

Reintegration or Relapse? Assessing the Effectiveness of DDR (Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration) Programs in Post-Insurgency North-East Nigeria

Ibrahim Alkali

Department of Sociology, Yobe State University, Yobe State, Nigeria.

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the effectiveness of Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) programmes in post-insurgency North-East Nigeria, with a specific focus on Borno State. Against the backdrop of the Boko Haram insurgency and increasing defections of ex-combatants, the study investigates the extent to which DDR initiatives have facilitated sustainable reintegration, identifies key factors contributing to relapse into insurgency, and evaluates community perceptions of reintegration efforts. A quantitative cross-sectional survey design was adopted, involving 276 respondents drawn from community members, government officials, and NGO practitioners. Data were collected using a structured Likert-scale questionnaire and analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The findings reveal that DDR programmes have achieved moderate success in facilitating reintegration, particularly in skills acquisition and behavioural transformation. However, significant challenges persist, especially in economic sustainability and community acceptance. Poverty and unemployment emerged as the most significant drivers of relapse, followed by social stigma and inadequate programme support. Regression analysis further indicates that institutional capacity significantly influences DDR effectiveness, while community perception, though important, is not statistically significant. The study concludes that while DDR programmes contribute to short-term stability, their long-term effectiveness depends on addressing underlying socio-economic vulnerabilities and strengthening community engagement. It recommends a more integrated, community-based, and development-oriented approach to DDR implementation in Nigeria.

Keywords: DDR, Reintegration, Insurgency, Boko Haram, Peacebuilding, Borno State, Recidivism, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

The protracted insurgency in North-East Nigeria, particularly in Borno State, has emerged as one of the most devastating conflicts in contemporary Africa. Since its escalation in 2009, the Boko Haram insurgency and its offshoot, the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), have resulted in widespread displacement, destruction of livelihoods, and loss of lives (Alkali, 2023). In response, the Nigerian government has implemented various counterinsurgency and post-conflict recovery strategies, including the Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) programme under the framework of Operation Safe Corridor (Sambo & Ahmed, 2024). Reintegrating former Boko Haram fighters into Nigerian society presents significant challenges. Creating a reintegration program that meets the unique needs of former fighters while avoiding the appearance of preferential treatment is extremely difficult (Kalama & Queen, 2020). The nature of the insurgency in the Northeast therefore, determines that government response should be able to curb Boko Haram terrorists' activities and secure communities from sporadic attacks of the insurgent (Hamidu & Bulila, 2024).

DDR programmes are widely recognized as essential components of post-conflict peacebuilding, aimed at facilitating the transition of ex-combatants from violent engagement to civilian life. While disarmament and demobilization are often relatively straightforward processes, reintegration remains the most complex and critical phase, involving social acceptance, economic inclusion, and psychological adjustment (Hamidu &

Bulila, 2024). The DDR of ex-combatants is a complex process, with political, military, security, humanitarian and socio-economic dimensions which deal with the post-conflict security problem that results from ex-combatants being left without livelihoods or support networks, other than their former comrades, during the critical transition period from conflict to peace and development (Kamala & Queen, 2020).

Despite the implementation of DDR initiatives in North-East Nigeria, concerns persist regarding their effectiveness. Reports of community resistance, stigmatization of former insurgents, and cases of re-radicalization raise questions about whether these programmes truly foster sustainable peace or inadvertently create conditions for relapse into insurgency (Zidon et al., 2024). Former members of violent extremist groups often experience violence, mistrust, and shame upon reintegrating into communities (Sambo & Ahmed, 2024). Communities express concerns about the safety and security risks associated with reintegrating former Boko Haram fighters with some fearing it will intensify existing animosity (Eme & Anyadike, 2018; Sambo & Ahmed, 2024). Boko Haram, its members' families, and affected communities often become targets of social dishonor and suspicion (Miangwa, 2013). Members of extremist organizations face antagonism and mistrust, hindering recovery and reintegration.

