighter, and of both a man and a woman abducted into Boko Haram, and varied aspects of the profiles such as whether the affiliates were described as repentant. For repentant former affiliates, acceptance rates were at 71 per cent for the male fighter, 72 per cent for the abducted man, and 82 per cent for the abducted woman. For profiles where repentance was not mentioned, acceptance levels decreased to 53 per cent for the male fighter, 56 per cent for the abducted man, and 77 per cent for the abducted woman. These levels of acceptance, already relatively high in 2018, appear to have increased in the past few years.¹¹

Additionally, the Mercy Corps survey suggests that the results around high levels of willingness to accept both child and adult former affiliates found in the MEAC survey are not a coincidence. In the Mercy Corps data, respondents were equally willing to accept former affiliates at different age levels (16-, 21-, 26-, vs. 31-years-old). The profiles also varied whether respondents were described as going through reorientation, and similarly to the current data we find that people are equally willing to accept regardless of whether the former affiliate went through reorientation.

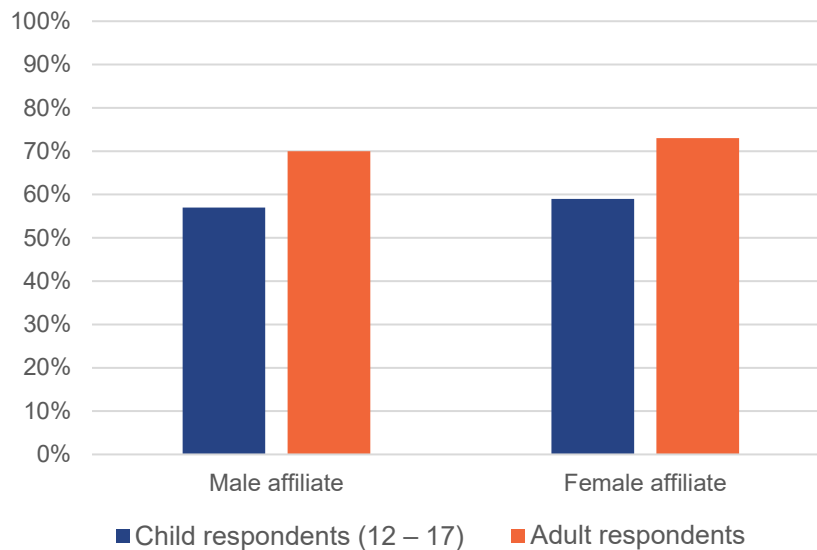
⁹ Note that these numbers average across child and adult Usman, and child and adult Fatima.

¹⁰ See Mercy Corps, *Radio for Reconciliation: How Messages from Boko Haram Returnees and Religious Leaders Shape Community Acceptance* (Portland 2021), and Graeme Blair, Rebecca Littman, Elizabeth R. Nugent, Rebecca Wolfe, Mohammed Bukar, Benjamin Crisman, Anthony Etim, Chad Hazlett, and Jiyoun Kim, *Trusted Authorities Can Change Minds and Shift Norms during Conflict* (2021).

¹¹ When comparing it is important to note that the questions in the Mercy Corps survey were not exactly the same as those in the MEAC survey, and the respondents were different people.

When acceptance is disaggregated by age of survey respondent, some interesting differences emerge. As shown in Figure 2, adult respondents are more likely to be okay with a male or female former Boko Haram affiliate returning to their community than are child respondents.¹² This general pattern holds when respondents are asked about whether they would be okay with Fatima or Usman returning to their community. One possible explanation for the lower levels of receptivity amongst child respondents is their lower status in the community. Children may feel more powerless to respond should problems emerge from reintegration, and they may be more cautious about accepting people back.

