



GENDERED DIMENSIONS OF
**DISENGAGEMENT, DISASSOCIATION,
REINTEGRATION AND RECONCILIATION**
IN THE LAKE CHAD BASIN REGION

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

DDR	disarmament, demobilization and reintegration
DDRR	disengagement, disassociation, reintegration and reconciliation
IDP	internally displaced person
ISWAP	Islamic State in West Africa Province
PRR	prosecution, rehabilitation and reintegration
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
VEO	violent extremist organization

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

IOM is committed to integrating gender considerations into its transition and recovery portfolio, including by promoting women's meaningful participation and fundamental role in peacebuilding and conflict prevention efforts.

As part of its support to governments in dealing with men and women associated with violent extremist groups, IOM identified gaps in the knowledge and understanding of the gendered dimensions of engagement, disengagement and reintegration processes experienced by associates of these groups. How, for example, does gender impact decisions to join or depart a group? To what extent are community perceptions of former associates shaped by gender stereotypes, and in what ways do these perceptions interact with the reintegration process?

METHODOLOGY

The research sought answers to the above questions with reference to communities in the Lake Chad Basin region and former associates of Boko Haram. It aimed to produce a gender analysis of the diverse experiences of women and men who have disengaged from violent extremist groups and offer practical guidance to policymakers and practitioners.

To complement existing analysis focused on former Boko Haram associates, the research survey targeted community members, authorities and other local stakeholders, gathering their perceptions of these former associates and of engagement, disengagement and reintegration processes. After reviewing existing literature, research teams in Cameroon and Chad administered a questionnaire with 21 open- and closed-ended questions to 100 non-associates of Boko Haram residing or working in areas affected by activities of the group. Afterwards, the research teams followed up with qualitative, open interviews with selected respondents.

KEY FINDINGS

The field research illustrated that people's perceptions of why and how associates join Boko Haram, what they do while they are associated with the group, why they leave, and what their needs are after returning home are all shaped along gender lines. Thus, women former associates were assumed to have been forcibly recruited or to have followed a husband into the group, and to have played a secondary, non-violent role within it. Men were believed to act with agency when joining the group and to serve in active roles. While the literature clarifies that these gendered views do not capture the complexities involved, perceptions have powerful implications for reintegration and reconciliation processes.

Importantly, these views were linked to further assumptions about former associates. Communities saw women as victims, believing that they represented less of a threat to their communities than men and that their reintegration would be easier. At the same time, disengaged men were feared and suspected of crimes, including sexual crimes – and the challenge of reintegrating them was acknowledged. Paradoxically, these differences did not mean that communities prioritized the reintegration of women. On the contrary, men's reintegration

was deemed more important – in part because men were believed to be capable of stopping Boko Haram’s crimes and partly due to the belief that a woman’s situation would be automatically resolved by addressing the needs of her male relatives.

Concerning reintegration support, the field research suggested that most community members and stakeholders understood the need for differentiated responses. The survey also indicated that people were open to providing women former associates with more favourable or generous assistance than what is offered to civilian women.

Respondents in both countries ranked psychosocial support and economic reintegration as the most important forms of reintegration assistance. Psychosocial support also emerged in the literature as a top priority for overcoming barriers

to social integration and helping women recover from layered victimization. The prioritization of economic reintegration may reflect the recognition that poverty and inequality are obstacles to reintegration. Further, economic dependence on men partly explains why some women follow their husbands into groups like Boko Haram, and livelihood support can be structured to increase autonomy.

Integrating gender considerations and including women in the full project cycle for activities targeting and benefiting former associates of violent extremist groups are preconditions for effective and sustainable reintegration. These steps also have the potential to catalyse transformational change by challenging gender norms. Concerted action to ensure the participation of women and women’s organizations here can be leveraged to increase their participation in the related areas of governance and security, and to promote their role in conflict prevention.



IOM-constructed “Peace Markets”, like this one in South Sudan’s Warrap State, help foster trust and peace between communities through shared economic benefits. © IOM 2013

RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the research findings, the following recommendations are made:

- (a) Prioritize gender analysis and ensure that the results inform policy and programme design and decisions addressing disengagement, disassociation, reintegration and reconciliation (DDRR);
- (b) Promote women’s meaningful participation in all aspects of DDRR;
- (c) Address the specific needs of victims, including victims of sexual violence, and recognize that many women disengaging from violent extremist groups suffer layered victimization;
- (d) Build capacities to identify and respond to the differentiated needs of men and women, integrate gender considerations in all aspects of work, and protect women and girls;
- (e) Empower women and women’s organizations to take active, decision-making roles;
- (f) Facilitate local ownership over DDRR processes;
- (g) Challenge and change gender norms that fuel conflict and recruitment;
- (h) Undertake additional research on gendered perceptions of former associates and their reintegration.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY

United Nations Security Council resolution 1325 (S/RES/1325) highlights the unique impact of violence and conflict on women and their strategic potential in managing peace, preventing conflict and supporting sustainable solutions. The resolution launched the Women, Peace and Security Agenda, which has since been reinforced by nine additional resolutions¹ that provide guidance on recognizing women's differentiated needs and perspectives, promoting gender equality and strengthening participation, protection and rights across the conflict cycle.



Women and children at an IDP camp in Borno State, north-east Nigeria. © IOM 2020/ Sascha PIMENTEL

While noting the significant progress made on the agenda in the preceding four years, a 2019 report of the United Nations Secretary-General underscored the still-critical need to engage women in peacebuilding efforts and ongoing challenges relating to violence against women, conflict-related sexual violence, underrepresentation of women in decision-making roles, persistent humanitarian needs of women and girls, and the lack of national plans on women and peace, among other concerns (United Nations, 2019a).

The report also emphasized the continuing importance of the integration of gender perspectives in disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) and the broader security sector, as well as women's participation in efforts to prevent and counter violent extremism (United Nations, 2019a). The United Nations has made guidance available on gender in the framework of DDR, including the Integrated DDR Standards (IDDRS) calling for gender-responsive DDR programming (United Nations, 2019b). However, gender remains too often treated as a secondary consideration in programme design and implementation in the highly security-focused field of DDR.

¹ Namely, United Nations Security Council Resolutions 1820 on Women, Peace and Security (2008); 1888 (2009), 1889 (2009), 1960 (2011), 2106 (2013), 2122 (2013), 2242 (2015), 2467 (2019) and 2493 (2019).

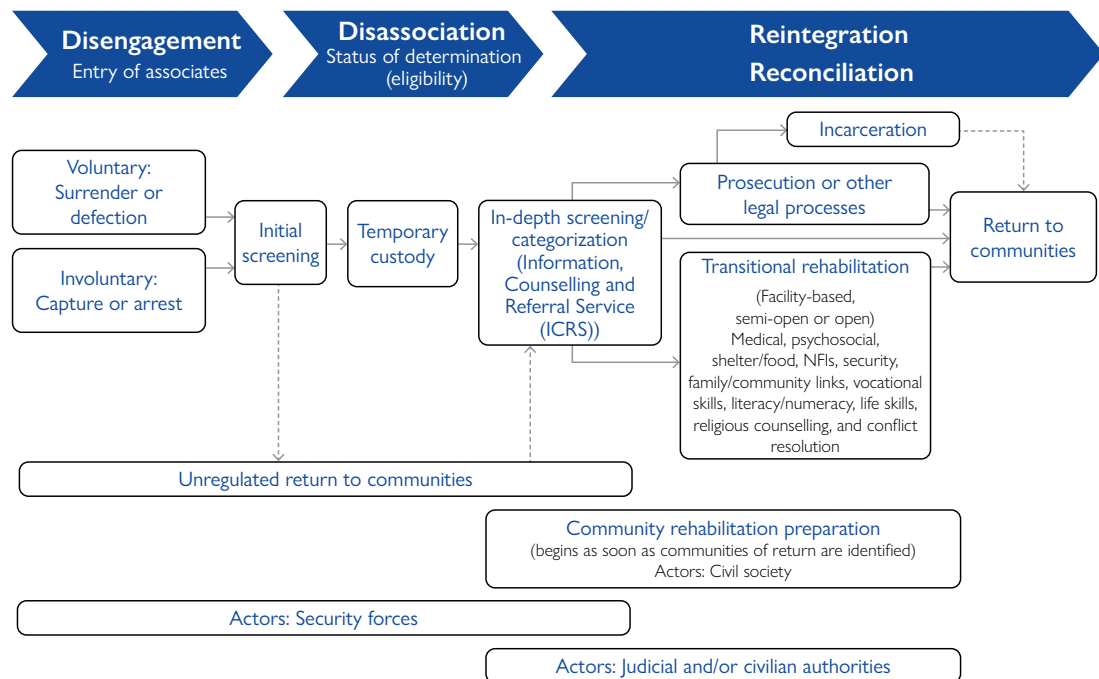
1.2 OVERVIEW OF DISENGAGEMENT, DISASSOCIATION, REINTEGRATION AND RECONCILIATION

Situations with ongoing armed conflict or the presence of violent extremist organizations (VEOs) pose unique challenges. Importantly, where United Nations-sanctioned² violent extremist groups are involved, United Nations Security Council Resolutions 2178, 2349 and 2396 have called for prosecution, rehabilitation and reintegration (PRR) predicated on a screening process to support the categorization of individuals for appropriate treatment and handling. It follows that blanket amnesty for those who disengage from United Nations-sanctioned groups would be contrary to international law.