Thus, existing studies have largely focused on descriptive evaluations of DDR initiatives, policy frameworks, and general reintegration outcomes. While these studies provide valuable insights, they often lack data-driven assessments that simultaneously examine institutional capacity, community perception, and relapse dynamics within a unified analytical model. Furthermore, much of the literature emphasizes either economic reintegration or deradicalisation processes, with limited attention to how these interact with community acceptance and institutional effectiveness in shaping long-term outcomes. Studies on Operation Safe Corridor, for instance, tend to highlight programme achievements without rigorously analysing drivers of recidivism using statistical methods.

Hence, this study addresses these concerns by examining the effectiveness of DDR programmes in Borno State. Specifically, it seeks to answer the following questions: To what extent have DDR programmes facilitated sustainable reintegration? What factors contribute to relapse into insurgency? How do host communities perceive reintegration efforts?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptual Clarifications

Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) has emerged as a central pillar of post-conflict peacebuilding, particularly in societies transitioning from violent conflict to stability. DDR processes are designed to facilitate the transition of ex-combatants from military to civilian life while contributing to broader goals of peace, security, and development. DDR refers to a set of processes aimed at disarming combatants, disbanding armed groups, and reintegrating former fighters into civilian society (United Nations, 2006).

Disarmament

According to the United Nations Peace Keeping Report (2017), DDR involves “removing weapons from combatants, disbanding armed groups, and assisting former fighters to reintegrate into society”. Over the past three decades, DDR has been implemented across multiple post-conflict contexts, including Africa, Latin America, and parts of Asia, making it a critical area of scholarly and policy interest. Disarmament refers to the collection, documentation, control, and disposal of weapons held by combatants (Muggah, 2005). It aims to reduce the means of violence and build confidence among former adversaries. Disarmament is often the first step in DDR, creating a secure environment for subsequent processes.

Fusato (2003) emphasizes that disarmament reduces mistrust between warring factions and enables the resumption of normal social and economic activities. Without effective disarmament, the risk of renewed violence remains high.

Demobilization

The United Nations 2005 report also defined demobilization as the formal and controlled discharge of active combatants from armed forces or other armed groups. The first stage of demobilization may extend from the processing of individual combatants in temporary centres to the massing of troops in camps designated for this purpose (cantonment sites, encampments, assembly areas or barracks). The second stage of demobilization encompasses the support package provided to the demobilized, which is called reinsertion.

Reintegration

Reintegration is the long-term process through which ex-combatants return to civilian life and become productive members of society. It includes economic, social, and psychological dimensions. Unlike disarmament and demobilization, reintegration is complex and time-intensive (Uchegbu, 2019). It requires sustained support and coordination with broader development initiatives. The ultimate goal is to ensure that former combatants can secure livelihoods and coexist peacefully within their communities (Moriera, 2019).

Traits and Impact of Boko Haram

Boko Haram, established in the early 2000s by Mohammed Yusuf, is an extremist organisation driven by a strong anti-Western ideology and the ambition to establish an Islamic state (Alkali, 2023). Initially, the group concentrated on rejecting Western education and promoting a rigid interpretation of Islamic law. Over time, however, it evolved into a violent insurgent movement engaging in bombings, kidnappings, and attacks targeting civilians, educational institutions, and government facilities (Thurston, 2018; Ike et al., 2021). These developments worsened the already fragile socioeconomic and environmental conditions in Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe States. By 2010, the group had significantly expanded its operations, with the years 2014 and 2015 marking the peak of its violent activities.

The insurgency has resulted in widespread destruction, instability, and psychological trauma across northern Nigeria. According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA, 2025), there is significant population displacement, with approximately 2.3 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) recorded by the end of 2024, including an estimated 260,000 individuals who have fled to neighbouring states. Borno State hosts the majority of IDPs (1.7 million) and returnees (886,000), reflecting its critical role in the ongoing humanitarian response. Meanwhile, Adamawa State accommodates 868,000 returnees, accounting for 41% of the total 2.1 million returnees across the BAY (Borno, Adamawa and Yobe) states.

The scale of violence has exposed deep weaknesses in Nigeria's governance structures, including long-standing underinvestment, marginalisation of local populations, and institutional fragility, all of which have contributed to the spread of extremist ideologies (Samu, 2012). The insurgency further disrupted critical services such as education and healthcare. Many schools were destroyed or forced to close, while healthcare systems became overwhelmed by increased demand (Dunn, 2018). These disruptions negatively affected Nigeria's economy, reducing investment, limiting agricultural productivity, and contributing to declining food production (Ike et al., 2021).