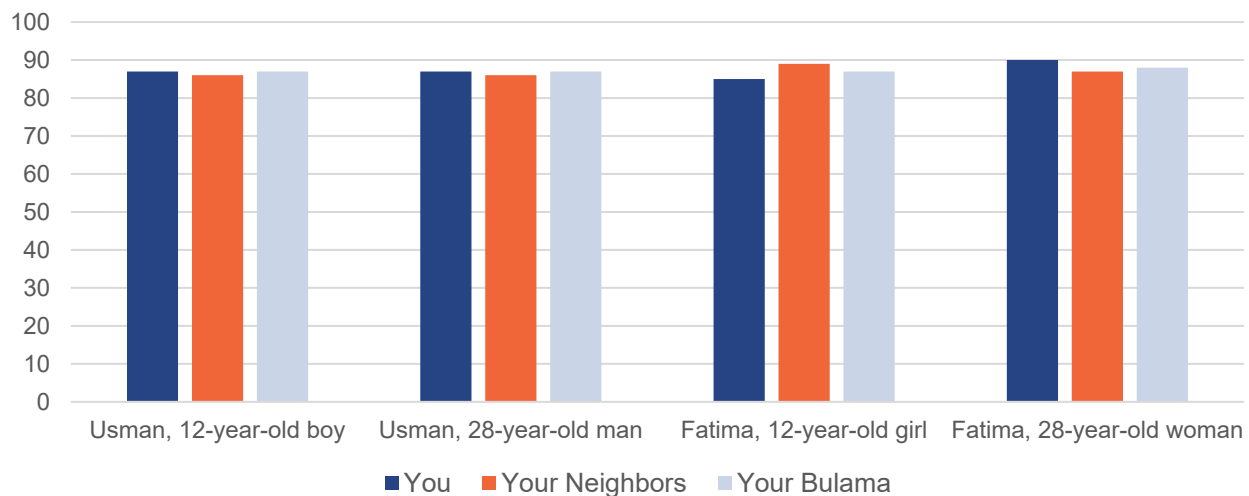
Figure 2 – Age Differences in Acceptance of Former Boko Haram Affiliates



Perceptions of Community Norms around Reintegration

Interestingly, children are also slightly less likely than adults to think their fellow community members and community leaders support reintegration, which may influence their own lower levels of support, as perceptions of community norms are important influences on personal attitudes. When looking at the broader sample, most respondents believed their fellow community members are just as supportive as they are of accepting former affiliates from Boko Haram back into the community. As shown in Figure 3, the percentages of respondents who believed their neighbours and community leaders (known as bulamas) favored reintegration for Usman and Fatima presented are extremely similar to respondent's own acceptance levels. For example, just as 87 per cent of respondents are ready to accept 12-year-old Usman back into their community, 86 and 87 per cent of respondents believe their neighbours and bulamas, respectively, are in favor of Usman reintegrating back into the community.

¹² The sample size of children who responded to the questions about the generic male and female former Boko Haram affiliates is 354. For the Usman and Fatima profiles, the sample size ranges from 69 to 93 per condition. Although these small sample sizes limit our ability to draw a strong conclusion, the pattern is worth highlighting as it does raise additional questions.

Figure 3 – Perceptions of Community and Community Leader Receptivity to Return

It bodes well for Borno State's peacebuilding and social recovery that most respondents think their communities are in favor of reintegration, as it also appears that individual support would only go so far in the face of community opposition. When asked if others in the community would not allow Usman or Fatima to return, whether they would support the decision, about half of all respondents said yes, regardless of Usman or Fatima's age.¹³ This shows the importance of taking into account the perceptions around community norms about receptivity to return. Even a small amount of vocal opposition in a particular community could have a large effect on an individual's social acceptance, and thus, likely, their reintegration prospects.¹⁴

Emotions Toward Former Boko Haram Affiliates

In addition to acceptance, respondents were asked about their levels of anger and fear toward former affiliates. As shown in Figure 4, the percentage of respondents who feel anger toward the generic male and female affiliates are 50 per cent and 42 per cent, respectively. Fear followed a similar pattern: 53 and 45 per cent of respondents felt afraid of the male and female affiliate, respectively. However, negative emotions decline dramatically when asked about anger and fear toward the specific profiles of Usman and Fatima. Anger drops to between 10-13 per cent depending on the specific profile they received, and the percentage of respondents who felt afraid dropped sharply to between 14-16 per cent. These numbers may decrease so dramatically because the Usman and

¹³ The percentage of respondents who said yes ranged from 44 and 45 per cent for Usman (12- and 28-year-old profiles, respectively), and 49 and 50 per cent of respondents for Fatima (12- and 28-year-old profiles, respectively)

¹⁴ In upcoming findings reports, the MEAC team will further explore the impact of personal and community victimization on receptivity to reintegration, as well as gender dynamics around reintegration.