In such contexts, the treatment and handling of former associates involves multiple paths, including the prosecution of those suspected of genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity and acts of terrorism. An individual's eligibility for non-prison rehabilitation and reintegration benefits is contingent on his or her legal status and, often, assessed risk level. Rehabilitation and reintegration processes for eligible participants formerly associated with United Nations-sanctioned groups also require adaptation to address legal, ethical, security and practical concerns.

To meet these challenges, IOM drew from the field of DDR and emerging PRR practices to develop a novel approach focused on DDRR. The IOM approach to DDRR is illustrated in Figure 1, which shows the progression of former associates of United Nations-sanctioned violent extremist groups through four phases of treatment and handling. While there are contextual differences and variances in how States address and handle these caseloads, this framing reflects a broadly applicable process drawn from the Organization's experiences in the Lake Chad Basin region.

Figure 1. Disengagement, disassociation, reintegration and reconciliation



² IOM considers a "sanctioned group" to be a violent extremist organization designated as a terrorist organization by the United Nations, a Member State or a regional organization (see, e.g. IOM, 2020).

Within its DDRR portfolio, IOM recognizes a gender-sensitive approach to be essential – that is, an one that is supported by solid gender-sensitive analysis and comprehensive understanding of each person’s engagement, disengagement and disassociation processes. The success of DDRR programmes requires that account be taken of the multiple experiences of men and women as fighters, spouses of fighters, slaves, hostages or as associates³ of VEOs in other roles. Moreover, in the absence of a formal peace process where women’s participation can be formally assured, the DDRR model gives great importance to their involvement in and contributions towards preventing violent extremism. For these reasons, and because DDRR pursues long-term aims in conflict prevention, conflict resolution and peacebuilding, the model represents an ideal framework for researching, proposing and implementing solutions that reflect women’s needs, interests and capacities.

1.3 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

At the time of writing, research on the gendered dimensions of processes affecting associates of VEOs remains limited. Only a few sources dealt with the Lake Chad Basin region.⁴ Moreover, the literature was narrowed by its focus on women’s experiences of DDRR processes, without grappling with gender as such, and available publications did not offer guidance to improve gender-responsiveness. To fill these gaps and as part of its regional DDRR programme, IOM launched desk and field research into the gendered dimensions of DDRR in the Lake Chad Basin region.

The overall objective of the study was to provide a gender-sensitive analysis of the diverse experiences of women and men in VEOs and post-disengagement processes by understanding the complex interactions between gender, violence and peace.

Specific objectives include:

- (a) Identifying elements relevant to building gender-responsive DDRR policies and programmes;
- (b) Developing guidance for policymakers and practitioners to overcome gender barriers in DDRR and ensure women’s participation;
- (c) Promoting the integration of gender into reintegration processes at the community level through women’s empowerment and support for transcending existing social norms that shape gendered identities;
- (d) Contributing to transformative approaches to gender equality and women’s rights.

Text box 1: Understanding gender and sex

Gender refers to the respective social attributes associated with males and females that are learned in a given culture. Although deeply rooted in every culture, these attributes change over time and have wide variations both within and between cultures.

Sex refers to biological and physiological attributes that define males and females. It is natural, determined by birth and, therefore, generally unchanging and universal.

Source: IOM, 2015.

³ IOM uses the term “associate” to mean all persons (regardless of age, relationship, gender, etc.) with whom the national- or regional-level authorities have some responsibility or authority over (i.e. through custody or otherwise), and whom they believe had some contact with VEOs without presuming or prejudging the nature of their relationship to the armed group in question. This may include: (a) combatants or fighters, (b) those performing a broad range of non-combat roles (e.g. espionage) and support functions (clerks, housekeepers or cooks), and (c) civilians accompanying fighters, such as children forcibly taken away by violent extremist affiliates.

⁴ Examples of such work include: Coulouris, 2019; Farr, 2005; Hauge, 2015; Udo-Udo Jacob, 2018; Mazurana et al., 2017; and Tarnaala, 2016.

IOM is cognizant of the fact that that gender and related dynamics are conceived of differently from one context to another, and this report is not intended as a comprehensive overview of gendered dynamics in all countries of the Lake Chad Basin region. Rather, this report seeks to highlight phenomena that frequently arise in disengagement processes from VEOs and key considerations regarding gender to strengthen DDDR policies and programmes.



Women and children in the Bakassi camp, north-east Nigeria. © IOM 2018/Alfred CABALLERO

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 APPROACH AND METHODS

The research was conducted over an eight-month period and included an initial desk study phase (July to November 2019) and subsequent field research in Cameroon (December 2019) and Chad (February 2020).

The research team reviewed literature on the gendered dimensions of engagement and disengagement from VEOs, to both better understand the dynamics and extract guidance for DDRR programming. This phase focused on an analysis of secondary data sources, including research based on interviews with women formerly associated with VEOs, and sought to understand women's roles within these groups and their specific challenges during disengagement. To the extent possible, IOM considered information and analysis from the four countries in the Lake Chad Basin region – Chad, Cameroon, the Niger and Nigeria – as part of a broader review of theoretical and practical literature from other contexts.

The field study was designed to complement the literature review with a deeper understanding of a particular region and test its main assumptions and conclusions. To build on existing work without duplicating it, the field study did not interview women formerly associated with VEOs, but elicited the perspectives of other actors, such as community members, local authorities and other stakeholders. The questions posed sought to gather their perceptions of returning men and women associates, including both positive and negative predispositions.

Specifically, the field research sought the views of non-associates on the following four issues:

- (a) Common obstacles to the reintegration of former associates of VEOs;
- (b) Extent to which these obstacles are the same or different for men and women;
- (c) Needs of former associates;
- (d) Ideas for durable reintegration solutions.

The main research tool was a questionnaire with 21 open- and closed-ended questions administered to 100 respondents in the Far North Region of Cameroon and Lake Province in Chad. The research team also undertook qualitative interviews with selected respondents. The sample included religious and traditional leaders, family members of former associates, women leaders and members of women's organizations, and other actors identified as relevant in each context. Within these categories, the research team prioritized individuals based on their prescribed or assumed societal roles, their likely influence over one or more phases of DDRR, and their potential to positively impact the perception of women in society. The team also sought out married persons, who were assumed to have more intimate knowledge of the familial and conjugal dimensions of engagement and disengagement, which the desk research highlighted as significant.

The questionnaires and interviews were administered by local teams selected in each country who were able to provide the research with increased access, sociocultural context and knowledge of the local languages.

In Cameroon, respondents were reached in these communities most impacted by the return and reintegration of former Boko Haram associates: Mayo Tsanaga Department (Mokolo Centre, Koza and Mozogo-Mawa) and Mayo Sava Department (Meme, Koulgui and Mora Centre). In Chad, the research team worked close to the city of Baga Sola and in sites with high rates of internal displacement (namely Kafia).

2.2 LIMITATIONS

A recurring limitation of perception surveys impacted this research, namely, that there was a suspected (but unmeasurable) variance between respondents' answers and their actual thoughts and feelings. The research team took steps to reduce this gap by creating safe and trusting environments conducive to frank discussion, including through the involvement of community liaisons. Nevertheless, the research team believes that many respondents were reticent to express themselves fully due to fear. This was especially noticeable in Cameroon,



where Boko Haram attacks took place shortly before the survey started. Some individuals who had agreed to participate in the survey cancelled their interviews following the attacks, and even those who kept their appointments were likely influenced by recent events.

