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MEAC Lake Chad Basin Case Study Report

Preventing Recruitment and Ensuring Effective Reintegration Efforts: Evidence from Across the Lake Chad Basin to Inform Policy and Practice

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MANAGING EXITS
FROM ARMED CONFLICT

CONTENTS

KEY FINDINGS	5
I. Background	9
II. Demographic Overview of Respondents	17
A. Gender, Age, and Displacement	17
B. Chad	20
C. Cameroon	21
D. Niger	21
E. Nigeria (baseline survey)	22
F. Sample of Associated and Affiliated Respondents	22
III. Potential Factors Driving Association with Boko Haram and its Factions	24
A. Economic Factors	25
B. Civic and Political Engagement Factors	26
C. Social Support Networks and the Impact of Family Association	27
D. The Influence of Climate Change	28
IV. Involvement with Boko Haram and/or its Factions	32
A. Entry into the Group	33
1. Age of Entry into the Group	33
2. Compensation and Incentives to Recruit	33
3. High Level of Abductions in Cameroon and Chad, Fewer in Niger and Nigeria	35
B. Life Inside Boko Haram and its Factions	37
1. Roles and Responsibilities in the Daily Activities of the Group	38
2. Risks to Personal Safety and Engagement in Violent Acts	39
3. Family Life and Family Ties	41
C. Exiting Boko Haram and/or one of its Factions	42
V. The Conflict and Humanitarian Context for Reintegration	46
A. Greatest Concerns - Poverty, Food Insecurity, and Water	46
B. Greatest Threats to Community Safety	49
VI. Experience with Boko Haram in the Communities	50

A. Presence of Boko Haram	50
B. Experiences of Victimization	53
C. Perpetrators of Violence	59
VII. Receptivity to Returning Boko Haram Ex-associates	61
A. Return of Ex-associates to their Communities	61
B. Non-associated Community Members' Willingness to Engage with Ex-associates	63
1. Negative Perceptions of Ex-associates	63
2. Concerns About Stigmatization	65
3. The Potential for Forgiveness and Reintegration	66
C. Punishment Preferences of Non-associated Community Members	69
1. Overview of Punishment Preferences for Ex-associates Depending on Their Gender, Agency in Association, and Role in the Group	70
2. Preferences for Harsh Punishments for Boko Haram Ex-associates	74
D. Familiarity of Non-associated Community Members with the Reintegration, Screening, and Transit Centres	77
VIII. Potential Impacts of Armed Group Association on Transitions to Civilian Life	80
A. Economic Indicators	80
B. Social and Civic Engagement	82
C. Psychological Functioning	83
IX. Life After the Centre or IDP Camp	84
A. Expectations of IDPs and Persons in Transit Centres	84
X. Existing Institutional Structures for Prevention and Reintegration	86
A. Trust and Perceptions Around State and Non-state Institutions	86
B. Non-state Security Actor Transitions	89
C. Beneficiary Needs and Humanitarian Aid	91
1. Support, Needs, and Preferences Among Non-associated Community Members	91
2. Beneficiary Needs and Support Preferences Among Boko Haram Ex-associates	94
XI. Conclusion: Optimism for the Future	98

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This study is the first publication of a series of works commissioned by the Secretariat of the Regional Strategy for Stabilization, Recovery and Resilience in collaboration with the Managing Exits from Armed Conflict (MEAC) project. This partnership aims to provide robust evidence and a sound analytical framework through which to understand the Boko Haram insurgency and its impact on communities of the Lake Chad Basin region. This study will make a valuable contribution to informing the efforts of all stakeholders working to promote peaceful, prosperous, and dynamic societies across the region linked by thriving economic and cultural relationships.

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KEY FINDINGS

This short section lays out some of the main findings of this MEAC study in the Lake Chad Basin. The corresponding sections are hyperlinked for those that want to read the full analytical overview of each result.

1. **Insecurity remains, but communities are most threatened by the ongoing humanitarian crisis:**
 - a. **Basic needs are not covered for most of the population:** Despite the international focus on the Boko Haram insurgency, the humanitarian and economic crises are the greatest day-to-day concerns for most respondents. Poverty, lack of sufficient food, and, to a slightly lesser degree, lack of sufficient water are the three biggest problems reported by the respondents across the four countries (see [section V. A](#)). The humanitarian crisis today has been driven by the insurgency and, in turn, helps fuel its continuation and exacerbates its impacts on the population. Most respondents have been out of reach of humanitarian actors and reported not receiving anything since the beginning of the conflict (see [section X.C](#)).
 - b. **Boko Haram remains the main threat to security:** When asked specifically about threats to their security, Boko Haram is most frequently named as the biggest threat to the safety of the communities in Chad, Cameroon, and Niger - and less so in Nigeria (see [section V.B](#)).
 - c. **The majority of the respondents across the Lake Chad Basin continue to express high trust in the State apparatus:** This is despite the ongoing conflict and the difficulties of curbing insecurity and violence, highlighting which institutions might be most credible in facilitating reintegration efforts (see [section X.A](#)).
2. **Potential factors driving association with Boko Haram and its factions:**
 - a. **Struggling economically is correlated with Boko Haram association:** This association holds in at least Cameroon and Niger (and possibly Nigeria (more details below)), although it is not the sole factor for association. This finding has important implications for prevention programming (see [section III.A](#)).
 - b. **In Chad and Niger being involved in social groups or in political activities, respectively is associated with a lower likelihood of becoming involved with Boko Haram:** In light of this evidence, prevention efforts should consider how leveraging existing civic and social engagement opportunities can help build resilience to recruitment (see [section III.B](#)).
 - c. **In Cameroon, social relationships with mentors can play an important role against association with Boko Haram.** These relationships act as a protective factor decreasing the probability of their association with Boko Haram or one of its factions. This finding needs to be understood for crafting effective prevention programming (see [section III.C](#)).
 - d. **In Cameroon and Niger (and possibly Nigeria), having family involved in the group was also a strong predictor of Boko Haram association.** In Cameroon, people whose parents are Boko Haram ex-associates had a 16 percentage points higher probability of becoming associated with the group or one of its factions than those whose parents were not associated (9 percentage points in Niger). The relationship between familial involvement

and armed group association likely represents a range of experiences (e.g., coerced participation to the draw of following a beloved family member who was associated with the group), which can complicate applying this finding to prevention intervention planning. Yet, it is abundantly clear that familial association with an armed group dramatically increases the likelihood an individual will themselves become involved (see [section III.C](#)).

- e. **The study in Nigeria did not allow for the analysis to control for abduction**, which makes it difficult to draw conclusive inferences, but the data still suggests that economic conditions, the quality of family relationships, and family association influence Boko Haram association there.
- f. **Climate change-related livelihood difficulties appear to be related to recruitment into armed groups in the Lake Chad Basin**: Climate-related difficulties in farming, herding, or fishing have been experienced and/or witnessed by a majority of respondents in Cameroon and Chad (less so in Niger and Nigeria). Significant portions of ex-associates who experienced these difficulties said they were among the reasons they became involved with Boko Haram or its factions. Considering the vulnerability of the populations around the Lake Chad Basin to climate shifts and shocks, and the real concerns that armed groups take advantage of these vulnerabilities, it is clear that prevention and reintegration programming efforts should be made climate-sensitive (see [section III.D](#)).

3. **Systematic differences between Niger and the other countries in the region hint at the differences in the way Islamic State – West Africa Province (ISWAP) is operating there:**

The sample in Niger had more people associated with ISWAP than in other countries. Ex-associate experiences with the group suggest fewer of them were coerced into the group and they received more incentives to join compared to ex-associates in the three other countries (see [section IV.A](#)). Moreover, more ex-associates in Niger left because they lost trust in the group's leadership or lost faith in the cause, rather than fearing for their lives or wanting to go back to their families, as in the other countries (see [section IV.C](#)). Finally, a sizable minority of ex-associates in Niger report that their lives were better off when they were with the group rather than now (see [section IV.C](#)). These findings highlight the need to adjust prevention and reintegration programming in Niger and in other areas where ISWAP is operating to address the group's manner of operation.

4. **Life inside Boko Haram and its factions:**

- a. **Recruitment Incentives were prevalent in Niger, but not in the rest of the Lake Chad Basin**: Most people were not offered anything to join Boko Haram and its factions in Chad, Cameroon, and Nigeria. By contrast, the majority of ex-associates in Niger were offered something to join, which given the prevalence of ISWAP affiliation among this subsample, may suggest that the group recruited differently than the other faction of Boko Haram. Overall, money is what is mostly offered by Boko Haram to recruits (see [section IV.A](#)).
- b. **Abductions and coercion were often the way people became associated with Boko Haram, except in Niger**: In Chad and Cameroon, Boko Haram appears to have engaged in widespread coercion to recruit, where 80-90 per cent of ex-associates reported having been abducted. By contrast, in Niger, only 26 per cent of ex-associates reported having been

abducted, which again may speak to differences in the way ISWAP operates (see [section IV.A](#)).

- c. **Traditional gender roles are reinforced by Boko Haram, but not necessarily by non-State security actors:** Across the four countries of the Lake Chad Basin, the data shows that traditional gender roles were replicated in the roles and responsibilities assigned within Boko Haram (see [section IV.B](#)).
- d. **Life with Boko Haram was extremely dangerous:** The overwhelming majority of ex-associates reported being put in danger of being hurt or killed by Boko Haram and its members. Only a minority of ex-associates admit to having committed acts of violence themselves (see [section IV.B](#)).
- e. **There are enduring bonds to Boko Haram even after exit, as many have intimate relationships with others who were (or are) in the group:** Many ex-associates had intimate relationships with other people who were members or lived under their armed group, but this varies across the countries. A considerable minority of ex-associates in Cameroon and Niger were married to someone from their last armed group. This held to a lesser extent in Nigeria, and a much smaller minority in Chad (see [section IV.C](#)).

5. Exiting Boko Haram and life post-group:

- a. **Most ex-associates wanted to leave the group and were motivated by concerns for their safety:** The overwhelming majority of respondents across all four countries desired to leave the group and escaped. The most common reasons for leaving in Chad, Cameroon, and Nigeria relate to fear of violence and death. By contrast, in Niger, more people disengaged because their religious or ideological expectations were not met by the group/faction (see [section IV.C](#)).
- b. **Ex-associates in transit centres want to go back to their communities but face challenges:** Respondents who are currently displaced and in transit/rehabilitation centres want to go back to their communities. For the majority of respondents, return to the community is motivated by being with family. Moreover, a majority of people in transit or rehabilitation centres also mention their desire to find a source of income and develop a business when they get out (see [section IX.A](#)).
- c. **Most ex-associates feel they are better off now that they have left Boko Haram, but there are noticeable differences in Niger:** Ex-associates overwhelmingly consider their lives to have been worse when they were with the armed group than they are today, even though many are struggling. These findings hint at possible progress toward **RSS Indicator 12.3b**. The data is relatively different in Niger, where 30 per cent of ex-associates considered their lives to be better when they were associated (see [section IV.C](#)).
- d. **Impacts of association on psychological well-being:** There are strong, consistent links between being a Boko Haram ex-associate and reporting poor treatment once back in the community in Chad, Cameroon, and Niger. These concerns are important to understand and address as they likely inhibit reintegration progress as would be measured by **RSS Indicators 12.3b and 12.3c**. (see [section VIII.C](#)).

6. Experiences of the communities

- a. **Communities have been victimized as have former associate populations:** The majority of the respondents experienced harm to themselves and their relatives. Systematically across the four countries, ex-associates from Boko Haram are more likely to have experienced victimization than those who were never associated. Boko Haram and its factions are designated as the main perpetrators, but the military is also mentioned by 28 per cent of respondents in Nigeria (see [section VI.A](#), [VI.B](#), [VI.C](#)).
- b. **Rejection and fear of ex-associates in the communities:** The potential for rejection of returning ex-associates appears to be very high. The overwhelming majority of non-associated community members consider people who were with Boko Haram as “bad.” Yet, despite these perceptions, other markers of receptivity to reintegration are relatively high, which may represent a positive indication of progress toward **RSS Indicator 11.3a** (see [section VII.B](#)).
- c. **Many people want ex-associates punished for their involvement in Chad, Niger, and Cameroon, but not as much in Nigeria:** Non-associated community members overall favour justice and accountability measures for those who were involved with Boko Haram, especially for men (death penalty, imprisonment, or prosecution). For these types of punishment, there seems to be more tolerance towards women ex-associates than men ex-associates – except in the case of Chad. Restorative or transitional justice mechanisms, such as obligatory reorientation or rehabilitation, public apology, and monitoring or observation are also chosen by some. This finding relates to **RSS indicator 10.4** (see [section VII.C](#)).
- d. **Despite familiarity with transit or rehabilitation centres in some places, the community remains fearful of those who graduate from them:** Non-associated community members in Chad, Cameroon, and Niger are quite familiar with the different screening, reintegration, and reorientation centres, especially in comparison knowledge rates about similar processes in Nigeria. Knowing about government efforts to rehabilitate Boko Haram ex-associates does not necessarily result in high confidence in their work. Despite strong familiarity with the different transit centres, a sizable minority of respondents still consider that people getting out of them pose a threat to society (see [section VII.D](#)).
- e. **Receptivity to returning Boko Haram ex-associates:** Despite feelings of anger and fear and potential for rejection, the majority of non-associated community members also consider themselves as being able to forgive ex-associates, whether men or women, which represents an opportunity for transitional justice to reconcile communities. This also hints at the potential to make progress on **RSS Indicator 12.4a** (see [section VII.B](#)).
- f. **Despite it all, ex-associates remain optimistic about their future prospects:** Despite the many challenges they face, most ex-associates exiting Boko Haram and its factions feel some optimism about the future. When asked if they thought they would be able to be a successful and respected member of their community in the future, most ex-associate respondents say yes, in line with the responses of non-associate respondents. Thus, these findings provide a glimmer of hope and speak to a positive first indication towards progress on **RSS Indicator 12.3b** (see [concluding section](#)).

I. Background

About MEAC

How and why do individuals exit armed groups, and how do they do so sustainably, without re-engaging in conflict? These questions are at the core of UNIDIR/UNU-CPR's Managing Exits from Armed Conflict (MEAC) initiative. MEAC is a multi-year, multi-partner collaboration that aims to develop a unified, rigorous approach to examining how and why individuals exit armed conflict and evaluating the efficacy of interventions meant to support their transition to civilian life. MEAC is creating a first-of-its-kind knowledge base to rigorously and longitudinally study the sources of resilience to conflict involvement as well as the challenges and obstacles to exiting armed groups. The MEAC methodology combines quantitative, qualitative, and experimental approaches that will be synthesized and analysed over a multi-year period in each field study country. MEAC seeks to inform evidence-based prevention and reintegration-related programme design and implementation in real time to improve efficacy. At the strategic level, the cross-programme, cross-agency lessons that will emerge from the growing MEAC evidence base will support more effective conflict resolution and peacebuilding efforts. MEAC is supported by the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Switzerland's Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA), the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO), Irish Aid, the UN Development Programme (UNDP), the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and is being run in partnership with the Secretariat of the Regional Strategy for Stabilization, Recovery and Resilience, UN Department of Peace Operations (DPO), UNICEF, and the World Bank.

MEAC's Work in the Lake Chad Basin

Over the last two years, MEAC has been testing its methodology and assessment toolkit in multiple contexts. In late 2020, MEAC rolled out the contextualized, translated toolkit in Nigeria through its implementing partner Mobukar Consultancy, which has led some of the largest surveys in the North East of Nigeria to date. Additional case studies in Chad, Niger, and Cameroon were added in 2021. Combined, these studies represent the first regional approach to pre-programme reintegration assessment. Understanding that the Boko Haram conflict presents a regional threat that requires a regional response, the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC) and UNDP supported the MEAC expansion into the region. The goal of this work is to generate robust, comparable evidence to support coordinated and effective prevention and reintegration efforts in the region. In Cameroon, Chad, and Niger, a partnership with the Institute for Security Studies (ISS) was established to support the process. Through its Lake Chad Basin Programme, the ISS has been providing evidence-based analysis of conflict dynamics in the region for seven years. It has developed a deep understanding of the different facets of the Boko Haram crisis and policy and programming responses to it, including disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) and transitional justice mechanisms. Building on its expertise, networks, and influence in the region, ISS has helped MEAC build local research

capacity, run large scale surveys, and engage with government, civil society, and UN stakeholders in Chad, Niger, and Cameroon.

About this Report

This report presents evidence about conflict prevention, conflict transitions, and reintegration journeys in the Lake Chad Basin region to inform policy and practice. Specifically, the data presented herein speaks to the indicators listed in the Regional Strategy for the Stabilization, Recovery and Resilience of the Boko Haram-Affected Areas of the Lake Chad Basin (RSS). This data will allow the LCBC and its partners to better understand the needs in the region and the challenges to enhancing security and protection efforts. This data can serve as an initial reference point from which to understand subsequent progress. In addition, throughout the report, the potential policy and programmatic implications of the presented findings are considered.

Methodology

To study conflict exits, MEAC conducts multi-method studies that prioritize quantitative methods that involve collecting individual-level data, from a mixed sample of ex-combatants and formerly associated individuals and non-associated community members, at frequent intervals over an extended period of time. It is important to clarify the language used in this report.

The MEAC project examines individual transitions to civilian life after involvement with armed groups. Its tools are flexible to monitor transitions away from Boko Haram and those from non-State militias or similar groups to the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) or the comité(s) de vigilance (et de sécurité) (COVI/COVIS). This is not to suggest that these groups – or participation in them – are equivalent per se. Thus, it is important to clarify the language used in this report.

When describing those involved with armed groups and armed forces, there is a challenge in using clear, accurate terminology. The term ex-combatant is potentially relevant for those who directly and regularly participated in hostilities, whether for Boko Haram or the CJTF/COVI/COVIS. Recognizing, however, that many people are not directly participating in hostilities or are not doing so regularly, and that association is often coerced and/or varies in its formality and proximity, such a term is not applicable to everyone coming out of armed groups in the region – regardless of whether the focus is Boko Haram or the CJTF/COVI/COVIS.

Lastly, since the report oscillates between discussing those who had been with Boko Haram and/or one of its factions and those who have been with other groups, like the CJTF, COVI/COVIS and vigilantes, the following terms are used for clarity and so as not misconstrue the nature of individual involvement with different armed actors in the region:

- Ex-associates: those who had been with Boko Haram, a related faction, or a similar type of rebel group.
- Ex-affiliates: those who had been with a voluntary security outfit, militias, or government-affiliated security actors (GSAs). How these types of non-State armed groups are described is discussed below.

Again, this is not to suggest that these individuals are fundamentally different categories of analysis, but rather to ensure clarity when reading through the report.

Likewise, it is difficult to describe the subset of armed groups that fight against rebel or insurgent groups in coordination and support with, or towards similar ends as, government forces. Previous publications by the MEAC project have used the term voluntary security outfits (VSOs), but subsequent data collection suggests that often association with such groups is not entirely voluntary, especially for young people. The term government-affiliated security actors (GSAs) avoid this issue but may overstate the degree to which such irregular forces are aligned and affiliated with the State. Community security actors may better describe this subgroup of interest and will be used to describe groups like the more formalized the CJTF/COVI/COVIS, the larger Yan Gora, and vigilantes such as the hunters and charmers and the Shuwa vigilantes known as Kesh.

Recognizing that reintegration cannot be understood in a vacuum, MEAC's work on ex-associate and ex-affiliate journeys are contextualized against metrics from non-associated community members from the same areas. Gathering measures of reintegration progress frequently – particularly when aided by technology – provides more fine-grained detail of an ex-associate or ex-affiliate individual's trajectory out of armed conflict.

To effectively measure reintegration progress (as well as understand pathways into armed groups), MEAC's methodology adopts a holistic approach in two respects. First, MEAC seeks to understand an individual's entire trajectory including life pre-conflict, factors that led to association, experience in the armed group(s), how and why they exited, and what life has been like since then. Second, MEAC seeks to measure a series of indicators around a person's orientation and proximity to armed conflict and conflict actors (e.g., continued operational support to an armed group, norms around violence), as well as a series of supporting conditions and outcomes that are thought either to contribute to the successful transitions or be signals of one (e.g., having a source of income not tied to an armed group, having a robust social support network of people not associated with armed groups). The latter include metrics of economic well-being, social well-being, physical and mental health, political and civic engagement, and a series of safety, security, and service access measures. MEAC's approach to measuring reintegration progress – and contextualizing it in the community context – was informed by several years of research, fieldwork, and a consultation process with practitioners, policymakers, donors, and more than 100 academics from political science, economics, sociology, anthropology, psychology, neuroscience, criminology, public health, communications, and social work.

Difficulties and Limits

The research took place in an active conflict and the security situation in the four countries where the study was rolled out was often precarious and fluid. Security concerns influenced the survey rollout and decisions to visit certain communities. In addition, many of the targeted areas were isolated, especially in the islands of Chad, which made access logistically challenging. In addition to careful planning, the local research teams in each country had to be flexible. Several of the communities originally targeted for data collection were found to exist on a map in name only as everyone had fled due to security or other concerns. Additionally, ex-associates are very mobile as they seek better livelihood opportunities and were difficult to identify and access in some places. Lastly, in some cases, securing consent for participation was challenging with ex-associates and required significant discussion and diplomacy before data collection could begin. This was particularly the case in Niger, where in addition to the challenges of identifying a mobile and disbursed former combatant/former associate population, there was also frustration with the very idea of sitting for a survey interview. A number of ex-associates appeared reluctant to respond to a study which, in their opinion, was unlikely to lead to any meaningful change to their difficult living conditions. While in many of the contexts where MEAC has rolled out its surveys and qualitative assessment tools for this project, it was clear that most respondents had not had the opportunity to tell the story of their involvement with armed groups and many found doing so cathartic. That said, there are always concerns about overburdening respondents and the impact that could have on the information they share, and steps are taken to address this concern in all MEAC studies.

Research Components

In 2021, MEAC agreed to build upon its research infrastructure in Nigeria and expand its work in the rest of the Lake Chad Basin region. Working with the LCBC and its local government and civil society partners, as well as its implementing partners, Mobukar Consultancy (Nigeria) and ISS (Chad, Niger, and Cameroon), MEAC has run several studies that inform this report:

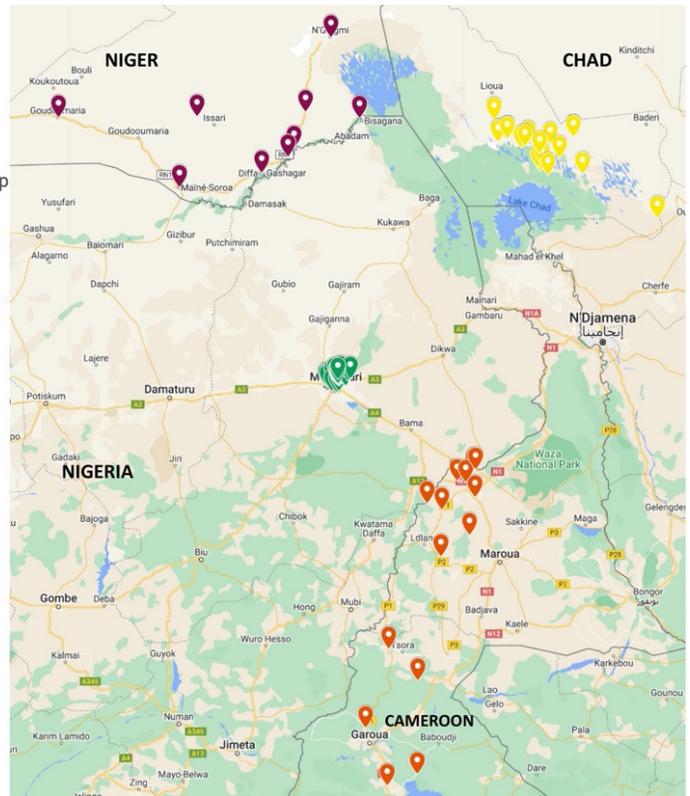
In Chad, Niger, and Cameroon, MEAC ran a pre-programme assessment that comprised:

- A 516-person survey in Niger with ex-associates, ex-affiliates, and non-associated community members across the Diffa Region. (March-April 2022)
- A 998-person survey in Chad with ex-associates, ex-affiliates, and non-associated community members in the Lac and Hadjer-Lamis Regions. (March 2022)
- An 807-person survey in Cameroon with ex-associates, ex-affiliates, and non-associated community members across the Far North and North Regions. (March 2022)

In Nigeria, a much larger longitudinal study was underway before the partnership with LCBC. Planned surveys were adapted to include corresponding metrics and surveys to further inform the study there. The Nigeria study has numerous parts that are drawn on for this report:

- A 2,963-person community phone survey in and around the Maiduguri Metropolitan Area, Konduga, and Jere. (December 2020-March 2021)
- A survey of 275 local community leaders from in and around the Maiduguri Metropolitan City (MMC) and Konduga, in Borno State. (September 2020-June 2021)
- A 3,273-person baseline survey with ex-associates of armed groups including Boko Haram, ISWAP, and ex-affiliates of various volunteer security outfits (e.g., the CJTF, vigilante groups) and members of the surrounding or receiving communities in Borno State (Maiduguri, Konduga, and Jere). The data presented herein represents the baseline survey up to early June 2022. The baseline started in May 2021 and is continuing in Nigeria given the recent mass defections and access to Sulhu participants. (May 2021-early June 2022, but ongoing)
- An ongoing midline survey that to date includes 965 respondents, mostly located in Borno State although some have since relocated to other states, predominantly comprised of ex-associates and ex-affiliates and those who were matched with them in community-based reintegration programmes. Some of those “matched” individuals appear to be selected because they were thought to be vulnerable; for others, it was less clear if they were chosen by some criteria or just because their involvement would help ensure the community would benefit as well from any reintegration programming. (January 2022-early June 2022, but ongoing)
- An ongoing registration survey that to date includes 1,604 respondents located at the Bulumkutu and Shokari transit centres in Maiduguri, Borno State, as well as Hajj camp. This is a short intake survey to identify respondents for the base-, mid-, and endline surveys. The data collection in the centres started in December 2020 and is continuing to include respondents who are part of the ongoing mass exits in the North East. (December 2020-early June 2022, ongoing)
- Qualitative studies including 12 focus groups focusing on what it means to “exit” a volunteer security outfit and what exit trajectories have been like for women coming out of Boko Haram in Borno State. (March 2022)

- | | | | |
|---------------------|--------------------|--------------------|----------------------|
| ● Baga Sola | ● Goudoumaria | ● Zamai | ● Mashamari |
| ● Melea | ● Kabelawa | ● Mayo Oulo Rive | ● Maimusari |
| ● Malloumari Koussi | ● Gueskerou | ● Gomari | ● Gonikachallari |
| ● Koulikimé | ● Maïné-Soroa | ● Bulumkutu | ● Farm Centre Camp |
| ● Yakoua | ● N'Guigmi | ● Dala | ● El Maskin IDP Camp |
| ● Kaya | ● Diffa | ● Bolori I | ● Muna Garage |
| ● Kaya | ● Bosso | ● Bolori II | ● Liminati |
| ● Kaya | ● Kindjandi | ● Maisandari | ● Ilyakubu Camp |
| ● Gomirom Doumou | ● Déwa Karguéri | ● Bakassi Camp IDP | |
| ● Nahr | ● Kolofata | ● Jiddari | |
| ● Ngalamia | ● Amchide | ● Bale Galtimari | |
| ● Magar | ● Modzocg | ● Gwange | |
| ● Kindiiria | ● Moskota | ● Gwange II | |
| ● Kousseri | ● Meri | ● Bulabulin | |
| ● Layrom | ● Mora | ● Hausari | |
| ● Guitté | ● Gancey | ● Shehuri South | |
| ● Medi Kouta | ● Limani | ● Shehuri North | |
| ● Ballom 1 | ● Gashiga | ● Mafoni | |
| ● Ballom 2 | ● Ngong | ● Lamisula | |
| | ● Dourbey | ● Gamboru | |
| | ● Village Carrière | ● Old Maiduguri | |
| | ● Touboro | | |



Community samples were designed to be representative of the areas they were pulled from, within certain security and ethical parameters (e.g., no children younger than 12). For example, in the communities targeted for surveys, enumerator teams randomly selected households and, within them, men, women, and children to interview. Women and girls are only interviewed by female enumerators. Occasionally, through this randomized approach, ex-associates, and ex-affiliates (including from volunteer security outfits like the CJTF/COVI/COVIS and vigilante groups) were identified in the community sample. Most ex-associates who had previously been with Boko Haram or one of its factions, however, were identified through the centres where they reside or through community leaders who had been involved in their return to the community, resulting in a sample of convenience.