Fatima profiles get respondents to consider a specific former affiliate rather than a generic man or woman who was with Boko Haram. They may also be substantially lower because Usman and Fatima – in the survey profiles - are described as repentant and having spent a year in detention.

Figure 4 – Emotions Toward Former Boko Haram Affiliates

	Male affiliate	Female affiliate	Usman, 12-year-old boy	Usman, 28-year-old man	Fatima, 12-year-old-girl	Fatima, 28-year-old woman
Feel anger toward them	50%	42%	12%	12%	10%	13%
Feel afraid of them	53%	45%	14%	16%	14%	15%

When asked if they would have fear that the generic man, generic woman, Usman, and/or Fatima would hurt people in the future, the responses followed a similar - albeit less dramatic - pattern. Fear that the generic man and woman would harm people in the future is 28 per cent and 34 per cent, respectively. When it feels as if respondents are being asked about real people – people who have a name, a story, and are described as repentant – the community’s fear that former affiliates would harm others in the future declines too. Fear that the generic man (28 per cent) and woman (34 per cent) would harm people in the future fell to between 20-22 per cent for the Usman and Fatima profiles (12- and 28-year-old versions). Again, a striking feature of the responses is the relatively similar – low – rate of anger and fear regardless of whether the fictional former affiliate is male or female, adult or child.

Experiences with Reintegration

The data thus far suggests that receptivity to reintegration is high, even when people are asked about generic male and female former Boko Haram affiliates. Receptivity becomes even higher - nearly 90 per cent - when people are given more specific information about a former affiliate and told that they are repentant. Levels of receptivity are very high regardless of the affiliate’s gender or age. Recognizing that many respondents have already had personal experiences with reintegration, the survey went beyond the range of hypothetical scenarios and asked about direct experience.

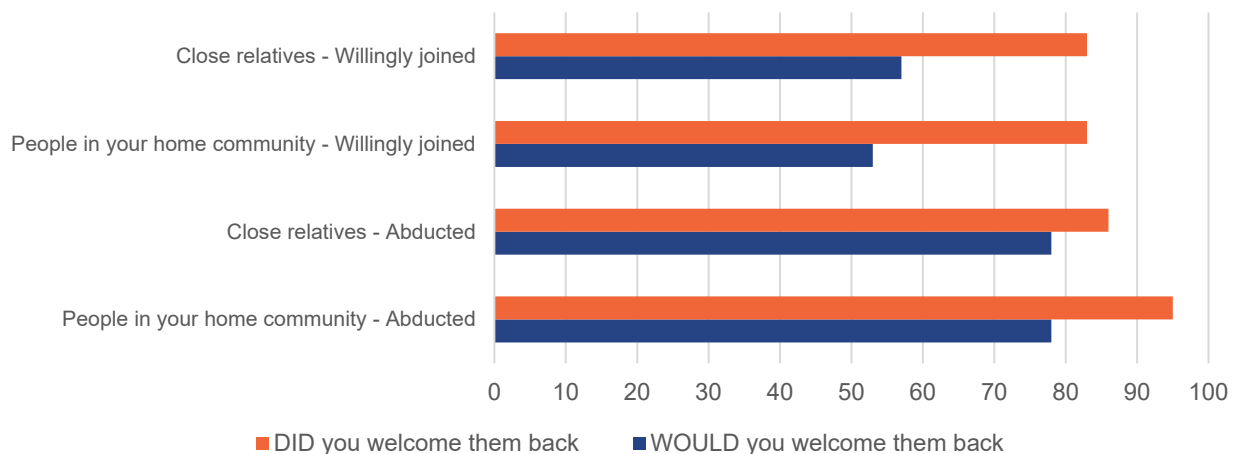
Respondents were asked whether they had ever heard of someone who returned from Boko Haram and has been a good community member. They were then asked whether they had heard of someone who returned and has been a problem in the community. They were also asked whether anyone in their family or community was with Boko Haram, and whether any of these people have returned. If they have returned, respondents were asked whether they had welcomed them back. If they had not returned, respondents were asked whether they *would* welcome them back.

First, the data show that positive stories outweigh negative stories about real returnees in the community. Many more people have heard of returned former Boko Haram affiliates who have been “good community member[s]” (39 per cent) than those who heard of former affiliates who had “been a problem” in the community (14 per cent).