There was a parallel risk that researchers would misunderstand respondents' answers to a singular question, especially when these answers were not corroborated by other observations or analysis. The questionnaire was therefore designed to gather overlapping information through multiple questions so that researchers could triangulate responses, confirm meaning and assess the overall cohesiveness of a respondent's replies.

Njaidda Ali, an IDP living in an IOM-managed camp in Maiduguri, Nigeria. © IOM 2018/Alfred CABALLERO

Despite efforts to use simple language, respondents with low education levels appeared to struggle to understand some questions. This was partly due to the translation of the questionnaire into multiple languages. Further, sociological concepts relating to gender – and the nuanced vocabulary required to communicate them – tended to vary from one group to another, even within the same country or region. As a result, discussions on gender sometimes became stuck at superficial comparisons between men and women, where the interviewer and respondent could not find shared vocabulary or a conceptual platform needed to reach deeper questions about gender.

Finally, the research took place in communities under the influence of Boko Haram and did not extend into areas where the Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP) had a presence. There are significant differences between these two VEOs, including in terms of repudiation of the State, relationships with local communities and internal dynamics. For example, Boko Haram is reported to have a more radical “us versus them” rhetoric and to behave more brutally toward civilians. In view of these differences, conclusions in this report are not necessarily valid for former associates and return communities linked to ISWAP.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

The information and analysis consulted on VEOs in the Lake Chad Basin region and relevant gender considerations produced two sets of conclusions. The first set aims to describe, through a gender lens, Boko Haram's practices and crimes, including sexual and gender-based violence, and the engagement and disengagement of their associates. The second set draws from literature on VEOs and institutional experience to propose strategic considerations for the design and implementation of DDRR programmes.

3.1 BOKO HARAM AND GENDER

3.1.1 Drivers for engagement and disengagement

Engagement in and disengagement from VEOs, together with communal perceptions of these processes, are heavily influenced by gender norms, roles and expectations. For example, men and boys are more likely to be recruited for their physical strength, with a view to their direct, active participation in the group's military operations. Women and girls, in turn, may be sought out and recruited for other services, such as cooking or nursing.

Gendered perceptions of agency and responsibility

Communities perceive men as having a choice or agency in their entry into a VEO, whereas women are considered to be engaged as victims or followers. This is an accurate description of how many women join a VEO, but it is not the complete picture. Some women consciously join VEOs for a variety of reasons, including a rejection of paternalistic and ideological factors outside the VEO. Some may aspire to take an active role within the group. Women may perceive engagement as an opportunity for greater freedoms, education opportunities and social status that are inaccessible to them in their civilian lives (Matfess, 2018; International Crisis Group, 2016). Note that the same paternalistic structures that push some women to join are also factors in some men's decisions to engage with Boko Haram. Specifically, young men with low incomes may be unable to marry, as they lack the financial resources to pay a dowry. Membership in a VEO gives them direct access to women in the form of an "assigned" wife, allowing them to achieve a corollary boost in social status.

How these gendered differences on engagement are perceived by stakeholders and communities influences post-disengagement processes. The assumption that men are more likely than women to volunteer to join a VEO and actively participate in combat is linked to the perception that men are more threatening and, thus, more difficult to reintegrate. This latter perception helps explain why rehabilitation and reintegration programmes tend to focus on men. At the same time, the conception of women as victims underlies the common expectation that communities will welcome them and that reintegration will occur organically, such that women disengaging from VEOs can be sent home without special programming.

This logic discriminates against women by depriving them of benefits made available to men and is inherently flawed. It is not uncommon for women to suffer higher levels of social

exclusion than men after leaving a VEO, which is linked to their marginalization and risks of conflict recidivism (Hudson et al., 2012). The reasons for their exclusion are complex, but two factors explained in the literature reveal how gendered perceptions shape this phenomenon:

- (a) Authorities often allow women to bypass the screening process put in place for men because they automatically categorize women as playing secondary roles in the group and posing low future risk. One consequence of failing to screen women is that receiving communities do not access information on each woman's personal trajectory. The absence of such information, or a trustworthy signal from the authorities that the woman has been individually assessed as being ready for return, leaves room for negative rumours and mistrust.
- (b) As a result of their presumed lack of agency, returning women may also be seen as untrustworthy. Communities may feel that women whose husbands or male relatives remain in the group will be influenced by them. In other words, if returning women are seen as deprived of their own will, they may also be seen as vulnerable to manipulation to perform services for the group, such as spying.

Social freedoms and status

The promise of social promotion emerges as a strong incentive for both men and women to join Boko Haram (Matfess, 2018). Such opportunities arise because the social structures within the VEO, albeit patriarchal, differ from those outside the group, and this variance opens possibilities for social ascent to some.

Individual conceptions of social promotion differ. For example, while some women may see their social status increase by taking an active role in the group, the literature suggests that some women and girls are motivated by the prospect of marriage to a high-ranking officer, who would offer the bride material goods and could afford to give her a relatively idle life (Oduah, 2016). Those women who join a VEO of their own volition may be aware of the radical ideological environment within the group and would be willing to accept this dogmatism in exchange for improved social standing (Matfess, 2018). Similarly, some young men may be attracted by the promised access to women, while others are motivated by an increase in social status associated with possessing firearms.

For some men and women, the promise of social promotion materializes if they perceive their experience in the VEO as having elevated their social standing or personal power. Men and women with this self-perception may be reluctant to leave the VEO or remain disengaged if their departure



A girl fills a jerrycan with water from an IOM tap stand at the Doro refugee camp in South Sudan.
© IOM 2013

from the group means returning to their prior, “lower” social station. As has often been observed with mid-ranking commanders in traditional DDR processes, the loss of a sense of identity and of status resulting from the transition to civilian life can be a powerful impediment to reintegration.

The case of Zamira,⁵ the former wife of a high-ranking Boko Haram commander, is a good example. In interviews with researchers and humanitarian workers, Zamira admitted that she enjoyed her “new” life with Boko Haram and that she would return to the group at the first opportunity, mainly because she felt that she would never be able to enjoy a similar status in civilian life (International Crisis Group, 2019).

That some men and women return to their communities feeling that they have achieved an elevated standing in the group illustrates the importance of self-perception, or the way in which these former associates view themselves. Self-perception has implications for DDRR programming where former associates resent a loss of a sense of identity or of status upon disengagement, as discussed above, but also where self-perceptions clash with the perceptions of others. Returning men and women may be more open to disengage if their new-found status is acknowledged but receiving communities and stakeholders may be unwilling to provide this validation, especially where they have suffered at the hands of Boko Haram.

3.1.2 Roles within Boko Haram

As is often the case in armed groups, the roles played by women and men in Boko Haram reflect culturally accepted gender norms. Women’s dependence on male relatives and their structural exclusion from economic, political and social activities often translate into forced participation or secondary, supportive roles. That said, the proportion of men forcibly recruited to perform supportive roles typically tasked to women, such as cooking or gathering wood, is higher in Boko Haram than in other groups outside of the Lake Chad Basin region.⁶ The distribution of roles and the treatment of women seems to be consistent across the different factions of Boko Haram (Matfess, 2020).

As already described with respect to engagement dynamics, community perceptions of associates based on their gender and position in the armed group impact reintegration in unpredictable ways. For example, by some measures, reintegration would be more difficult for a man who had an active fighting role than for a man who served as a cook for an armed group because communities are more likely to fear a former fighter. On the other hand, a former fighter may attain more respect – based on gendered assumptions about strength and masculinity – from his community, thus facilitating his reintegration. Under the same patriarchal modes of thinking, the cook’s prospects for acceptance could be negatively affected if the community sees his role as unnatural or unmasculine.

3.1.3 Sexual and gender-based violence

Sexual and gender-based violence is a tactic of war for Boko Haram (United Nations, 2020),⁷ which is employed by the group towards various ends. For example, Boko Haram’s sexual

⁵ Names have been changed to protect identities.

⁶ In the Zamai caseload of 400 families currently in displacement in the Far North Region of Cameroon, none of the men claim to have carried weapons at any point during their year-long stay with the group.