As with all its work, MEAC’s methodology is informed by the highest standards in research ethics and best practices for interviews and surveys with vulnerable populations to ensure their participation is always voluntary and does not risk re-traumatization. Indeed, MEAC surveys measure anxiety levels at the beginning and end of surveys to ensure they are not causing harm to respondents. In addition, respondents always have the option to refuse to answer any question.¹ Each case study underwent United Nations University’s Ethics Review Board assessment and was approved by a panel of internal and external researchers.

¹ All of the statistics presented herein are contingent on answering the question.

Context and History of the Conflict

The Emergence of Boko Haram Under the Leadership of Mohammed Yusuf

The emergence of the Jama'atu Ahlis-Sunna Lidda'Awati Wal-Jihad (JAS), otherwise known as Boko Haram, dates back to 2002 in Maiduguri, Borno State, Nigeria. Originally founded by Mohammed Yusuf and focused on preaching against the corruption of political elites and the perniciousness of the Western way of life, the group gradually slid into violent actions against the Nigerian State and its symbols. Boko Haram took advantage of the situation of widespread poverty and State absence in the Lake Chad Basin to attract people into its ranks with a discourse that combines religion, denunciation of the State, and the proposal of a new order. Following a series of attacks on police stations and government buildings, the Nigerian security forces attacked the group's headquarters, killing Yusuf and some of his supporters, among others, later that year.

Abubakar Shekau: Consecration of the Martial Option and Internationalization

Abubakar Shekau, who took over the leadership of the movement after Yusuf's death in 2009, enshrined an approach of undifferentiated violence, targeting communities, as well as security services, and other symbols of the State such as schools. The group's abduction of 200 schoolgirls in Chibok in April 2014 increased its media visibility. From 2014 onwards, the group extended its actions in Cameroon, then in Niger and Chad from 2015, including attacks in the heart of the Chadian capital.

Allegiance to the Islamic State and Split

In March 2015, the group pledged allegiance to the Islamic State, becoming its official affiliate in the Lake Chad basin. This allegiance gave rise to ISWAP. However, internal disagreements over the group's approach led to a split between the group's central leadership, resulting in the splintering of the group into two factions. As of 2016, Abu Musab al-Barmaid continued to head the faction known as ISWAP, while Shekau continued to lead the faction known as JAS.²

Death of Shekau

Following the death of Shekau in May 2021, thousands of individuals left Sambisa Forest where JAS was active, and surrendered to the Nigerian Government. ISWAP is presently the strongest group in the Lake Chad Basin. Although reduced in size, Shekau's followers continue to operate, led by Bakura Doro. Despite indications that Boko Haram has split into different factions, such specific distinction is not always clear to respondents. Recognizing that local populations often refer to the umbrella term Boko Haram – a tendency that varies by geography and interaction – MEAC's tools

² It should also be noted that another split took place in 2012, giving birth to the Ansaru group. This group, which has been dormant for a decade, seems to be back in the limelight with its allegiance to Al Qaeda in the Maghreb (AQIM) and actions on the ground, thus further complicating the security dynamics in this region.

were designed to capture answers related to Boko Haram, the Shekau faction, and the ISWAP faction to allow for differences in knowledge and visibility among respondents.

Responses to the Crisis

The response to the Boko Haram crisis first began in Nigeria and was heavily militarized. As the conflict became more regionalized, the other countries of the Lake Chad Basin also became involved. Joined by Benin, they reactivated the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) in 2015 to collectively respond to the crisis in addition to their national responses. Community actors organized in vigilance committees and self-defence groups also rose to contribute to the response by supporting the security forces, either preventively or outright offensively, as in Nigeria with the CJTF, Yan Gora, and the hunters and charmers. In Cameroon, Chad, and Niger, the CJTF is translated as COVI/COVIS.

Despite military victories achieved on the ground against the Boko Haram factions, the group and its factions continued to cause death and destruction across the Lake Chad Basin region. In response to continued instability, Chad, Niger, Cameroon, and Nigeria, through the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC), supported by the African Union (AU), developed the [Regional Strategy for the Stabilization, Recovery and Resilience in the affected areas of the Lake Chad Basin Region](#) (known as the Regional Stabilization Strategy or RSS), proposing a holistic response to the crisis that goes beyond the military.

Consequences of the Conflict

After 13 years of conflict, the consequences are enormous. Indeed, the conflict has already caused more than 40,000 deaths in the four countries, with Nigeria being the most affected, followed by Cameroon, Niger, and Chad. The scale of the atrocities is such that the Global Terrorism Index (GTI) of 2022, for example, places Boko Haram among the bloodiest terrorist groups and Nigeria among the 10 countries most affected by terrorism in the world.³ On the humanitarian front, the conflict has already caused the displacement of 2,800,000 people within their own country, 260,000 refugees, 11,000,000 people in need of humanitarian assistance, and more than 4,000,000 food insecure people.⁴ The dual humanitarian and security crises have been exacerbated by the effects of climate change and the increasing pressure on limited natural resources as well as the COVID-19 pandemic.

Disengagement and Desertion

Recognizing that Boko Haram's – and its factions' – continued ability to recruit and maintain its ranks allows the group(s) to persist despite the multi-faceted offensives against them, a major focus of the RSS is on facilitating sustainable exits out of the group(s). This importance has made the screening,

³ Institute for Economics & Peace, [Global Terrorism Index 2022: Measuring the Impact of Terrorism](#) (Sydney: Institute for Economics & Peace, 2022).

⁴ OCHA, "[Lake Chad Basin: Humanitarian Snapshot](#)," United Nations, 14 April 2022.

prosecution, demobilization, rehabilitation, and reintegration of those associated with Boko Haram one of the pillars of the RSS.

II. Demographic Overview of Respondents

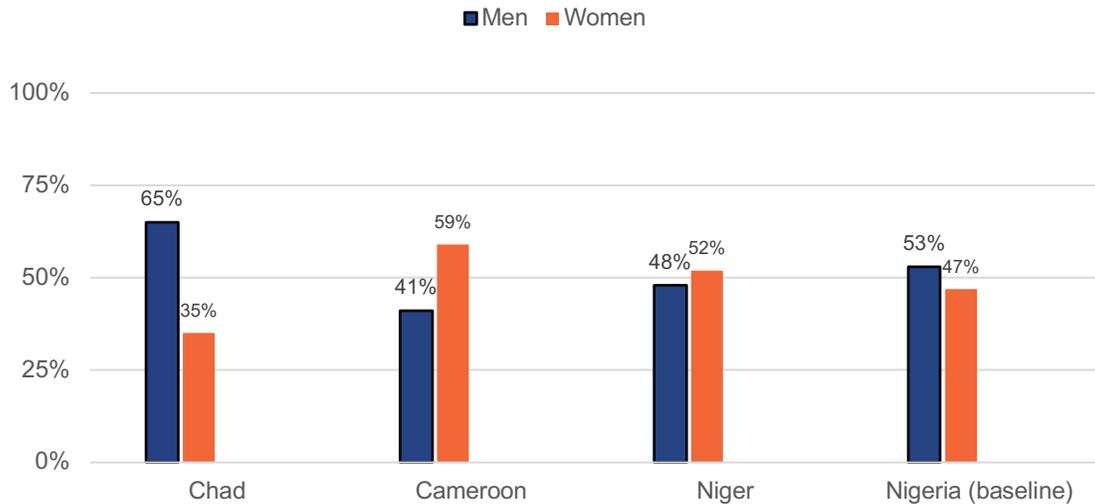
This section describes the demographics of the samples examined in this report and describes the following indicators: gender, age, nationality, tribes, religion, education, family life and size of households, displacement, and association with an armed group.

A. Gender, Age, and Displacement

Gender: The randomized community surveys in Chad, Cameroon, and Nigeria, were designed in a way to try to ensure gender parity across the samples, but this was better achieved in some locations than others. Gender disparities are in part explained by the ex-associates' portion of the sample, which is non-randomized, contrary to the sample of non-associated community members. It was more challenging in Chad and Niger to identify women and girl ex-associates to participate. In communities, sociocultural barriers restricting women to the home and limiting their ability to engage with individuals outside their households made it difficult to gain access to them, despite the use of female enumerators for this purpose. In Chad, men and boy respondents count for 65 per cent of the 998 respondents, and women and girls for 35 per cent. The representation of women is higher in Cameroon than in the other countries. They account for 59 per cent of the 807 respondents, while men account for the remaining 41 per cent. Niger also presents a slightly higher female representation, as women account for 52 per cent of the 516 respondents, and men for 48 per cent. In the baseline survey in Nigeria, men and boys count for 53 per cent of the 3,273 respondents, and women and girls for 47 per cent. In the midline survey in Nigeria, men and boys count for 52 per cent of the 965 respondents, and women and girls for 48 per cent.⁵

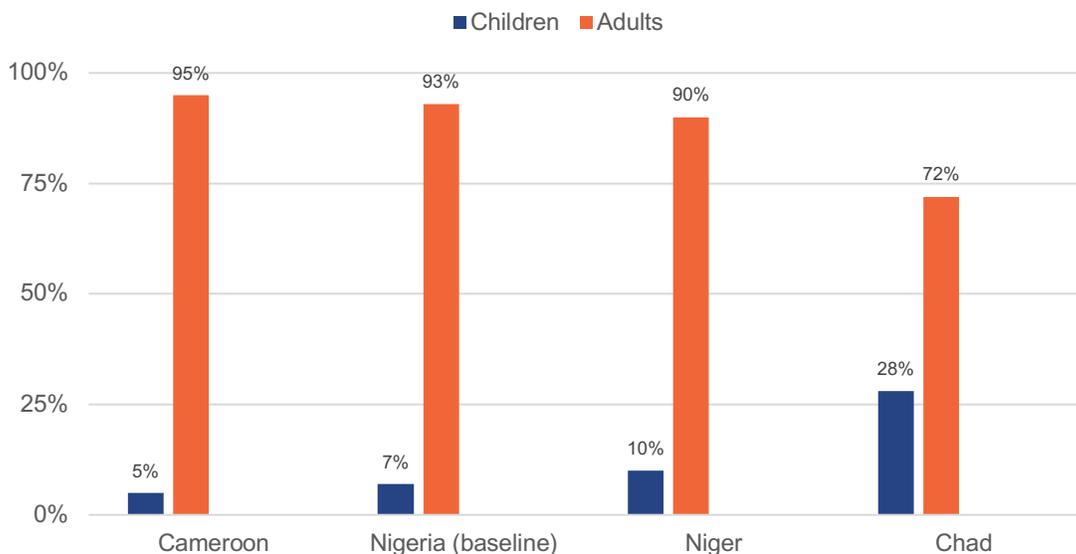
⁵ The percentages of male and female respondents vary between the base- and the midline. Everyone in the Nigeria sample will receive a base- and end-line survey. However, only a subset of the sample receives a midline survey (those who were formerly associated as well as non-associated community members who are part of community-based reintegration support programmes), resulting in a slightly different composition of the sample.

Figure 1 – Respondents categorized by gender



Age: Overall, the majority of respondents are adults. In Chad, the majority of respondents are adults (72 per cent).⁶ Most of the children surveyed belong to the age group 15-17. In Cameroon, adults represent 95 per cent of respondents.⁷ In Niger, adults represent 90 per cent of the respondents.⁸ In Nigeria, the overwhelming majority of respondents are adults (94 per cent of adults in the baseline survey, and 97 per cent in the midline survey). Despite these high percentages, the size of the Nigeria baseline survey still yields a large subsample of children (almost 200), allowing for some insights into the unique aspects of child recruitment and use by armed groups in the region.

Figure 2 – Respondents categorized by age



⁶ 10 per cent between the ages of 18-24, and 20-21 per cent between the ages of 25-34 and 35-44.

⁷ Among the adults, a third of the respondents are between 25-34 (35 per cent).

⁸ The age group most represented is 25-34 years old (29 per cent).

Displacement: The surveys in Chad, Niger, Cameroon, and Nigeria were deployed in areas with high levels of displacement and in internally displaced persons (IDP) camps, including those in Midi Kouta in Lac province (Chad), Zama in the Far North region (Cameroon), Dewa in the Diffa region (Niger), and several in Maiduguri in Borno State (Nigeria). As a result of the selected locations, the majority of respondents reported being currently displaced. In Chad, 62 per cent of respondents reported being currently displaced, out of which 72 per cent are currently living in an IDP camp. In Cameroon, 68 per cent of the respondents reported being currently displaced, out of which 41 per cent are currently living in an IDP camp. In Niger, 62 per cent of respondents reported being displaced, out of which 47 per cent are living in an IDP camp. In the Nigeria midline survey, 82 per cent of respondents said yes when asked if they were ever displaced by the conflict, and in the baseline survey, 28 per cent said they were currently living in an IDP camp. In Niger, 70 per cent of the ex-associates surveyed still reside in transit centres, and 32 per cent in Cameroon. By contrast, in Chad, only 9 per cent of ex-associates currently reside in transit centres. This is one indication that the ex-associates surveyed across the region were often at different stages of their reintegration journeys, which has implications for analysing their responses and reporting against certain RSS Indicators. The samples for each country are described in more detail below.

Figure 3 – Respondents currently displaced and/ or currently living in IDP camps (Chad, Cameroon, Niger)

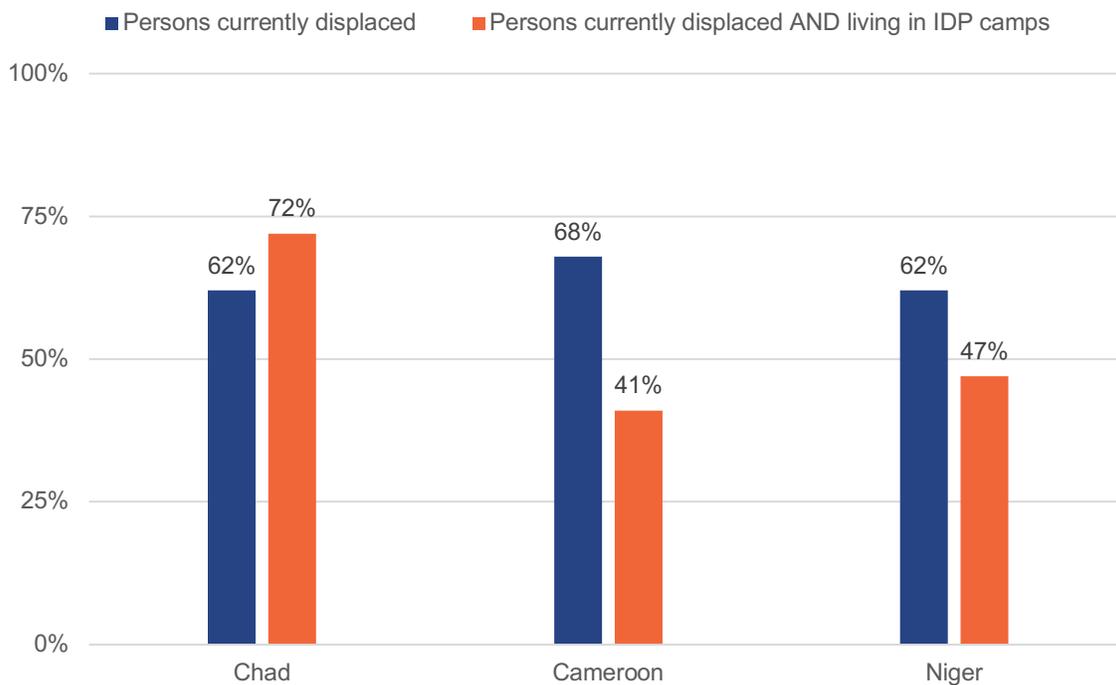
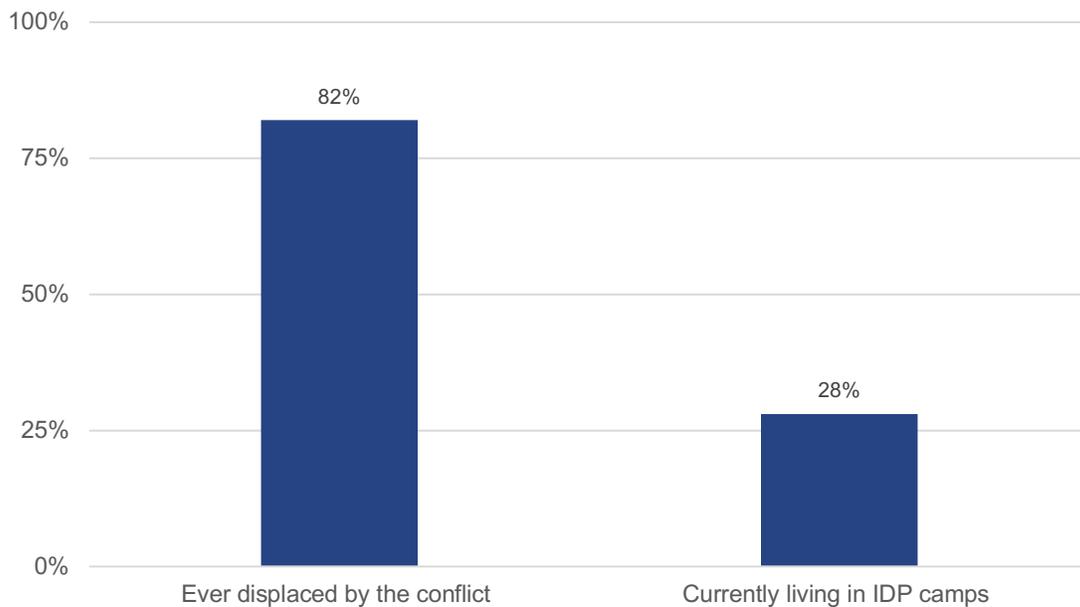


Figure 4 – Respondents ever displaced or currently in IDP camps (Nigeria)

B. Chad

Nationality, Tribe, and Religion: 99 per cent of these 998 respondents are Chadians and 91 per cent are from the Buduma tribe. Most respondents are Muslim (99 per cent), and 1 per cent are Christian.

Education: Only 19 per cent of respondents reported receiving formal education. By contrast, 72 per cent of the respondents received religious education.

Family and Household: 71 per cent of respondents are married, 25 per cent were never married, and 4 per cent of respondents are either widowed or divorced. 72 per cent of the respondents reported having children. Thus, when it comes to marriage and household composition, the data show that the overwhelming majority of adults above 18 are married (93 per cent) and have children (95 per cent). When looking at the data for children (12-17-years-old), 12 per cent of children indicated that they were married and 9 per cent said they themselves have children.

Association: 56 per cent of the respondents surveyed in Chad have never been associated with an armed group (560 respondents), whereas 44 per cent have been part of an armed group at some point (438 respondents).

- Women and girls represent 36 per cent of ex-associates/ex-affiliates.
- Men and boys represent 63 per cent of ex-associates/ex-affiliates.

C. Cameroon

Nationality, Tribe, and Religion: 98 per cent of the 807 respondents are nationals of Cameroon. The most represented tribes are Kanuri (29 per cent); Mafa (27 per cent), and Mandara (19 per cent). The respondents are predominately Muslim (76 per cent), with 21 per cent being Christian.

Education: 40 per cent of respondents reported receiving some formal education, while 77 per cent of the respondents reported receiving religious education.

Family and Household: 70 per cent of respondents are married, 16 per cent were never married, and 14 per cent are either widowed or divorced. 80 per cent of the respondents reported having children. Thus, when it comes to marriage and household composition, the data show that the overwhelming majority of adults above 18 are married (73 per cent) and have children (83 per cent). When looking at the data for children (12-17-years-old), 30 per cent indicated that they were married and 17 per cent said that they themselves have children (this was only 5 people because the subsample of children was quite small here).

Association: The representativity of ex-associates and non-associated community members is balanced in Cameroon. 52 per cent of the respondents are ex-associates/ex-affiliates, and 48 per cent are non-associated community members.

- Women and girls represent 62 per cent of ex-associates/ex-affiliates.
- Men and boys represent 38 per cent of ex-associates/ex-affiliates.

D. Niger

Nationality, Tribe, and Religion: 70 per cent of 516 respondents are nationals of Niger, and 30 per cent of them are nationals of Nigeria. The most represented tribes are Kanuri (64 per cent) and Ffulde (19 per cent). All of the respondents are Muslim (100 per cent).

Education: Only 41 per cent of the respondents received a formal education, but 92 per cent reported receiving religious education.

Family and Household: 67 per cent of respondents are married, 26 per cent were never married, and 7 per cent are either widowed or divorced. 69 per cent of the respondents also reported having children. Thus, when it comes to marriage and household composition, the data show that the overwhelming majority of adults above 18 are married (73 per cent) and have children (77 per cent). When looking at the data for children (12-17-years-old), 9 per cent indicated that they were married and 7 per cent said that they themselves have children (but again this is a small subsample).

Association: There was less balance in Niger between the ex-associates/ex-affiliates and non-associated respondents: 79 per cent of respondents have never been associated with an armed group, whereas 21 per cent have been part of an armed group at some point. As explained in the

methodology section above, location and accessing ex-associates turned out to be particularly challenging in Niger.

- Women and girls represent 14 per cent of ex-associates/ex-affiliates.
- Men and boys represent 86 per cent of ex-associates/ex-affiliates.

E. Nigeria (baseline survey)

Nationality, Tribe, and Religion: 99 per cent of 3,273 respondents are nationals of Nigeria. The most represented tribes are Kanuri (52 per cent) and Hausa (11 per cent). 95 per cent of respondents identified as Muslim, and 5 per cent as Christian.

Education: 47 per cent of the respondents reported having attended formal education, and almost everyone surveyed (95 per cent) reported having received religious education.

Family and Household: 63 per cent of adult respondents are married. 71 per cent of the adult respondents have children. The overwhelming majority of adults above 18 are married and have children. When looking at the data for children (12-17-years-old), 5 children (2 per cent) indicated that they were married, and one individual said that they themselves have children.

Association: 63 per cent of the respondents have never been associated with an armed group, whereas 37 per cent have been part of an armed group at some point (1,216 respondents).

- Women and girls represent 28 per cent of ex-associates/ex-affiliates
- Men and boys represent 72 per cent of ex-associates/ex-affiliates

Most of the data for Nigeria in this report pulls from the baseline survey, but on occasion, data points from the midline, community leader, or community phone survey are used. Relevant details on those samples are provided in footnotes or in the text.

F. Sample of Associated and Affiliated Respondents

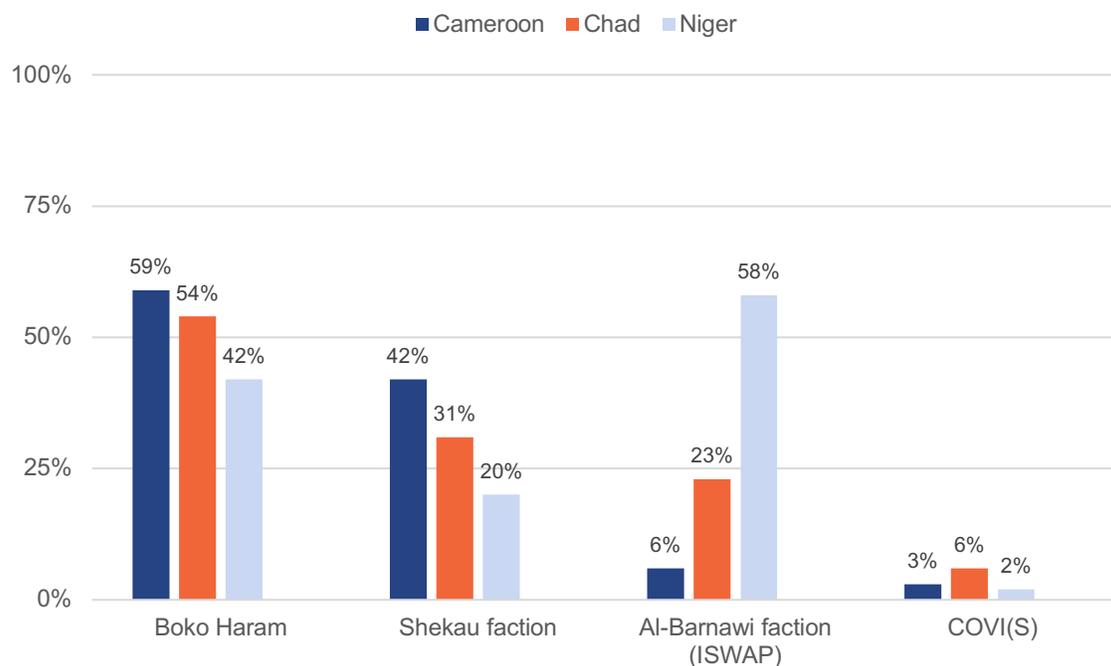
To determine association with armed groups, respondents were asked the following question: “Were you ever with any of these groups, even just for one day?” followed by a multiple choice list in each country that covered relevant and active armed groups (e.g., Boko Haram; Shekau faction (JAS); Al-Barnawi (ISWAP); Ansaru; the COVI/COVIS; the CJTF; Yan Gora (non-COVIS); Yan Gora (non-CJTF); Zaraguina; Hunters and charmers; community militia).⁹ Part of the list was largely the same

⁹ Yan Gora is often considered a (less formal) version of the CJTF or the COVI/COVIS. Locally, even among those who are part of these groups themselves, it is sometimes unclear whether someone is with Yan Gora, or with the CJTF. To try to create some clarity for respondents, as well as nuance in the findings, “non-CJTF” was added to the Hausa and Kanuri translations of Yan Gora in Nigeria, and “non-COVI(S)” was added in Cameroon, Chad, and Niger.

across all countries, and part was country-specific. For example, in Chad, the former rebel movements MDJT (Youssef Togoimi) and MDD (Brahim Mallah Mahamat) were included.¹⁰

Of the ex-associates and ex-affiliates surveyed, the majority are ex-associates who had been with Boko Haram or one of its factions. This is not surprising given the sampling method for ex-associates, which focused on rehabilitation or transit centres for those coming out of the group. A small percentage of ex-affiliates in Cameroon, Chad, and Niger said they were with the COVI/COVIS (2-6 per cent depending on the country). In the Nigeria baseline survey, 513 respondents (40 per cent of the ex-associates) were with Boko Haram (Jamā'at Ahl as-Sunnah and the Al-Barnawi faction), a larger number of respondents affiliated with vigilante groups were surveyed, including former and current affiliates of the CJTF (363 respondents - 30 per cent), Yan Gora (262 respondents - 22 per cent) and hunters and charmers 12 per cent (140 respondents - 12 per cent).¹¹ The figures below show the percentage of respondents in each country who admitted armed group association or affiliation by group.