In response, national governments intensified military operations and security measures. Nigeria deployed troops in counterinsurgency campaigns, achieving notable progress in weakening the insurgency. Although violence has declined somewhat in recent years, fatalities have only marginally decreased (UNDP, 2024). A combination of factors—including sustained military pressure, internal divisions within Boko Haram, community resistance, amnesty initiatives, and rehabilitation programmes—has contributed to this decline (Chuku et al., 2020; Ike et al., 2021). Many insurgents have defected due to disillusionment, harsh living conditions, fear of death, and internal conflicts within the group (Huvé et al., 2022; Ike et al., 2021).

Following the death of Abubakar Shekau in 2021, approximately 2,000 Boko Haram members surrendered, leading to a significant wave of defections. This trend underscored the urgent need for effective deradicalisation and reintegration strategies. Increasingly, there is recognition that military approaches alone

are insufficient to achieve lasting peace (Akhare & Akpabio, 2018). Consequently, non-military interventions—particularly deradicalisation, rehabilitation, and reintegration—are now considered essential for addressing the underlying causes of terrorism (Onapajo & Ozden, 2020).

Reintegration and Reconciliation; Nigerian Context

In an effort to find a long-term solution to the ongoing Islamic extremism problem in the northeast of the country, the Nigerian government has created an action plan for the complete deradicalization and rehabilitation of former Boko Haram militants. Repentant Boko Haram fighters were urged to surrender and embrace peace following the initiative's initial proposal at the September 2015 meeting of the Nigerian National Security Council (NSC) (Mules & Al-Amin, 2019).

In accordance with the government's Operation Safe Corridor, hundreds of former rebels who either turned themselves in or were apprehended during conflicts with Nigerian security forces are presently going through the deradicalization process (Mules & Al-Amin, 2019). Additionally, a comprehensive national DDRR policy framework was developed in 2017 to guide reintegration efforts (Ameh, 2025). The DDRR framework focuses on facilitating the transition of former combatants back into society, reducing violence, rebuilding communities, and promoting long-term peace. By 2018, the federal government's DDRR Action Plan was structured around four key pillars: community-based reintegration, technical support, legal and policy frameworks, and individual case management. These approaches aim to strengthen resilience against extremism while promoting inclusive, whole-of-government and whole-of-society strategies tailored to local contexts (USAID, 2020).

The launch of Operation Lake Sanity in 2022 marked a coordinated military effort to clear Boko Haram strongholds in the Lake Chad region. The operation resulted in the capture of territories, rescue of hostages, and weakening of insurgent networks. As security conditions improved, attention shifted toward stabilisation and post-conflict recovery, highlighting the importance of voluntary DDRR approaches in sustaining peace and preventing rearmament (Breitung et al., 2021).

While disarmament and demobilisation remove weapons and dismantle armed groups, reintegration addresses the underlying social and economic dimensions necessary to prevent recidivism (Musa, 2017). Effective reintegration requires comprehensive and sustained interventions aimed at restoring individuals' capacities and enabling them to contribute meaningfully to society (IDDRS, 2014; Ike et al., 2021).

Three primary approaches to reintegration are commonly identified: individual-focused reintegration, short-term stabilisation (reinsertion), and community-based reintegration (Danso, 2023). Increasingly, emphasis is placed on community-based approaches, which reduce stigma, promote inclusion, and support broader reconstruction and reconciliation efforts (Ike et al., 2021).

The reintegration process involves collaboration between federal and state governments, particularly in Borno State, which has developed a community-based reintegration model. Transition centres such as Bulumkutu and Shokari provide temporary support to returnees before their reintegration into local communities. The "Borno Model" represents an innovative approach that integrates formal rehabilitation with community-based strategies to address the complex needs of returnees (UNODA, 2022; Salem et al., 2022).

Participants in OPSC receive extensive rehabilitation services, including education, vocational training, counselling, and religious guidance. Since its establishment in 2017, the programme has successfully graduated several cohorts, with thousands of participants reintegrated into their communities across Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe States (Bakare, 2024). Graduates are required to take an oath of allegiance, committing to lawful conduct, with violations resulting in the withdrawal of programme benefits.