⁷ There is ample evidence that this statement applies to violence against women and girls. The considerations highlighted in this section could be true also for men and boys, but there is insufficient evidence possibly due to persistent social stigma around sexual violence against men and boys.

violence against women and girls outside their group creates a climate of fear and, paradoxically, an incentive for women and girls to join in order to escape this violence.⁸ Moreover, sexual violence, including rape, is strategically employed to destroy women's relationships with their husbands and families, weakening bonds and rending the social fabric of whole communities. Boko Haram have also used women and girls disproportionately to perpetrate attacks on "soft targets" in response to the increased military offensive of the Multi-National Joint Task Force. Some scholars interpret Boko Haram's increased use of women and girls in war operations as a manifestation of *akhaffu dararayni*, a concept which requires the decision maker to choose the lesser of two evils, by opting to send girls to carry out suicide attacks rather than risk the lives of soldiers and thereby compromise jihad.

Boko Haram's resort to sexual and gender-based violence flouts the group's proclaimed ideology, which prohibits such violence. According to some witnesses, sexual violence and rape usually take place at night or under the cover of chaotic military operations, suggesting that these crimes are not openly permitted by the group (Nwaubani, 2018). This flagrant contradiction between declared values and actual behaviour affects the public's view of Boko Haram, their perceived legitimacy and aspirations for moral authority.

Sexual violence has severe effects on reintegration. Women victims of sexual violence are often perceived negatively by their communities and are more likely to face stigma and exclusion than other returning women. Children conceived from rape or while the mother is in captivity are often discriminated against or rejected. Mothers in such situations are sometimes forced to choose between these children and other members of their families. For men disengaging from VEOs, the common suspicion that they perpetrated sexual violence while with the group also impacts their reintegration negatively.

3.2 INSIGHTS FOR POLICYMAKERS AND PRACTITIONERS

3.2.1 Gender analysis

The literature and the experience of IOM underscore the central importance of gender analysis. To increase the gender responsiveness of DDDR, policies and programmes must be grounded in thorough gender analysis, including:

- (a) Mapping and analysis of prevailing power relations and gender dynamics in the environments from which VEO associates originate and to which they are likely to return, especially as they relate to individual and collective political, social and economic reintegration;
- (b) Understanding of gender considerations for entry and exit processes, including engagement, disengagement, association and disassociation;
- (c) Analysis of the gendered nature of role distribution within VEOs and its possible significance for DDDR processes.

Gender analysis should explore the role of gender as such, and not, as is often the case, start and end with a comparative analysis of men and women. To illustrate this point, consider the

⁸ There is the case of one of the "Chibok girls", who appeared in a video in May 2017 declaring that she did not want to be reunited with her family, whom she considered "infidels". Her classmates have testified that her conversion was linked to the sexual violence that she suffered (Nwaubani, 2018).

discussion above on how social freedoms and status can motivate both men and women to join a VEO. Despite this surface-level similarity, engagement and disengagement will affect the social positions of men and women differently in light of broader social expectations. Men will enjoy structural advantages inside the group and, in most cases, again upon return to civilian life. Therefore, the measure of social ascent on engagement – and loss of the same upon disengagement – for men is only understood with reference to the social norms applicable to men, and the relevant measure for women is only understood with reference to those applicable to women. This differentiated approach is critical when designing options and processes for sustainable rehabilitation and reintegration.

Tools of analysis

At the individual level, gender analysis can be advanced by preparing comprehensive social network maps. These tools display a person's social networks and highlight key relationships and influences that facilitate or hinder disengagement, rehabilitation and reintegration. One limitation of these maps is that the tool is static, while the processes it seeks to understand are highly fluid and dynamic. The reasons driving a woman to join a VEO may differ from those that encourage her to stay engaged, and she may decide to leave the group even if her reasons for joining remain valid.

At the community level, and in view of the important role played by community perceptions in women's reintegration, gender analysis should aim to measure the beliefs and attitudes that create biases against women's empowerment in society (UNDP, 2019). Practitioners may refer to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) multidimensional gender social norms index, which was created to capture how social beliefs can obstruct gender equality along multiple dimensions: it appears gender biases and overall inequality are positively correlated (UNDP, 2019).

At the macrolevel, DDDR practitioners should measure and monitor national progress in terms of gender equality and identify structural obstacles and opportunities, so that programming is fully responsive to its environment. An available tool is the Gender Inequality Index, with its indicators focused on justice, inclusion and security (Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security, 2019).

Applications

The results of the individual, community and macrolevel analyses are essential inputs to the design of gender-responsive DDDR activities for former associates. For example, individual and group motivations for joining a VEO should influence service delivery during the rehabilitation phase. If the analysis shows that women are motivated to join Boko Haram to attain economic security, programmes can prepare gender-specific labour and market analyses and prioritize livelihoods support. Similarly, if the profiles indicate that women are drawn to the prospect of political participation, DDDR teams should consider opportunities for leadership and civic education. In short, a gender-responsive rehabilitation programme will respond to the practical needs of men and women, with a view to increasing gender equality.

Finally, the collection of gender data must be a clear priority for staff and partners in order to make gendered dimensions visible. Beyond its importance as an input for the design of individual programmes, the data collected should, when possible, be transformed into knowledge products and widely disseminated.

3.2.2 Participation and empowerment

The literature strongly confirms that women's meaningful participation in conflict prevention and peacebuilding is indispensable. In DDDR contexts – where there is no formal peace process to guide the de-escalation of conflict and ensure women's participation – DDDR processes can be effective platforms for the meaningful engagement of women. Purposefully involving women and women's organizations in the design and implementation of DDDR processes will promote their broader integration in State policy and legal spaces, which challenges and changes patriarchal structures that fuel conflict and recruitment. Women's participation must be promoted on equal footing as that of men, and their efforts towards peace promotion, conflict prevention and reconciliation should be formally recognized.

Meaningful participation of women is fostered by increased coordination among stakeholders that prioritize the participation and empowerment of women. Recognizing that women's leadership is already established in many informal forums at the community level, practitioners may support women by facilitating these informal spaces.

Participation is also predicated on local ownership over policies and programmes. DDDR processes should bolster local leadership, allocate enough resources to local civil society groups and heed critical insights from women and girls. Achieving local ownership requires DDDR actors to listen to local stakeholders and recognize them as equal partners and not only as sources of information. The literature provides useful guidance on local ownership, including national action plans on the Women, Peace and Security Agenda,⁹ that outline inclusive consultation processes with civil society actors and monitoring measures for government progress.

Women as peacebuilders

It is generally accepted that women fulfill peacebuilding roles within their communities (United Nations, 2010). In sub-Saharan Africa, for example, women have historically played an important part in the prevention of violent extremism and have shown enormous potential as peacebuilders across the region. They are often considered as warrantors of family honor and guardians of community traditions, which is a position of considerable influence in the community.

Women's placement within their communities and at home has implications for DDDR. For example, some types of victimization, such as sexual violence, may lead to the woman being blamed for the dishonour to her entire family. Further, the successful reintegration of a woman may be seen to reflect positively on and benefit her extended family and community. This may be advantageous to the woman, but the fact that her behaviour has such far-reaching effects is also an additional burden on her. In other words, the stakes of her reintegration are higher and any failures could impact her entire community.

DDRR policies and programmes should take account of women's unique potential and empower women to contribute to peacebuilding, community resilience and the construction of alternative identities. The Lake Chad Basin region, where there is a transnational dialogue on conflict and peace, represents a unique opportunity for women's cross-border participation and for the exchange of ideas and good practices around gender.

⁹ A list of national action plans on the Women, Peace and Security Agenda is available at [www.wpsnaps.org/#:~:text=National%20Action%20Plans%20\(NAPs\)%20are,governed%2C%20funded%2C%20and%20monitored.](http://www.wpsnaps.org/#:~:text=National%20Action%20Plans%20(NAPs)%20are,governed%2C%20funded%2C%20and%20monitored.)

3.2.3 Practical and strategic gender-based needs

The notion of practical and strategic gender-based interests and needs, pioneered by Moser (1989), offers a useful framework for understanding the needs of DDDR participants. Practical gender-based needs refer to the needs of women and men to make everyday life easier, such as access to water, better transportation and childcare facilities, among others. Addressing these will not directly challenge gender power relations but may remove important obstacles to women's economic empowerment. Strategic gender needs refer to needs at the societal level to transform gender roles and relations, such as a law condemning gender-based violence, equal access to credit, equal inheritance and others. Addressing these needs will alter gender power relations (UNDP, 2019).

3.2.4 Contrasting perceptions

For the design of DDDR programmes and tools, an important step is to understand participants' perceptions. The self-perception of former associates should be a touchstone in the design of rehabilitation programmes and case management protocols. Practitioners can also identify situations where self-perceptions come into tension with external perceptions – held by communities, authorities and other stakeholders. Where such differences exist, DDDR activities can help bridge them and forge a shared understanding of conditions for peaceful, successful and lasting transitions to civilian life. This mutual understanding can be the basis of a new or renewed social pact between the former associate and the community.