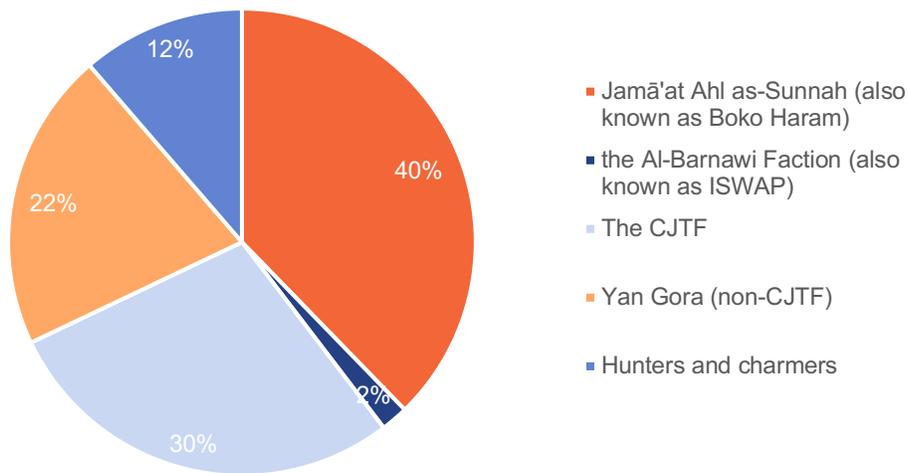
Figure 5 – Ex-associates and ex-affiliates categorized by armed group association (Chad, Cameroon, Niger)



¹⁰ Given the splintering of Boko Haram into different factions, and changes in the leadership structures of the group, different options were included. In Cameroon, Chad, and Niger, respondents could choose between Boko Haram - the umbrella term by which the group continues to be known by many, the Shekau faction, and the Al-Barnawi faction (also known as IWAP). In Nigeria, respondents were asked about Jamā'at Ahl as-Sunnah (also known as Boko Haram) and the Al-Barnawi Faction (also known as ISWAP).

¹¹ In Nigeria, hunters and charmers can also be referred to as vigilantes, but they are not always one and the same. In Nigeria, "hunters are armed and roam territory tracking animals, while charmers are seen as having spiritual protection against physical harm that puts them in an advantageous position to take on Boko Haram." Siobhan O'Neil, Sherif Mabrouk, and Kato Van Broeckhoven, "[Volunteer Security Outfits in North East Nigeria](#)," *MEAC Findings Report 5* (New York: United Nations University, 2021): 5.

Figure 6 – Ex-associates and ex-affiliates categorized by armed group association (Nigeria)



III. Potential Factors Driving Association with Boko Haram and its Factions

The MEAC project collects information on the whole trajectory of ex-associates to understand their reintegration needs and progress, including information on their lives before involvement, time in the group, how and why they left, and their current well-being. For the period before conflict involvement (or before the conflict arrived in one's community),¹² MEAC asks similar well-being questions to both ex-associates and non-associated respondents. This allows for a unique comparison of differences in those populations and may provide some limited insights into what types of factors influence armed group involvement in the region. This section is also informed by the literature on how and why people 'join' armed groups. The data included responds to theories and debates about the role of economic push and pull factors, the impact of social networks in facilitating association, and the relationship between political violence to other types of political and civic engagement. This section compares the economic well-being, civic and political engagement, social support networks, as well as familial armed group ties, of ex-associates and non-associated respondents in the period before involvement or before the conflict.

¹² For the majority of respondents across the three countries, the conflict reached their communities between 2014 and 2016.

To assess the impact of pre-involvement factors on association with Boko Haram and one of its factions, a binomial regression model was run examining the impact of various economic, social, and political/civic factors. The model controlled for age, gender, and abduction. In other words, it is not abductions driving the following findings. The section that follows reports on statistically significant results – that is to say, those results where there is extremely high confidence that the findings are not the result of chance but are in fact indications of a relationship between the indicators of interest.

A. Economic Factors

In Cameroon, Nigeria, and Niger, poor economic conditions appear to have been part of the reason individuals became associated with Boko Haram. Using metrics on income, land assets, savings, gold, and food security before association or before the conflict arrived to one's community, a simple index of economic well-being was created, which categorized respondents as doing well or doing poorly. Regression analysis demonstrated that poor economic well-being increased an individual's likelihood of being involved with Boko Haram (or one of its factions) by 12-20 per cent percentage points (controlling for age, gender, and abduction).¹³ This finding would be consistent with hypotheses that many people have become involved with Boko Haram and its factions to cover their basic needs and/or that Boko Haram targets communities that are particularly poor and food insecure. Indeed, Boko Haram has been skilful in using dire living conditions in its recruitment narrative, trying to lure young people to join with promises of improved socioeconomic prospects and positions of power. It is notable that a sizable minority of ex-associates reported that they were offered "money" or "food" when they joined (respectively 32 per cent and 26 per cent in Chad, 15 per cent and 10 per cent in Cameroon, and 26 per cent and 14 per cent in Niger - see [figure 12 in section IV.A.2](#)). Poverty and the humanitarian crisis have made association with Boko Haram "a matter of bread and butter."¹⁴

In particular, in Nigeria, economic well-being is correlated with a 14 percentage points higher probability of taking part in Boko Haram or one of its factions.¹⁵ Although this relationship is statistically significant, there were high rates of missing data in Nigeria, where respondents refused to answer questions about their economic situation during the pre-involvement/conflict period. In such cases there is always the possibility that missing data reflects a bias that could influence this association. This issue requires further examination, and this result should be treated with caution.

While struggling economically does appear to be correlated with Boko Haram association in at least Cameroon and Niger and potentially in Nigeria, it is not the sole factor for association. That said, this finding has potential implications for prevention programming. In particular, the need to identify

¹³ Due to differences in the way questions were asked in the Nigeria baseline survey, it was not possible to control for abduction in this analysis, as it was for Chad, Niger, and Cameroon.

¹⁴ Martin Ewi and Uyo Salifu, "[Money Talks: A key reason youths join Boko Haram](#)," *Institute for Security Studies Policy Brief* 98 (2017).

¹⁵ It was not possible to control for abduction in the Nigeria analysis.

populations who are economically vulnerable and who may be at higher risk of becoming associated with armed actors, and to design interventions that improve their economic prospects.¹⁶

B. Civic and Political Engagement Factors

There has long been debate about whether individuals join armed groups (or whether such groups arise) because of frustration with failed efforts to achieve political change through existing civic and political channels. To explore this relationship, the MEAC survey measured a range of civic engagement and political activities in the period before involvement/the conflict arrived (e.g., striking, protesting, voting, volunteering, and running for office).

In general, across Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad, and Niger, the majority of both ex-associates and non-associated community members did not report engaging in any political activity before the conflict. This lack of engagement may be partly due to the fact that the majority of the conflict-affected communities involved in the study are rural, located on the margins of the four Lake Chad Basin countries. Such communities are outside the epicentres of political activity. While individuals in rural communities can vote in national elections, they are often instrumentalized along ethnic or religious lines. Otherwise, rural communities are largely divorced from national and sometimes even local political debate. Many local leaders ascend to their positions as a result of their hereditary lineages, and while there are traditional consultation mechanisms that allow for community opinions to be taken into account, the political and civic engagement activities at the local level are less prevalent than in other contexts. The rates of political engagement for ex-associates as well as non-associated community members are low except for classical political activities (e.g., less than 1 per cent for each of the different political activities, except voting which was around 33-34 per cent in Chad, Cameroon, and Niger).¹⁷

Using the same analytical approach applied to economic well-being above, i.e., controlling for age, gender, and abduction, the study found that the relationship between political participation and armed group association was not statistically significant across every country, but it was relevant in Niger. There, the regression analysis revealed that being involved in political activities (e.g., voting or canvassing for a political party) was associated with a lower likelihood of becoming involved with Boko Haram. Those involved in political activities prior to the conflict were 13 percentage points less likely to become associated with Boko Haram or one of its factions than those who were not involved in such activities. This might suggest that those in Niger were able to pursue their political goals through traditional, legal channels, undermining the appeal of armed group messages about achieving social change through violence.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ There is a discrepancy between ex-associates and community members around voting. In Chad, 12 per cent of ex-associates used to vote before the conflict vs. 21 per cent of community members who were never associated with an armed group. After the conflict, 14 per cent of ex-associates voted, vs. 22 per cent of non-associated community members. In Cameroon, 13 per cent of ex-associates used to vote before the conflict vs. 20 per cent of non-associated community members.

When examining social engagement in a range of organizations and groups (e.g., religious, community, unions, youth, women, or sports associations) a similar result was found, but only in Chad. In Chad, those individuals who were engaged in social groups – like, but not limited to, a youth organization or labour union – were almost 12 percentage points less likely to become involved with Boko Haram. This trend was not statistically significant in Cameroon, Niger, or Nigeria. For Chad, however, it may be that having a like-minded community already and/or a means of pursuing political and social goals through legal means can make the prospects of joining groups like Boko Haram less enticing. There may also be some protective factors such engagement confers, but that requires more exploration.

C. Social Support Networks and the Impact of Family Association

The study also examined the impact of one's social support network on the likelihood of association with Boko Haram or one of its factions. Using a similar approach, it became clear that the quality of one's social support systems – measured as closeness to friends and family and/or having a mentor – was not statistically significant for predicting Boko Haram involvement. There was one exception.

In Cameroon, those respondents who had a trusted mentor before the conflict were *less likely* to end up being associated with Boko Haram than those who did not have such a person in their lives. Those who reported having someone “...who listened to you and gave you advice or assisted you in making plans for the future?” were 18 percentage points less likely to end up associated with Boko Haram or one of its factions.¹⁸ These results lend support to the idea that strong social networks represent a protective factor against affiliation to Boko Haram. However, it is also important to highlight that Boko Haram and its factions have used social networks to reach out to communities.

In Nigeria, the results indicated the quality of family relationships has a significant effect on the probability of association with Boko Haram. Having a poor relationship with your family before the conflict was associated with a higher likelihood of involvement in Boko Haram or one of its factions (approximately 40 percentage points). This finding suggests positive family relationships could serve as a protective factor to recruitment into Boko Haram.

For many, however, parents, relatives, peers and/or mentors facilitate, or in some cases even encourage, engagement with Boko Haram. It is common, particularly for women and children, to become associated with the group or its factions not of one's own volition but through personal and familial relationships, many of which are unequal in their power distribution (e.g., women becoming associated through their husbands, children through their parents). This is discussed further below.

¹⁸ It is important to note that without controlling for abduction, the regression model for Chad shows that having a distant relationship with family was dramatically associated with Boko Haram involvement. Not being close to your family before the conflict was associated with an over 50 per cent increase in the likelihood of involvement. The effect for the case of Chad vanishes when controlling for abduction, which may reflect a potential strong association between these two variables, maybe because families or friends were abducted together.

In this regard, having family involved in the group was a strong predictor of association across Cameroon and Niger. In Cameroon, people whose parents were associated to Boko Haram had a 16 percentage points higher probability of becoming associated with the group or one of its factions than those who did not have associated parents. The apparent impact of family involvement on recruitment is considerably high. In Niger, those respondents who had family involved with Boko Haram or one of its factions were 9 percentage points more likely to become associated with the group or its factions. In Nigeria, where it was not possible to isolate the impact of family association in the same way, it is telling that among respondents who had either of their parents ever associated with Boko Haram (or its factions), 83 per cent were also associated with Boko Haram (or its factions). Summary statistics reinforce the strong influence of having affiliated parents on child recruitment and association with armed groups. Amongst respondents who became associated with Boko Haram, those who had parents involved were much more likely to become involved with the group as children (40 per cent compared to only 14 percent of respondents who did not have associated parents). It is worth noting that a similar finding was noted for community security actors – with a similar size differential. The strength of the relationship between familial involvement and armed group association likely represents cases where the encouragement by – or draw of following – a loved family member who was associated with Boko Haram, which can complicate applying this finding to prevention intervention planning.

D. The Influence of Climate Change

Another area that is getting increased attention for exacerbating and increasing the likelihood of conflict is climate change. Given the concerns about the countries of the Lake Chad Basin region being hotspots for climate change and reports that armed groups are already taking advantage of competition over resources impacted by climate change,¹⁹ the MEAC project sought to better understand how climatic shifts were related to the Boko Haram conflict.²⁰ In each country, respondents were asked whether they had observed climatic shifts: changes in temperature, rainfall, natural disasters, and/or to Lake Chad and the cultivable lands surrounding it. They were then asked whether they had ever experienced, or heard of anyone who had, difficulties making a living from farming, herding, or fishing because of climate-related changes: changes in average temperature, rainfall, natural disasters, and changes to Lake Chad or the cultivable lands.

Climate change experiences vary within and across each country around Lake Chad, in part driven by the locations where MEAC rolled out its surveys. As seen in figure 7, in Chad – where many of the localities surveyed were in close vicinity of the Lake – changes in the Lake's water level were widely noticed (by 52 per cent of respondents). By contrast, the localities visited in the North and Far

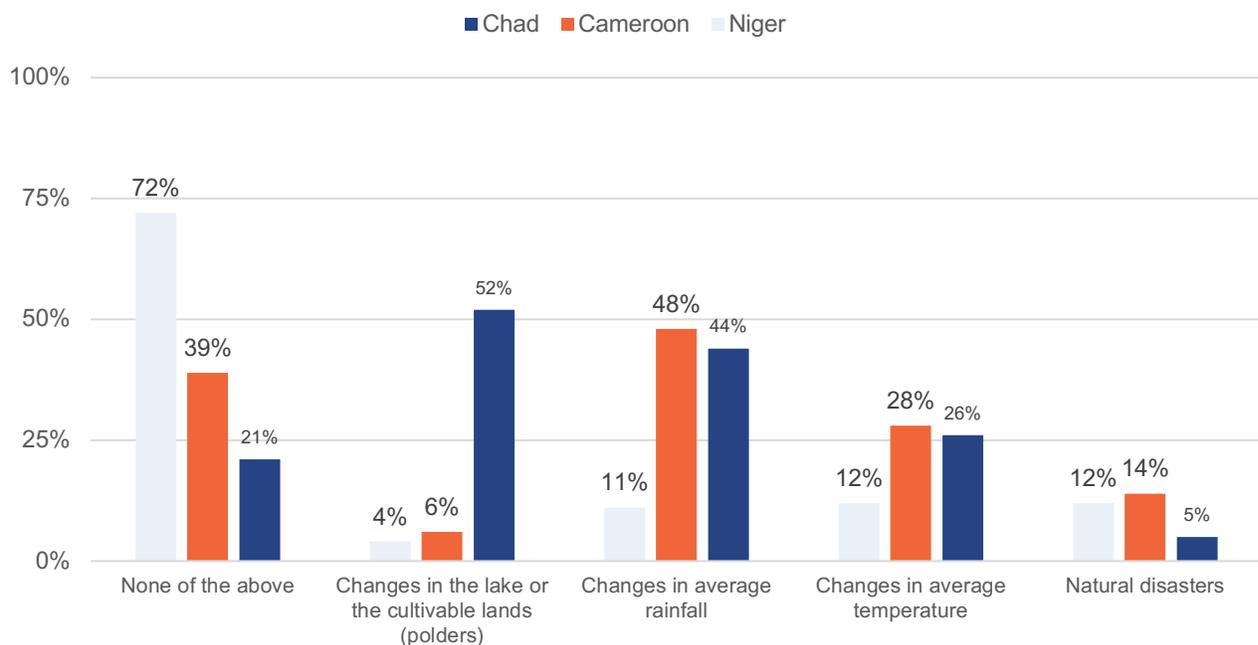
¹⁹ Jessica Caus, "[Climate-driven Recruitment into Armed Groups in Nigeria](#)," *MEAC Findings Report 1* (New York: United Nations University, 2021).

²⁰ The questions on climate change effects were made as practical and accessible as possible. Initial questions focused on phenomenon like changes in rainfall which were both objectively documented in the region and easily noticed by local populations that rely heavily on agriculture for their living or subsistence. Every effort was made to ensure the phrasing in each of the six languages used across the region was simple. All that said, this is a new area of research and there is not consensus on the best way to answer questions about climate change and its effects. This is a topic the project will continue to examine moving forward.

North of Cameroon were far away from the Lake, and changes in water level were not widely noted by respondents (only 6 per cent).

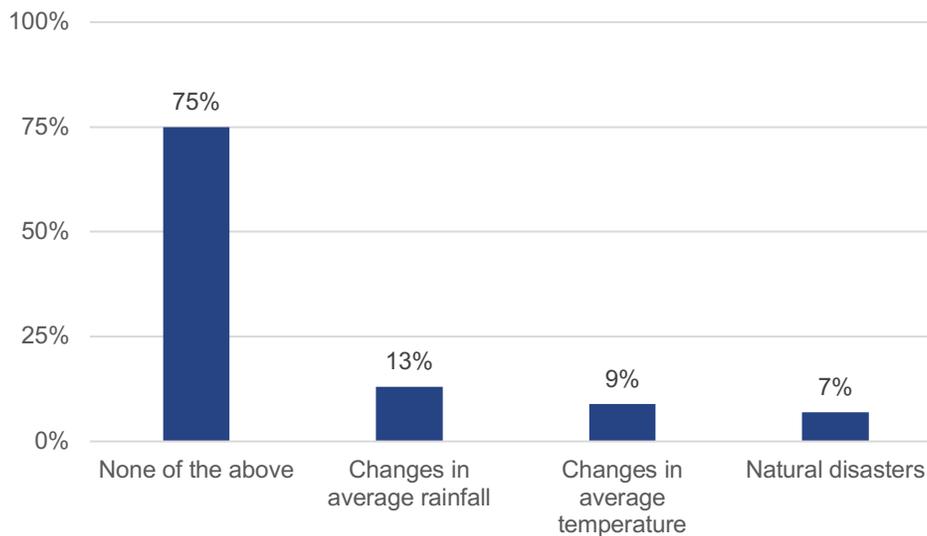
Beyond just acknowledging shifts, respondents across the region reported knowing people (including themselves) whose livelihoods were impacted by climate change. Both non-associated community members and ex-associates in Chad, Cameroon, and Niger were asked the following question: “Before the Boko Haram conflict came to your community, from what you have heard, did you or anyone you know experience difficulties making a living from farming, herding or fishing because of any of the following?”. Climate-related difficulties with farming, herding, or fishing were experienced and/or witnessed by the majority of respondents in Cameroon and Chad. In Chad, changing water levels have impacted the amount of – and thus enhanced the pressures on – cultivable land and contributed to displacement, significantly impacting many people’s lives. By contrast, there were fewer climate-related difficulties reported in Niger, where 28 per cent of respondents reported that they themselves encountered, or knew someone who had, at least one of these four climate-related changes. Most of the localities visited in Niger were not around the Lake or in the vicinity of water. In Nigeria,²¹ 25 per cent of non-associated community members in the baseline survey reported that they or someone they knew experienced changes in climate leading to difficulties farming, herding, or fishing. Of those, 9 per cent reported changes in average temperature, 13 per cent reported changes in average rainfall, and 7 per cent reported an increase in natural disasters.²²

Figure 7 – Difficulties to farm, herd, or fish due to climate-related changes (Chad, Cameroon, Niger)

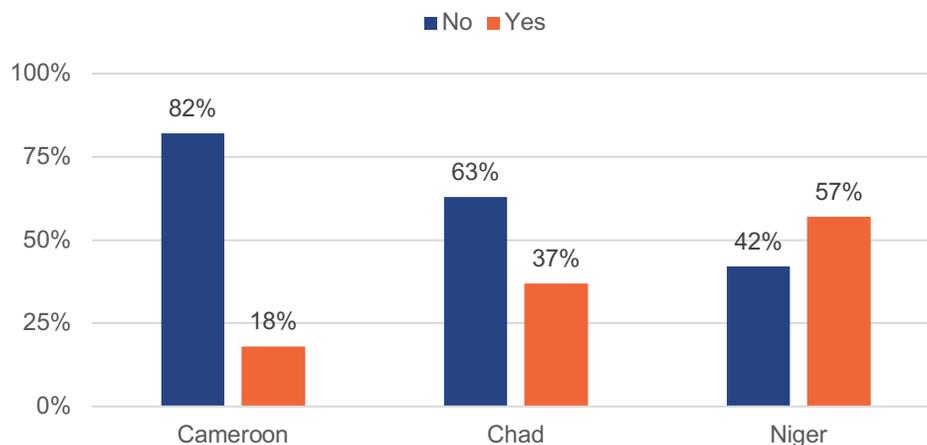


²¹ Contrary to Chad, Cameroon, and Niger, respondents in Nigeria were not asked about changes in the Lake or the cultivable lands.

²² Respondents could select multiple responses for this question.

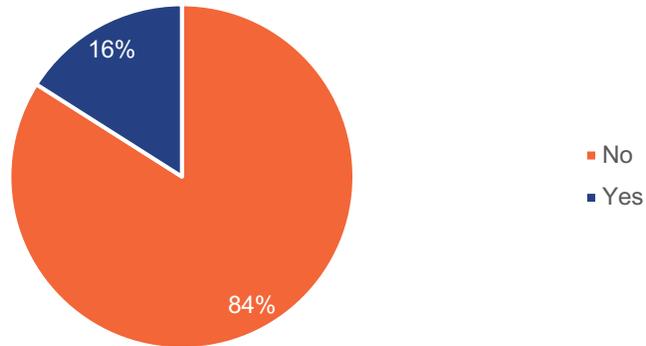
Figure 8 – Difficulties to farm, herd, or fish due to climate-related changes (Nigeria)

Interestingly, non-associated community members in the four countries knew people who had joined Boko Haram due to the climate-related difficulties to make a living. Of those who reported that they or someone they knew experienced changes in climate leading to difficulties farming, herding, or fishing, 16 per cent of respondents in Nigeria knew someone who joined for such difficulties,²³ as well as 18 per cent in Cameroon, 37 per cent in Chad, and 57 per cent in Niger.

Figure 9 – Do you know of anyone who joined Boko Haram because of these difficulties? (Chad, Cameroon, Niger)

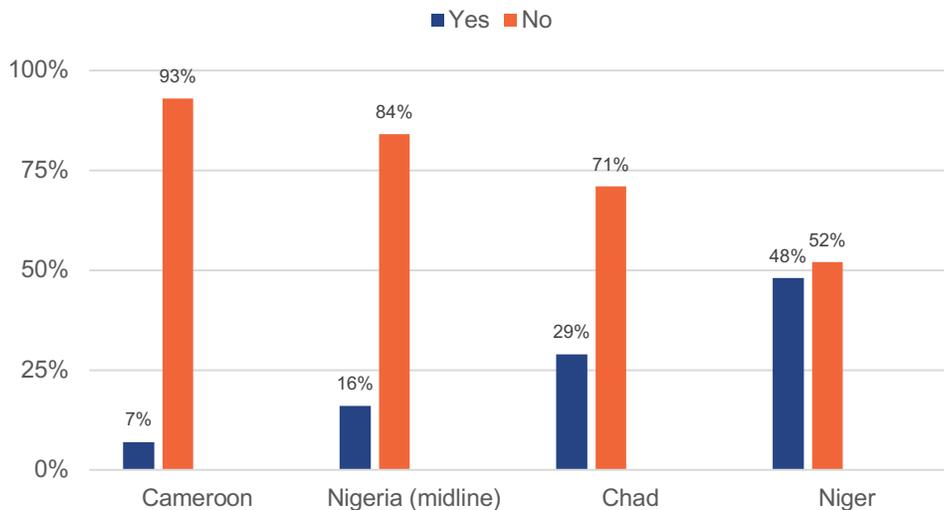
²³ In the baseline survey in Nigeria, this question was asked only to non-associated respondents, which is why the results are reflected separately in figure 10. Former associated respondents receive this question in the currently ongoing midline survey. Out of those ex-associates who experienced – or knew someone who experienced – climate change-related difficulties farming, herding, or fishing (41 per cent), 17 per cent reported knowing someone who joined Boko Haram for this reason, and 20 per cent reported knowing someone who joined the CJTF or another group like it for these reasons. These percentages might change as the midline data collection continues.

Figure 10 – Do you know of anyone who joined Jama-at Ahl as-Sunnah (also known as Boko Haram) or another group like this because of these difficulties? (Nigeria)



Ex-associates and ex-affiliates who reported climate change-related difficulties were asked directly whether these difficulties were among the reasons why they became involved with an armed group in the first place (whether Boko Haram or other types of armed groups like the CJTF/COVI/COVIS or vigilantes). While only a small minority in Cameroon (7 per cent) said climate-related livelihood challenges were part of the reasons for becoming involved with Boko Haram, those figures were much higher in Chad (29 per cent) and Niger (53 per cent). In the Nigeria midline survey, out of those who reported climate change-related difficulties, 13 per cent of Boko Haram ex-associates and 18 per cent of ex-affiliates of the CJTF, Yan Gora, and similar vigilante groups said these difficulties were among the reasons they became involved with these groups.²⁴

Figure 11 – Were these difficulties among the reason for why you came to be with the group?



²⁴ These percentages could change as data collection of the midline survey in Nigeria continues.

Climate change-related livelihood challenges appear to influence armed group association, but as with the other factors discussed in this section (e.g., economic well-being, political and social engagement, and social networks) they are not likely to be the sole or even main trigger of conflict involvement. Indeed, conflict involvement – as argued in prior work²⁵ – is thought to be multi-causal and journeys into armed groups may be somewhat distinctive even when similar societal and community-level factors influence them. That said, the findings on climate change-related recruitment patterns are unique and important.

MEAC's study has found evidence that points to a potential direct link between climate change and armed group recruitment. The findings have important policy and programming implications for the Lake Chad Basin. First, much of the population in the region is highly dependent on agriculture, farming, and fishing for their livelihoods or subsistence. As such, the population is vulnerable to climate shifts and shocks and there are real concerns that armed groups are well positioned to take advantage of these vulnerabilities. There have already been reports that tensions between pastoralists and farmers – thought to be exacerbated by desertification – have been increasingly instrumentalized by Boko Haram and other armed actors to build security alliances with and mobilize communities to their cause across the North West of Nigeria and further afield in the Sahel.²⁶ Armed groups could target communities whose economic viability has been impacted by climate change for recruitment or may passively benefit from the swelling ranks that such climatic shifts and extreme weather events can help create. Second, it is clear that prevention and reintegration programming efforts should be made climate-sensitive. In practice, this might mean that livelihoods or skills training activities undertaken as part of a reintegration programme could focus on economic alternatives or alternative agricultural practices that are less vulnerable to environmental factors to ensure resilience to future climatic shifts and events. Specifically, agricultural livelihoods training could focus on sustainable, climate-smart agricultural practices.

IV. Involvement with Boko Haram and/or its Factions

The MEAC study provides unique insights into life within armed groups in the region, particularly Boko Haram and its main two factions. This section provides an overview of the ex-associate sample across each country and examines individual pathways into the ranks of armed groups, respondents' conflict experiences, and how and why they ultimately separated from their armed group.

²⁵ Siobhan O'Neil and Kato Van Broeckhoven, eds., [Cradled by Conflict: Child Involvement with Armed Groups in Contemporary Conflict](#) (New York: United Nations University, 2018).

²⁶ International Crisis Group, ["Violence in Nigeria's North West: Rolling Back the Mayhem,"](#) *Africa Report* 288 (2020).

A. Entry into the Group

This subsection provides an overview of how and why ex-associates first entered Boko Haram or one of its factions, as well as their age when they first got associated.