Second, a significant portion of respondents personally know someone in their family or community who has been with Boko Haram. For example, of those surveyed, 28 per cent reported having a close relative(s) who was abducted by Boko Haram, while 12 per cent reported having a close relative who voluntarily joined the group. Since these are sensitive questions that people may be wary of answering, it is possible the actual numbers could be higher. Among those, many respondents (29 per cent) also report knowing a former affiliate(s) – a close relative or community member – who has returned to their community after being abducted into or willingly joining Boko Haram. More specifically, 9 per cent report having a close relative who returned to their community, and 25 per cent know someone in their community who returned after being with Boko Haram.

Finally, as with the findings outlined earlier, when the issue of reintegration after association with Boko Haram becomes more tangible, the survey data suggest receptivity to those returning increases. Of those with abducted relative(s) who had not yet returned to the community, 78 per cent said they *would* welcome them back if they returned. Among those whose actual abducted family member had returned home after being with Boko Haram, the rate of reported acceptance increased to 86 per cent.

Figure 5 – Hypothetical versus actual welcoming back¹⁵



As shown in Figure 5, a similar pattern is seen for close relatives who joined Boko Haram voluntarily, and for community members who were either abducted or joined voluntarily. Actual levels of acceptance when a family or community member who was affiliated with Boko Haram returns home

¹⁵ This series of questions asked respondents how many family or community members they know who willingly joined / were abducted by Boko Haram. With the focus on numbers, there were a lot of “I don’t know” answers. Those respondents who said “I don’t know” did not get the follow-up question about whether they know someone who returned. Therefore, the numbers presented here for whether people know someone who returned, and for whether they did / would welcome back community members who were affiliated with Boko Haram, represent only a subset of the sample. There is no reason to think the numbers presented here around reintegration of returning community members would be different if asked to everyone.

are substantially higher than anticipated levels of acceptance for those who have not yet returned. For example, of those who had close relatives who “voluntarily” joined Boko Haram, when that/those relative(s) has not yet returned, 57 per cent of those respondents said they would welcome them back. The actual rate of acceptance for those whose relative(s) had already returned home is much higher at 83 per cent.¹⁶

Policy and Programmatic Implications

The data gathered as part of this survey confirms that the return of former Boko Haram affiliates is not a theoretical concept. Many people in the Maiduguri area are being confronted with members of their community or family returning after a period of association with Boko Haram or other armed groups.

The survey data highlighted in this report shows that support for the reintegration of former Boko Haram members is high across all profiles – boy, girl, man, and woman. These high levels of support for reintegration have been found in other recent studies, notably Mercy Corps’ 2018 survey in a similar geographic area. The data are consistent with the idea that receptivity to return has increased over the course of the insurgency in the North East, even for certain groups that face specific patterns of stigmatization (e.g., women and girls).¹⁷ At the same time, the numbers of people returning after being associated with Boko Haram have grown.

The findings suggest that increased information about the trajectories of former associates since they left Boko Haram had no impact on willingness to accept them back into the community. Across the different survey scenarios, such as completing a reorientation programme, being willing to apologize, or none of these, the key feature seems to be that former associates were repentant and/or detained for a year. This complements Mercy Corps’ study, which found that repentance was the only element that shifted receptivity to return. This finding has potential implications for scaled up communications efforts around reintegration, as well as individual-level family tracing and the successful brokering of returning former associates back to their communities. For practitioners seeking to measure receptivity for return to support their programming, offering specific examples may yield more accurate metrics of community perceptions on reintegration.

One way of interpreting the lack of impact of completing a reorientation programme could be the lack of public knowledge about such programmes. MEAC’s survey found that only a small portion (just 23 per cent) of the population in and around Maiduguri had ever heard of Operation Safe Corridor (OPSC) - the Nigerian Government’s pipeline for low-risk Boko Haram affiliates.¹⁸ With little awareness about the programming provided as part of OPSC and afterwards by international organizations, public confidence might be unmoved upon learning the returnee is a graduate. If this is indeed what underlies this result – or lack of impact on community attitudes – the Nigerian and state government organizations and their international supporters may wish to consider enhancing awareness about the OPSC programme.

¹⁶ 12 per cent of respondents have family members who voluntarily joined Boko Haram (n = 385). Of those, 119 people said their relatives had come back.