3.2.5 Supporting victims and preventing sexual violence

Comprehensive DDDR programmes should provide the full range of support services required by victims of sexual and gender-based violence and develop survivor-centred rehabilitation and reintegration initiatives. With a view to reintegration, DDDR practitioners should aim to understand the sociological dynamics that create or intensify negative perceptions of women victimized by sexual violence. Psychosocial support to these women and their families and communities is often necessary to achieve recovery and mitigate social stigma.

At the same time, DDDR processes can contribute to wider efforts to study vulnerabilities to conflict-related sexual violence and help develop policies that prevent its occurrence. For example, DDDR programmes can support structural change by raising awareness among State actors of the incidence and sociological consequences of sexual violence, as well as by strengthening legal and institutional tools.

An important step is to engage law enforcement and judicial authorities in a dialogue on accountability for these crimes, applicable laws and country status as party or non-party to specific international treaties. State-actor awareness regarding sexual violence and its sociological consequences needs to be strengthened and existing legal and institutional tools reformed. The literature reveals that sexual crimes, including those committed by VEOs,¹⁰ are not treated seriously within many legal systems, which is severely detrimental to individual and collective reintegration. Within the framework of DDDR, screening protocols can contribute to accountability by taking strict account of the perpetration of sexual crimes that bar eligibility

¹⁰ Attah (2016) discusses the legal treatment of rape and sexual crimes perpetrated by Boko Haram.

to non-prison rehabilitation and reintegration. Similarly, prosecution can play an essential psychosocial and healing role for victims by recognizing their suffering and offering closure.

On a related note, DDDR programmes should develop an understanding of how the VEO and its former associates view taboos and transgressions. The relationships between men and women inside the group are also important, as these will have a lasting effect on the behaviour of former associates in their return communities. Such reflections have critical implications for asserted or perceived notions of hierarchy and power inside and outside the group, which are essential for DDDR processes.

3.2.6 Transforming gender norms

A community's foundational social norms influence the beliefs people hold about what is considered appropriate behaviour. These beliefs determine the range of choices and preferences that may be exercised by an individual. For gender roles, these beliefs can be particularly important in determining personal freedoms and power relations. A change in social norms can be triggered in different ways, such as through economic development; technological innovation; new laws, policies and programmes; social and political activism; and exposure to new ideas and practices through either formal or informal channels (UNDP, 2019).

The literature is clear that gender norms often fuel conflict, motivate women and men to join VEOs, and frustrate their transitions to civilian life. Identifying, challenging and ultimately transforming these norms is essential to successful reintegration, reconciliation, peacebuilding and conflict prevention. Such societal changes require concerted action by political leaders and decision makers, by both men and women, and at all levels. Experience illustrates that men and boys must be involved in transformative changes – from efforts to challenge rigid gender norms and power dynamics at the household and community levels (UNDP, 2019), to macrolevel changes to policy and legislation.

4. FIELD RESEARCH FINDINGS

This section presents findings from the field studies conducted in Cameroon and Chad, which sought an in-depth understanding of gendered dimensions in a particular region and to test the main conclusions of the literature review.

4.1 CULPABILITY AND RISK

The field studies highlight that women who disengage from Boko Haram benefit from a certain clemency that is not afforded to men, while at the same time suffering from severe social stigma and marginalization. The extent of the clemency is not homogeneous across the region, however, and there were stronger calls for social and criminal justice in Cameroon than in Chad. In Cameroon, most local populations have negative perceptions of Boko Haram, as they are more likely to have been victimized by the group's crimes. These perceptions represent a major sociological obstacle for the reintegration process. In Chad, on the other hand, community attitudes toward former associates are less negative, possibly because respondents have suffered fewer incidents of direct victimization.

In both countries, respondents perceive the distribution of roles within VEOs as fundamentally gendered, believing that men play active roles and carry weapons, while women are confined to secondary positions or exploited. It follows that, in both countries, male former associates are considered more threatening to community security than their female counterparts.

Concerns about security help explain why majority of respondents (73%) believe that former associates should be kept separate or "isolated" from their communities for some period of time before return. Paradoxically, however, most respondents see former associates, men and women, as victims and do not perceive them as radical in their ideological beliefs. An in-depth and gender-sensitive analysis of how people conceive of victimization, association and radical ideologies would provide more clarity on this apparent contradiction.

In the rare case where women are viewed as more dangerous than men, it is because they are perceived as susceptible to violent influences from men. This characterization demonstrates an entrenched gender stereotype of male domination. To express this view, respondents state that women involved in terrorist acts, for example, are "sent" or "instrumentalized" by men.

Communities may doubt that a woman who left a group, while her husband or partner remains engaged, would be sincere in her reintegration intentions. In short, perceptions of a woman's risk of harm to the community are linked to cultural notions that women cannot evade male domination and could, at the behest of men, turn violent against their own communities.

4.2 VICTIMHOOD

In both countries, majority of respondents believe that women are more likely to be victimized and that the degree of victimization for women former associates is higher than that of men. In Cameroon, 56 per cent report that victimization is higher among women, 27 per cent believe women are less victimized, and 17 per cent believe that victimization is equal between men and women. In Cameroon, the perception of women's disproportionate victimization appears to be based on a recognition that women are more likely to experience socioeconomic vulnerabilities and structural inequalities linked to gender.

In Chad, 62 per cent of respondents affirm that women are more victimized than men, while 35 per cent consider men and women to be equal in terms of victimization, and only 3 per cent believe that men are more victimized than women, with different explanations coming from different categories of respondents. In Chad, women are viewed as victims because they are forced to join Boko Haram, experience abuse and struggle to reintegrate once they have left. Respondents explain their views by stating, for example, that "[m]embers of Boko Haram use them as their wives," or "[t]hey suffer abuse in the group and their reintegration is also difficult."

4.3 REINTEGRATION OBSTACLES AND PRIORITIES

Table 1. Respondents' perceived obstacles to the reintegration of former Boko Haram associates

Obstacles	Cameroon	Chad
Perceptions that former associates are dangerous	35%	32%
Economic difficulties and poverty	31%	38%
Religious beliefs and customs	25%	27%

When asked to identify the obstacles to reintegration, respondents in Cameroon signal communities' perception that returning former associates are threats to security as number one, followed by economic difficulties, and then by religious beliefs and customs. In Chad, economic difficulties rank as the perceived main obstacle, followed by negative or unfavourable perceptions of community members, and then by traditional, conservative religious beliefs and customs. That respondents in Cameroon give more importance to community perceptions aligns with the earlier finding that Cameroonian perceptions of Boko Haram and its associates are more negative than those expressed by Chadian respondents.

Overall, about one third of respondents rank the expected negative perceptions of returning men and women as the largest obstacle to reintegration. Some respondents describe this obstacle as creating a vicious cycle, where communities are fearful about a returning former associate, such that the former associate becomes reticent to integrating into an unwelcoming environment, resulting in increased fears and distrust among community members.

Table 2. Respondents' perceived priority needs for the reintegration of former Boko Haram associates

Priority need	Cameroon	Chad
Psychosocial support	34%	31%
Economic reintegration	22%	36%
Religious and traditional training	21%	16%
Detention and rehabilitation centres	23%	17%

When asked to rank the needs of returning former associates, respondents in Cameroon prioritize psychosocial support, followed by economic reintegration. Psychosocial support is also a top priority for Chadian respondents, but they put a stronger emphasis on economic reintegration. In addition, 23 per cent of respondents in Cameroon and 17 per cent in Chad prioritize detention and rehabilitation centres as a reintegration need. Their interest in such centres seems to confirm the earlier finding that many respondents felt former associates should be kept separate from their communities before re-entry. Again, that respondents in Cameroon rank these centres as a higher priority appears to confirm the earlier finding that different degrees of negativity of perceptions and attitudes towards Boko Haram exist in Cameroon and Chad, and the stronger calls in Cameroon for justice. Additionally, respondents in Cameroon may be more familiar with such centres, as such centres are part of the national strategy, and the recently created National Demobilization, Disarmament and Reintegration Committee has announced plans to open a large centre in Meme as part of the Government's response in the Far North Region.

4.4 DIFFERENTIATED ASSISTANCE

Respondents in Cameroon clearly express that DDDR programmes must adapt to individual, gendered needs. Their position is well-supported in the literature. In Chad, on the contrary, respondents pay less attention to the importance of individual or gender specificities.