1. Age of Entry into the Group

Unsurprisingly, many of the ex-associates surveyed across the Lake Chad Basin region first came to be associated as young people, many as children. Overall, 45 per cent of the ex-associates interviewed across Chad, Cameroon, and Niger entered an armed group for the first time as minors.²⁷ Across the three countries, 18 per cent of surveyed ex-associates were younger than 12 years old when they first got involved, and 23 per cent were between the ages of 12 and 17. In Nigeria, 32 per cent of ex-associates in the baseline survey first became involved with Boko Haram or its factions when they were children. Overall, the high rates of child involvement may be linked to abductions, as well as children who followed parents who joined the group.

2. Compensation and Incentives to Recruit

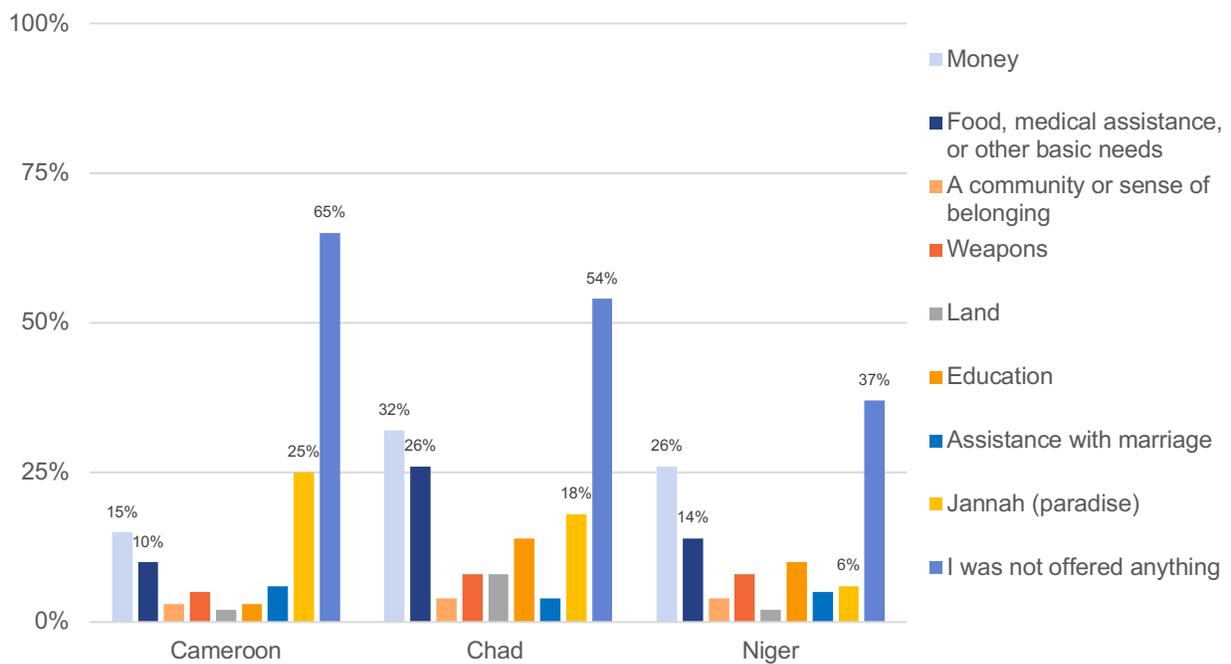
There is a considerable public debate about the incentives armed groups offer to possible recruits. The data collected across the region suggest most people were not offered anything to join Boko Haram and its factions in Chad and Cameroon (54 per cent and 65 per cent of ex-associate respondents said they had not been promised anything to join).²⁸ This is even more striking in Nigeria, where 79 per cent of ex-associates said that they were not promised anything when they first came to be with the group. In Niger, by contrast, only 37 per cent said they had not been promised anything, which given the prevalence of ISWAP affiliation among this subsample, may suggest that the group recruited differently than the other faction of Boko Haram.

Of the ex-associates in Chad that had been promised something, 32 per cent mentioned money, 26 per cent said food, medical assistance, and other basic needs, 18 per cent said Jannah or paradise, and 14 per cent noted education. In Cameroon, ex-associates who were promised some form of compensation report mostly Jannah (25 per cent); money (15 per cent); and food, medical assistance, or other basic needs (10 per cent). In Niger, ex-associates who were promised some form of compensation report mostly money (26 per cent), food, medical assistance, or other basic needs (14 per cent), and education (10 per cent). Jannah did not figure as prominently in recruitment promises in Niger but, as “something else” was selected by 24 per cent of ex-associates, this again possibly signals a difference with the message of ISWAP, albeit one that requires further exploration. Across each country, a small percentage reported they were promised weapons (5-8 per cent) and/or marriage assistance (4-6 per cent).

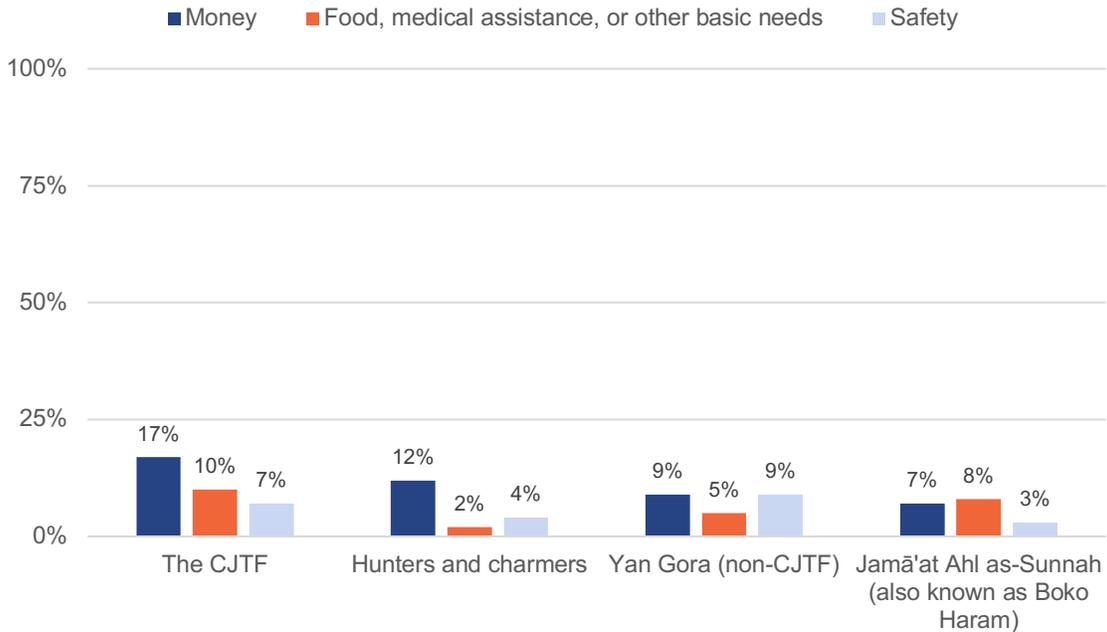
²⁷ This represents 44 per cent of the ex-associates in Chad, 46 per cent in Cameroon, and 38 per cent in Niger.

²⁸ “When you first came to be with [association_last], were you promised any of the following things?”

Figure 12 – Compensation and incentives to recruit offered by Boko Haram groups (Chad, Cameroon, Niger)



In Nigeria, few ex-associates reported being promised anything when they first joined the group. A small number of respondents reported being promised money (7 per cent), food, medical assistance, or other basic needs (8 per cent), and education (5 per cent). Data from the Nigeria baseline survey also provides insights into promises made by armed groups other than Boko Haram, such as the CJTF, Yan Gora, and Hunters and Charmers. The majority of the ex-affiliates from these three groups said that they were not offered anything (67 per cent, 71 per cent and 75 per cent respectively). It is worth noting, however, that while most former CJTF affiliates were not offered anything, 17 per cent reported being offered money, and 10 per cent reported being offered food, medical assistance, or other basic needs. Promises of economic incentives also seem to play a role for other vigilante groups, as 9 per cent of Yan Gora former members, and 12 per cent of former Hunters and Charmers reported that they were promised money.

Figure 13 – Compensation and incentives to recruit offered by type of armed group (Nigeria)

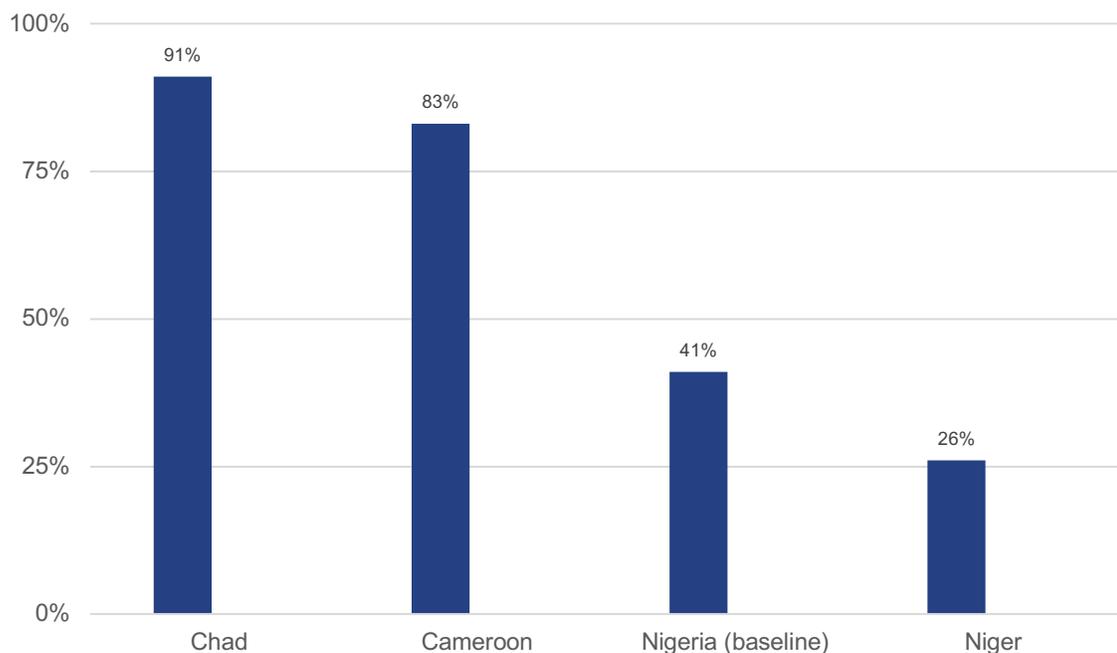
3. High Level of Abductions in Cameroon and Chad, Fewer in Niger and Nigeria

Recognizing that armed group recruitment often occurs along a continuum of coercion, all respondents were asked whether they were ever abducted by Boko Haram or a similar group. Ex-associates were also asked an open-ended question to tell the story of how they first came to be with the armed group. A combination of these questions allowed this study to draw patterns as to why and how people entered the group. It should be noted that physical violence and threats are not the only things that constrain the 'decision' to join an armed group. It is difficult to speak of volition to join an armed group in a protracted conflict context in which neutrality might not be a real option if one wants to protect themselves or their family, and a lack of economic opportunities means there is no way to feed oneself and one's family except through some interaction with armed actors. For example, a young ex-associate described being beset on all sides by armed actors: "At the time, we felt surrounded on all sides by the army, which was killing all the young people it suspected of being part of Boko Haram, so I had no choice but to join the ranks of Boko Haram who could welcome me and even offer me money "

For those who had some agency in their involvement, ex-associates mentioned a personal connection – friends or partners – who facilitated their entry into the group, while others reported joining because of money, basic needs provision or for protection, and then some joined because they initially believed in the group's goals. Especially in Chad and Cameroon, Boko Haram appears to have engaged in widespread coercion to recruit. The data is dramatic in this regard: 91 per cent of Boko Haram ex-associates in Chad and 83 per cent in Cameroon reported having been abducted

by Boko Haram or a related group.²⁹ Open-ended answers about how they came to be with the group tell a similar story. Around three quarters of the respondents in Chad and Cameroon told stories about having been kidnapped or threatened to join the group. In Nigeria, 41 per cent of Boko Haram ex-associates reported in the baseline survey having been abducted by the group. In Niger, a smaller portion of the former associate sample reported having been abducted (26 per cent). Again, the differences in Niger may be tied to the predominance of ISWAP association among ex-associate respondents there and suggest a different approach to recruitment and different application of coercion to fill the ranks.

Figure 14 – Percentages of Boko Haram ex-associates who were abducted



Women and girls and men and boys are all targeted for abduction by Boko Haram. Rates are particularly high in Chad, where 93 per cent of women who were associated with Boko Haram reported being abducted, 89 per cent in Cameroon, and 80 per cent in Niger (out of a small subsample of only 15 respondents).³⁰ In Nigeria, 39 per cent of women and girls ex-associates in the baseline survey reported being abducted. A minority of women also told stories about joining

²⁹ It is worth noting that this may not reflect the true rate of abduction among Boko Haram and faction associates; given the sampling methods, which targeted those coming through defector and reintegration programmes, some of which were only open to associates categorized as low risk, for which abduction may have been a criterion (although this cannot be confirmed given the information available on screening and programme criteria).

³⁰ Some women are taken with their families (“ J’ai été enlevé avec mon mari par Boko Haram lors d’une attaque sur mon village ”); while others are targeted only because they are women (“ La faction shekau a mené une attaque dans la communauté et enlevé les femmes ”), or because of their family ties (“ Mon grand frère faisait partie du groupe ISWAP et c’est comme ça que les éléments de ISWAP sont venus m’enlever ”). Some were taken while very young, because they were kidnapped either alone or with their mothers.

Boko Haram and its factions to follow their husbands, for money, or because they were initially enticed by the group's message.³¹

Men and boys are abducted at slightly lower rates than women and girls in Chad and Cameroon and at much lower rates in Niger. By contrast, men and boys are abducted at slightly higher rates in Nigeria (43 per cent). When they are abducted, men and boys share similar abduction stories than women and girls. Conversely, across Chad, Cameroon, and Niger, men and boys are also more likely to share stories about having joined 'willingly', for example in the hope of a better life.³²

Non-associated community members also report high levels of abductions among their close relatives and the people of their communities. Abductions are reported on a higher scale in Chad, compared to Cameroon and Niger. For example, in Chad, 61 per cent of non-associated respondents reported that close relatives were abducted and 77 per cent reported people from their communities were abducted. In both Niger and Cameroon respectively, 36 per cent of respondents reported that close relatives had been abducted. In Niger and Cameroon, more than half of respondents (53 per cent and 58 per cent respectively) knew people from their communities who were abducted. In Nigeria, 27 per cent of non-associated respondents in the baseline survey reported having close relatives who were abducted, and nearly half (49 per cent) said they knew people in their communities who were abducted. In the midline survey in Nigeria (which was predominantly composed of ex-associates) 39 per cent of respondents said they had close relatives and 57 per cent knew people in their communities who were abducted by Boko Haram.

Reported rates of wilful involvement with Boko Haram and its factions are lower. Non-associated respondents reported that fewer close relatives willingly joined the groups (10 per cent in Niger, 20 per cent in Cameroon, and 30 per cent in Chad). Perceptions of how non-associated community members came to be with the groups differ somewhat, with 46 per cent of non-associated respondents in Niger, 33 per cent in Cameroon, and 40 per cent in Chad reporting that people from their communities willingly joined. In Nigeria, however, only 7 per cent of non-associated community members in the baseline survey are aware of close relatives who willingly joined Boko Haram, but 45 per cent thought that either many or a few members of their communities joined willingly.

B. Life Inside Boko Haram and its Factions

Respondents were asked about their lives and experiences in their armed group/faction, notably around conflict experiences, roles and responsibilities, social ties within the group (e.g., marriage and children) and outside them, and relationships that may influence their exit from the group.

³¹ To follow their husbands ("je suis partie avec mon époux car il fait partie de la faction shekau"), and in a few cases, because they were drawn to the group's message ("Quelques membres de notre communauté étaient revenus pour sensibiliser afin de rejoindre le groupe de shekau. Convaincus par le message de ces membres, alors nous avons décidé volontairement de rejoindre le groupe de shekau la nuit par pirogue"), or for the money: ("J'ai entendu que une fois arrivée chez boko haram tu auras beaucoup d'argent et j'ai profité d'aller avec eux").

³² For example: "J'avais des amis qui faisaient partie de ISWAP. C'est ainsi que ce dernier m'a fait savoir que là-bas la vie est belle car il y a de quoi à manger suffisamment et que j'aurai même beaucoup d'argent et une moto une fois que je décide d'intégrer la faction. Vu ma situation de misère et la confiance que j'avais pour cet ami là, j'ai décidé le suivre."

1. Roles and Responsibilities in the Daily Activities of the Group

Across the four countries of the Lake Chad Basin, the data shows that traditional gender roles were replicated in the responsibilities assigned to or taken up by men and boys and women and girls when they were with Boko Haram or one of its factions. For example, in Chad, Cameroon, and Niger, fighting is reported more frequently by men/boys (20-30 per cent) than by women/girls (0-4 per cent). Other activities with security or ideological components such as recruitment, preaching, guarding at checkpoints, and spying were also reported among men/boys, but were rarely mentioned by women/girls (less than 1 per cent). Manual or physical activities such as driving, trading, and farm work follow the same pattern. In Nigeria, 18 per cent of male ex-associates reported fighting, 17 per cent working on the farm or with livestock, 17 per cent collecting firewood, water, or supplies, 13 per cent guarding checkpoints, 12 per cent driving, 7 per cent cooking, 4 per cent recruiting or preaching and 3 per cent spying. In contrast to the Chad, Cameroon, and Niger data, a sizable portion of the male respondents in Nigeria also reported roles that are often played by women and girls, including collecting firewood (17 per cent), cooking (7 per cent), and cleaning (4 per cent).

Prior research has argued that women and girls who are involved with Boko Haram or one of its factions were often cast – voluntarily or through coercion – into new roles, in part outside the domestic sphere.³³ The data collected for these surveys do not bear that out: few security or operational roles are reported by women, most of whom describe performing domestic functions within the group. For example, in Nigeria, no women or girls reported fighting, recruiting, preaching, guarding, driving, or spying activities, whereas 20 per cent reported cooking and 14 per cent said they performed cleaning activities. Cooking and cleaning are reported by women and girls 20 per cent and 25 per cent respectively in Chad, 30 per cent and 40 per cent respectively in Niger, 40 per cent and 55 per cent respectively in Cameroon,³⁴ but only by between 0-9 per cent of men and boys across all countries.

Despite the focus in the media on the role of women in Boko Harams as fighters' wives, very few women and girls in Chad and Niger and relatively few in Cameroon described their role within the group as being a wife or taking care of children.³⁵ For example, 13 per cent of women in Cameroon reported that they were a wife during their time with the group, and only 5 per cent in Chad and one woman respondent in Niger.³⁶ In Nigeria, women report taking care of children (10 per cent) and being a wife (8 per cent) when describing their roles. This result is interesting and does not align with other data and experiences collected as part of the project, raising the question as to whether respondents understood the certain listed options as formal "roles."³⁷

³³ See, International Crisis Group, "[Nigeria: Women and the Boko Haram Insurgency](#)," *Africa Report* 242, (2016).

³⁴ These percentages represent the following numbers of female ex-associated respondents: 41 and 31 in Chad (out of 161), 140 and 98 in Cameroon (out of 261), and 6 and 4 respondents in Niger (out of 15).

³⁵ For example, only 8 per cent of female ex-associates in Chad reported taking care of children while they were with the group, and only 3 per cent in Cameroon. 20 per cent in Niger said so, but this only represents 3 women out of the 15 ex-associates. 13 per cent of women in Cameroon reported that they were a wife during the time in the group, but only 5 per cent in Cameroon, and solely 1 female individual in Niger.

³⁶ Similarly, only 8 per cent of female ex-associates in Chad reported taking care of children while they were with the group, and only 3 per cent in Cameroon. 20 per cent in Niger said so, but this only represents 3 women out of the 15 ex-associates.

³⁷ The question read "During your entire time with [answer to "Which group were you with last?"], did you do any of the following things, even if it was just for one day?" and a list of answer options was read out loud and respondents were asked to note each one that applied to their experience.

In Chad and Niger, women and girls were also seemingly more likely to be left without any role in the group. More than half reported not having any responsibilities (50 per cent and 53 per cent respectively),³⁸ whereas fewer men reported not having any roles or duties (24 per cent and 30 per cent). The gender differential was not present in the same way in Cameroon. Not reporting an activity may be explained by the wish of some respondents to avoid social stigma attached to having been a wife, slave, or fighter; by the fact that some respondents were kept captive or in detention; and that some respondents may have understood the question as solely pertaining to roles in the group's military activities.

The Nigeria baseline data suggest that traditional gender roles are often challenged in non-Boko Haram types of groups. For example, while women former members of Boko Haram did not report engaging in military activities, women who had been with the CJTF, Yan Gora, and Hunters and Charmers reported engaging in fighting (14 per cent, 20 per cent and 31 per cent of women former members of the respective groups). In the same vein, 7-10 per cent of women formerly with these groups reported recruiting or preaching activities. More often, (52 per cent of women from the CJTF, 30 per cent from the Yan Gora, and 46 per cent of Hunters and Charmers) women reported serving as guards or checkpoint activities, which is not totally unexpected given that screening is often done by people of the same gender (e.g., women search other women at checkpoints or entry points).

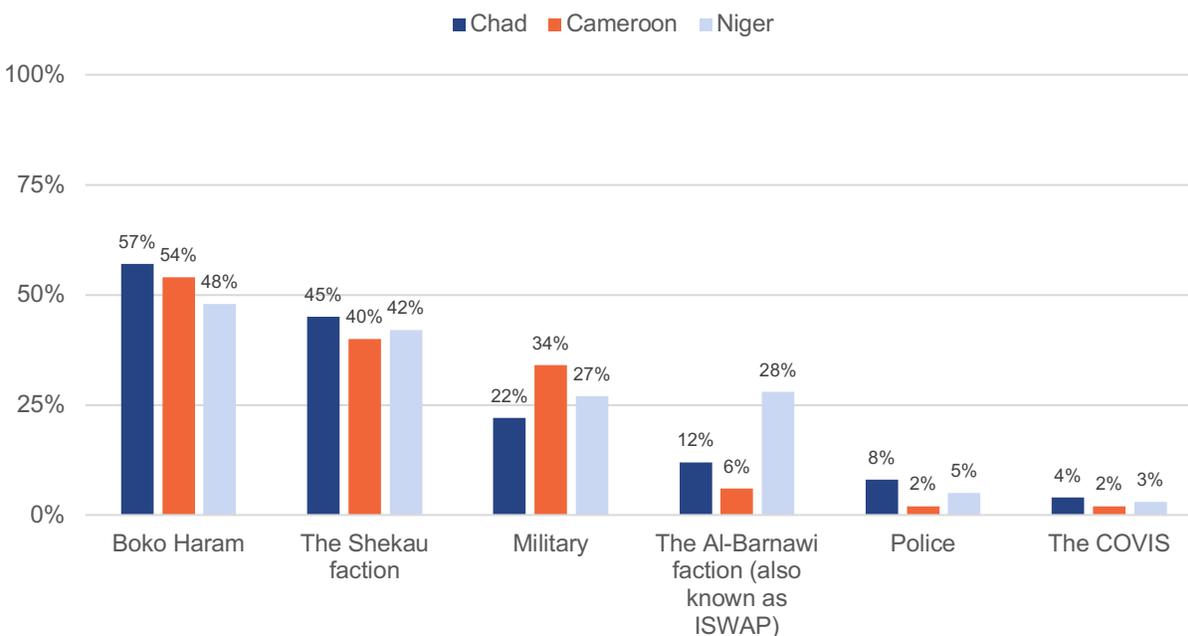
2. Risks to Personal Safety and Engagement in Violent Acts

Life in Boko Haram and its factions carried a number of serious risks to one's safety and security. Several indicators were used to measure engagement with violence, being put in danger of being hurt or killed, and the use of drugs and weapons within the groups. Some risks of physical harm, such as injuries or killings can result from confrontations with the military or other groups/factions, but also internally as punishment by Boko Haram. Across Chad, Niger, and Cameroon, the overwhelming majority (75-90 per cent) of ex-associates reported feeling in danger of being hurt or killed during their time with the group.³⁹ In Nigeria, 40 per cent of Boko Haram former members reported this feeling in the baseline survey. In most cases, it was the group itself that put them in such danger. Ex-associates in Chad, Cameroon, and Niger designated Boko Haram, the Shekau faction, and the military as the three main responsible groups for putting them in danger (40-50 per cent for Boko Haram, 36-39 per cent for Shekau, 20-30 per cent for military). It is worth noting that the Al-Barnawi faction is designated by 24 per cent of respondents in Niger, but less frequently in Cameroon (5 per cent) and Chad (11 per cent). To some extent, this matches association patterns in the data wherein there was a higher proportion of ex-associates who were associated with ISWAP in Niger than in any other country.

³⁸ "During your entire time with [association_last], did you do any of the following things, even if it was just for one day?"

³⁹ It is worth noting that this percentage is similar for non-associated community members who expressed feelings in danger of being hurt or killed as a result of the conflict (except in Cameroon, where 91 per cent of ex-associates and 71 per cent of non-associated community members expressed this). Some localities visited in Cameroon are however far from the epicentre of the conflict, and hence may experience these risks differently.

Figure 15 – Entities responsible for danger to ex-associates (Chad, Cameroon, Niger)



When asked about their own involvement in violence, the majority of former combatant/former associate respondents did not admit to actively participating in acts of violence endangering others in the group or outside the group, nor necessarily received the means to do so. Across Chad, Niger, and Cameroon, 80-90 per cent of ex-associates did not report having committed acts of violence against other persons, such as beatings, torture, killings, or sexual assault and 70-85 per cent said they did not use a weapon against anyone during their time with the group. The rates of use of weapons or engaging in any of the forms of violence described above are, however, slightly higher in Niger than in Cameroon and Chad, which seems to make sense given that 75-85 per cent of ex-associates in the latter two countries reported not receiving a weapon during their time with the group. Rates were lower in the Nigeria midline survey, where 10 per cent of Boko Haram ex-associates reported receiving a weapon while they were in the group. The situation in Niger is different, as almost half of ex-associates report having received a weapon. While the figures presented here are large majorities, it is worth noting that still a significant number of ex-associates admitted to engaging in violence (10-30 per cent depending on the violent act specified and the country). For example, 5 per cent of ex-associates in Nigeria, 11 per cent in Chad, 14 per cent in Cameroon, and 28 per cent in Niger admitted to having used a weapon against someone during their time with the group. Similarly, 7 per cent of ex-associates in Nigeria, 10 per cent in Chad and Cameroon, and 17 per cent in Niger admitted to having beaten or tortured someone during their time with the group. The trend is similar for admitting to killing someone (4 per cent in Nigeria, 8 per cent in Chad, 13 per cent in Cameroon, 18 per cent in Niger). Finally, 11 per cent of ex-associates in Chad and 14 per cent in Cameroon admitted that, during their time with the group, they had sex with someone forcefully, or touch them in any way, without their consent (but only 3-4 per cent in Niger and Nigeria). It is worth noting that the rates of refusals to answer these questions are higher than usual (between 2-4 per cent of the respondents refused to answer these questions), and it is quite likely that not everyone who has engaged in conflict-related violence admits to doing so.

