

BUILDING PEACE THROUGH DDR PROGRAMS: LESSONS FROM REINTEGRATING BOKO HARAM EX-RECRUITS IN CAMEROON

This fact sheet presents findings from the RESOLVE Network Policy Note "[*Building Peace Through DDR Programs: Lessons from Reintegrating Boko Haram Ex-Recruits in Cameroon*](#)" by Lydie C. Belporo. In the countries of the Lake Chad Basin, Boko Haram's emergence has created major new security challenges for the region's governments. Cameroon's Far North region, the most populous in the country, is at the heart of these security issues. Since late 2020, Boko Haram has intensified attacks in Far North localities with assassinations targeting civilians, kidnappings, and looting in small towns along the Nigerian border. These incursions have displaced nearly 300,000 people and killed more than 5,000 since the crisis began.

Cameroon's legal response to terrorism has raised concerns among civil society groups inside the country and internationally. The 2014 anti-terrorism bill's ambiguity and lack of clarity has contributed to the proliferation of harsh sentences and a general shift from a legal "state of law" to a "state of police." While waiting for the amendment or repeal of this controversial law, a presidential decree created a National Committee for Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (CNDDR) on November 30, 2018. Drawing upon field research and observations conducted in late 2020 in Maroua, Mora, Méri, and Yaoundé, grey literature and documentary sources, this note examines how existing community norms or mechanisms might be as useful as more standard approaches to disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration.

For more, see: Belporo, Lydie C. [*Building Peace Through DDR Programs: Lessons from Reintegrating Boko Haram Ex-Recruits in Cameroon*](#). RESOLVE Network, 2021.

KEY POINTS & DEBATES



Research focusing on exits from radical and violent extremist groups is rather rare and mostly seeks to understand "push," "pull," and risk factors in explaining disengagement.



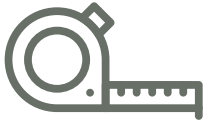
Considering the numerous failures of DDR program implementation in African countries, this policy brief highlights to policymakers and practitioners the need to develop a hybrid model between traditional/local and institutional/formal approaches that closely involve multiple stakeholders.



Countering violent extremism (CVE) programs must consider the multiple overlapping needs of those who are at the exit of their extremist journeys, with a particular emphasis on local realities and how they can be addressed through local initiatives.

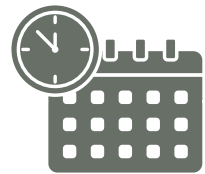
POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Create policy for existing violence & transplant programs tailored for the local context in Cameroon.



Cameroon's choice to focus its DDR programming primarily on deradicalization is particularly unsuitable, unlike in Nigeria where religion was a frequent tool for recruitment into Boko Haram. This design is inconsistent with what is known about how Cameroonian ex-fighters became affiliates of the group. Since in Cameroon, for the time being, most of the DDR activities being carried out in the Far North focus on training for income-generating activities and civic and moral education, it would be more useful to conceptualize that disengagement and training programming as community re-integration of ex-associates rather than deradicalization.

Prevent the risks of recidivism & reverting to violence by a definite schedule for reintegration.



Cameroonian authorities should rely on the considerable experience and knowledge amassed during the past 30 years and glean from the robust body of research to avoid creating new grievances by forcing returnees to cope with a with long period of uncertainty about the future. Cameroon's DDR should follow the United Nations Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards (IDDRS) revised in 2019, which provided that for those leaving groups designated as terrorist organizations the exit strategy should be well-planned and last for a specific period of time.

Formalize & institutionalize traditional reintegration processes with local stakeholders in support of DDR.



Traditional soft power diplomacy can play a pivotal role in the reintegration and management of former Boko Haram associates since symbolic power of local authorities is great in the northern regions. Cameroon is formed on a pluralist system in which traditional leaders play roles in the organization of civil life—it is imperative to involve them in these processes. Institutionalizing and formalizing traditional practices, that are better suited than DDR programs only in this context, allows the participation of the whole community including traditional leaders and families.

Plan macro, long-term, & intersectional interventions to strengthen community resilience.



The reintegration process of Boko Haram ex-associates should be based on community support. Both ex-combatants and communities should be provided with resources so as not to cultivate the feeling that the ex-associates are more favored than the victims. Cameroonian authorities should work more closely with international stakeholders already in the field to coordinate projects and improve the living conditions of the surrounding affected populations. To allow populations to develop their resilience, it is vital to combine local initiatives and projects with national programs.

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