One question asks respondents how they would see a measure to provide more favourable assistance to former associates than to other women. This question aims to gather perspectives on affirmative action or "positive discrimination", which is employed in some societies to compensate for existing deficits between population groups by targeting priority participation of one group within society over another. These strategies are also adopted to mitigate a regime of institutional oppression.

Table 3: Respondents' attitudes towards preferential assistance to women former associates

Attitude	Cameroon	Chad
Measure is just and positive	65%	58%
Measure is not important	1%	28%
Measure is unjust	34%	14%

Overall, respondents approve of providing additional or special aid to women former associates. In Cameroon, two in three respondents see this as a positive and just measure and one in three saw the measure as unjust. In Chad, fewer respondents see the measure as either just and positive (58%) or unjust (14%), while 28 per cent perceived the measure as unimportant.

Answers to this question show significant variance between different categories of respondents. Political and administrative authorities note the necessity of such positive discrimination but caution that favouring former associates would lead others to feel contempt for them. Another respondent expresses a somewhat inconsistent view that such aid would be motivating to former associates as evidence that their communities hold them in esteem. Community actors express concerns that favoured beneficiaries would be stigmatized and fear that such favourable treatment would motivate some people to join VEOs, with the sole purpose of receiving economic advantages upon disengagement.

That said, most respondents are in favour of providing the benefits to disengaged women, which is both encouraging and interesting. In some ways, the finding is counter-intuitive: competition over resources tends to increase the probability of social conflict, and economic advantages provided to beneficiaries of reintegration programmes commonly exacerbate tensions within receiving communities. This apparent openness to preferential assistance for DDDR participants may be an entry point for devising balanced reintegration strategies. From a conflict sensitivity standpoint, however, this targeted assistance should be managed cautiously, after respectful consultation with community members, and coupled with benefits that accrue to the community at large.

4.5 REINTEGRATION

4.5.1 Majority view

About two thirds of respondents in both Cameroon (63%) and Chad (67%) consider that the reintegration of women is less difficult than the reintegration of men. Consistent with the literature, field studies in Cameroon revealed a widespread perception that women are forcibly recruited into VEOs. Their exit from the VEO is understood as a “rescue,” which is an intrinsically patriarchal concept. Similarly in Chad, women are described as “followers” and their reintegration is expected to flow naturally from the reintegration of men. On the other hand, men are seen as being more intensively engaged in the VEO, which has been linked to greater difficulty during reintegration. An important difference is observed in both countries between respondents based on sex: women express more fears about returning women, while men are more focused on the difficulties of reintegrating men.

A related issue is that a majority of respondents in Cameroon (55%) and Chad (67%) believe that the reintegration of men should be a higher priority than that of women. This pattern appears linked to notions of men’s “power” and women’s “passivity”, as respondents believe that men could make the attacks stop. In other words, reintegration of men is perceived by communities as a preventive solution to violence in areas under Boko Haram influence. In Chad, respondents explain that if men leave Boko Haram, the group would cease to exist.

Note that the answers to these two questions, on the difficulty of reintegration and what the priorities should be, also suggest that communities are more likely to prioritize the reintegration of men when those communities are under immediate and serious threat from Boko Haram.

Respondents also prioritize men’s reintegration based on their belief that women would follow them in whatever decision they make. As a female respondent explained: “Women follow in the steps of men. If priority is given to men, women will do nothing else but follow

their husbands.”¹¹ This sentiment, which runs especially strong in Chad, is echoed in several interviews, for example, with a local authority (“by prioritizing men, women will follow”), a humanitarian worker¹² (“if men come back, women will follow”) and justice actors who believe that prioritizing men would have a ripple effect among women.

The implication of this belief is clear. If decision makers believe that women’s situation can be resolved automatically with that of men, gendered dimensions will not be taken into account in DDDR policies and programmes. Under this view, there is no need to focus efforts and resources on the unique needs of women. Further research, and especially interviews with women former associates, would be helpful in testing these perceptions of gender dynamics in disengagement and reintegration choices.

The fact that communities fear returning men, while simultaneously prioritizing their reintegration over that of women, illustrates the complex interaction between gender and DDDR processes. In Chad, for example, State authorities correctly note that communities would perceive men as more dangerous, but these authorities also worry that such fears would mean that communities would not welcome men back. The latter, in some ways, is belied by communities’ prioritization of men’s reintegration over women’s and their views that reintegrating men can bring tangible security benefits.

4.5.2 Minority view

In Chad, the minority opinion that women’s reintegration can be more difficult than men’s also reveals certain gender stereotypes. First, such respondents believe that women “are more vulnerable and also they are mothers of children,”¹³ emphasizing structural inequalities that disadvantage women and justify special and priority treatment. Second, respondents express mistrust towards women former associates based on their connection to certain types of violence, such as suicide bombings. Third, and confirming results from the desk review, respondents express concerns that women would be more stigmatized than men on their return to their communities of origin. Several respondents state that returning women would never be truly reintegrated because they would be rejected by other women, as well as being unable to marry.

In other words, the minority opinion that women’s reintegration should be prioritized is based on the belief that women are more vulnerable and victimized. This reflects a certain degree of solidarity that can serve as an entry point for reintegration programmes.

One other reason cited for prioritizing women relates to fears that Boko Haram would attack the community in order to re-capture a returned woman. This fear is closely linked to the persistent perception that women are dominated by men and that they are unable to fully disassociate if their male relatives remain in the group. Under this view, women are a threat to their communities not because of what they will do, but because of what men related to them will do. It follows, then, that women who return alone warrant priority support so that they can sever their links to the VEO.

Note that even if communities generally fear such women less than men, the levels of mistrust are high. There are rare examples of women who played an active, primary role in their

¹¹ Displaced woman from Kafia, 25 years old.

¹² Civil society worker, man, 25 years old.

¹³ Response from a 33-year-old resident of Baga Sola, Chad.

respective groups – for example, as fighters, runners or scouts – and these exceptions trigger suspicions of women generally. Returning women are often reluctant to explain their actions during their time with the group, due in large part of fear of community reprisal, which further discourages trust.

4.5.3 Incorporated inequality

Gender stereotypes are rarely questioned by respondents, suggesting the phenomenon of “incorporated inequality”, where social inequality based on gender is so deeply entrenched that it is accepted without question. On the contrary, the inequality becomes an uncontested foundation for action and social practice. In this case, incorporated inequality impedes the research team from knowing whether respondents who prioritize women or favour differentiated assistance are motivated to improve the status of women or simply compensate individuals for inequalities that handicap their reintegration.

4.6 PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN IN REINTEGRATION PROCESSES

Table 4. Respondents’ views of the importance of women’s participation

Perceived importance of women’s participation	Cameroon	Chad
Absolutely necessary	32%	15%
Somewhat necessary	46%	51%
Desirable	14%	34%
Unnecessary	8%	-

A large majority of respondents describe women’s participation in DDDR as absolutely or at least somewhat necessary. Only a small percentage in Cameroon (8%) and no respondents in Chad believed that such participation was unnecessary. In Chad, however, the reasons provided by respondents for valuing women’s participation is limited to the need to support other women. Local authorities, leaders and civil society workers describe women’s potential functions to “advise former female associates,” and “provide moral assistance to them.” A displaced man living in Baga Sola explains: “The importance of the role of women is mostly that it reassures women.” Other actors mention that women “can talk without taboos with former women associates” or “can mediate while discussing all topics.”¹⁴

The fact that so many respondents’ views coincide on women’s particular capacities in DDDR programming is important. Even though women are more likely than before to hold government positions, men continue to dominate decision-making spheres,¹⁵ and women still tend to be tied to professional roles and institutions that are perceived as feminine, relating to family or culture, for example. The recognition that women are better suited to work with women former associates could result in engaging women for psychosocial support and other forms of counselling. While this is a possible entry point, women’s involvement in some aspects of DDDR will not translate automatically to their positioning in other domains, such as security and governance.

¹⁴ Response from a 35-year-old resident of Baga Sola, Chad.

¹⁵ According to the UNDP (2019, p. 150): “Women and men vote in elections at similar rates. So there is parity in entry-level political participation, where power is very diffused. But when more concentrated political power is at stake, women appear severely under-represented. The higher the power and responsibility, the wider the gender gap – and for heads of state and government it is almost 90 per cent.”