There have been numerous reports of Boko Haram pushing drugs on those in its ranks, particularly Tramadol before military operations.⁴⁰ The MEAC data suggest that indeed drug use is prevalent, but still taboo to admit to. Around half the ex-associates surveyed in each country (57 per cent in Chad and Cameroon, 63 per cent in Niger, and 50 per cent in the Nigeria baseline survey) reported other people in the armed group used drugs.⁴¹ Ex-associates in the four countries, however, overwhelmingly deny having used drugs themselves during their time with the group (80-90 per cent in Chad, Cameroon, and Niger, and 96 per cent in the Nigeria baseline survey). This can be explained by religious sensitivities and social stigma attached to admitting drug use.

3. Family Life and Family Ties

The MEAC data suggests that many ex-associates had intimate relationships with other people who were members or lived under their armed group. Given Boko Haram's history of abducting women and girls and forcing them to marry fighters, this was expected.⁴² A sizable minority of ex-associates in Cameroon (42 per cent) and Niger (39 per cent) were married to someone from their armed group, and a smaller minority in Chad (11 per cent). In the baseline survey in Nigeria, 25 per cent of ex-associates who were with Boko Haram reported that they were married to someone from the group. Women and girl ex-associates were more likely to report being married to someone in their group than men and boys who had left. This data suggests that marriages in the group – particularly forced marriages for women and girls – were common, even if women and girls were reticent to describe themselves as having played the role of “wife” or “mother” as described in [section IV.B](#).

Many of these marriages were forced. In Chad and Cameroon, 55 per cent of the ex-associates surveyed reported they did not marry voluntarily. The overwhelming majority of these respondents were women and girls (95 per cent in Cameroon and 66 per cent in Chad). In contrast, in Niger, 93 per cent of the ex-associates claimed their marriages were voluntary for all parties. Indeed, it is essential to remember that the Niger sample of ex-associates was predominately male (85 per cent) and while men and boys claim their marriages were not forced, their wives may not describe the unions the same way. In the Nigeria baseline survey, 19 per cent of all the women and girls who had been with Boko Haram said they had a forced marriage.

Even if former associate marriages came about under duress and during one's time with the group, it is not clear that leaving the group necessarily enables an individual, especially a girl or a woman, to leave their spouse. A focus group conducted in March 2022 in Maiduguri with women who had

⁴⁰ A former combatant for Boko Haram interviewed by the BBC said, "When you are going for a military operation you will be given it to take, otherwise if you take it, you will be killed...They told us when you take it you will be less afraid - you will be strong and courageous." ["Nigeria's Tramadol crisis: The drug fuelling death, despair and Boko Haram," BBC](#), 1 June 2018.

⁴¹ A similar trend is reported by non-associated community members respondents about the places where they live now in Niger and Cameroon, but less so in Chad (only 40 per cent).

⁴² The founder of Boko Haram, Mohammed Yusuf, urged women to join the group in an effort to “broaden the group's membership, and enabl[e] women to become wives for male combatants and mothers for the next generation of fighters. This strategy was also designed to encourage men to join the group. Under the leadership of Abubakar Shekau, who took over after Yusuf's death in 2009, Boko Haram began abducting women and girls.” Jeannine Ella Abatan, ["The role of women in West Africa's violent extremist groups," ISS Today](#), 12 October 2018.

been forced into Boko Haram when they were children highlighted that women are often stuck in forced marriages to former Boko Haram fighters because they as women cannot seek a divorce. The women the MEAC researchers spoke to were unequivocal, even in front of their co-wives, that they would leave these men immediately if they could. Despite all the focus in DDR-type programmes on breaking operations structures and bonds between combatants, there are still enduring bonds that remain after demobilization, which disproportionately tie women to the legacy of their armed group engagement. Given the strategic objectives outlined in the RSS on protecting and empowering women and girls (SO37-SO38), this issue may be important to investigate further.

C. Exiting Boko Haram and/or One of its Factions

Respondents were asked how and why they ultimately separated from Boko Haram and/or one of its factions. Other indicators such as continued engagement with the group, relationship with the group, or missing things from the group after having exited allowed the MEAC team to assess enduring ties with the groups.

The overwhelming majority of respondents across all four countries (70-80 per cent in Chad, Cameroon, and Niger, and 86 per cent in the Nigeria baseline survey) reported that they escaped. While around half of the respondents in Chad, Niger, and Cameroon, and 65 per cent in the Nigeria baseline survey considered it possible to leave the group while they were still involved in it, there were real concerns about what could happen to them if they were intercepted. When asked about what would happen to them if they tried to escape or defect, most former associate respondents in Chad, Niger, Cameroon, and Nigeria thought they would be killed (70-82 per cent). In Chad, Cameroon, and Niger, 25-43 per cent of former associates thought they would be imprisoned, compared to 13 per cent in the Nigeria baseline survey.

In Cameroon and Niger, ex-associates surveyed wanted to leave the group (78 per cent and 83 per cent respectively), but in Chad, only 47 per cent of respondents reported this desire to leave. In the Nigeria midline survey, a staggering 97 per cent of ex-associates said they wanted to leave the group. Across the four countries, male respondents express their desire to leave in slightly higher percentages than women. The same goes for children respondents compared to adult respondents, except in Nigeria where the trend is reversed.⁴³

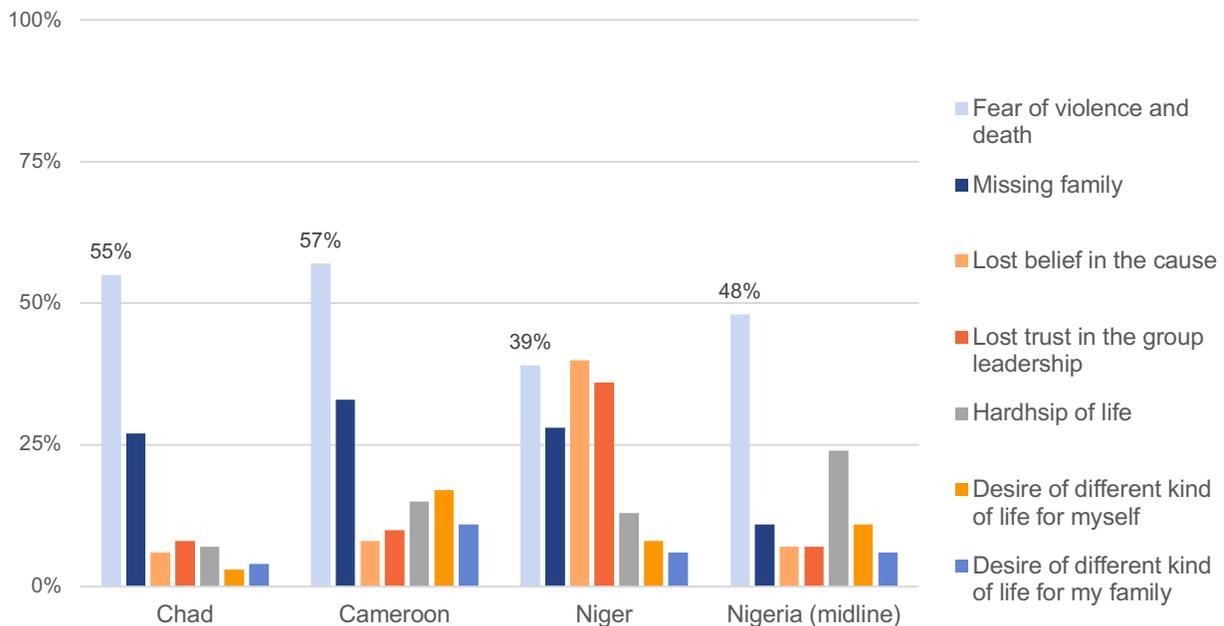
Reasons for leaving are consistent in Chad and Cameroon, and mostly pertain to fear of violence and death (55-57 per cent). Insecurity is also an important motivation for exit in the Nigeria midline survey, where 48 per cent of ex-associates reported fear of violence and death. The insecurity felt by ex-associates is reflective of the internal violence in the group, the violent rivalries between its

⁴³ The rates for men/boys and women/girls were similar across all four countries (within 5 percentage points), but in most cases there were noticeable differences by age. More children reported wanting to leave than adults (59 per cent of children vs. 43 per cent of adults in Chad, 96 per cent of children vs. 78 per cent of adults in Cameroon, and 100 per cent of children (notably a very small subsample) to 82 per cent of adults). In Nigeria, the rates are relatively similar with slightly lower rates for children (92 per cent compared to 97 per cent for adults).

factions, and the exposure to military offences.⁴⁴ By contrast, in Niger, it seems that more people disengage because their religious or ideological expectations were not met by their group/faction. For example, in Niger, 40 per cent of ex-associates surveyed said they had lost faith in the cause and 36 per cent said they lost trust in the group/faction's leadership. It is worth noting that 7 per cent of the former associated respondents in the Nigeria midline survey also reported a loss of trust in the group's leadership or a loss of belief in the cause as a reason to exit.

Missing one's family was also a strong motivator for exiting Boko Haram and its factions across Chad, Cameroon, and Niger. In these countries, a sizable minority of former associate respondents (between 27 per cent and 33 per cent) left because they missed their families. The number drops to 11 per cent for ex-associates in the Nigeria midline survey. Finally, the data indicate that hardship and poor living conditions are also a factor, at least in Cameroon, Niger, and Nigeria. For example, in Nigeria, 24 per cent of respondents in the midline survey considered hardships within the group as a motivational factor to exit. Although at lower rates, respondents across the four countries also reported a desire for a different kind of life for themselves.

Figure 16 – Reason for leaving Boko Haram and/or one of its factions



Leaving the group is one step towards demobilization and reintegration, but ex-associates can maintain ties even after they have physically separated from it, raising concerns about re-recruitment. Although the majority of ex-associates in Chad, Cameroon, and Niger did not continue to help the group/faction after they exit (60-80 per cent), a sizable minority given the concern at hand report having continued to engage in some actions for the benefit of the group. The type of activities and the percentages of respondents who continued to engage in them vary across the countries. In Chad and Cameroon, most ex-associates who continued activities on behalf of their former group/faction

⁴⁴Remadji Hoinathy, "[Why effective handling of Boko Haram deserters matters](#)," *ISS Today*, 30 March 2021.

reported engaging in things like collecting firewood, water, or supplies (15 per cent and 12 per cent respectively) or cooking or cleaning (21 per cent and 15 per cent respectively). A smaller percentage (8-9 per cent) reported engaging in fighting or defending the community. In Niger, of those who remained involved, 17 per cent reported fighting or defending the community. Asked why they continued to help their former group in these ways, most respondents reported fear for their lives. The data is different in Nigeria, where 86 per cent of all ex-associates and ex-affiliates surveyed in the midline (from Boko Haram and other armed groups like the CJTF and vigilantes) reported that they did not continue to support the group in any way, which may be in part explained by the fact that much of the midline sample is comprised of ex-associates who are part of reintegration programmes, some of them in the communities to which they have returned. Only 2 per cent reported fighting or guarding, and 1 per cent spying or carrying or delivering items. Further analysis is needed to determine how the pull to stay engaged differs across armed groups (e.g., Boko Haram versus the CJTF).

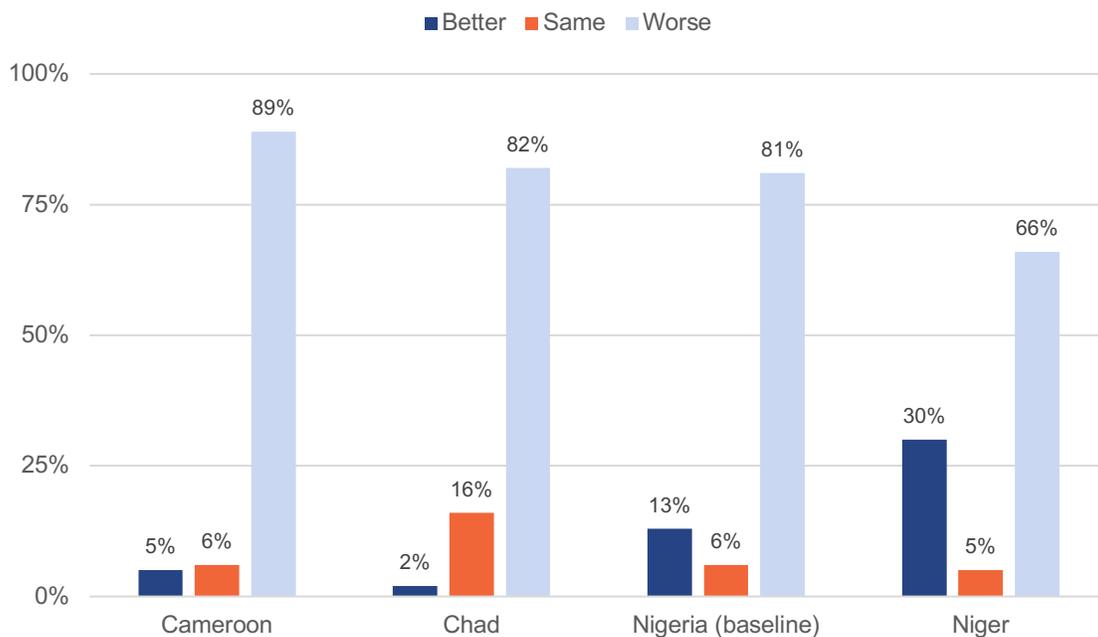
Given concerns about re-recruitment, it is important to examine how and why ex-associates maintain ties or continue actions on behalf of their former group, but it is important to remember that most ex-associates want nothing to do with their former group. Nearly all ex-associates are clear that nothing would entice them to return: 97 per cent of the ex-associates in Chad and Cameroon, and 92 per cent in Niger said nothing could entice them to return to the armed group they were associated with, nor would they ever consider joining a different armed group. In the Nigeria baseline survey, 97 per cent of Boko Haram ex-associates also said nothing could incite them to go back. Overwhelmingly, ex-associates who were with Boko Haram want to return to civilian life.

In Nigeria, where the sample included more non-State security outfits, there were interesting differences for ex-affiliates of the CJTF, Yan Gora, and Hunters and Charmers. Although the percentages of ex-affiliates who said nothing could entice them to return to these groups remain high, they are lower than with Boko Haram. For example, respectively for the CJTF, Yan Gora, and Hunters and Charmers, 71 per cent, 82 per cent and 60 per cent said they would never go back. Of those who listed hypothetical reasons for remobilizing, 11 per cent for former CJTF members, 8 per cent for former Yan Gora members, and 7 per cent for former Hunters and Charmers members said they would do so to protect their community from Boko Haram.

This desire to leave Boko Haram and its factions and stay out of the group makes sense given that most ex-associates consider their lives to have been worse when they were with the group than they are today, despite the fact that many are struggling now (explored further in [section VIII](#)). These findings speak to the relative well-being of those exiting Boko Haram and hint at possible progress toward **RSS Indicator 12.3b**. As shown in figure 17, the proportions are not as stark in Niger. While most ex-associates in Niger say their life was worse in the group/faction, they do so at a lower rate than in Cameroon, Chad, and Nigeria. Indeed, more ex-associates in Niger report life being better in the group than outside it, compared to the rates in the other countries (30 per cent compared to 13 per cent in Nigeria, 5 per cent in Cameroon, and 2 per cent in Chad). The breakdown by gender and age among respondents who considered their lives to worsen while they were with the group provides interesting results. Across Chad, Cameroon, and Nigeria, there were higher percentages of women respondents who considered their lives were worse when they were with the group than

their male counterparts. For example, in Chad and Cameroon, 78-79 per cent of men said their lives were worse while with the group, whereas 90-94 per cent of women said so. In Nigeria, the trend is the same, with 61 per cent of men and 78 per cent of women saying life was worse with the group. In Niger, however, the trend is reversed: 69 per cent of men said their lives were worse while with the group, while only 47 per cent of women said so (although this finding should be caveated given the small subsample size of 15 women ex-associates respondents in Niger). It is also worth noting that overall, there are higher percentages of adults who considered their lives as worse compared to children. This is especially noticeable in Nigeria (67 per cent of adults, 52 per cent of children).

Figure 17 – Boko Haram ex-associates on whether their lives were better, the same, or worse when they were with the group



This difference in Niger may speak to the unmet expectations of those who have exited armed groups and tried to transition to civilian life there, and possibly to their different relationships with the groups they were part of. To the first point, in contrast with the other countries, most ex-associates in Niger reported joining Shekau or ISWAP willingly and the proportion who were with ISWAP is higher than anywhere else. Regarding their reintegration progress, most ex-associates in Niger are now out of the Goudoumaria Centre and are experiencing life “post-association.” Those who went through Goudoumaria answered the offer of the Niger Government to lay down their arms for promises such as skills training and rehabilitation to facilitate their transition. Yet, many may be disappointed by the reality of re-entering civilian life, notably the difficulty of finding a job. There are indications that many had to sell the livelihood kits and trade materials they received in the Centre, simply because there was no demand on the market for the skills they had learned.⁴⁵ By contrast, in Cameroon, ex-associates are still in transit centres, and thus potentially still hopeful about their

⁴⁵ Jeannine Ella Abatan and Remadji Hoinathy, “[Getting Goudoumaria right: are Boko Haram defectors reintegrating safely?](#),” *ISS Today*, 8 December 2021.

reintegration prospects. The marked difference between some of the figures in Niger and the other three countries of the Lake Chad Basin may indeed be explained by the different composition of the former combatant/former associate sample (e.g., more willingly joined, more were associated with ISWAP than in other contexts), and wherein the reintegration process they are (e.g., already back in the community and in many cases struggling with their economic transition).

V. The Conflict and Humanitarian Context for Reintegration

Non-associated community members and ex-associates were both asked about life in their community and what presents the biggest problems for them, as well as whom they perceived as the biggest threat to the safety of their communities. These questions were posed in order to understand how the conflict continues to impact people today as well as to place it in the larger context of challenges faced in the region. It was also the goal to determine if the potential precipitating factors for association with Boko Haram and its factions discussed in [section III](#) are present today and should be addressed in prevention interventions to reduce the likelihood of continued recruitment into Boko Haram and its factions.

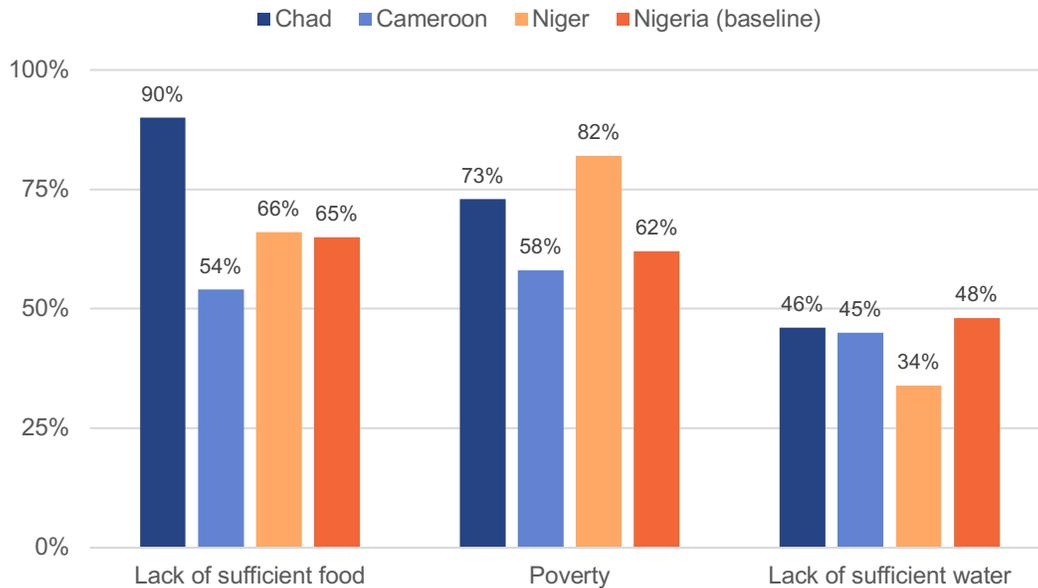
A. Greatest Concerns - Poverty, Food Insecurity, and Water

Despite the international focus on the Boko Haram insurgency, the humanitarian and economic crises present the greatest day-to-day concerns for most respondents across the region. As seen in figure 18, Poverty, food insecurity, and, to a slightly lesser degree, insufficient access to water are the three biggest problems reported by the respondents across the four countries. Notably, conflict violence is not one of them. The MEAC data reinforces reporting from the humanitarian community about the grave situation in the Lake Chad Basin region. For example, in January 2022, just two months before the MEAC survey, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) estimated that more than 3.3 million people were struggling with food insecurity across the Lake Chad Basin, a number that increased to 4.1 million in April 2022.⁴⁶ This regional crisis is driven and/or exacerbated by the cumulative effects of extreme poverty; constricted access to agricultural lands, food distribution and basic services as a result of the conflict; climate change; and the COVID-19 pandemic. It should be noted that the surveys detailed herein were administered in places that were not actively under assault or under the rule of an armed group, which may contribute to respondents ranking security lower than other concerns. It is quite possible that populations more frequently impacted by armed group violence or under armed group rule would have ranked security

⁴⁶ OCHA, "[Lake Chad Basin: Humanitarian Snapshot](#)," United Nations, 17 January 2022.

concerns higher in their list, but even there, hunger and other challenges can be constant sources of misery that are exacerbated and intertwined with conflict dynamics.

Figure 18 – Three biggest problems reported in the communities



Physical and food insecurity in the region has led to an increase in displacement and has limited access to basic services and humanitarian aid for affected populations. The crisis has forced close to 3 million people to leave their homes across the Lake Chad Basin (2 million in Nigeria alone), making many of them even more dependent on humanitarian assistance.⁴⁷ The pervasiveness of displacement in the region is captured by the MEAC study. Displaced persons constitute the majority of the respondents across Chad, Niger, and Cameroon (60-70 per cent). This is in part out of design, as several IDP camps were chosen for the randomized survey in order to understand the experiences and perspectives of communities impacted by the conflict, some of which exist today on maps in name only as the entire population has fled. As such, many survey respondents were living in IDP camps (72 per cent in Chad, 40-50 per cent in Cameroon and Niger). In Nigeria, 28 per cent of respondents were living in IDP camps at the time of participating in the baseline survey. More broadly, 82 per cent of all respondents in the baseline survey in Nigeria reported having been displaced at some point because of the conflict.

Displacement exacerbates hardship. Displaced persons often find refuge in communities already facing their own challenges and resource scarcity. Many IDP camps – whether organized sites or informal ones – lack sufficient food, clean drinking water, shelter, and sanitation, and IDPs remain extremely dependent on humanitarian aid. As a result and illustrated by figures 19a, 19b, and 19c below, concerns over poverty, food, and to a lesser extent water are much higher among displaced respondents in Chad, Niger, and Cameroon – whether they reside in IDP camps, informal sites, or

⁴⁷ Ibid.

other communities – than non-displaced survey respondents.⁴⁸ That said, the rates among the non-displaced are also quite high and speak to the pervasiveness of the humanitarian crisis in the region.

Figure 19a – Poverty, food, and water concerns among displaced and non-displaced respondents (Chad)

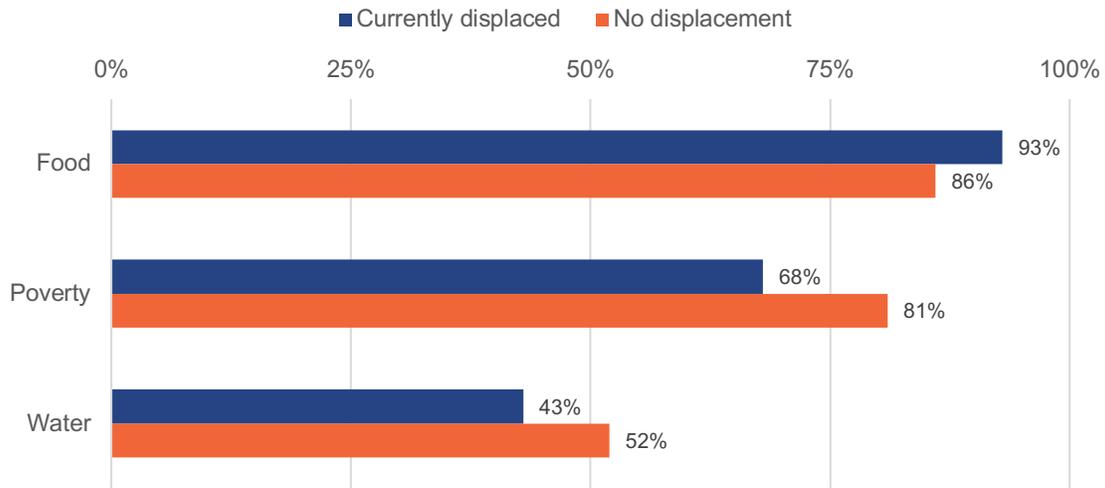
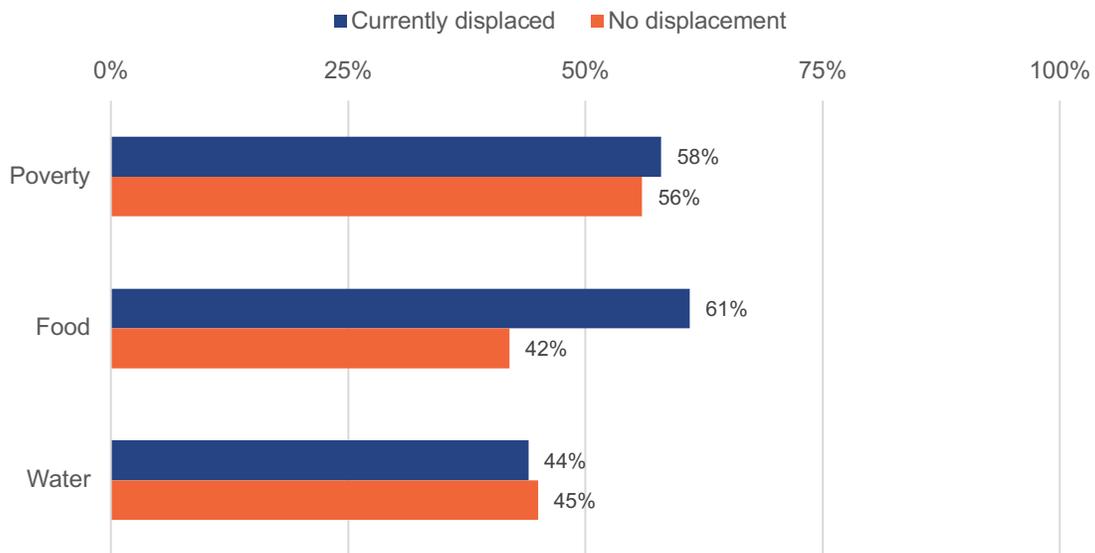
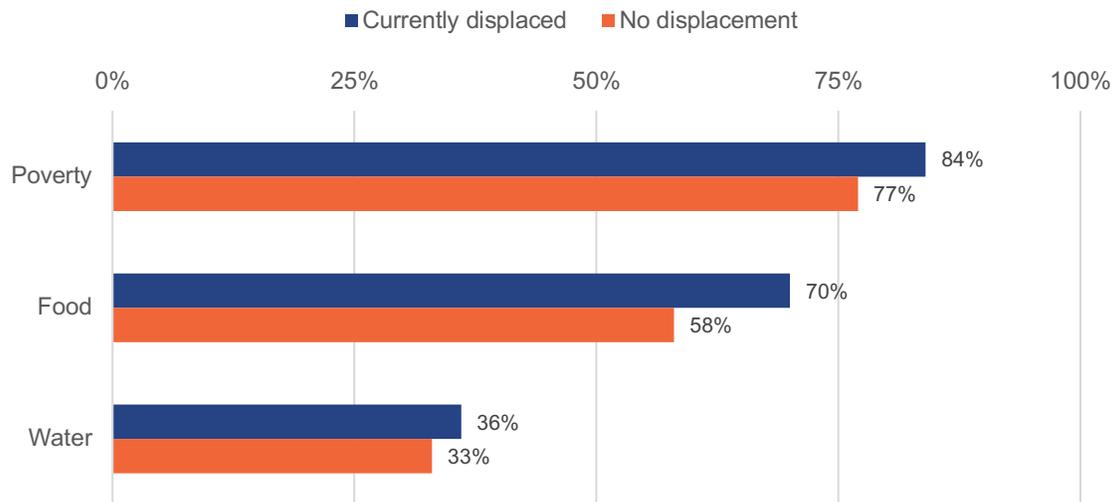


Figure 19b – Poverty, food, and water concerns among displaced and non-displaced respondents (Cameroon)



⁴⁸ Questions about displacement were asked slightly differently in the Nigeria surveys preventing a direct comparison here.