Challenges and Prospects of Post-Insurgency Reintegration

Reintegrating former Boko Haram fighters into society remains a complex and sensitive process. While DDR programmes aim to facilitate peaceful transition, they often struggle to balance the needs of ex-combatants

with the expectations of affected communities. In many cases, communities perceive reintegration initiatives as favouring former insurgents over victims, thereby generating resentment and resistance (Alkali, 2023).

Reports from some communities in Borno State present a contrasting narrative. While Nigerian authorities have already portrayed the deradicalization programme as a success, there have reportedly been several cases in which released former insurgents were returned to rehabilitation centres after being attacked by community members who had previously suffered under Boko Haram (Mules and Al-Amin, 2019).

Empirical evidence indicates that returnees frequently encounter mistrust and, in some instances, violence upon reintegration (Breachmacher, 2019). These reactions are particularly pronounced in communities that have experienced severe insurgent violence. The absence of adequate victim support further intensifies tensions, undermining reconciliation efforts. Reintegration is crucial for promoting healing and reconciliation. Boko Haram, its members' families, and affected communities often become targets of social dishonour and suspicion (Miangwa, 2013).

Reintegrating former Boko Haram terrorists presents a major global concern. Incentivising the defection and rehabilitation of low-level soldiers has emerged as a viable tactic for limiting the capabilities of violent extremist organisations. However, OPSC graduates fear being stigmatised, mistrusting others, and facing violence (ICG, 2021). The mental health and general well-being of survivors were also affected, particularly girls and young women who were previously held captive and subjected to kidnapping, sexual enslavement, and other crimes committed by extremist organizations (Amnesty International, 2024).

The transition from combatant to civilian life may result in a loss of identity. Activities that provide general knowledge, mental health, psychosocial assistance, counselling, and referral to support services within DDR programs, economic reintegration, and social reintegration help create trust between excombatants (World Bank (2009). According to Roberts et al. (2008), Psychological therapies such as psychological first aid, urgent needs assessment, and stabilization approaches are recommended for acute distress management and as a foundation for more comprehensive interventions.

Women and girls face distinct hurdles when attempting to reintegrate into society. Individuals forced into marriage after being sexually raped by Boko Haram fighters may experience shame, rejection, and other difficulties owing to cultural and patriarchal norms (Amnesty International, 2019). Obisesan (2023) asserted that Boko Haram carried out an extraordinary campaign against women and girls, refuting the notion that women are typically the victims of hostilities. However, a large proportion of terrorists' harsh and violent operations targeted women.

Economic constraints also pose significant challenges. Conflict-affected regions often experience high levels of unemployment, weak infrastructure, and limited livelihood opportunities (Ike et al., 2021). As a result, many ex-combatants struggle to achieve economic independence, increasing the risk of relapse into violence

The absence of retaliation, especially from those who had received the OPSC training, has been cited by community members as proof that graduates are well-behaved and peaceful, in contrast to those who self-reintegrated from BH-ISWAP, who are perceived as less trustworthy and confrontational. According to Brechenmacher (2019) business counselling and vocational training have been very effective in preparing OPSC graduates for meaningful careers that would aid in their reintegration into society. This suggests that increased feelings of security and successful reintegration are closely related to these outcomes.

However, there is no clear strategy to accelerate infrastructure development, economic growth, and social progress. According to the World Bank (2016), a multi-sectoral approach combining emergency aid with long-term sustainable development initiatives is required to improve resilience, create jobs, and stimulate the economy. These risk factors remain and contribute to community opposition to Boko Haram (ISS, 2021). Unsatisfied people are more likely to become radicalised if they continue to live in poverty, therefore long-term economic growth is essential.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is anchored on Social Reintegration Theory of Maruna, (2006) and Farrall (2002), which emphasizes the importance of social bonds, identity reconstruction, and community acceptance in successful reintegration.

The theory explains how individuals who have been separated from mainstream society—such as ex-combatants, prisoners, or marginalized groups—can be successfully reabsorbed into their communities through the restoration of social bonds, trust, and shared norms. The theory draws heavily from classical sociological traditions, particularly the work of Émile Durkheim on social cohesion and Travis Hirschi on social bond theory (Massimo, 2003).