5. COMBINED RESULTS FROM THE LITERATURE AND THE FIELD

5.1 GENDER ANALYSIS

The desk and field studies confirmed that gender analysis that explores gender issues fully without resorting to superficial comparisons or conclusions is strictly necessary for effective DDDR. The research highlighted the variance and nuances in beliefs regarding gender and their implications. The fieldwork also illustrated that views relating to gender vary between and even within communities, which requires analysis at the level of individuals and of their families, groups and communities, as well as the wider environment.

5.2 MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION

The research strongly supports the finding that women must be systematically included in DDDR processes. Their exclusion is discriminatory insofar as it limits opportunities for their successful reintegration and worsens their vulnerabilities. The fact that a large majority of respondents see women's participation as absolutely or even somewhat necessary is positive. Achieving women's participation requires purposeful, sustained and concerted action, and the literature provides guidance on practical steps, including building their capacities, as well as those of other partners and stakeholders, and reinforcing informal spaces where women already exercise leadership.

5.3 GENDERED PERCEPTIONS

This research makes significant contributions to the literature on gendered views of engagement and disengagement. On the whole, respondents view women as being forced or following men in and out of Boko Haram, where they performed secondary roles, without culpability for or power within the group. These perceptions impact every phase of DDDR. Their effects are complex and sometimes paradoxical, leading to women being afforded more clemency but less importance than men. The belief that women's situation will be resolved automatically with that of men results in systematic neglect of women's needs and interests.

The literature and perspectives drawn from women former associates point to different motivations. Some women are not forced to join, but consciously choose engagement to achieve social freedoms and status. The fact that respondents do not mention this possible engagement scenario may be a reflection of the strength of their internally held gender stereotypes. It is important that DDDR practitioners recognize these multiple experiences among women so

they can tailor rehabilitation and reintegration services appropriately. In brief, understanding the full range of drivers, beyond the simplistic view of women's passivity, is a prerequisite for successful DDDR.

5.4 REINTEGRATION SUPPORT

The desk and field studies signal the importance of differentiated assistance to address the needs of women and men after their disengagement from VEOs. Looking at respondents' explanations, it is not clear to what extent their approval of differentiated assistance reflects a real difference in needs, as opposed to the respondents' own gender biases. It is also uncertain whether their support is suggestive of a willingness to rectify structural inequalities. Respondents' openness to assisting former associates preferentially over other women is an important finding and an entry point for practitioners. Their support suggests the recognition of the compounded vulnerabilities that returning women face based both on their gender and status as former associates.



Hadiza Adamu Garba and her children are IDPs living at the IOM-managed Bakassi camp in north-eastern Nigeria, where they endure a brief sandstorm at the end of the *harmatan* season. They come from surrounding villages razed by Boko Haram. © IOM 2018/Alfred CABALLERO

The research underscores the need for livelihood support for women former associates geared towards reducing their dependence on male relatives. The literature and survey confirm that structural inequalities are often linked to women's recruitment into Boko Haram and their risk of recidivism. Livelihood support can be seen as meeting a woman's practical needs while also correcting a pre-existing social injustice linked to her initial engagement and vulnerability to future recruitment. An important caveat here is that even if reintegration efforts can and should take aim at structural inequalities, they are not a valid substitute for action specifically designed to increase gender equality.

5.5 TRANSFORMATIONAL CHANGE

Returning to Moser's (1989) concept of gender needs, it is clear that DDDR provides a solid platform to make progress towards meeting practical and strategic needs. In practical terms, the DDDR focus on individually tailoring rehabilitation and reintegration support aims to meet the everyday needs of former women associates, facilitate their transition back to civilian life and strengthen their resilience against future recruitment. This tailoring process, to suit individual and specific community contexts, is essential. Women are not a homogeneous group in terms of their needs and capacities, and there is a diversity of gender views between and even within communities.

As a holistic social process, DDDR can be a trigger of social change. It should seek to be progressive and transcend the existing social cadrés that feed into the construction of gendered identities, to promote transformative women's and men's rights and gender equality. DDDR generally, and reintegration activities especially, can be designed with the goal of addressing and transforming the patriarchal structures that fuel violence and recruitment into VEOs.

Decision makers, institutions and power holders may be resistant to this transformation, and DDDR programmes should be accompanied by awareness-raising campaigns to increase understanding of the need for gender-responsive action and the ways in which gender equality contributes to stronger and more conflict-resilient societies.

In tandem with policy and legal action, DDDR can support transformation at the community level. For example, by integrating women in all aspects of DDDR, the approach can change how women's needs are understood and met, with positive externalities in other spheres. Supporting women and women's organizations as peacebuilders and agents of reintegration can affect change within their communities and societies at large. Within communities, the change agenda should be community-driven, and not merely "community-consulted", and involve both women and men.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 POLICY AND PROGRAMMATIC RECOMMENDATIONS

This research led to key policy and programmatic recommendations:

- (a) **Integrate gender analysis** into the policy and project cycle, ensuring that the results inform design and decisions. Comprehensive analysis requires an understanding of individuals and their immediate groups, communities and wider environments. Special attention should be given to external perceptions, as these play a significant role in the reintegration of men and women.
- (b) **Promote women’s meaningful participation** in the design and implementation of all aspects of DDDR policy and programming. To this end, identify the best entry points, which may include facilitating informal mediation and dialogue spaces where women have a comparative advantage. In addition, consider ways in which women’s participation in DDDR can be leveraged to enhance their existing roles, for example, as norm-shapers within their communities, and open up new spheres of influence. DDDR managers should take all necessary steps to ensure that women are represented in their staff. Achieving meaningful participation in the highly securitized field of DDDR will require continuous and concerted efforts to generate institutional change on a large scale.
- (c) **Recognize that many women suffer layered victimization** and address their specific needs. Psychosocial support is a top priority for women and men dealing with violence and trauma. Among the varied needs of victims of sexual and gender-based violence, recognize that in some cultural contexts, victimized women and their children will be stigmatized by their families and communities. Within the framework of DDDR, take steps to ensure laws and institutions are in place to hold perpetrators accountable for sexual crimes.
- (d) **Build capacities among government and civil society** to identify and respond to the differentiated needs of men and women, mainstream gender considerations, and protect women and girls. Capacities of government and civil society actors should be reinforced, with special emphasis on their ability to explore and address power dynamics, patriarchal perceptions and their effects on DDDR. Also recommended are efforts to raise awareness among government authorities of the need to include civil society and women in DDDR policies and programmes and shift away from an overwhelming securitized approach.
- (e) **Empower women and women’s organizations** to take active, decision-making roles in the reintegration process. For example, practitioners can facilitate shared spaces for women former associates, women civil society leaders and other stakeholders to promote dialogue on the needs and expectations of women. Other forums may be appropriate to address contextual priorities, such as psychosocial support, conflict resolution mechanisms and traditional mediation.
- (f) **Promote local ownership of DDDR**, which requires supporting local leadership, providing resources to civil society groups, engaging local stakeholders as equal partners, and listening to women and girls affected by conflict.

- (g) **Challenge and transform gender norms.** DDRR cannot succeed in its medium- or long-term goals without confronting gender norms that contribute to conflict, motivate recruitment and hinder reintegration. DDRR can and should affect social change, involving women and men at all levels of society to promote women’s and men’s rights and gender equality. Conflict sensitivity is important here because transformative change carries risks, including resistance from men and power holders.

(See Annex II for recommendations collected from respondents during the field research in Cameroon and Chad.)

6.2 RESEARCH RECOMMENDATIONS

This research revealed the complex and nuanced nature of gendered perceptions, including several paradoxes that warrant additional research:

- (a) **Surveys or interviews to assess community views of preferential support**
Most respondents support the proposal of preferential support for women former associates, but they also believe that others would resent or reject such support.
- (b) **Understanding meanings given to words like “victims,” “radical” and “isolation”**
Most respondents believe that former associates, whether men or women, are essentially victims who do not have radical ideological beliefs. At the same time, most respondents state a preference for former associates to be kept in isolation or separate from their community for a period of time before (re-)entry. Understanding how respondents understand these concepts would help them reconcile their views.

