

**PROSPECTS OF HARMONISING REHABILITATION PROGRAMMES FOR  
SURRENDERED EX-BOKO HARAM COMBATANTS IN THE LAKE CHAD REGION**

**by**

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**Abstract**

Due to the increasing number of Boko Haram combatants surrendering, a rehabilitation programme for surrendered Boko Haram combatants and other returnees is gaining momentum in Lake Chad Region countries. However, these programmes are significantly impacted by slow implementation, lack of clear-cut strategy, and combat posture of some Lake Chad Region countries. This study discusses the prospect of harmonising rehabilitation programmes to minimise the setbacks and maximise its potentials across the Lake Chad Region. Two typologies of harmonisation programmes are discussed. These are operation harmonisation, in which all the rehabilitation programmes are institutionalised in a single body like the Multinational Joint Task Force or harmonisation in principle, protocols and procedures in which a common principle is drawn out for memberstates to imbibe and follow in the state rehabilitation programme. The study submits that the region's stakeholders are at liberty to choose the typology of the harmonised reintegration programme they want to adopt. However, consideration of harmonised rehabilitation programme is significant to make rehabilitation programmes for surrendered Boko Haram members impactful in the post-conflict Lake Chad Region.

**Keywords:** Boko Haram, Deradicalisation, Reintegration, Lake Chad Region, Lake Chad Basin Commission

## 1. Introduction

Boko Haram<sup>1</sup> is one of the deadliest armed groups in contemporary history. The activities of the group began with the jihadist campaigns of Yusuf Mohammed in 2002 (Mohammed, 2014; Onuoha, 2014). The group snowballed into a violent confrontation with Nigeria in 2010 after it went underground and rebuilt itself. By 2013, Boko Haram had transformed into a regional threat spreading across the Lake Chad countries (Mohammed, Momodu &Owonikoko, 2018). Today, Boko Haram terrorism has become a threat to security in the Lake Chad Region. There is no core Lake Chad Basin State—Nigeria, Niger, Chad and Cameroon—that has not experienced the horrendous activities of Boko Haram in its territory, especially in their Lake Chad territories. It is estimated that the Boko Haram insurgent group has killed over 40,000 people in Lake Chad Region (Curiel, Walther &O’Clery, 2020).

At the earlier stage of the group’s activities, a hard-power approach involving the deployment of military operations from individual states or collectively under the auspices of the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) was adopted. Later, other soft-power mechanisms were adopted. One of the most visible soft-power approaches Lake Chad Basin States adopted in the Boko Haram insurgency’s containment is the deradicalisation, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) programme. The DDR programme, as used in this study, refers to programmatic activities carried out to aid disengaged members of violent extremist groups to effectively transition into civilian life. Altier (2021) referred to this in her study as the Violent Extremist Disengagement and Reintegration (VEDR) Programme. For almost a decade now, conscientious programmes have been put in place across states in the Lake Chad Region to ensure that members of violent extremist groups, especially Boko Haram, surrender and transit to civilian life. This is done under different programmes and auspices. The need to adopt the approach is hinged on the increasing number of insurgents surrendering to their different Lake Chad states. Given the nature of the region and the common security threat posed by the Boko Haram insurgency in Lake Chad, this paper argued for the harmonisation of the rehabilitation programme for surrendering Boko Haram combatants in the Lake Chad Region to make the programme more effective. Data for the paper were drawn from both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources involved interviews and focus group discussion sessions with relevant stakeholders across the Lake Chad region. Although some of the

information and data were deliberately not collected for this research, they were useful in developing this manuscript and were appropriately used. Secondary data used for the study involved relevant published articles.

Following the introduction and theoretical framework of the paper, this paper is divided into five sections. The first section interrogates the justifiability of using a soft-power approach to managing the Boko Haram insurgency in the Lake Chad Region. The second section explains why Boko Haram members are surrendering. The third section reviews the rehabilitation programme for Boko Haram in different countries of the Lake Chad Region. The fourth section discusses the typology and prospect of harmonisation. Lastly, the fifth section is the conclusion.

## **2. Theoretical Framework**

Two different but mutually reinforcing theories (models) guide the study. The first is the security community. A security community is a region or zone within which large-scale violence is unlikely or even unthinkable. In other words, states have stable expectations of peaceful change. This means that community members have the assurance that they will not fight each other and settle their collective threat together amicably (Adrej, 2007; Deutsch, 1961 cited in Albert, 2017). This perspective is similar to democratic peace theory, which opined that democratic states seldom go to war to resolve impasses among themselves (Pugh, 2005; Bakker, 2017; Bakker, 2018; Bremer, 1992; Chan, 1997; Chernot, 2004). However, the security community goes beyond this. It further emphasised that nations with similar threats can work together to address common threats. The Lake Chad Basin countries have adopted this security regimen to fight the terror threats of Boko Haram after realising that Boko Haram terrorism is unique to Nigeria, but a region-wide security threat for Lake Chad. Albert (2017) has used this concept to explain the collective deployment of military action against Boko Haram by Lake Chad countries. The concept is also suitable for explaining the centralisation and harmonisation of non-coercive response to the threat of Boko Haram in Lake Chad.