Figure 19c – Poverty, food, and water concerns among displaced and non-displaced respondents (Niger)



B. Greatest Threats to Community Safety

When asked specifically about security, Boko Haram is most frequently named by respondents as the biggest threat to their safety in Chad, Cameroon, Niger, and Nigeria (88 per cent in Chad, 56 per cent in Cameroon, 41 per cent in Niger, and around 33 per cent in the Nigeria baseline survey).⁴⁹ Respondents were permitted to provide multiple answers and many chose to name not only Boko Haram but its factions: in Chad, the Shekau faction (41 per cent of respondents) and ISWAP (19 per cent) were mentioned the second and third most frequently. The data suggest that respondents in Niger and Cameroon either do not differentiate between the group's factions in the same way or have different experiences with the factions than the respondents in Chad do. Fewer respondents in Cameroon and Niger named Shekau's faction (17 per cent and 21 per cent, respectively) or ISWAP (1 per cent and 13 per cent respectively). The same trend appears in Nigeria, where 33 per cent of the baseline survey respondents specifically named JAS as a threat, and only 1 per cent named ISWAP.

This disparity may reflect the common narrative about the two factions and the way they operate. The majority of respondents consider that there is a difference between the two Boko Haram factions (61 per cent in Chad, 56 per cent in Cameroon, 76 per cent in Niger, and 47 per cent in the Nigeria midline survey). The majority of those who recognize a difference believe that the Shekau faction would be the worst for their communities, compared to Al-Barnawi (67-73 per cent). The majority of

⁴⁹ By contrast, when asked what the biggest problems in their communities are, only a minority of respondents in Chad and Niger name Boko Haram (13 per cent and 11 per cent respectively). It is however quite high in Cameroon (35 per cent). Thus, Boko Haram is viewed as a main threat for the communities among other threatening actors, but not as one of the biggest problems to the communities among a wide range of other problems, notably related to living conditions.

respondents reported that the Shekau faction engages in indiscriminate attacks against civilians, purposely targeting villages and communities, whereas the Al-Barnawi faction is reported as only targeting the military. For example, in Nigeria, some respondents from the community phone survey distinguished between the two factions by saying: “Boko haram [JAS] kills everyone but ISWAP only fights the government,” “ISWAP members do not kill civilians while Boko Haram kills everybody” and that “ISWAP protests peacefully.” Alternatively, other respondents said: “they are all terrorists” and “they are all the same.”

Boko Haram and its factions, while most frequently named, do not represent the only threats to communities. Bandits or thieves are considered a threat by 23 per cent of the respondents in Cameroon, 11 per cent in Niger, 8 per cent in Chad, and 6 per cent in the Nigeria baseline survey. Non-State/volunteer security outfits (VSOs) like Yan Gora, COVI/COVIS, Hunters and Charmers, and Zaraguina, and formal security providers like the police and military were selected by less than 1-2 per cent of the respondents in Chad, Cameroon, Niger, and in the Nigeria baseline survey.

More frequently cited as a security threat than informal or formal security forces were youths. Youths in the community are considered by a sizable minority as a security issue in Niger (12 per cent of the respondents) and to a lesser extent in Cameroon (5 per cent of the respondents). By contrast, only 4 per cent in the Nigeria baseline survey and less than 1 per cent of the respondents in Chad considered them as a threat, which may be explained by the role youth play in communities there. When asked about security providers, 13 per cent of the respondents in Chad reported that youths in the community are one of the main security providers, as discussed in [section X](#).

VI. Experience with Boko Haram in the Communities

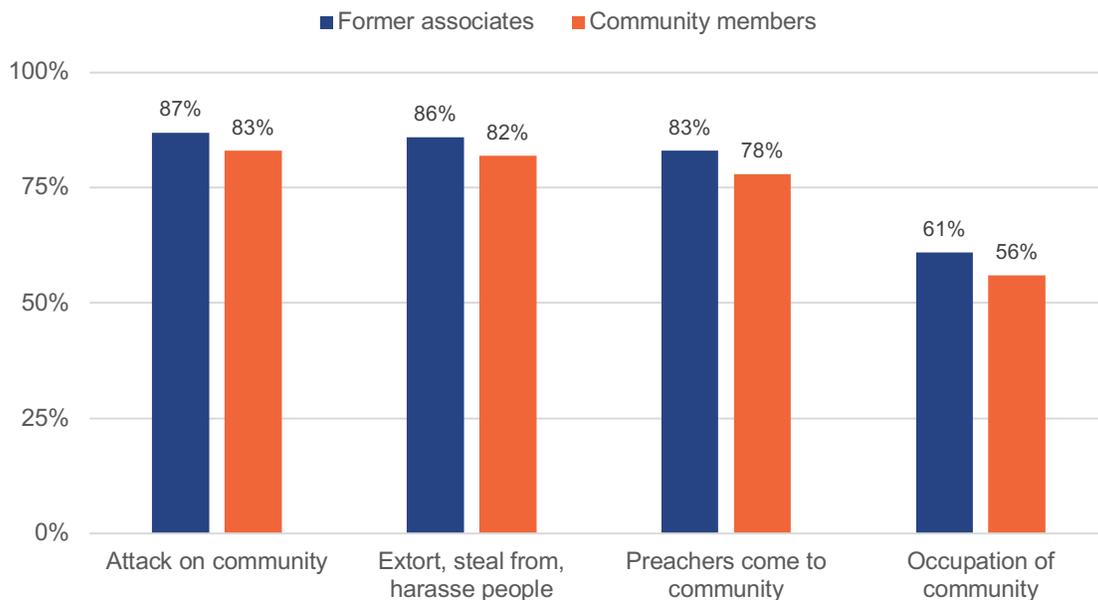
This section examines conflict experiences - both for ex-associates from Boko Haram or one of its factions and non-associated community members who were never involved with an armed group. The data on victimization presented herein and experiences with Boko Haram and other armed groups are examined to understand the needs of ex-associates reintegrating back into their communities and those of the communities, as well as the potential source of community resistance to reintegration.

A. Presence of Boko Haram

The survey sample has been deeply impacted by the insecurity and violence across the Lake Chad Basin.⁵⁰ The overwhelming majority of respondents reported violent acts from Boko Haram or similar groups against their communities. The survey specifically targeted locations impacted by conflict, but the data suggests that that impact was felt widely across communities. Most respondents and their families have been subject to extortion, theft, harassment, and attacks. On average, most respondents across all countries reported Boko Haram harassed, stole from, and attacked their communities. A significant percentage of respondents lived under Boko Haram occupation (29 per cent in Cameroon to 58 per cent in Chad). Not all victimization, or engagement with the group and its faction, however, occurred during the occupation. Respondents reported the presence of preachers from Boko Haram came to their communities – especially in Chad – at higher rates than during the occupation.

Disaggregating experiences with Boko Haram for non-associated community members and ex-associates highlights some differences for certain countries. As seen in figure 20b, in Cameroon, ex-associates reported these actions of Boko Haram or similar groups in their communities at higher rates than non-associated community members, likely suggesting that ex-associates may have become involved as the result of occupation or an attack on their community. A similar trend is apparent in the Nigeria baseline survey, and to a lesser extent, in Chad and Niger.

Figure 20a – Reported Boko Haram activity (Chad)



⁵⁰ This subsection looks at the experience of community with armed groups such as Boko Haram, through the following questions: “Did fighters from Boko Haram or another group like this ever come to your community to extort, steal from, or otherwise harass people?”; “Did fighters from Boko Haram or another group like this ever conduct an attack on your community?”; “Did any preachers from Boko Haram or another group like this ever come to your community?” and “Did Boko Haram or another group like this ever occupy your community?”. These questions were asked to both ex-associates and non-associated community members.

Figure 20b – Reported Boko Haram activity (Cameroon)

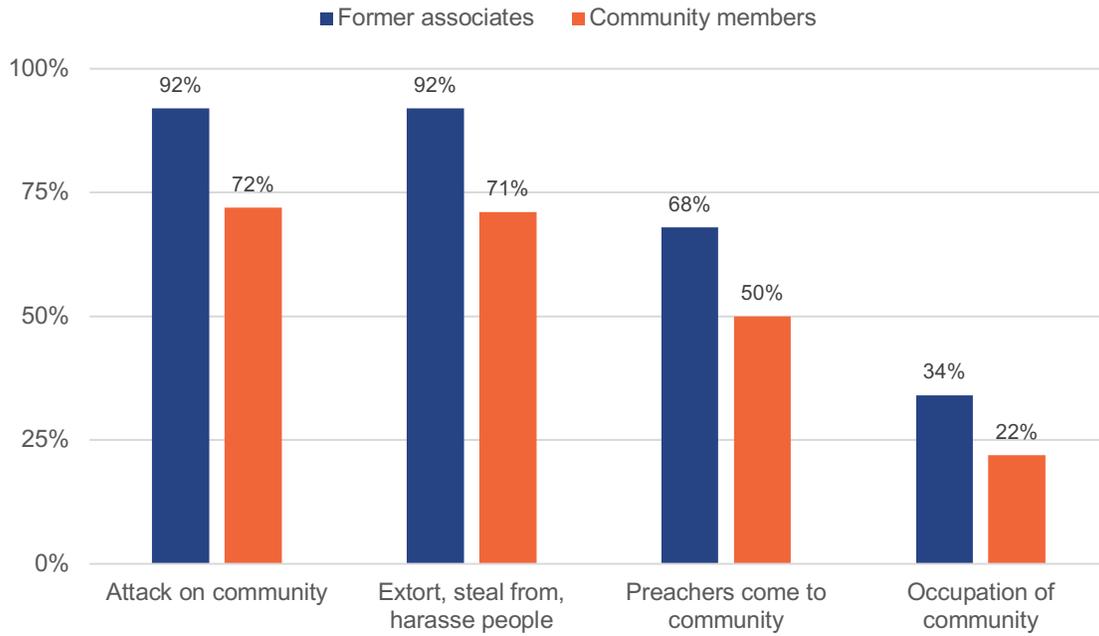


Figure 20c – Reported Boko Haram activity (Niger)

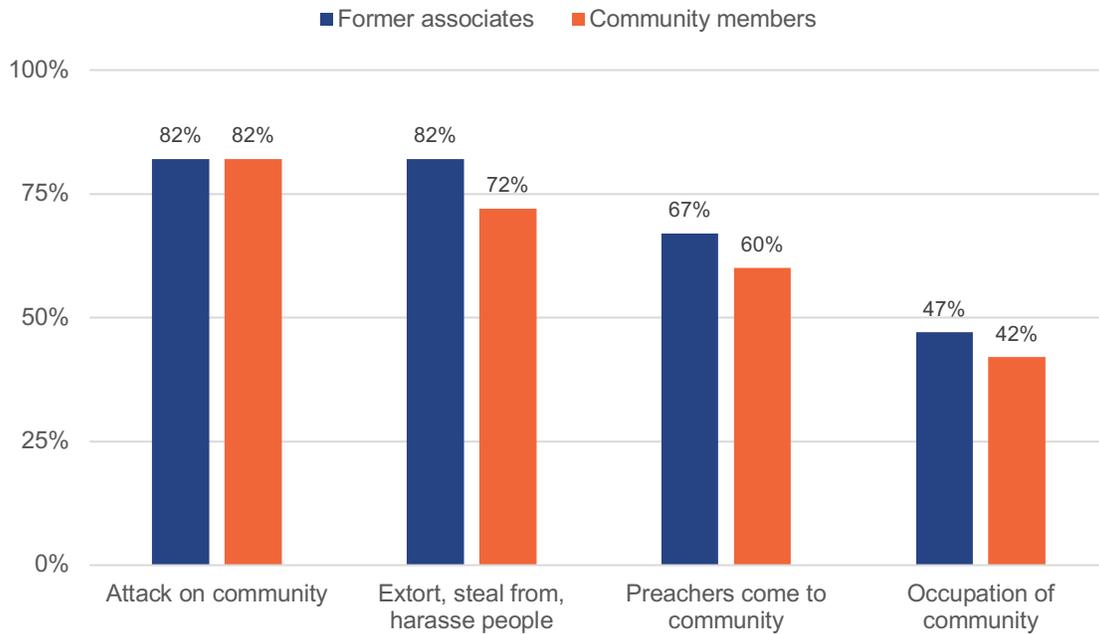
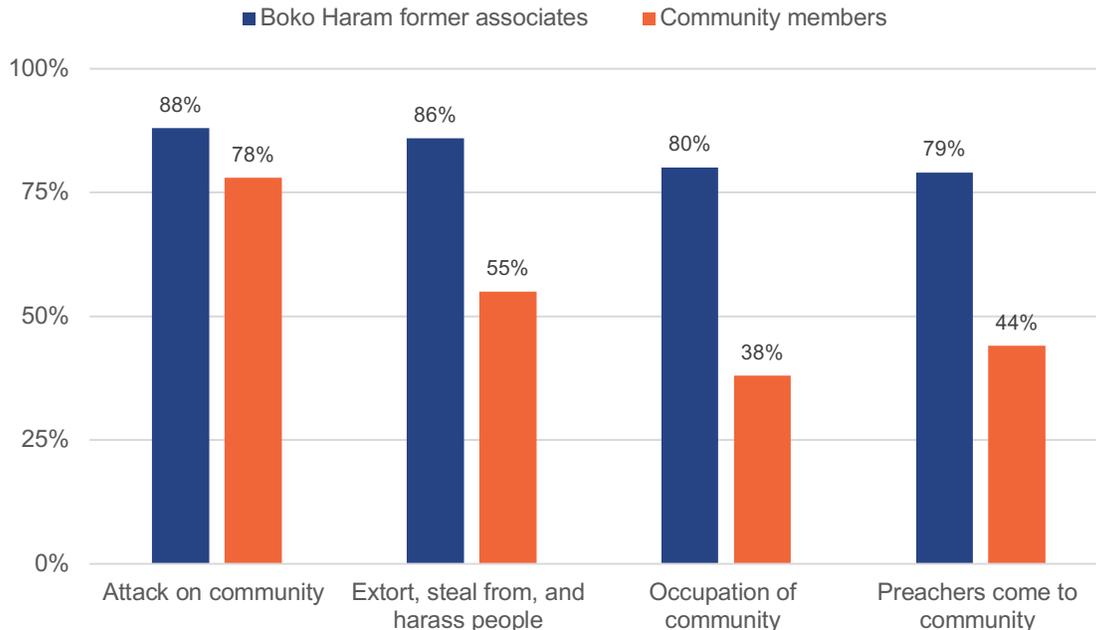


Figure 20d – Reported Boko Haram activity (Nigeria baseline survey)



B. Experiences of Victimization

As a result of the conflict, the majority of the respondents experienced harm to themselves and their relatives. The MEAC survey used a nuanced approach to understanding not only victimization to the community, but also to one's person, property, and family.⁵¹ As seen in figure 21, across the four countries the types of victimization most often reported by respondents included property destruction and physical assaults on relatives (beatings, torture, shootings as well as killings). Notably, 94 per cent of respondents in Chad said they had their property destroyed or taken away during the conflict. Beyond property damage and knowing relatives who were victimized, many respondents were exposed to violence themselves during the conflict. Across all the surveys, more than half of the respondents had a close relative who was killed during the conflict. Nearly half of all respondents in Chad and Cameroon reported having been beaten, tortured, or shot themselves. Smaller but notable portions of the sample were seriously wounded or injured as a result of the conflict, and some respondents admitted to having been the victim of sexual violence.

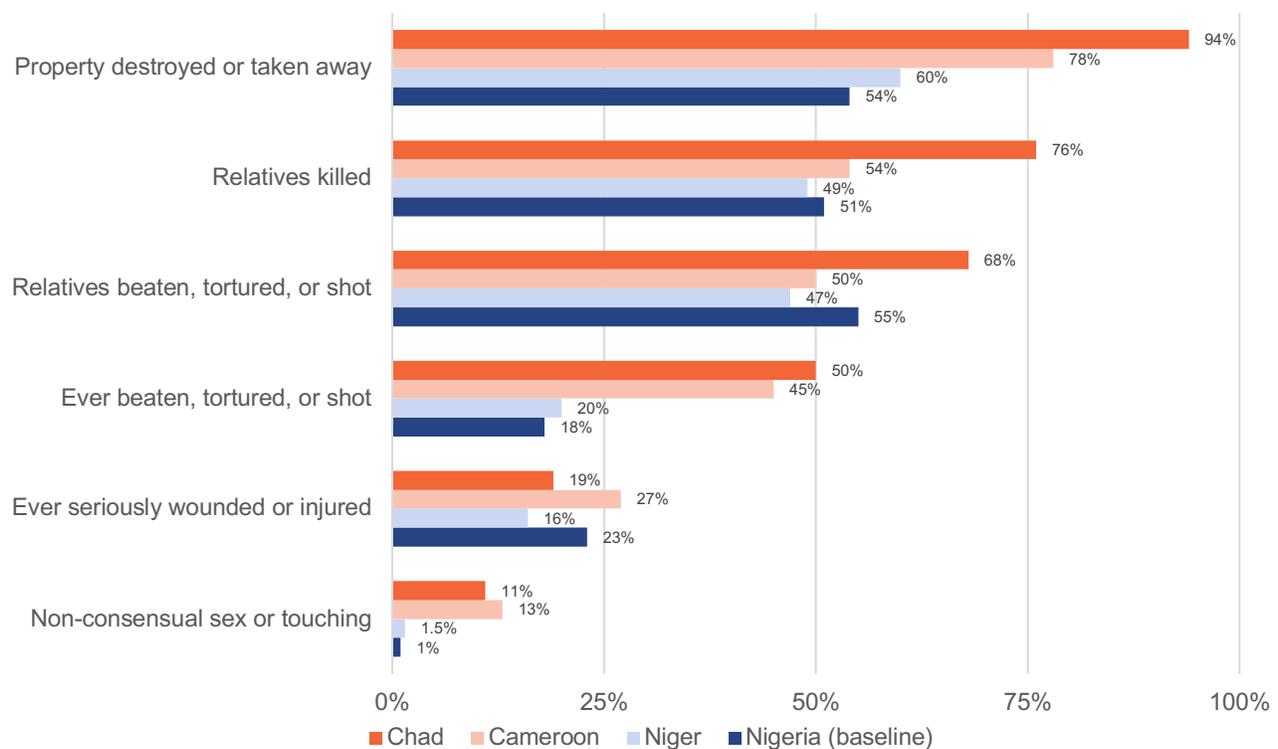
It is likely that sexual violence is underreported across MEAC surveys.⁵² Yet, the percentages of respondents (11 per cent in Chad and 13 per cent of respondents in Cameroon) who reported having

⁵¹ MEAC looked at several indicators: physical injury (to oneself or family); destruction of property (to oneself); beatings, torture, and killings (to oneself or family), sexual assault (oneself), and displacement (oneself). This is in addition to abduction which was discussed in section IV.

⁵² Due to the sensitivity of the question, the format of the survey, as well as social stigma and taboo, it is conceivable that many respondents would not feel comfortable to admit to having experienced forced sex or non-consensual touching. As with any other question, respondents could refuse to answer these questions.

experienced non-consensual sex or touching is sizeable. In Nigeria, only 1 per cent of respondents in the baseline reported that they themselves were subjected to non-consensual sex or touching. In the same survey, however, 8 per cent of married respondents said their marriages were forced. Furthermore, in the community phone survey with 2,963 respondents, 11 per cent reported knowing someone in their community who had experienced forced sex or non-consensual touching by someone from an armed group.⁵³ These differences provide indications that the taboos and stigma around certain questions may distort the reality on the ground. This is particularly true for MEAC's questions on sexual violence, which have been crafted in consultation with gender-based violence (GBV)/conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV) experts to ensure clarity, but in doing so the questions are posed with a level of directness not always common in this context, which may impact the data.

Figure 21 – Experiences of victimization



When disaggregating the data, it becomes clear that, across the four countries, people who were associated with Boko Haram and its factions are more likely to have experienced victimization and exposure to violence than those who were never associated. In Cameroon, for example, 90 per cent of ex-associates reported destruction of property (compared to 65 per cent among non-associated community members), 63 per cent reported having been subjected to physical harm (25 per cent among ex-associates) and 22 per cent reported having been subjected to non-consensual sex or touching (4 per cent among non-associated community members). The manner in which this

⁵³ Rebecca Littman et al., [“The Relationship Between Victimization and Receptivity to Returning Boko Haram Associates,”](#) *MEAC Findings Report 13* (New York: United Nations University, 2021).

question was asked makes it difficult to isolate when ex-associates were victimized – in the lead up to their association and/or during it. What is clear is that ex-associates who are in their reintegration journey have been exposed to conflict violence and may have specific needs related to those experiences, which may need to be addressed to effectively support their transition to civilian life and will impact progress against **RSS Indicator 11.2a**.

Figure 22a – Experiences of victimization disaggregated between Boko Haram ex-associates and non-associated community members (Chad)

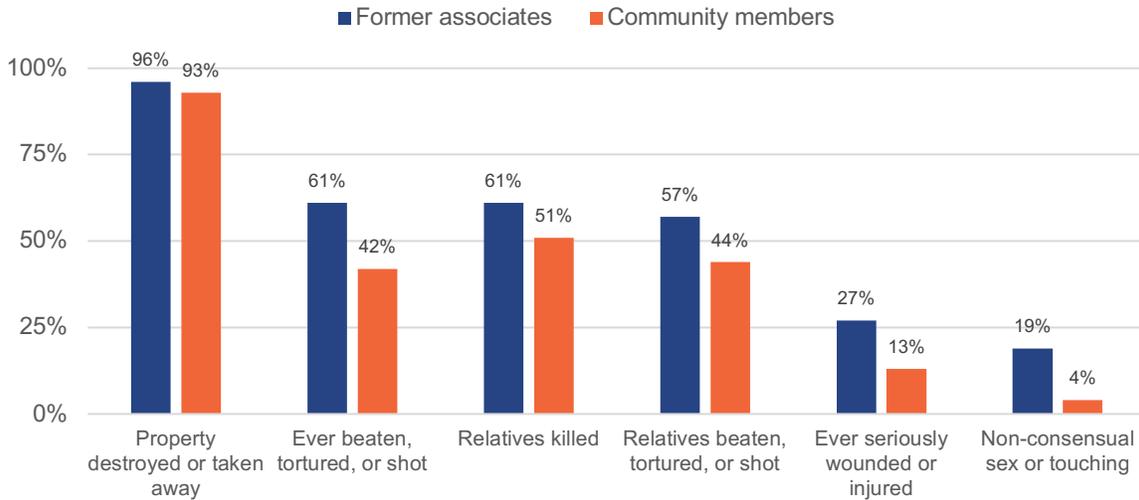


Figure 22b – Experiences of victimization disaggregated between Boko Haram ex-associates and non-associated community members (Cameroon)

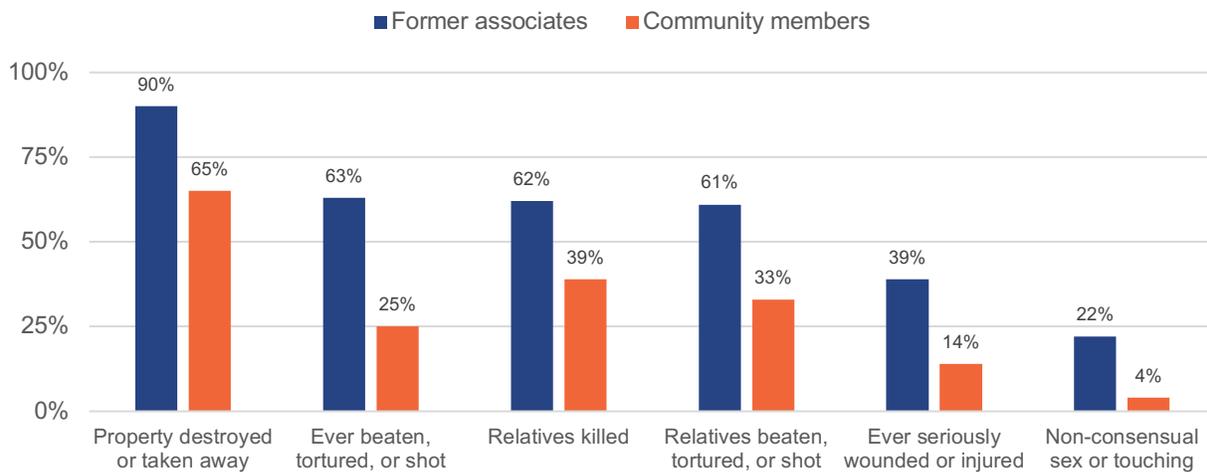


Figure 22c – Experiences of victimization disaggregated between Boko Haram ex-associates and non-associated community members (Niger)

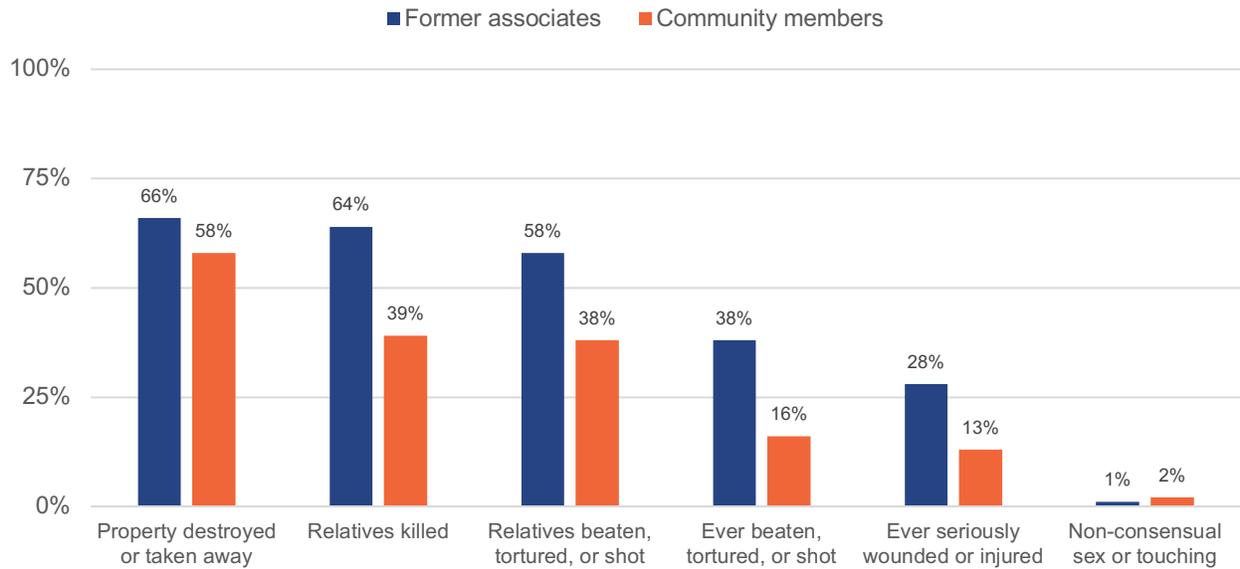
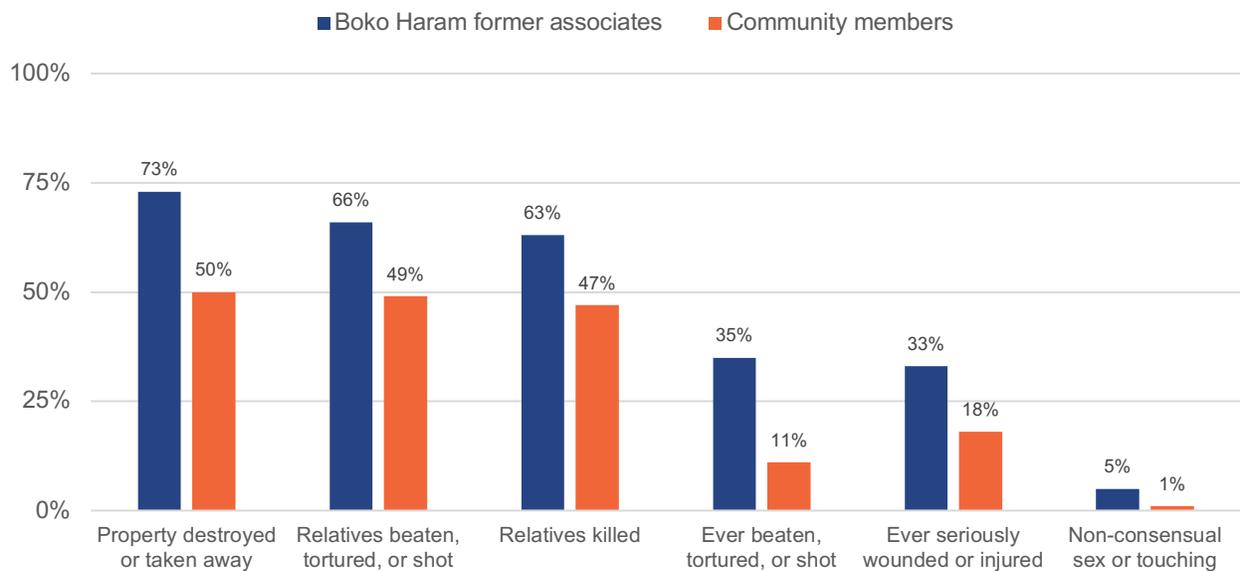


Figure 22d – Experiences of victimization disaggregated between Boko Haram ex-associates and non-associated community members (Nigeria baseline survey)



In Cameroon, as seen in figure 23b below, disaggregating the data by gender as well as association indicates that women and girls, and especially those who were associated, tend to be subjected to harm at higher rates than men and boys. By contrast, the rates of victimization between men and women among non-associated community members and ex-associates in Niger and Chad are more balanced, with the exception of sexual violence. Women and girl ex-associates are slightly more likely to be victimized than men and boy ex-associates in Chad. In Niger, non-associated men and

boys are slightly more likely to be subjected to victimization than non-associated women and girl respondents. In the Nigeria baseline survey, women and girls who were associated with Boko Haram are proportionally more likely to experience forced sex and report higher rates of physical harm of close relatives than men/boys. As seen in figure 23d, by contrast, men who were associated report more personal direct physical harm. Among non-associated community members, women/girls and men/boys report similar rates of harm to relatives and sexual violence, but non-associated men and boys personally experience more physical harm (being beaten, tortured, or shot).