¹⁷ Referencing the specific stigma faced by women who had been associated - or thought to be associated - with Boko Haram - “That stigma has somewhat subsided as more returnees have arrived...” International Crisis Group, “Returning from the Land of Jihad: The Fate of Women Associated with Boko Haram,” *Africa Report* 275 (2019), <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/west-africa/nigeria/275-returning-land-jihad-fate-women-associated-boko-haram>.

¹⁸ Levels of awareness of Operation Safe Corridor, as well as levels of trust in reorientation programming, will be explored in an upcoming findings brief.

There are real concerns about the stigmatization of individuals reintegrating into communities after being associated – or accused of association – with armed groups, especially because accusations of association can be highly spurious and undermine an individual's safety and prospects for reintegration. Practitioners report real difficulty overcoming some of the specific types of stigma different groups face (e.g., women and girls who are returning with children), as well as for adult men due to assumptions about their engagement.¹⁹

Even if a small minority of the population rejects returnees, it may be hard for former Boko Haram affiliates to return to secure and productive civilian lives. The findings also suggest that respondents who are willing to receive returnees back into their community could be swayed to reject them if that is what other community members or community leaders decide to do, or are perceived as wanting to do. On the other hand, if community leaders accept returnees, community members may be encouraged to support reintegration. Mercy Corps' earlier survey found that those respondents who received messaging from religious leaders about the need to support reintegration showed a higher level of acceptance of former Boko Haram associates than those that received a placebo message.

Publicly supporting the return of former Boko Haram associates may be difficult for some community leaders who themselves have been targeted and who are afraid of being blamed if reintegrated former members return to the fight or engage in problematic behaviour in the community. In 2011 and 2012, Boko Haram targeted and killed religious and traditional leaders and forced many of them into hiding as a result. Nevertheless, a recent MEAC survey of community leaders seems to indicate that leaders in and around Maiduguri are receptive to welcoming back former associates.²⁰ It is important to consider that they could be blamed if an accepted affiliate returns to the group or engages in violence against community members. As politicians question the value of OPSC and reintegration efforts,²¹ community leaders may be in an even more difficult position for openly supporting the return of former Boko Haram affiliates. To bolster reintegration at all levels, state governments in the region need to make their position on reintegration clear. Only then can community leaders do the same, and hence reinforce community member receptivity to returning Boko Haram affiliates.

The findings suggest that beyond the community engagement before and after the arrival of former armed group affiliates – which practitioners believe is key to sustainable reintegration – there is value in investing in communications campaigns around reintegration, particularly information about community receptivity to the return of former armed group associates. The MEAC study highlighted the real possibility that hypothetical questions of reintegration yield lower support, but as scenarios become more specific,²² or as people are actually presented with returning family or community members, support for reintegration increases. This suggests that moving forward to better gauge community perceptions, more specific scenarios are needed and sharing anonymized positive stories may be valuable. The results also show that significantly more respondents were aware of former Boko Haram associates who had returned and were “good community member[s]” than those who were “a problem” in the community. While this finding will likely be heartening for those working on reintegration, it also raises the question about the penetration of these messages and whether

¹⁹ It is possible that differences in experience could be explained by other factors (e.g., rural-urban divides).

²⁰ To date, when asked if they would allow a generic former associate to live in their community, surveyed community leaders in and around Maiduguri largely confirm that they would allow male (66 per cent), female (79 per cent), and children (85 per cent) who were formerly associated with Boko Haram to live in their community. These percentages go up when presented with more detailed scenarios. This data is not final as the community leader survey is ongoing. The findings will be presented in a separate findings brief.

²¹ Femi Owolabi, “Zulum: ‘Repentant’ Boko Haram members end up as spies for the insurgents,” *The Cable*, 5 March 2021, <https://www.thecable.ng/zulum-repentant-boko-haram-members-return-to-group-after-spying-on-communities>.

²² It should be noted that given all the Usman and Fatima scenarios mention repentance, and the generic man/woman scenario did not, it is not possible to isolate which one of these factors - specificity, repentance, or both - are influencing the increase in receptivity to return. The hypothetical v. actual acceptance rates for family and community members - combined with the Mercy Corps findings, suggests it may likely be both.

moving away from superlative anecdotes of reintegration – the atypical success stories and examples of failure – could further enhance willingness to accept former associates back into the community. Stories of normal and uneventful reintegration experiences – ex-combatants working to start new businesses, or formerly associated children working to catch up on missed schooling – rarely make the news.

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