The second framework for this study is collective action. The concept of collective action was coined from Mancur Olson's (1965) book titled *The Logic of Collective Action: Public Good and the Theory of Group*. However, it was introduced in politics and security studies by Elinor Ostrom (2007) in his Collective Action Theory (CAT) study. The central thesis of CAT is that better

optimal outcomes can be attained when stakeholders within a group come together to act co-operatively rather than individually. This theory points to the power of synergy, combined efforts and unity of action in addressing a common problem nationally, regionally or continentally. It preaches “a collective group solution to a group problem”. Lake Chad Basin countries have adopted the philosophy of this theory since the emergence of the Boko Haram insurgency. A specific step in this direction is the reinvigoration of the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) as a collective action of Lake Chad Basin States to combat the threat of the group. Similarly, harmonising the regional deradicalisation programme also aligns with this framework.

### **3. Justifiability for Utilising a Soft-Power Approach to Boko Haram Insurgency in the Lake Chad Region**

The perception of the state as having the sole monopoly of the legitimate use of force has always guided how Lake Chad states engage violent groups like Boko Haram. Thus, when the group began its violent activities, Lake Chad countries used a coercive approach involving security apparatuses to trail members of the group. The belief was that when such an approach is used, it would repress the group, but this was not so. This prompted the change of strategy and the inculcation of a soft-power approach. Nigeria initiated a soft-power approach with the declaration of amnesty for the group on the condition that members of the group lay down arms and were demobilised from the group (Owonikoko, 2020) before other Lake Chad countries followed suit. The author attended a conference in Maroua, Far North Region of Cameroon, to discuss the soft-power approach to managing the Boko Haram insurgent group in Lake Chad.

The use of the soft-power approach to engaging the Boko Haram insurgency has thrown up inquisitions; one of which revolves around the moral justification for the use of the soft-power approach, such as granting of amnesty and the DDR programme for members of a group that has been involved in violence and orchestration destruction in Lake Chad. Those who have opposed the use of the soft-power approach towards engaging the group believe that doing such will absolve surrendered members of the group from punishment. They expressed this will embolden other people to think that they can carry out similar acts or even more horrendous acts and get away with it via granting amnesty or the DDR programme. Thus, it will tacitly promote terrorism. In a group interview with community leaders in Madagali Local Government Area of Adamawa State, they expressed the fear that granting amnesty to Boko Haram members – and bringing them back into

communities without meting out punishment – could only send the unintended message to children growing up in these communities that they could commit similar or more heinous crimes, against their communities or the state and be amnestied without punishment (Interview cited in Owonikoko, 2020:43). This sentiment was expressed during the conference the author attended in Maroua, Cameroon in September 2018, in which scholars from across the region expressed that the repentant Boko Haram ought to be dealt with according to the law rather than be pardoned and reintegrated. These sentiments conform to Bambose's (2010) expression of the usefulness of punishment for wrongdoing. According to Bambose (2010), punishment is necessary for retribution, incapacitation, rehabilitation and deterrence. Failure to punish crimes or atrocities leaves no room for deterrence. Another argument is that using a soft-power approach, such as granting amnesty or implementing the DDR programme for insurgents that have carried out horrendous activities against the state and the people, amounts to injustice. They stress that such injustice may stir up retaliation from those who fell victim to attacks by former insurgents. Trauma experienced by the victims can resonate when the ex-Boko Haram members are amnestied by the government and returned to their communities. Traumatic memories can be revived because the infrastructure destroyed in the attacks has yet to be reconstructed by the government. Indeed, a study on the reintegration of repentant and deradicalised Boko Haram members in north-east Nigeria shows this (Owonikoko, 2022a). Interaction with scholars from Lake Chad in Diffa shows that this perception also looms large among the communities in Lake Chad, especially those who suffered Boko Haram attacks in one way or the other (Focus Group Discussion with scholars from Niger, Cameroon and Chad conducted on 9 December 2020, in Diffa, Niger Republic). Despite this, many factors have made using the soft-power approach, especially the DDR programme and granting the amnesty programme, a worthwhile activity.

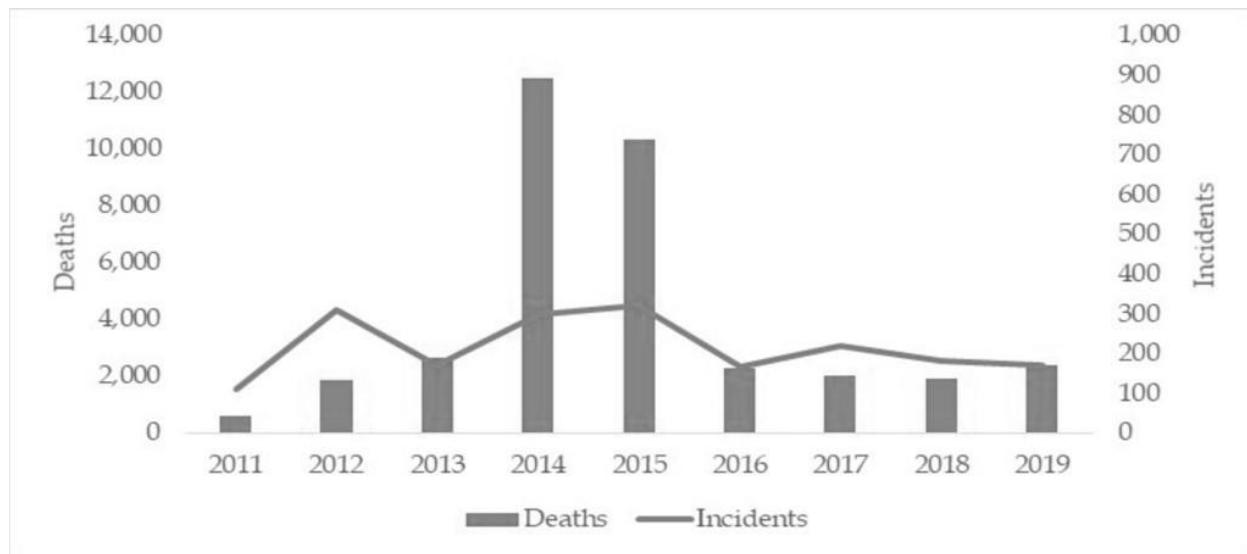
The first factor is the futility of military engagement. The first mode of engagement of the terrorist group in Nigeria and the other Lake Chad Region states is the heavy deployment of military personnel; firstly, by individual states and, later, collectively, as the MNJTF. As a result of the use of this approach, the security and defence budget of these countries rose significantly. Table 1 shows Nigeria's defence expenditure between 2009 and 2021 stood at US\$27027bn. On the other hand, other Lake Chad countries like Niger, Cameroon and Chad stood at US\$1844bn, US\$4901bn and US\$4745bn, respectively. While this is low compared to other elite countries of the world, defence budget of the Lake Chad Region State has experienced consistent increments over the