Figure 23a – Victimization indicators disaggregated by gender and association (Chad)

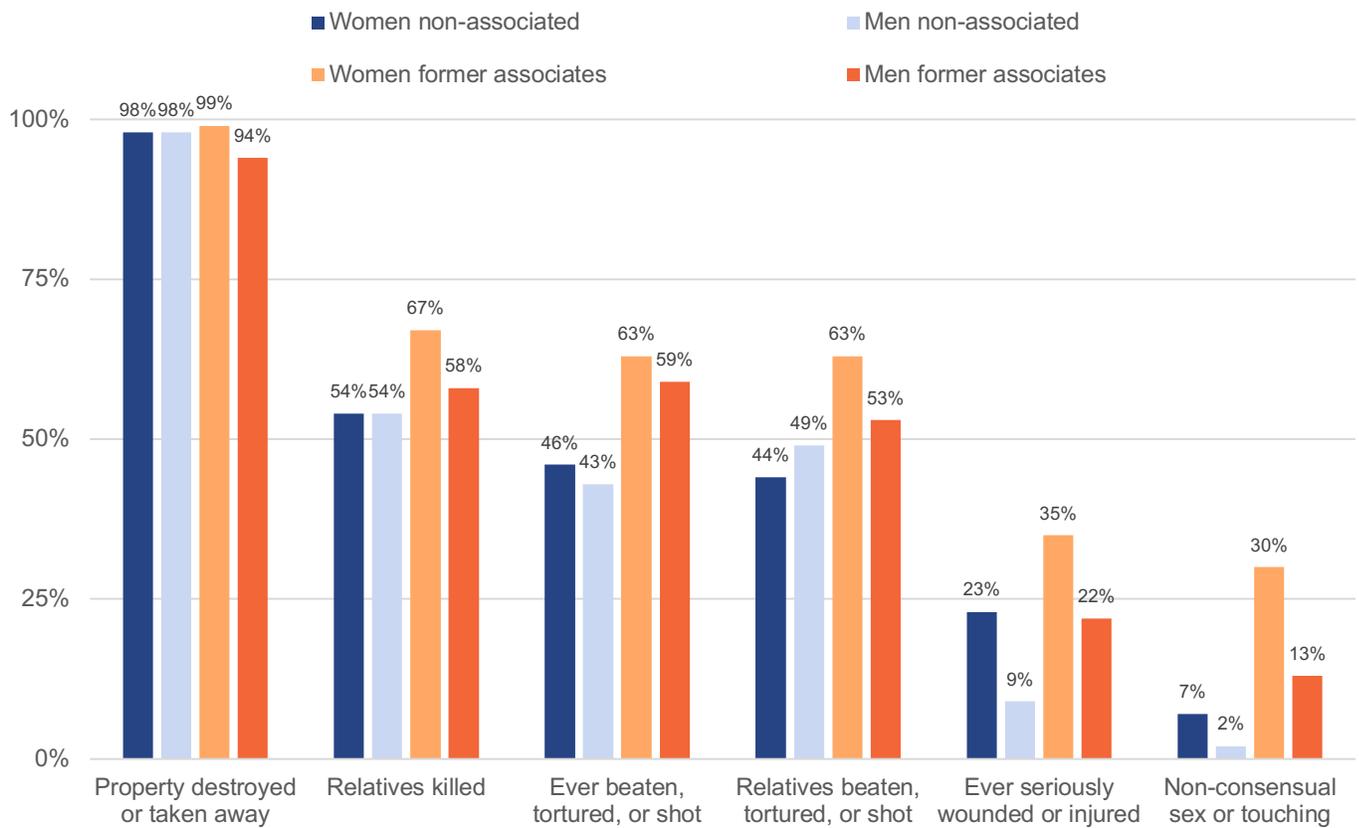


Figure 23b – Victimization indicators disaggregated by gender and association (Cameroon)

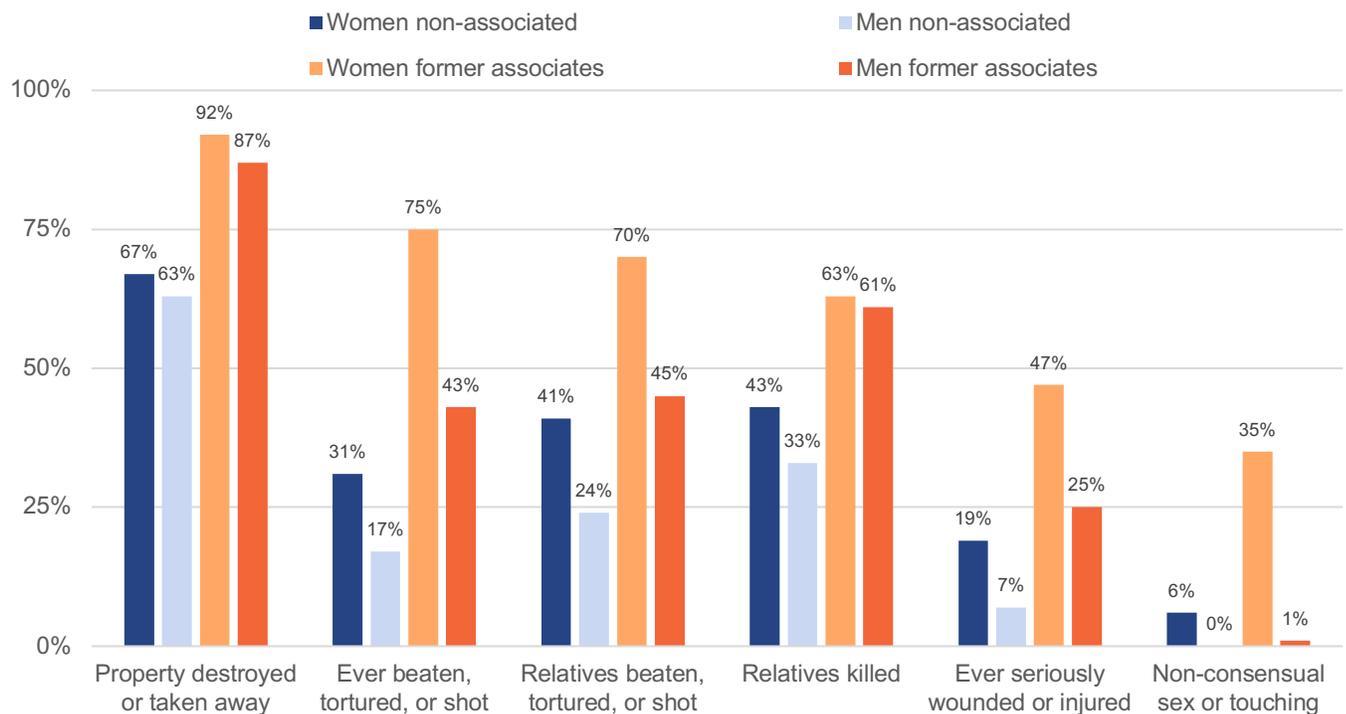


Figure 23c – Victimization indicators disaggregated by gender and association (Niger)

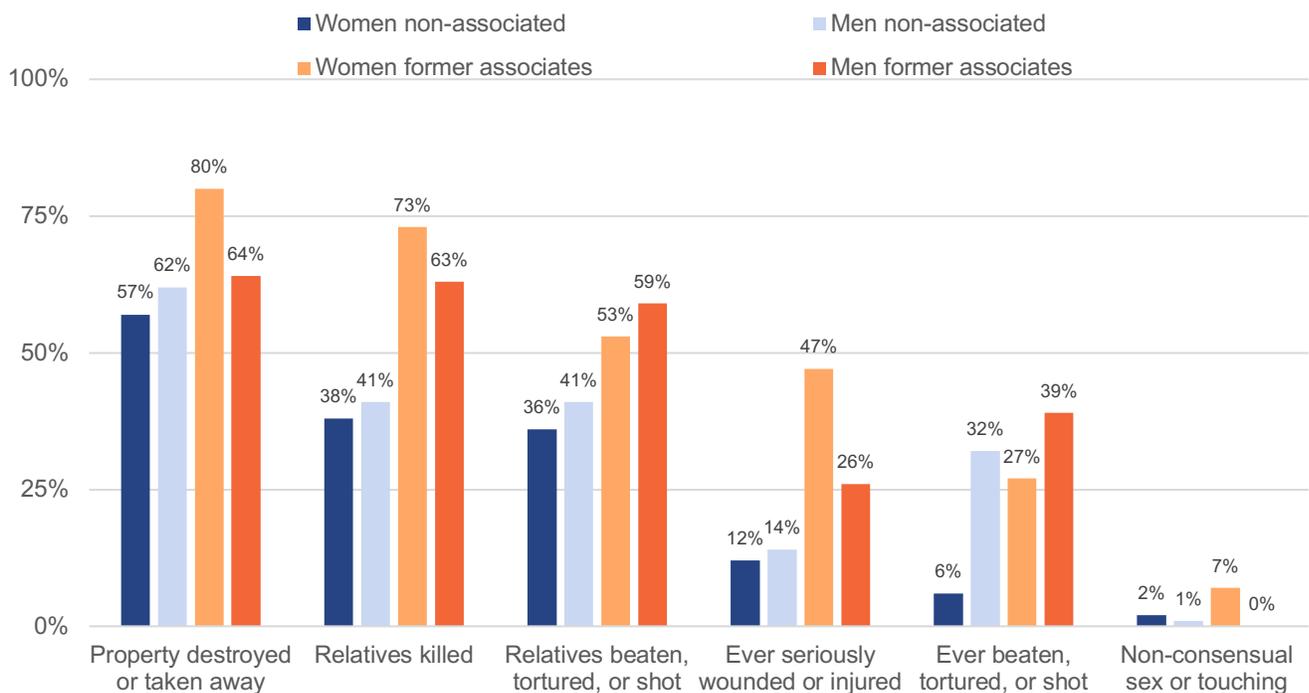
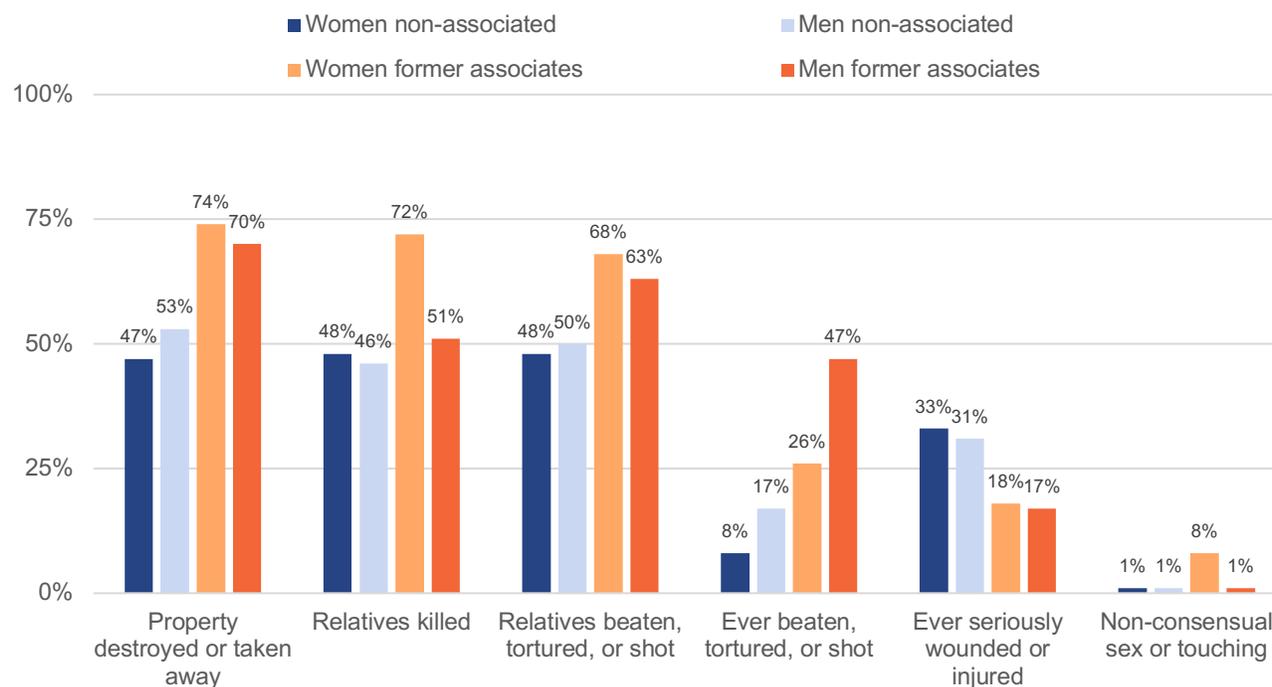


Figure 23d – Victimization indicators disaggregated by gender and association (Nigeria baseline survey)

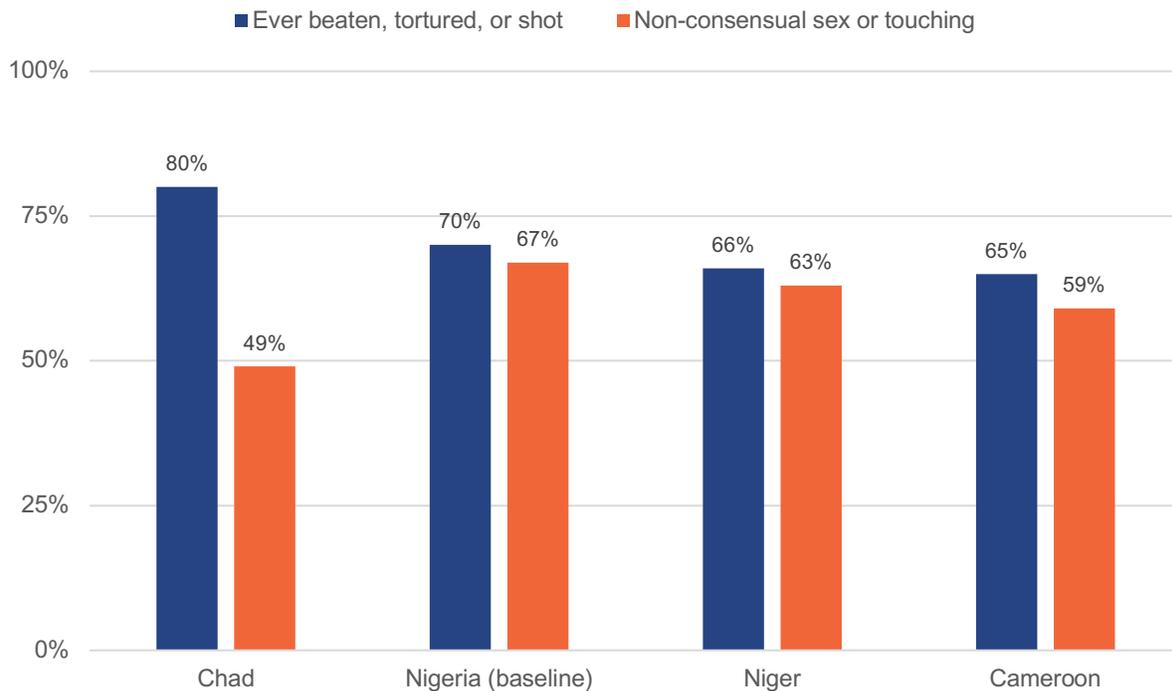


C. Perpetrators of Violence

Across all categories of victimization, the most frequently named perpetrator was Boko Haram. As seen in figure 24, people who were subjected to beatings, torture, gunshots, or sexual violence as well as those who reported their family being killed or physically harmed overwhelmingly designated “Boko Haram” and its factions as the main culprits (80 per cent in Chad and 65-66 per cent in Cameroon and Niger).⁵⁴ In the Nigeria baseline survey, 70 per cent of respondents designated Boko Haram as responsible for the direct physical harm they experienced, and 68 per cent as responsible for sexual violence. Compared to the other Lake Chad Basin countries, the Nigeria baseline survey shows much higher rates of victimization by State and State-affiliated actors. In Nigeria, almost a third of those who reported being beaten, shot, or tortured during the conflict said it was at the hands of the military. Regarding sexual violence, 6 per cent of the respondents in the Nigeria baseline designated people in their own community (either youths or other people) and 4 per cent designated the military as having been responsible.

⁵⁴ Some respondents in the other countries mentioned bandits or the military, although in low percentages (1-2 per cent in Chad, 5 per cent for the military in Cameroon, 6-7 per cent in Niger).

Figure 24 – Percentages of respondents naming Boko Haram as responsible for the physical harm and sexual violence they suffered



When respondents differentiated between Boko Haram's factions, they were much more likely to name the Shekau faction as the perpetrator of physical and sexual violence against them and their families. By contrast, very few respondents named the Al-Barnawi faction (also known as ISWAP) as engaging in these types of acts in Chad and Cameroon. In Niger, however, 32 per cent of respondents who had been physically or sexually victimized identified ISWAP as the perpetrators, while less than 40 per cent of respondents reported Shekau's faction as responsible for similar types of violence. Again, this may speak to the more prominent role ISWAP plays in Niger compared to the other countries. While the levels of victimization in Niger appear lower than in Chad and Cameroon, they are still significant, perhaps suggesting that while ISWAP may be considered less violent toward civilians than Shekau's faction, it certainly is engaged in violence against civilians. Indeed, there are reports that ISWAP carries out acts of reprisal against communities suspected of colluding with the army or refusing to pay the fees demanded by the group.

VII. Receptivity to Returning Boko Haram Ex-associates

Reintegration is a two-way street. No matter how holistic, well-tailored, and well-supported the intervention, if communities are not willing to socially, economically, and civically absorb ex-associates, it is unlikely that the latter will fully or sustainably reintegrate into civilian life. Thus, it is essential to understand community receptivity to Boko Haram ex-associates, who with the death of Shekau and the mass defections that followed, are and will be returning in increasing numbers to many communities.⁵⁵ As the MEAC research already established in Nigeria, “difficulty reintegrating and the potential for rejection poses a humanitarian concern, as well as a potential security challenge if it impels ex-associates to return to Boko Haram, switch to another armed group, or dissuade others still with Boko Haram from leaving for fear of negative reintegration experiences.”⁵⁶ This section looks at ex-associates who returned home, whether non-associated community members are willing to engage with them, and the community’s preferences for handling those exiting Boko Haram and its factions.

A. Return of Ex-associates to their Communities

There are signs of self-demobilization or self-reintegration – people who leave Boko Haram or one of its factions and return directly to their (or another) community, bypassing any of the defection, DDR-like, and reintegration programmes and/or screening set up by government authorities. Other ex-associates come through different programming streams. Those who do pass through government detention or transit centres often have assistance reconnecting with their former community. The MEAC survey asked non-associated community members if they knew people in their community who were with Boko Haram and came back and, if so, whether anyone brokered their return (see figure 25).⁵⁷ Furthermore, ex-associates themselves were also asked if anyone brokered their return (see figure 26). When their arrival was brokered, community and religious leaders played an important role in Cameroon and Chad, and to a lesser extent the government and the security services brokered returns.⁵⁸ In Chad and Cameroon, when asked about their own experiences, ex-associates likewise identify the government, community leaders, and security services, but they also identify family members as those who brokered their return. Many ex-associates, particularly in Cameroon, describe brokering their own return. In Niger, the government

⁵⁵ The surveys in Chad, Niger, and Cameroon did not deal with the mass defections or survey many people who have come out in this recent wave of defections. In Nigeria, which is a longer running study, mass defection respondents are being surveyed moving forward.

⁵⁶ Rebecca Littman et al., “[Community Acceptance of Former Boko Haram Affiliates](#),” *MEAC Findings Report 7* (New York: United Nations University, 2021)

⁵⁷ Respondents could select multiple responses for these questions in case several actors played the role of brokers.

⁵⁸ In Nigeria, this question is currently being asked in an ongoing mid- and endline survey and is therefore not included in this figure.

primarily plays the role of brokering returns. In Nigeria, most ex-associates report that no one brokered their return. For those who did indicate that someone brokered their return, the government was listed as the main broker (39 per cent), followed by international organizations or NGOs (8 per cent), and family members (2 per cent).⁵⁹

Figure 25 – Non-associated respondents on who brokered the return of ex-associates in their communities

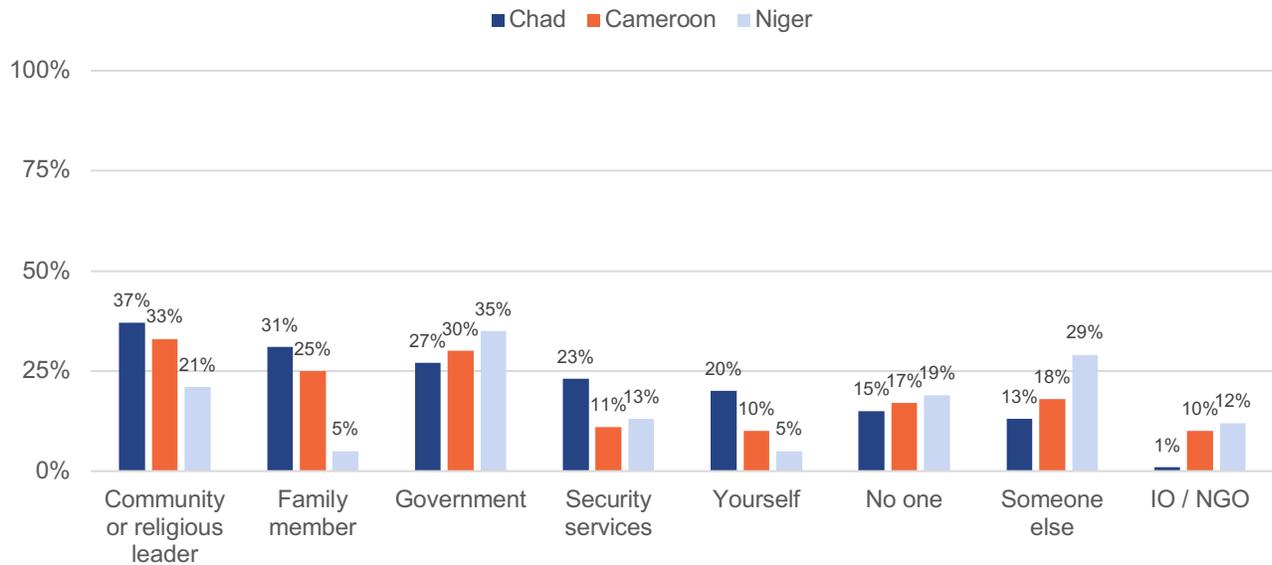
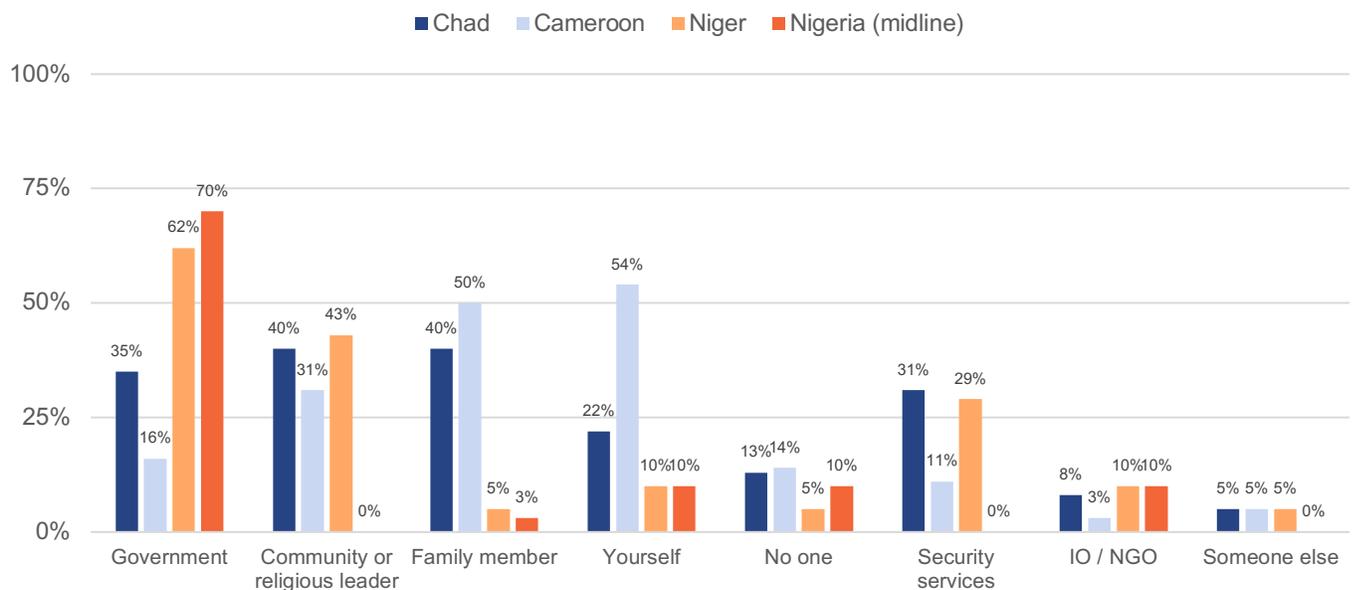


Figure 26 – Ex-associates on who brokered their return into the communities (Chad, Cameroon, Niger, Nigeria)



⁵⁹ In Nigeria, response options varied slightly. Respondents did not get the options “Yourself” and “Security services”.