Further research is also advisable to contextualize and expand findings on the following issues:

- (a) **Engagement decisions**
While the literature suggests that some women join VEOs voluntarily, for example, to achieve social freedoms, respondents in the field study fully attribute women’s engagement to forced recruitment or male dominance. Additional research focusing on women associates and non-associates would be helpful towards deeper understanding of the drivers of engagement.
- (b) **How does the gender of the respondent affect perceptions?**
The sample did not allow researchers to conclude whether women and men have the same perceptions about women former associates, including whether both genders distrust former associates equally and how women and men view victims of sexual violence. Understanding how a non-associate’s gender affects his or her perceptions is important, especially in view of how communities see women’s essential role as counsellors to other women in the context of DDRR.
- (c) **Stigmatization**
The survey raised important questions about the social stigma experienced by women former associates upon their return to their communities. Outside of sexual violence, what factors contribute to stigma? To what extent does stigmatization suffered by women depend on their experiences in the VEO and, particularly, the extent to which their role as associates deviated from social norms?

ANNEX I

QUESTIONNAIRE

(An official English translation of the questionnaire is not available, as the interviews and FGDs were conducted in French or a local language.)

Le questionnaire sera guidé par les trois questions principales issues des conclusions de la revue documentaire à savoir :

1. Quels sont les obstacles majeurs à la réintégration des ex-engagées en tant que combattantes volontaires ou otages de Boko Haram ?
2. Les obstacles à la réintégration des femmes sont-ils les mêmes que ceux qu'on retrouve quand il s'agit des hommes ?
3. Quelles solutions durables de réintégration impliquant les communautés d'origine envisagez-vous ?
4. Pourquoi pensez-vous qu'elles seraient plus efficaces que qui pourraient être proposées par l'État ou les organisations internationales ?

Partie 1 - Différentiation hommes femmes (perception genre)

1. Quelle est l'entreprise de réintégration la plus difficile entre celle des hommes et des femmes ex-engagé(e)s de ou otages des groupes extrémistes violents ?
 - (a) réintégration hommes
 - (b) réintégration femmes

Pourquoi ?

2. Si on doit choisir entre la réintégration des hommes ou des femmes ex-engagé(e)s et/ou otages des groupes extrémistes violents, à laquelle devrait-on donner la priorité ?
 - (a) priorité hommes
 - (b) priorité femmes

Pourquoi ?

3. Entre les hommes et les femmes ex-engagé(e)s et/ou otages de groupes extrémistes violents, qui représente potentiellement plus de danger à la sécurité de la société ?

Pourquoi ?

4. Pensez-vous que les femmes ex-engagées et/ou otages de groupes extrémistes violents sont selon votre perception :
- (a) Plus victimes que les hommes
 - (b) Moins victimes que les hommes
 - (c) Aussi victimes que les hommes

Pourquoi ?

Partie 2 - Perceptions sécuritaires et sociales locales

5. Les ex-engagés (hommes ou femmes) ou otages des groupes extrémistes peuvent-ils représenter un danger pour la sécurité de la société ?
- (a) Oui
 - (b) Non

Pourquoi ?

6. Voyez-vous les ex-engagés et otages de groupes extrémistes religieux comme victimes ou coupables ?
- (a) Comme victimes
 - (b) Comme coupables

Pourquoi ?

7. Veuillez classer les facteurs suivants dans l'ordre, partant de celui qui selon vous représente le plus grand obstacle à la réintégration, vers celui qui est le moindre obstacle à la réintégration (multi-réponses)
- (a) croyances religieuses et coutumières
 - (b) sentiment d'insécurité (perception comme un danger)
 - (c) difficultés économiques et pauvreté
 - (d) autres (préciser)

Pourquoi ?

8. Pensez-vous qu'il est possible qu'une ex-engagée ou otage soit une bonne mère de famille ou citoyenne qui joue pleinement son rôle dans la société ?

Pourquoi ?

9. Pour vous, la réintégration est :
- (a) la responsabilité des communautés locales
 - (b) la responsabilité de l'État
 - (c) la responsabilité des ex-engagées et otages
 - (d) une responsabilité partagée

Pourquoi ?

10. Si vous pensez que la responsabilité est partagée, donnez la part de chacun en termes de pourcentage.
11. Sur une échelle de 1 à 10, pouvez-vous mesurer l'importance des femmes ex-engagées et otages de groupes extrémistes violents.
12. Pour vous quels sont les acteurs qui donnent le plus d'importance à cette réintégration des femmes ex-engagées ou otages des groupes extrémistes violents (numérotez par ordre de 1 à 6)
- État
 - Communautés
 - Organisations internationales
 - Société civile
 - Organisations et leaders féminins
 - Leaders religieux/traditionnels
13. Pour vous quels sont les acteurs qui donnent le plus d'importance à cette réintégration des hommes ex-engagés ou otages des groupes extrémistes violents (numérotez par ordre de 1 à 6)
- État
 - Communautés
 - Organisations internationales
 - Société civile
 - Organisations et leaders féminins
 - Leaders religieux/traditionnels
14. Si les moyens consacrés à la réintégration sont limités, qui méritent d'être prioritaires entre les hommes et les femmes ex-engagé(e)s et/ou otages de groupes extrémistes violents :
- (a) hommes
 - (b) femmes

Pourquoi ?

15. Accorder des avantages économiques et financiers aux ex-engagées ou otages des groupes extrémistes comparativement aux autres femmes, pour aider dans leur réintégration, constitue selon vous :
- (a) Une injustice
 - (b) Une décision juste et positive
 - (c) Une décision sans importance

Pourquoi ?

Partie 3 - Stratégies de la réintégration

16. Classez par ordre d'importance les besoins prioritaires pour la réintégration des ex-engagées ou otages des groupes extrémistes violents :
- Accompagnement psychologique
 - Réinsertion économique
 - Formation intensive auprès des autorités religieuses et coutumières
 - Centres de détention et de rééducation de l'État

17. La réintégration doit-elle se faire :
- (a) directement en communauté
 - (b) précédée par une phase d'isolement

Partie 4 - Acteurs et institutions de la réintégration

18. Quels acteurs, quelles organisations pensez-vous être les plus utiles dans la conduire des processus de réintégration des ex-engagées ou otages des groupes extrémistes violents (classer de 1 à 4 par ordre croissant d'utilité) :
- (a) Services de l'État central
 - (b) Leaders religieux et coutumiers
 - (c) Organisations locales
 - (d) Organisations internationales

D'autres acteurs ou organisations non mentionnés ci-dessus ont-ils un rôle à jouer dans le processus de réintégration ? Lesquels ?

19. La présence et l'appui d'institutions internationales aux processus de réintégration des ex-engagées et otages de groupes extrémistes violents constituent-ils une bonne ou une mauvaise chose ?

Pourquoi ?

20. La présence des femmes comme responsables dans les programmes de réintégration des femmes ex-engagées et otages de groupes extrémistes violents est-elle :
- (a) indispensable
 - (b) nécessaire
 - (c) souhaitable
 - (d) non nécessaire

Quel autre rôle les femmes devraient-elles jouer dans ces programmes?

Partie 5 - Différentiation entre ex-engagées et otages

21. Y a-t-il parmi les ex-engagées et les otages un groupe qui représente plus de danger pour la sécurité de la société ?

Pourquoi ?

22. La réintégration des ex-engagées et/ou otages doit-elle se faire en différenciant les besoins selon qu'il s'agisse d'hommes ou de femmes ?

ANNEX II

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM FIELD RESEARCH

Field researchers collected recommendations made by respondents during the survey and qualitative interviews, outlined below.

Cameroon

- Engage in multi-actor dialogue with the State, humanitarian actors, international organizations, civil society and other stakeholders on the gendered dimensions of the DDDR process in general and, specifically, in the Far North Region and affected communities.
- Raise awareness on the importance of women's participation in the DDDR and reintegration processes. Messaging can be informed by this study's literature review, including on the role women play in peacebuilding and conflict prevention.
- Organize capacity-building events for women in different contexts to prepare them for meaningful participation in DDDR.
- Organize discussion forums where community leaders and all stakeholders will participate.
- Carry out consultations to identify economic reintegration measures that will be beneficial to participants and acceptable to communities.
- Organize sessions to share the results of the study with and submit them to a critical review by the communities and refine them, allowing for targeted operational recommendations to be drawn.
- Conduct a similar study in other departments to obtain broader results.

Chad

- Organize a workshop to share the results of this study with key stakeholders.
- Develop a strategic communications campaign to raise awareness on the gendered dimension(s) of DDDR.
- Establish a platform for the exchange of ideas on sociocultural obstacles to reintegration and measures to promote community acceptance of returning women and men.
- Foster dialogue among civil society actors, the justice sector and law enforcement to seek a shared understanding of their respective roles and synergies, as part of a holistic approach to DDDR and the prevention of violent extremism.

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