years and percentage of the budget allocation to defend is high compared to the countries' gross domestic product and the percentage of the budget allocated to other critical sectors of the countries. The reason for the incremental budget allocation to defence is that it is costly to prosecute an internal war. As Nwolise observed, internal armed conflict in Africa always leads African countries to increase their military expenditure (Nwolise, 1987). Unfortunately, military engagement with Boko Haram in Lake Chad did not bring the much-needed results despite the increase in military expenditure. Although the offensive operations of the militaries of Lake Chad countries and that of the MNJTF curtail Boko Haram from having a field day in Lake Chad, the group continues to attract newspaper headlines for its attacks. In 2015, the group was rated as the third most dread terrorist group in the world (Global Terrorism Index, 2015). This was mainly due to the group's activities in 2014, which recorded an average of 25 attacks in a month. Since then, the group attacks have fluctuated, as figure 1 shows, but the group continues to carry out lethal attacks. In 2020, Boko Haram used the Covid-19 pandemic as an advantage to carry out strategic attacks in Lake Chad, including the famous Chadian Boma Peninsula attack, where close to 100 Chadian soldiers were killed and approximately 50 severely injured. Between June and December 2020, Boko Haram carried out high-profile attacks that killed about 300 people on the Nigerian side of Lake Chad alone (Owonikoko, 2021). Many communities have continued to be ransacked by Boko Haram/Islamic State of West African Province (ISWAP) to date. All of these show the continued threat of Boko Haram, despite the high military expenditure of Lake Chad states. This prompted the government of the Lake Chad region to examine other means of engaging the Boko Haram insurgents apart from the coercive approach to stem the tide of their attacks.

**Table 1: Military Expenditure of Lake Chad Countries, 2009-2021**

Lake Chad State	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Nigeria	189.6	222.6	247.8	218.3	209.9	190.8	186.1	179.8	171.9	202.8	186.0	240.3	256.8
Niger	47.1	61.8	71.8	137.1	92.4	128.2	--	174	201	212	248	225	246
Cameroon	332	355	323	346	364	366	375	409	422	418	422	376	393
Chad	686	613	566	--	656	349	225	319	227	238	235	308	323

Source: SIPRI Military Expenditure Database (2021), Military Expenditure by Country in Constant (2019) US\$m., 1988-2021



Source: Allen (2019, cited in Onuoha, 2020:203)

**Figure 1: Boko Haram attacks in Lake Chad Region, 2011-2019**

Another major factor in the adoption of the DDR and amnesty programme for Boko Haram is the issue of forced or involuntary conscription of members by the group. Boko Haram used many tactics to recruit people to populate the group into their folds. While some people joined the group because they believed in the ideology of Boko Haram or to avenge/revenge atrocities they faced within their communities, many joined without a clear understanding of what the group stands for due to the recruitment method adopted by Boko Haram. There are four different kinds of subtle recruitment methods adopted by the Boko Haram insurgent group, namely deception, brainwashing, forced contagion, and forced conscription. The first is recruitment through deceit. This involves the act of causing someone to accept the ideology and cause for which the group fights as true and legitimate when in fact, it is not. This is done through many means, including open preaching and conduction of Dawah, during which wrong ideology is surreptitiously inculcated into the targets, enticement through loans, and incentivisation through monetary rewards. In doing this, the group leveraged sheer ignorance of the people, illiteracy, and bad governance at all levels, including community governance and poor socio-economic conditions, to deceive them into joining the group. This typically begins from infection and befriending to show the people that they mean well to them. After establishing rapport, other means are

introduced, such as loans, rented apartments, stipends or even small business ventures etc., to get them close to becoming members of the group. The impression created in them using all these means is that they would be better off joining the group than continuing to be loyal members of their immediate society.