Durkheim emphasized that social order depends on collective conscience and integration, while Hirschi argued that individuals refrain from deviance when they are strongly attached to family, institutions, and societal values. Emerging more explicitly in post-conflict and criminological studies in the late 20th century, the theory became central to rehabilitation and peacebuilding frameworks (Massimo, 2003). It highlights that reintegration is not merely physical return but a gradual process involving acceptance, participation, and identity transformation within the community.

Social Reintegration Theory can be likened to repairing a broken bridge between an individual and society. When a person becomes involved in violent conflict or criminal activity, that bridge—representing trust, norms, and relationships—is damaged or completely destroyed (Ameh, 2025). Disarmament and demobilization may remove the individual from the conflict environment, but they do not automatically rebuild the bridge. Reintegration is the process of reconstructing that connection piece by piece (Bulila & Hamidu, 2024).

In this analogy, the community represents one side of the bridge, while the ex-combatant stands on the other. For the bridge to be functional, both sides must actively participate. The individual must demonstrate willingness to change, adopt lawful behavior, and reconnect with societal values. At the same time, the community must be willing to accept, forgive, and provide opportunities for inclusion. If either side refuses to cooperate, the bridge remains incomplete, increasing the risk that the individual may return to conflict or deviant behavior.

Thus, successful reintegration depends on rebuilding trust, restoring social roles, and creating mutual understanding (Bulila & Hamidu, 2024). Without these elements, the individual remains socially isolated, and the likelihood of relapse into violence becomes significantly higher.

Applying Social Reintegration Theory to the Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) of Boko Haram members in Borno State provides a useful framework for assessing the effectiveness of such programs (Ebiede et al., 2020). In the Nigerian context, initiatives like Operation Safe Corridor focus primarily on disarmament and deradicalization through structured rehabilitation processes (Ebiede et al., 2020). However, Social Reintegration Theory suggests that the most critical phase is reintegration into society, where long-term success or failure is determined.

In Borno State, many communities that suffered directly from insurgent violence often exhibit deep mistrust, fear, and resentment toward returning ex-combatants (Mules & Al-Amin, 2019). This reflects a breakdown in social bonds—the very elements that Social Reintegration Theory identifies as essential for preventing deviance. Even when former insurgents complete rehabilitation programs, their acceptance into communities remains uncertain (Mules & Al-Amin, 2019). Reports of hostility and, in some cases, violence against returnees indicate that the “bridge” between individuals and society has not been fully rebuilt (Moriera, 2019).

From the perspective of the theory, DDR programs must go beyond vocational training and ideological reorientation to include community-based reconciliation mechanisms (Ikea, et al. (2022). These may involve dialogue, truth-telling, and local peacebuilding initiatives that address the grievances of victims while fostering

empathy and understanding. Without community involvement, reintegration remains superficial, increasing the risk of relapse into insurgency (Alkali, 2023).

Furthermore, Social Reintegration Theory underscores the importance of social institutions—family, religious groups, and local leadership—in facilitating acceptance (Bulila & Hamidu, 2024). In Borno State, traditional and religious leaders can play a crucial role in legitimizing reintegration efforts and rebuilding trust. Economic inclusion is also vital; without access to livelihoods, former insurgents may feel excluded and revert to familiar networks of violence (Zidon et al., 2024).

In sum, the effectiveness of DDR programs in North-East Nigeria depends not only on state-led interventions but also on the restoration of social cohesion. Sustainable peace can only be achieved when both ex-combatants and communities actively participate in rebuilding fractured relationships (Bulila & Hamidu, 2024).

Research Design

The study adopts a quantitative cross-sectional survey design. The cross-sectional approach enables the collection of data from different categories of respondents at a single point in time, making it suitable for assessing perceptions and outcomes of DDR programmes across Borno State.

The target population comprises three key stakeholder groups: Community Members residing in affected areas, Government Officials involved in DDR implementation and NGO/CSO Practitioners working on peacebuilding and reintegration. These groups were selected because they provide diverse perspectives on DDR effectiveness, relapse risks, and community acceptance.