Another method of recruitment is through brainwashing/indoctrination of targets. This involves the indoctrinating target to give up their social and religious belief and attitudes and accept contrasting ones that they give through preaching and proselytisation. Furthermore, they capitalise on the local people's naivety, innocence, ignorance and illiteracy to use this recruitment medium. Children and teenagers who are excessively naïve and ignorant are usually recruited using this medium. Yusuf Mohammed used this medium of recruitment while he was alive. He was going from one state of the north-east of Nigeria to another, preaching against western education and encouraging teenagers to renege against any insignia of the Nigerian State because it is against the command of Allah. During a focus group discussion session with parents from Michika and Madagali in Mubi, they all explained that when the late Mohammed Yusuf used to come to their localities, after finishing open preaching session with the public in their localities, there were usually some designated persons from him who gathered children and teenagers, and began to have a special session of preaching and proselytisation with them. One of the participants in the focus group discussion explained:

Yusuf Mohammed was usually coming to our place to preach and after his preaching, some of his boys sent by him would gather our children and teenagers to have a special session of preaching with them. We never knew he was teaching them corrupt ideology until when we see our children leaving our localities and abandoning going to school to go to Maiduguri to become followers of Yusuf Mohammed. This was long before Boko Haram became violent. (Participant 3, 65 years, FGD Session with Parents, Mubi 11<sup>th</sup> April, 2022).

Former Governor of Borno State, Kashim Shettima, revealed something related to this when he said, "The Boko Haram sect recruited new members, mostly through open preaching to spread their misguided ideology, targeting teenagers. They had leaders who openly preached in mosques and at special gatherings, without showing violence at initial levels" (cited in Haruna, 2016, para.11). They used the advantage of open preaching to gather impressionable children and teenagers,

brainwashing and indoctrinating them to recruit them to join the group. This did not only occur in Nigeria's north-east, Nigeria's Lake Chad neighbours also experienced this recruitment pattern. However, brainwashing and indoctrination do not stop when they join the group; it continues so that they can consolidate the misguided ideology they have inculcated into them.

Similarly, Boko Haram recruited through abduction/conscription. The group uses this strategy when they need more members, especially those with specialities that may be useful in the camps, such as mechanics, doctors, nurses, women etc. Many members of the group have been enlisted through this means across Lake Chad. Another means of recruiting is through birth. This is a natural way of recruiting into the fold of the group. During interviews with "teenage women" who were forcibly conscripted to Boko Haram and were married off, they explained that Boko Haram encourage rapid childbirth to populate their group. Therefore, children are weaned very early to give a chance to another baby. Children born into this are likely not to understand anything other than the Boko Haram lifestyle.

The point made from the mode of recruitment of Boko Haram discussed above is that quite a lot of members of the group joined due to deception, naivety or forceful conscription or been born into the group. Therefore, applying the soft-power approach allows people who have regained their sanity to demobilise from the group.

Furthermore, another major factor in the adoption of DDR and the amnesty programme for repentant Boko Haram members is that not doing it will not allow people trapped in Boko Haram insurgent dens to navigate their way out of the group to society. Boko Haram creates fear in the mind of their members not to think of escaping by killing anyone who attempts to escape and is apprehended. However, the fear of being rejected by their communities also makes the people not think of escaping. A former Boko Haram member explained:

...There are many members of the group who want to leave and come back to their families and communities but the penalty for unsuccessful escape, if caught by Boko and rejection by communities, prevent many from thinking of escape...but some still manage to stage their escape irrespective of not being sure of family and community acceptance... (Interviewee 2, ex-Boko Haram member, 31, January 2020, Gombe, Gombe State).

The implication is that Boko Haram has more members to continue to wreak havoc on communities and prevent people from doing what they usually do. For instance, in north-east Nigeria, Boko Haram attacks have prevented people from farming far away. In some communities, people cannot farm beyond a few kilometres away from the capital town. For instance, in the Madagali Local Government Area of Adamawa State, people who want to farm cannot go beyond two kilometres from Gulak, the capital town (Owonikoko, 2022a). Therefore, traditional rulers are using this to talk to people in the communities to allow the reintegration of ex-Boko Haram members so that Boko Haram members can be depopulated in the trenches and their security can improve so they can farm where they cannot farm.

#### **4. Why Boko Haram members are Surrendering**

In the last few years, there has been an increase in the number of people who demobilise from the group and are willing to surrender to the state. The increase in the number of Boko Haram members surrendering necessitated the workshop on the management of the disengaged Boko Haram group in Lake Chad held in Cameroon in 2018. Even after that, the number of Boko Haram members that have disengaged has increased significantly. There are many explanations for why Boko Haram insurgents are surrendering in their numbers.

The first explanation is infighting among members of the group. Since Boko Haram launched its violent confrontation against the Nigerian State and her Lake Chad neighbours, infighting, caused by the leadership style of Abubakar Shekau and the modus operandi of the parent group, has always resulted among notable leaders of the group that usually leads to the formation of breakaway factions. In 2012, a breakaway faction known as *Ansar al-Muslimin fi Bilad al Sudan* (supporters of Muslims in the Land of Black Africa), better known as Ansaru, emerged. However, the group did not last long as Shekau forced the group back into the Boko Haram folds (Njoku, 2020; Zenn, 2019). A tougher infighting emergence in 2016 culminated in the formation of a breakaway faction known as ISWAP with support from ISIS. Since the breakaway of ISWAP, intense tussle for the control of Lake Chad has always resulted between the two factions. In 2021, one of the infighting between the two led to the death of Abubakar Shekau, the erstwhile dreaded leader of Boko Hara (Abdullahi & Adebajo, 2021). Therefore, with the death of Shekau, the whole of Sambisa Forest has come under the control of ISWAP, and those who are loyal to Shekau and

do not want to succumb to the al-Banawi-controlled ISWAP are the ones surrendering massively to the Nigerian State.<sup>3</sup>

Arising from the infighting, some were forcefully conscripted to become members of the group. They found it difficult to come out of the group because their chance of escape is thin and capital punishment awaits anybody who attempts to escape but is apprehended. However, the consistent infighting among the group for the control of territory and superiority in Lake Chad allowed those who wished to escape to do so. One of the liberated ex-Boko Haram members interviewed expressed:

Many of us (conscripted) wanted to escape but we could not because it is very difficult to trace our way back home and the chance of successfully escaping is very thin. If you are caught as a male trying to escape, they will slaughter you but for the female, they will beat them and lock them in a cell for days without food. These tough punishments usually make people shun the idea of escape. However, the constant attack of ISWAP on our camp allows us to run because everybody is scampering for the safety of his life (ex-Boko Haram member, 25 years, Interview, Mubi, April 8, 2022).

Furthermore, the intensified military onslaught against the group also aided the liberation of many members of the group who wanted to demobilise. On several occasions, the military onslaught against the groups in their camps has led to the destruction of their camps and the opportunity for many to escape easily with much ease. Most times, military personnel operating around the area also aided the escape of members who used the opportunity to split and infight between the two groups. They usually report to them while the military personnel lead them to designated centres where they can be profiled and slated for deradicalisation or reunion with their families.

Another major factor in the increasing surrender of Boko Haram members has to do with contrasting activities of Boko Haram in their camps with the religious recruitment message of Boko Haram and Islamic practices as stipulated in the Holy Book – Quran – and Hadith. Furthermore, individuals joined the group because of the promise of socio-economic improvement, justice, protection and so on from Boko Haram. Unfortunately, all of these end up being deceits. The disillusionment created by most of the recruits made them disinterested in continuing to be a

member of the group. Interviews conducted by Akum et al., (2021:8) with former members who have now surrendered across Lake Chad countries showed this as one of the most prominent reasons.

## **5. Rehabilitation Programmes for Surrendered Boko Haram Members in Lake Chad Countries: A Review**

Due to circumstances surrendering the recruitment of Boko Haram members and the increased rate at which members of the group are surrendering, Lake Chad countries have established deradicalisation and reintegration programmes as ad hoc programmes and institutionalised systems. These programmes will be discussed in this section.

### ***5.1 Cameroon***

The ultimatum for 31 December 2017 given by the Cameroonian military to Boko Haram militants led to the surrender of many militants (Issa & Machikou, 2019). However, no significant preparations were made to receive the surrendered combatants. Instead, as more and more Boko Haram members surrendered, they were entrusted to the hands of the traditional rulers who carried out ritual-based rehabilitation of the ex-combatant. This required the ex-combatants to renounce Boko Haram by swearing on a copy of the Quran and then confessing their atrocities. However, most people in society believed that ex-combatants were easily pardoned. Thus, they promised to kill them if the soldiers did not (Mahmood & Ani, 2018).

The misgiving led to the government retaining the surrendered Boko Haram members in the MNJTF headquarters in Mora (Issa & Machikou, 2019). They were kept at the facility for a long time without a clear decision as to what to do with the group leading to ex-combatants complaining of idleness and escaping from the facility, raising fear of rejoining the insurgent group in the bush. This made the government devise a clear policy on how to deal with surrendered ex-combatants. An inter-ministerial committee known as the National Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration Committee (NDDRC) was set up in November 2018 to see to the deradicalisation, demobilisation and reintegration of ex-combatants in Cameroon. However, the framework of operation of the committee is still not clear. Moreover, it put together two distinct types of crises, each with different dynamics for DDR (Akum et al., 2021). Furthermore, the slow pace of the activities of the deradicalisation and reintegration programme of NDDRC discourages combatants

who may wish to disengage (Mbarkoutou Mahatma, Maroua, Far North Region, Interview, March 2022).

## ***5.2 Chad***

In Chad, state authorities struggle to handle surrendered Boko Haram members. While the government talked about amnesty and reintegration, the reality of groups in Chad is quite different. Boko Haram members who have surrendered to the military since 2016 remained in camps without a clear strategy on what to do with them, while some ex-combatants and other returnees have gone directly to their communities without any form of formal deradicalisation and reintegration programme (Bukarti & Bryson, 2019; Bukarti, 2020; Ani, 2021). Fortunately, the reintegration programme in Chad may succeed because it is less complicated than in other Lake Chad countries. After all, Boko Haram attacks are limited relative to other Lake Chad countries.

Furthermore, traditional rulers and communities promised some receptiveness to the ex-combatant (Ani, 2021). However, the lack of strategy to be adopted for deradicalisation and the government's posture of combat have put surrendered Boko Haram members in heightened danger at the hand of security personnel to the extent that some surrendered Boko Haram suspects were summarily killed in their prison cells in N'djamena in 2020 (Punch News, 2020 cited in Ani, 2021). This has had a significant impact on the willingness of Boko Haram combatants to surrender. Although the government does not have a formal reintegration programme, an ad hoc programme is currently going on in the state. An inter-agency counter-terrorism unit based at Baga Sola is helping to screen high-risk ex-combatant from those of low-risk. While high-risk individuals were handed over to the Ministry of Social Affairs after psycho-social assistance from the Lac Province government, the low-risk ex-combatant arehanded over to the local chiefs by the Ministry of Territorial Administration for reintegration. To make it more formal, the Chadian government, through the Ministry of Justice, has set up deradicalisation, demobilisation, rehabilitation and reintegration (DDRR) steering committee to address deradicalisation and reintegration systematically, but this has been slow (Akum et al., 2021). The combination of these has significantly impacted the deradicalisation and reintegration of ex-combatants in Chad.