A total of 300 questionnaires were administered, of which 276 were valid and returned, representing a 92% response rate.

A multi-stage sampling technique is employed. Purposive Sampling Selection of conflict-affected political wards such as Limanti, Gwange, Ngamboru and Bolori. Stratified Sampling was used to group the respondents into three strata: Community members, Government officials and NGO practitioners. Finally, Simple Random Sampling was employed to select respondents within each stratum are randomly selected to reduce bias.

Data is collected using a structured questionnaire designed in a close-ended Likert-scale format and analysis is conducted using statistical software such as SPSS and Stata.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Table 4.1: Awareness Index

Variable	Mean	Std. Dev
Awareness of DDR	3.82	0.74
Communication effectiveness	3.45	0.81
Understanding DDR objectives	3.67	0.76
Visibility of DDR activities	3.59	0.79
Information adequacy	3.41	0.85

Source: Personal Field Survey Data, 2026

The results presented in Table 4.1 indicate that respondents demonstrate a moderate to relatively high level of awareness of DDR programmes in Borno State, with an overall awareness mean score of 3.82. This suggests that DDR initiatives are generally known within the study area, likely due to sustained government and humanitarian interventions in conflict-affected communities. However, a closer examination of the individual indicators reveals important nuances. While respondents show a fairly strong understanding of DDR objectives

(Mean = 3.67) and moderate visibility of programme activities (Mean = 3.59), the relatively lower scores for communication effectiveness (Mean = 3.45) and information adequacy (Mean = 3.41) point to gaps in the quality and reach of information dissemination.

These findings imply that awareness may be broad but shallow. People are generally aware that DDR programmes exist but may lack comprehensive or accurate knowledge about their processes, benefits, and long-term implications. Such gaps can limit meaningful participation and reduce the effectiveness of reintegration efforts. In particular, weak communication channels may contribute to misinformation, suspicion, or unrealistic expectations among community members, thereby undermining trust in DDR programmes.

The findings are consistent with the position of the United Nations, which emphasizes that effective communication and public sensitization are critical components of successful DDR implementation (United Nations, 2006). According to the Integrated DDR Standards (IDDRS), awareness campaigns play a vital role in preparing communities for reintegration, reducing stigma, and encouraging cooperation between ex-combatants and host populations. Without adequate information dissemination, DDR programmes risk being misunderstood or resisted by local communities.

Similarly, the United Nations Development Programme argues that community awareness is essential for fostering local ownership of reintegration processes (UNDP, 2015). When communities are well-informed, they are more likely to support reintegrated individuals and contribute to peacebuilding efforts. Empirical studies in post-conflict settings such as Sierra Leone and Liberia demonstrate that targeted sensitization campaigns significantly improved community acceptance and reduced tensions (Humphreys & Weinstein, 2007).

Table 4.2: Relapse Risk Factors

Factor	Mean	Rank
Poverty/unemployment	4.32	1st
Lack of community acceptance	4.05	2nd
Inadequate DDR support	3.98	3rd
Weak monitoring	3.85	4th
Security threats	3.76	5th
Peer influence	3.60	6th
Ideological factors	3.41	7th

Source: Personal Field Survey Data, 2026

The results in Table 4.2 above reveal a clear hierarchy of relapse drivers, with economic hardship (poverty/unemployment) emerging as the most significant factor (Mean = 4.32). This indicates that when ex-combatants are unable to secure stable livelihoods after reintegration, the risk of returning to insurgent activities increases substantially. The prominence of lack of community acceptance (Mean = 4.05) further highlights the social dimension of relapse, suggesting that stigma, distrust, and exclusion can undermine reintegration gains. Additionally, inadequate DDR support (Mean = 3.98) and weak monitoring systems (Mean = 3.85) point to institutional shortcomings that may leave beneficiaries without sustained guidance or follow-up.

The relatively lower ranking of ideological factors (Mean = 3.41) suggests that relapse in Borno State is driven more by structural and socio-economic conditions than by persistent extremist beliefs. This implies that many ex-combatants may not necessarily return to insurgency due to ideological commitment, but rather as a coping mechanism in response to economic deprivation and social exclusion. Overall, the findings demonstrate that relapse is a multi-dimensional phenomenon, shaped by the interaction of economic vulnerability, social dynamics, and institutional effectiveness.