### ***5.3 Niger***

The government of the Diffa region initiated an amnesty and reintegration programme at a camp at Goudoumaria. This facility is named the Socio-Economic Reintegration Centre(SERC), about 200 km west of Diffa, supervised by a committee headed by the prefect and composed of the canton or village chiefs and religious authorities from each of the four departments in the region (Bossou, Diffa, Mainé and Nguigmi). This facility has been hosting surrendered Boko Haram since 2018 (Bukarti & Bryson, 2019). However, deradicalised ex-Boko Haram fighters remained in the camp for months without exit due to a lack of backing for the law. By March 2019, the government passed a law on amnesty and deradicalisation for ex-combatant willing to surrender (Bearak, 2019). The law also provides for a lesser punishment for those who are involved in serious crimes of murder. The government also supported the development of “Peace committees” (Comité de Paix) that is presided over by mayors and composed of community members, business people and religious leaders in the Diffa communities. The peace committees help to facilitate the reintegration of ex-militants. Yet, most communities remain reluctant to accept the defectors due to the devastating experience of Boko Haram activities in the region(Ani, 2021).

Furthermore, the time ex-combatants spent in the Goudoumaria Centre (about two years) was longer than expected, and the poor living conditions in the centre also led to the attempted escape. The official number of desertions in Niger is minimal compared to the number of residents from the region thought to have joined Boko Haram since the beginning of the crisis. This raises the question of why so many ex-associates who have left Boko Haram voluntarily have disappeared.

### ***5.4 Nigeria***

Nigeria is at the forefront of the Boko Haram insurgency. Nigeria has developed the most elaborate deradicalisation and reintegration programmes. It has three deradicalisation programmes, namely Prison-based Deradicalisation Programme; Yellow Ribbon Initiative, and Operation Safe Corridor (OPSC). OPSC pertains specifically to Boko Haram ex-combatants who surrender to state forces for rehabilitation and reintegration. Although the programme began in 2016, the activities leading to the beginning of the programme can be traced to 2013 when the federal government of Nigeria, led by Dr Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, announced an amnesty for Boko Haram. However, this was rejected by the group (Owonikoko, 2022b). When Muhammadu Buhari became president in 2015,

he maintained the country's readiness to provide amnesty and rehabilitation to surrendered Boko Haram members. However, a coherent deradicalisation idea was implemented by his government in 2016 following the establishment of OPSC.

According to Owonikoko (2022b), The process leading to undergoing the deradicalisation programme of OPSC by ex-Boko Haram members typically begins with contact with soldiers, either through capturing or voluntary surrendering. They are then screened and profiled by the personnel of Operation Hadin Kai; a military operation established to fight against the Boko Haram insurgency in the north-east. The screening is carried out to determine the extent and level of risk that the surrendered Boko Haram member poses and to ensure that any ex-member of Boko Haram who is about to be deradicalised is not among the 353 members of the group sternly wanted by the state. Then, the operation profiles the person through interrogation and cross-checking of information. If such a repentant member is not found to be "too risky", he is admitted into the OPSC's DRR programme, and his data and personal information, including medical records, are collected and stored for usage.

Five processes are involved in the reformation ex-Boko Haram members in OPSC, as shown in Figure 2. The first stage is the arrival of ex-Boko Haram members to the camp. The next stage is the debriefing and buy-in stage, where members are orientated on why they are at the camp and are debriefed to build the trust of the ex-combatants in the programme and the staff. Experts of the OPSC engage the clients in a large auditorium to explain the aim of the programme, the role of all stakeholders in the programme and the need for them to see benefits in the programme. This is followed by team-to-group engagement in which a group of experts engage with fewer ex-combatants to personalise the process for greater interaction and better observation of the clients and their needs. In doing this buy-in, the role of the clergymen, especially the imams, is crucial. Third, in the stage is deradicalisation. This is engaged simultaneously with the fourth stage—rehabilitation. These two stages address purging ex-Boko Haram members of radical ideology and re-orienting them to be better members of society. Three key areas are targeted in the deradicalisation and rehabilitation stages. These are religious ideology, structural/political grievance and post-exit trauma. Focus on religious ideology set to refute Boko Haram's religious ideology used by the sect to brainwash its members. In doing this, the imams develop counter-narratives from Islamic textual materials and engage the ex-members on Islamic and religious

concepts. Clients are trained in vocations of their choice by National Directorate of Employment officials to address structural/political grievances such as poverty, unemployment, marginalisation and literacy. The essence of this is to ensure that the ex-member of Boko Haram gets an alternative livelihood after reintegration. This aspect of the OPSC is vital because it provides economic empowerment for ex-combatants, enabling them to settle down well in their communities after reintegration. With this, the chance of returning to the insurgent group will be slim.

Furthermore, they were taught basic literacy, numeracy and civic education. The content of civic education is to imbue in the ex-Boko Haram members patriotism and loyalty to their country rather than Boko Haram. Post-exit trauma seeks to address trauma faced by the ex-combatants while in the jungle of Boko Haram members. This involved giving therapies such as psychotherapy, psycho-spiritual counselling, and social therapy. The last and most important in OPSC's reformation of ex-Boko Haram members is reintegration and reconciliation. This stage ensures that ex-combatants are re-admitted into their communities and reintegrated and reconciled with their communities that may have been aggrieved because of their heinous act. Thus far, over 1300 ex-combatants have passed through the rehabilitation programme of OPSC in three different phases since its inception in 2016 (see Table 2). However, apart from the challenges of community acceptance of the rehabilitated Boko Haram member, the programme is also significantly affected by the slow implementation. There are still many surrendered Boko Haram who are in camps in Maiduguri, awaiting enrolment in the rehabilitation programme of OPSC. As of September 2022, over 90,00 Boko Haram/ISWAP members have surrendered as of September 2022 (Taiwo-Obalonye, 2022), and some have been in camp in Maiduguri for a long period of time, triggering an insurrection of surrendered Boko Haram members in 2021 (The General News, 2021).

**Table 2: Deradicalisation of Boko Haram Members by OPSC since 2016**

S/N	Year	Batch/phase	No of deradicalised Boko Haram members
1	2016	First	228
2	2020	Second	601
3	2022	Third	559
<b>4</b>	<b>Total</b>	-	<b>1,388</b>

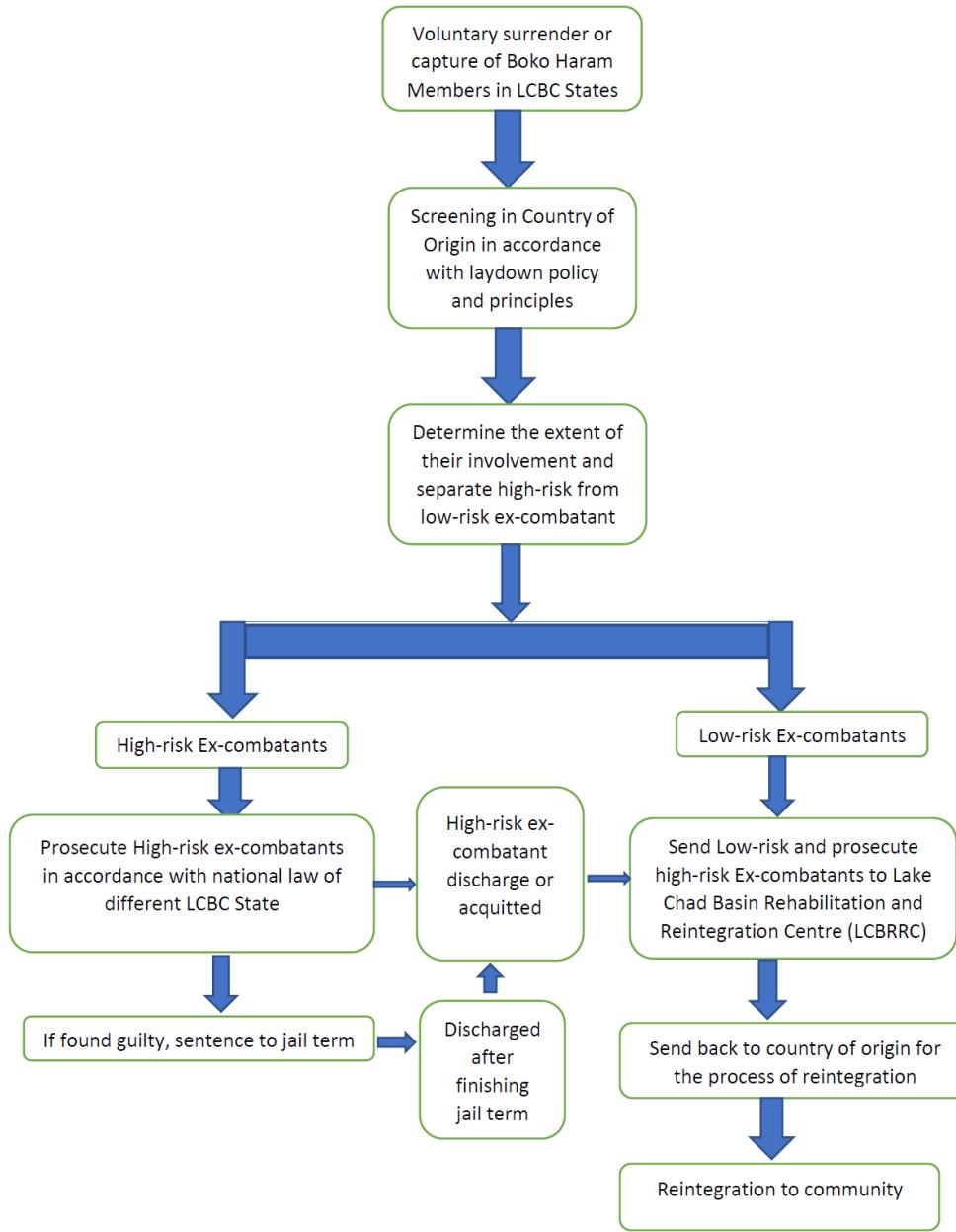
From the different experiences of rehabilitation and reintegration programmes in Lake Chad shared above, there are three key challenges that the countries of Lake Chad share in their different rehabilitation and reintegration programmes. The first mutual challenge is operational. This has to do with the manner in which the programme is implemented across Lake Chad states. The programmes are slow in implementation owing to several factors. Furthermore, another major challenge is the lack of co-ordinated strategy in some Lake Chad countries. Although some countries like Chad which have a significant challenge in this area, have already drawn out clear-cut strategy implementation, implementation is slow and unsteady. The last challenge peculiar to all the Lake Chad countries is the problem of community acceptance. Unfortunately, the lack of a pair review mechanism among the member states, probably due to a lack of effective, friendly relations among the states, especially between Nigeria and other Lake Chad Basin States, has made improvement difficult. All of these significantly impact the success of the Lake Chad region's rehabilitation and reintegration and overall peace and stability. However, these negative impacts can be mitigated when rehabilitation and reintegration of all Lake Chad countries are harmonised and coherently implemented. Apart from this, harmonisation is needed since the problem of Boko Haram, and its effects are similar in all member states.