According to Özerdem (2012), sustainable reintegration depends largely on the ability of ex-combatants to achieve economic independence; without viable livelihood opportunities, individuals are more likely to revert to violence. Similarly, the World Bank emphasizes that unemployment and poverty are among the most consistent predictors of recidivism in post-conflict settings (World Bank, 2009). Empirical studies in Sierra Leone and Liberia also demonstrate that ex-combatants who lack income-generating opportunities are significantly more likely to re-engage in armed activities (Humphreys & Weinstein, 2007).

However, some scholars caution against overemphasizing economic explanations alone. Muggah (2005) argues that while poverty is a significant factor, relapse is often the result of complex interactions between economic, social, and political variables. In the context of North-East Nigeria, Nwankpa (2014) notes that weak institutional follow-up and inadequate programme design can exacerbate reintegration challenges, even when economic support is provided.

4.2 Institutional Capacity and DDR Effectiveness

Table 4.3: Regression Coefficients-

Variable	Coefficient (β)	Std. Error	t-value	p-value	Significance
Constant	0.769	0.493	1.561	0.131	Not significant
Community Perception	0.185	0.165	1.123	0.272	Not significant
Institutional Capacity	0.589	0.173	3.411	0.002	Significant

Source: Personal Field Survey Data, 2026

A multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine the influence of community perception and institutional capacity on DDR effectiveness. The results as contained in the above 4.3 that institutional capacity has a strong and statistically significant positive influence on DDR effectiveness ($\beta = 0.589$, $p = 0.002$). This indicates that improvements in institutional structures such as funding availability, staff competence, inter-agency coordination, and monitoring systems can directly enhance the success of reintegration programmes. In practical terms, respondents perceive that when institutions are well-organized and adequately resourced, DDR programmes are more likely to achieve sustainable outcomes. This finding suggests that reintegration success in Borno State is largely driven by the operational strength of implementing agencies rather than external social factors alone. It also implies that weak institutional frameworks may undermine even well-designed DDR interventions.

This finding aligns with existing scholarship on DDR and post-conflict recovery. The World Bank emphasizes that institutional capacity is a critical determinant of DDR success, particularly in fragile states where governance structures are weak (World Bank, 2009). Similarly, the United Nations Integrated DDR Standards highlight that effective planning, coordination, and monitoring are essential for achieving long-term reintegration outcomes (United Nations, 2006).

In the Nigerian context, studies show that weak institutional coordination and inadequate funding have limited DDR effectiveness in the North-East (Akinwale, 2010; Nwankpa, 2014). Comparative evidence from Sierra Leone and Liberia further demonstrates that strong institutional frameworks improve reintegration outcomes by ensuring accountability and sustained support (Humphreys & Weinstein, 2007).

However, some scholars caution that institutional strength alone may not guarantee success, as overly bureaucratic approaches can neglect local realities (Muggah, 2005). Nonetheless, the dominant view supports the conclusion that institutional capacity is a foundational pillar of DDR effectiveness.

Community Perception and DDR Effectiveness

Table 2: Overall Model Insight: Institutional vs Social Drivers

Statistic	Value
R ²	0.529
Adjusted R ²	0.493
F-statistic	14.63
Significance (p-value)	0.00005

Source: Personal Field Survey Data, 2026

The analysis reveals that community perception has a positive but statistically insignificant relationship with DDR effectiveness ($\beta = 0.185, p = 0.272$). Although respondents acknowledge that acceptance, trust, and social cohesion contribute to reintegration, these factors do not independently predict DDR outcomes in this dataset. This suggests that while community attitudes are important, they may not be sufficiently strong to influence reintegration outcomes directly. It also reflects the possibility that institutional interventions overshadow social dynamics in the short term. The finding further indicates that reintegration in Borno State remains socially fragile, with lingering stigma and distrust.