## **6. Prospect of Harmonising the Rehabilitation Programme in Lake Chad**

As shown in the previous section, having different rehabilitation and reintegration programmes in various Lake Chad countries is faulted with many challenges that significantly impact the programme's ability to engineer post-conflict peacebuilding in the Lake Chad Region. Therefore, harmonising the different Lake Chad countries' rehabilitation and reintegration programmes will significantly improve the programme's effectiveness. There are two types of templates for harmonisation. The first is what I refer to as operational harmonisation. In this case, all rehabilitation and reintegration programmes of the Lake Chad Basin countries are harmonised into one single institution with operational headquarters in a chosen member-state. How will this be done? The process will begin with voluntarily surrendering or capturing Boko Haram combatants. Screening activities will be carried out on them to determine the extent of their involvement in the Boko Haram insurgency, the extent of havoc and atrocities committed and the risk they may constitute. From this screening, they will be divided into two.

On the one hand are high-risk surrendered or captured members. Those may need to be subjected to trial based on their countries' national terrorism/insurgency laws. When they are found guilty and have served their jail terms and discharged or not found guilty, they will be sent to the Lake Chad rehabilitation and reintegration programmes. On the other hand, the low-risk ex-combatants are sent directly to the rehabilitation centre. After completing the rehabilitation programme, they will be sent back to their countries of origin to begin the process of their reintegration. Figure 1 shows the format of harmonised rehabilitation and reintegration programmes in the Lake Chad Basin that is being proposed.

This has many advantages for Lake Chad Basin countries, especially concerning addressing the Boko Haram insurgency. One of the advantages is that it will allow the use of the best human resources from within member states and outside for implementing the programme. The second advantage is that pooling human and non-human resources will also impact the programme's effectiveness. However, a major challenge with this pattern of harmonisation is the lack of friendly relationships among the Lake Chad Basin countries. This has already impaired the ability of the MNJTF put together collectively by Lake Chad Basin countries to combat the Boko Haram insurgency in Lake Chad (Albert, 2017). Similarly, the collective response to addressing the shrinking Lake Chad Basin has also been impacted by the conflictive relationship among the Lake Chad Basin countries, especially between Nigeria and her Lake Chad neighbours (Owonikoko & Momodu, 2020).



Source: Researcher's own conceptualisation

**Figure 2: Proposed format for the Organisation of Harmonised Rehabilitation and Reintegration Programme in Lake Chad Basin**

It is hard to see how this conflictive relationship will not impact the effectiveness of the operational harmonisation of rehabilitation and reintegration programmes. However, if implemented, it has the propensity to make rehabilitation and reintegration programmes in Lake Chad more impactful. In implementing this pattern of harmonisation, uniform principles and policies have to be agreed upon regarding who can be brought to the rehabilitation centre for rehabilitation. For instance, there seems to be a generally accepted principle that only low-risk ex-combatants can be rehabilitated, but how does one define low-risk ex-combatant? This application may differ from country to country and must be harmonised.

The second pattern of harmonising rehabilitation and reintegration programmes is what I named harmonisation in principle. There is no centralised form of institution or infrastructure for rehabilitating repentant ex-Boko Haram under this arrangement. However, harmonised principles, protocols, procedures and tenets guide the rehabilitation programme of Lake Chad Basin States. With this agreement in principles, protocols and procedures, Lake Chad Basin countries will be doing almost the same thing in their countries. This offers an alternative form of harmonisation to operational harmonisation, but ensuring that the member-state followed the principles and procedures is difficult.

## **7. Conclusion**

This study makes a case for harmonised rehabilitation programmes in Lake Chad. This is suggested by looking at the many similarities that the regional states and people of the region share, as well as the similarity in the nature of the threat facing them. The study proposed operational harmonisation or harmonisation in principle for the rehabilitation programme for the ex-combatants of Boko Haram. However, the region's stakeholders are at liberty to choose the typology of harmonised reintegration programme they want to adopt. Nevertheless, consideration of harmonised rehabilitation programme is significant to ensure it is impactful in the post-conflict Lake Chad Region.

## Endnotes

1. The term Boko Haram in this study is used to designate JAS and its breakaway factions, especially as the Islamic State of West African Province (ISWAP).
2. The title of the conference is *Regional Workshop for Experience Sharing on the Management of Disengaged People from Boko Haram in the Lake Chad* held between February 14-16, 2018 at University of Maroua, Cameroon. The author presented a paper titled “Amnesty for Boko Haram members: Lessons from the Amnesty for Militants in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria”.
3. This information was given by a notable personality from Borno State during one of the programmes on transitional justice which the author also served as a resource person in Yola, Adamawa State.

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