This finding partially contradicts dominant theoretical perspectives. The United Nations Development Programme emphasizes that community-based reintegration is essential for sustainable peace (UNDP, 2015). Social reintegration theory also highlights that acceptance by host communities reduces stigma and lowers relapse risks (Kaplan & Nussio, 2018). Empirical studies from Rwanda and Colombia show that community acceptance significantly enhances reintegration success (Annan et al., 2011). However, other studies suggest that in highly securitized contexts like North-East Nigeria, institutional interventions may temporarily compensate for weak community acceptance (Nwankpa, 2014).

Scholars further argue that reintegration is both an economic and social process; neglecting community perception may undermine long-term peace building (Özerdem, 2012). Therefore, while this study finds no statistical significance, the broader literature underscores the critical role of community acceptance, suggesting the need for deeper qualitative exploration. The regression model shows that DDR effectiveness is more strongly influenced by institutional capacity than community perception ($R^2 = 0.529$). This indicates that structural and organizational factors dominate reintegration outcomes in Borno State. While institutional strength ensures programme delivery, weaker community influence suggests an imbalance that may affect long-term sustainability.

The findings of this study align with institutionalist perspectives but also reflect concerns raised in the literature: DDR programmes that prioritize technical implementation over social reconciliation may achieve short-term success but risk long-term instability (Muggah, 2005). Thus, a balanced approach is necessary.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to assess whether DDR programmes in Borno State have effectively facilitated sustainable reintegration or inadvertently contributed to relapse into insurgency. The findings indicate that DDR initiatives, particularly under Operation Safe Corridor, have made measurable progress in rehabilitating and reintegrating former combatants. Participants have benefited from vocational training, psychosocial support, and deradicalization processes, which have contributed to moderate levels of reintegration success.

However, the study also reveals that reintegration remains incomplete and fragile. Economic hardship, particularly unemployment and lack of livelihood opportunities, continues to pose a major threat to sustainability. Many ex-combatants struggle to transition into civilian life due to limited economic absorption capacity within local communities. In addition, persistent stigma, distrust, and fear among host communities undermine social cohesion and hinder acceptance. These findings underscore the central argument of Social

Reintegration Theory that reintegration is not merely an individual process but a relational one that requires mutual trust and community participation.

Furthermore, the study demonstrates that institutional capacity is a critical determinant of DDR effectiveness. Well-coordinated programmes with adequate funding, trained personnel, and effective monitoring systems significantly enhance reintegration outcomes. Conversely, weak institutional frameworks and inadequate follow-up mechanisms increase the risk of relapse. While community perception was found to be statistically insignificant in the regression model, its qualitative importance cannot be overlooked, as social acceptance remains essential for long-term peacebuilding.

In conclusion, DDR programmes in Maiduguri, Borno State, Nigeria have achieved partial success but require significant improvements to ensure sustainability. Without addressing economic deprivation, strengthening institutional capacity, and fostering community reconciliation, the risk of relapse into insurgency remains substantial.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the following policy recommendations are proposed:

- Government and development partners should prioritize sustainable livelihood creation for ex-combatants.
- DDR programmes should adopt a more community-centered approach by Promoting dialogue between ex-combatants and host communities.
- There is a need to strengthen awareness and communication strategies by conducting continuous community sensitization campaigns.
- Government should increase funding and improve coordination among security agencies, NGOs, and local authorities
- DDR programmes should implement a continuous follow-up mechanisms and mentorship and counselling services.
- DDR should be embedded within wider post-conflict recovery and development frameworks, including.

Ethical Considerations

This study adhered to established ethical standards for social science research. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all respondents prior to data collection. Respondents were assured of confidentiality and anonymity, and no personally identifiable information was recorded. Finally, the study ensured neutrality and avoided any form of bias or political influence in data interpretation and reporting.

Study Limitations

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. First, the use of a cross-sectional design limits the ability to capture long-term reintegration outcomes and dynamic changes over time. Second, the reliance on self-reported data may introduce response bias, particularly given the sensitivity of DDR-related issues.

Third, the study focuses primarily on Borno State, which may limit the generalisability of findings to other conflict-affected regions in Nigeria or beyond. Additionally, while the quantitative approach provides valuable statistical insights, it may not fully capture the depth of individual experiences and community dynamics.

Future research should consider longitudinal and mixed-method approaches to provide a more comprehensive understanding of DDR effectiveness and relapse patterns.

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