B. Non-associated Community Members' Willingness to Engage with Ex-associates

Non-associated respondents are responding in different ways to the return of ex-associates. They overwhelmingly have negative perceptions of ex-associates, which translates into concerns around their stigmatization. However, there is also receptivity among communities to forgive and reintegrate ex-associates among them.

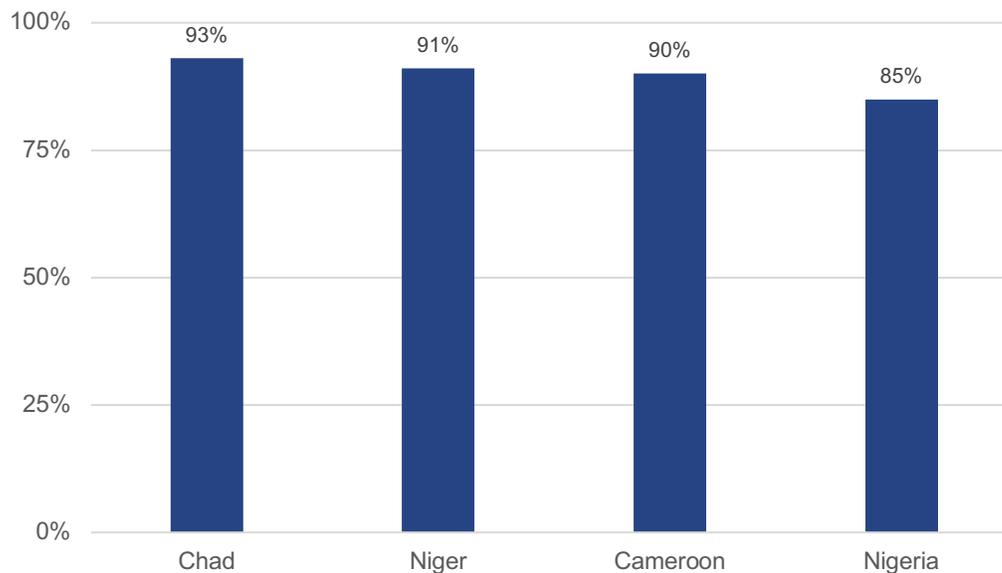
1. Negative Perceptions of Ex-associates

The potential for rejection of returning ex-associates appears to be very high, as more than 90 per cent of non-associated community members respondents across Chad, Cameroon, and Niger consider people who were with Boko Haram as “bad.” In turn, 80-90 per cent of ex-associates also assume that most people in their communities perceive ex-associates in a negative way. Moreover, the majority of non-associated community members report that there are people in their communities who feel harmed by the past actions of people who were with Boko Haram.

These perceptions do not appear conducive to community support for reintegration and yet data from the Nigeria community phone survey – run before the surveys in Chad, Cameroon, and Niger – found several indications that receptivity was higher than one might expect. First, as seen in figure 27, that survey found that more people have heard of ex-associates who had returned to the community and who have been “good community member[s]” (39 per cent) than those who had returned and “been a problem” (14 per cent).⁶⁰ This question has not yet been asked over time, but it will be in the follow up survey work in Nigeria. On its own, it may represent a positive indication of progress toward **RSS Indicator 11.3a** and, asked over time, this metric will allow for gauging if relationships are indeed improving. It is important to note that it is possible that this earlier survey may not represent current sentiments (e.g., since the mass defections started), be specific to Nigeria, or it may also be different because Nigeria at the time had already had so many people return home after Boko Haram engagement.

⁶⁰ Rebecca Littman et al., “[Community Acceptance of Former Boko Haram Affiliates](#),” *MEAC Findings Report 7* (New York: United Nations University, 2021): 10.

Figure 27 – Percentage of non-associated respondents who see Boko Haram ex-associates as ‘bad’



There are indications that community leaders are largely receptive to the return of their neighbours who had been with Boko Haram, which is key to advancing **RSS Indicator 12.4a**. Community leaders in and around Maiduguri were actually more likely to be receptive to returning ex-associates. Receptivity to return was actually higher among community leaders that had been targeted by the group themselves. According to MEAC’s community leaders survey, 89 per cent and 95 per cent of the community leaders targeted by Boko Haram would be willing to allow a woman or child who had been with the group to return (respectively), as compared to 83 per cent and 82 per cent among non-targeted leaders (respectively). Local leaders are key gatekeepers for brokering returns, who are well placed, especially in light of MEAC’s community phone survey in Nigeria, to influence community acceptance (e.g., if the Bulama vouches for those returning, community acceptance of them increases).⁶¹

Even if communities and their leaders recognize the positive reintegration stories, most ex-associates in Chad and Niger still hide the fact that they once belonged to the group or one of its factions. Only 43 per cent of ex-associates in Chad and 28 per cent in Niger would acknowledge their past involvement. By contrast, ex-associates seem more inclined to reveal their past involvement in Cameroon (58 per cent), which may be explained by the fact that most of them are still in the Meri transit centres where some concerns around acknowledging association may be somewhat hypothetical and/or were not yet potentially problematic when surrounded by people in a similar situation.⁶² Even more strikingly, in the Nigeria baseline survey, 66 per cent of Boko Haram ex-associates would also tell people in their community that they used to be with the group. An

⁶¹ Rebecca Littman et al., “[Social, Economic, and Civic Reintegration of Former Boko Haram Affiliates](#),” *MEAC Findings Report 10* (New York: United Nations University, 2021): 9.

⁶² Conversely, only about a third of non-associated community members respondents (30 - 40 per cent) are able to identify the persons in their communities whom they knew had been associated with Boko Haram or its related factions.

unwillingness to disclose former association, and a strong desire to go unnoticed, particularly in Niger, further reduces community visibility on who was once involved with Boko Haram and its factions and who was not. Ex-associates attempting to self-demobilize and reintegrate directly back into their communities, or start over somewhere else, may be a double-edged sword. On the one hand, not disclosing their involvement in an armed group allows ex-associates to avoid the stigma attached to association. On the other hand, it might impede the proper implementation of official programmes targeted at ex-associates and leave the latter unsupported and possibly more vulnerable to re-recruitment.

2. Concerns About Stigmatization

The data suggest that Boko Haram ex-associates may have reason to be concerned. Using probit regression models, MEAC examined how people respond to and treat Boko Haram, JAS, or ISWAP ex-associates, as reported by the latter. There are strong, consistent links between being an ex-associate in Chad, Niger, and Cameroon and reporting poor treatment once back in the community. Across all three countries, in all but one case,⁶³ being a former associate led to a higher probability of reporting that people acted afraid of them, acted like they did not trust them, being called names, or being threatened.⁶⁴ The size of the effects range from small to quite large, particularly in Chad where across each metric, being an ex-associate of Boko Haram or one of its factions led to a sizable increase in the probability respondents would report that people did not trust them, acted afraid of them, or called them names.

Ex-associates do not always make the causal link between their association and their ill treatment. Those who suffered from stigma, threats, or insults were also asked what explained their poor treatment by other people. Surprisingly, former association in an armed group is the dominant reason provided – it was selected by less than 2 per cent of ex-associates who answered the question in Chad, which is quite small considering 21 per cent answered, “the place you come from.” However, in Cameroon, 18 per cent of ex-associates consider that they were treated poorly because of their former involvement with an armed group, among other reasons (and 21 per cent of ex-associates consider that this poor treatment is due to the place they come from). While these figures are lower than one might expect, it is important to note that “where you come from” might also be interpreted as from the armed group or from a transit centre. In Nigeria, focus groups with women who left Boko Haram also highlighted that there are often related stigmas to armed group association. The women in this discussion talked about the community – already short on most basic provisions – initially not reacting warmly when they came back from the bush because they were unclean, malnourished, had lice, needed clothes, and did not have anything to offer. However, the midline survey data suggest many ex-associates attribute their ill treatment to their association with the group (48 per cent).

⁶³ In Niger, the relationship between being an ex-associate from Boko Haram/JAS/ISWAP and the probability of the respondent being threatened within the last month was not statistically significant.

⁶⁴ All of these questions asked how often respondents had experienced these treatments in the last month.

Maltreatment may not be internalized as such, but it may stem from community security concerns or emotional responses to ex-associates. Non-associated survey respondents were asked about their levels of anger towards ex-associates and beliefs that they would try to harm people in the future. The majority of non-associated community members report feeling anger towards men (50 per cent in Cameroon, 71 per cent in Chad, 80 per cent in Niger) and women (38 per cent in Cameroon, 67 per cent in Chad, 79 per cent in Niger) who were with Boko Haram. This more tolerant response to women may be due to the fact that women are not seen as having as much agency as men and thus their association with Boko Haram may not be viewed as a choice of their own free will but rather that of the men in their lives (husbands, brothers, fathers).⁶⁵ The majority of respondents in Cameroon and Niger also believed that men who were associated with Boko Haram and its factions were likely to try to harm people in the future, and more so than women ex-associates. Resentment and distrust towards ex-associates are thus high and may create barriers to reintegration.

3. The Potential for Forgiveness and Reintegration

Yet, despite these feelings of anger and fear, the majority of non-associated community members also consider themselves as being able to forgive ex-associates, whether men or women (respectively 71 per cent and 73 per cent in Chad, 72 per cent and 79 per cent in Cameroon, and 58 and 59 per cent in Niger), which represents an opportunity for community reconciliation. The willingness to forgive is very similar among men and women non-associated respondents, and adults and children in both Chad and Cameroon. However, there is a stark disparity between men and women, and adults and children, in Niger. Indeed, while 85 per cent of men respondents said they would be able to forgive men and 79 per cent of men said they would be able to forgive women who were with Boko Haram, the percentages drop drastically among women respondents, where only respectively 45 per cent and 50 per cent of them said so (for men and women who were with Boko Haram respectively). There is also a difference between adults and children, and 63 per cent of adults are willing to forgive either men or women Boko Haram ex-associates, while only 45-49 per cent of children said they would forgive men and women who had been with the group respectively. Earlier work by MEAC in Nigeria concluded that "...Islam encourages Muslims to forgive those who show humility and ask for forgiveness. It is widely believed that you are more likely to be forgiven by God for your wrongdoings if you forgive those who wronged you. The culture of forgiveness in the North East likely helps explain the high levels of willingness to forgive ex-associates in the survey data."⁶⁶ This also hints at the potential to make progress on **RSS Indicator 12.4a**.

Most importantly, across the Lake Chad Basin, receptivity to reintegration is high. As seen in figure 28, in Chad, Niger, and Cameroon, 49-64 per cent of the respondents would be willing to accept a man ex-associate of Boko Haram in their community. Women ex-associates appear more readily accepted, with higher rates of receptivity reported in Chad and Cameroon (67 per cent), compared

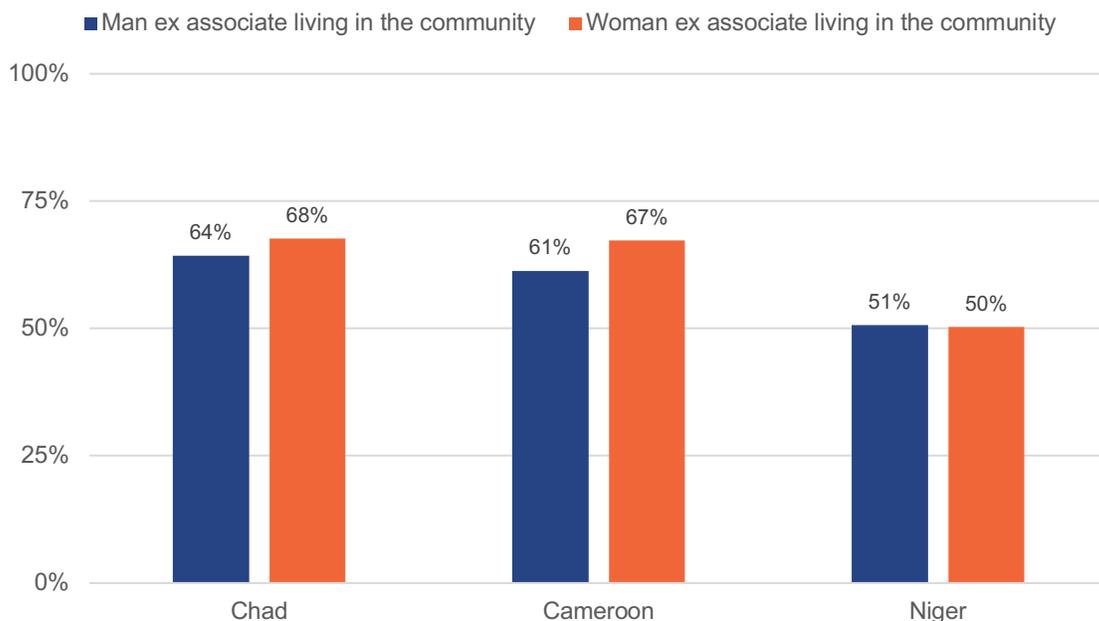
⁶⁵ Cultural, religious, and social organization along traditional gender roles contribute to this perception around women's agency. See: Jeannine Ella Abatan and Boubacar Sangare, "[Katiba Macina and Boko Haram: including women to what end?](#)," *ISS Today*, 31 March 2021.

⁶⁶ Rebecca Littman et al., "[Criminal and Transitional Justice Preferences for Former Boko Haram Associates](#)," *MEAC Findings Report 12* (New York: United Nations University, 2021): 7.

to their male counterparts. Overall, the willingness to accept the return of ex-associates to their communities is lower in Niger than in the other countries.

Levels of acceptance of ex-associates were generally high in Nigeria when the MEAC community phone survey in Nigeria was conducted. Questions around acceptance were asked several ways in this survey including those that referenced generic man/woman ex-associates that were repeated in Chad, Niger, and Cameroon. Other questions asked about the respondent's actual experience with people they knew in the family or community who were involved, and the survey included an experiment with two fictional profiles of Fatima and Usman,⁶⁷ who were trying to leave the group. In Nigeria, receptivity for a generic male former associate of Boko Haram was somewhat higher than in Chad, Niger, and Cameroon (69 per cent) and for a generic female former associate (71 per cent). Interestingly, when asked about Fatima and Usman, receptivity to return increased significantly for all age options (between 85-90 per cent depending on the gender and age details provided in the vignette). When survey questions move from hypothetical and generic to more specific questions, there are indications that receptivity to returning ex-Boko Haram associates changes based on a respondent's actual experience with associated individuals. This may explain this increase.

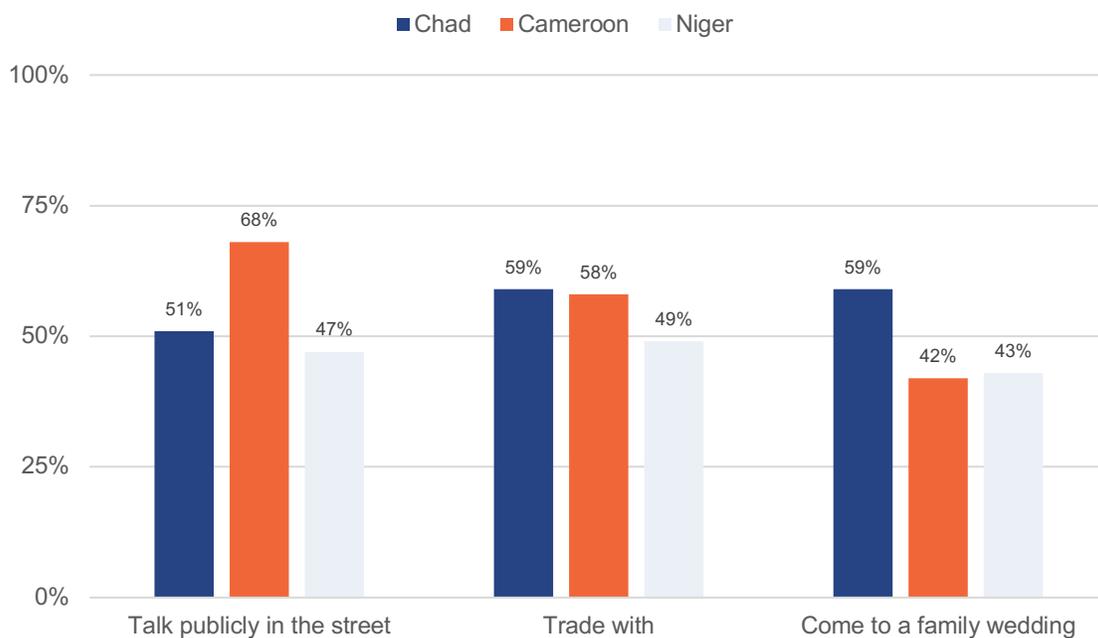
Figure 28 – Community receptivity to reintegration in the communities (Chad, Cameroon, Niger)



⁶⁷ The survey experiment varied three conditions: gender ("Usman" or "Fatima"), age (12- or 28-years old), and some information about the process s/he had been through (cleared by the government after completing a reorientation (reintegration) programme, expressed a willingness to publicly apologise and ask the community for forgiveness, or no additional information provided). The goal of the experiment was to isolate how a former associate's age, gender, and exit pathway influenced community receptivity to them returning.

Beyond a general acceptance metric, it is important to parse out what specific types of engagement non-associated community members may be willing to have with ex-associates, as they might indicate particular areas to target for reintegration and reconciliation efforts. Such an approach is helpful because while economic and social integration are related, they have different facets that must be understood to craft more tailored reintegration interventions. Figure 29 details whether non-associated community members are willing to engage with ex-associates economically and socially. Across Chad, Niger, and Cameroon, at least half of the non-associated sample was willing to talk with ex-associates in the street, trade with them, or invite them to a family wedding. Willingness to engage with ex-associates is systematically lower in Niger than in the other countries.

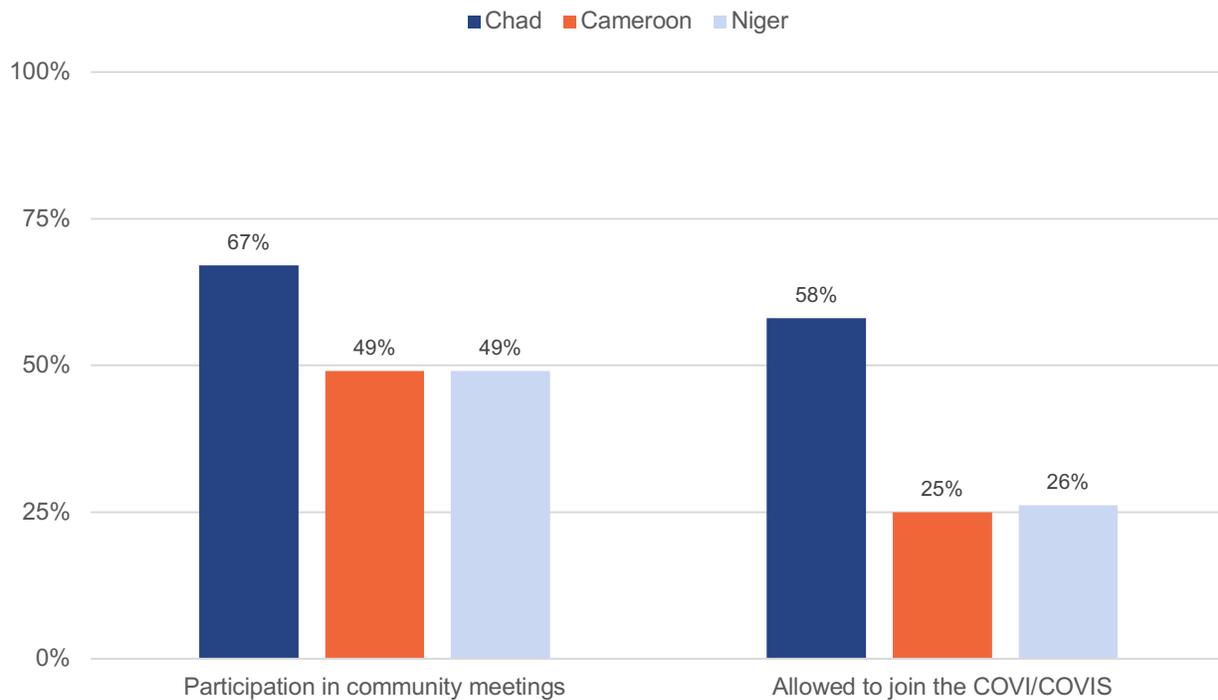
Figure 29 – Willingness of non-associated respondents to engage with ex-associates (Chad, Cameroon, Niger)



Another aspect of reintegration is political and civic engagement, which can take many forms including participation in community meetings or in ensuring the safety and security of the community. As seen in figure 30, non-associated community members in Chad seem more willing to integrate ex-associates in both community meetings and the COVI, compared to Cameroon and Niger. This may be explained in part by the fact that in Chad, most ex-associates have already been back in their communities for a while (the Bagasola centre only was used for screening) compared to those in Cameroon and Niger who were receiving in-centre support for longer periods. Allowing ex-associates to join the COVI/COVIS, however, gathers less support among non-associated community members overall. This indicates a remaining lack of confidence and trust of non-associated community members in ex-associates. Indeed, allowing them to be part of COVI/COVIS means making them part of the community security structures, with the possibility of holding weapons, which requires a greater level of trust and confidence that can only be built in the longer

term. Interestingly, there are indications in Nigeria that those exiting Boko Haram sometimes try to join non-State security outfits in an effort to signal that they do not pose a threat to the community.⁶⁸

Figure 30 – Potential roles of ex-associates in the communities, as allowed by non-associated community members (Chad, Cameroon, Niger)



C. Punishment Preferences of Non-associated Community Members

Communities across the Lake Chad Basin region have been victimized as a result of the Boko Haram conflict. They often have different traditions when it comes to addressing such violence, from criminal, transitional, and traditional justice approaches to retributive violence.⁶⁹ In order to develop and foster reintegration programmes that will have public support, it is important to gather information on the types of punishments and accountability preferences of the community. It is important to note that community preferences vary depending on the genders of ex-associates as well as the roles they had in the group (e.g., support versus active combatant roles). The preferences may also vary depending on the personal experiences of non-associated community members, in particular with personal, familial, or community victimization experiences.

⁶⁸ Hilary Matfess, Graeme Blair, and Chad Hazlett, "Beset on All Sides: Children and the Landscape of Conflict in North East Nigeria," *Cradled by Conflict: Child Involvement with Armed Groups in Contemporary Conflict* eds. Siobhan O'Neil and Kato Van Broeckhoven (New York: United Nations University, 2018).

⁶⁹ Anikola Olojo and Maram Mahdi, "Transition justice: testing the waters in the Lake Chad Basin," *ISS Today*, 26 April 2022.

1. Overview of Punishment Preferences for Ex-associates Depending on their Gender, Agency in Association, and Role in the Group

The MEAC surveys asked what kind of punishment respondents wanted for men and women who had been with Boko Haram. The question was asked in an open-ended manner and enumerators noted the pre-programme response closest to the respondents' answers (they could choose more than one). It is worth noting that many of the answers provided do not fit within traditional Western conceptions of punishments. Indeed, some were more in line with transitional justice approaches or reintegration and rehabilitation with the understanding that they were compulsory. The answers that resulted do not reflect how the UN and international actors silo these types of tools, but rather reflect what local people think of as punishments.

The data indicates that non-associated community members overall favour justice and accountability measures for those who were involved with Boko Haram, especially for men, as seen in a comparison of figures 31a and 31b. In Chad, 33 per cent of respondents and 39 per cent in Niger think they should be prosecuted (only 18 per cent in Cameroon). In Chad, 41 per cent of respondents and 27-29 per cent in Cameroon and Niger think they should be imprisoned. By contrast, non-associated community members may be more tolerant towards women who were with Boko Haram. That is not to say that non-associated community members think women should not be punished (65-75 per cent think that women should receive a punishment). Preferences for prosecution and imprisonment for women are also slightly lower in Chad and Cameroon, compared to men. They, however, remain the same in Niger, regardless of the gender of the former associate. As many as 20 per cent of respondents in Chad and 30 per cent in Niger consider that men who were with Boko Haram should be sentenced to death (only 10 per cent in Cameroon). The preference towards the death penalty⁷⁰ for women drops by 5-10 per cent across the three countries, compared to men.

As previously raised, the greater tolerance towards women ex-associates may be explained by the fact that they may be perceived by the communities as subjugates of their husbands and male family members, who cannot make independent decisions. Thus, their involvement may be viewed through the lens of involuntary, even coerced, engagement with the group. Men and boys, in contrast, are more likely to be viewed as individual agents, capable of making their own decisions and culpable for their association.

Restorative or transitional justice mechanisms, such as obligatory reorientation or rehabilitation, public apology, and monitoring or observation are also chosen by a significant percentage of the

⁷⁰ Measuring preferences towards the death penalty is extremely important as it contributes to understanding the degree to which non-associated community members would favour hard-line "punishment." However, the death penalty is *de jure* no longer in use in Chad, and death sentences are *de facto* no longer carried out in Niger and Cameroon. Whereas Chad executed 10 Boko Haram members in 2015 by firing squad, it abolished the death penalty for terrorism-related offences in 2020 (and in 2017 for non-terrorism offences). In Niger, 11 individuals are currently on death row, but the State has been observing a *de facto* moratorium on the death penalty since 1976, when the last execution took place. In Cameroon, the number of death sentences has increased since 2014, following the enactment of antiterrorism laws and the Criminal Code adopted in 2016 still upholds the death penalty. Most of the death sentences are currently delivered by the military court in Maroua for crimes linked to terrorism in the fight against Boko Haram, but no executions have been recorded since 1997. In Nigeria, the death penalty is still allowed in the Constitution, and death sentences are carried out. In April 2022, the Nigerian Senate amended the Terrorism Prohibition Act to make abductions punishable by death when the abduction led to a loss of life.

community samples. Here, the trends are very similar for both men and women ex-associates, as illustrated in figures 31a and 31b. In Cameroon and Chad, between 30-40 per cent of the respondents favour obligatory reorientation or rehabilitation (only 9-10 per cent in Niger). Around 15 per cent in Niger and 20 per cent in Chad also favour public apology (only 8-9 per cent in Cameroon). Finally, around 22-26 per cent of respondents favour monitoring or observation in Niger and Cameroon (18 per cent in Chad).

Figure 31a – Punishment preferences towards men who were with Boko Haram (Chad, Cameroon, Niger)

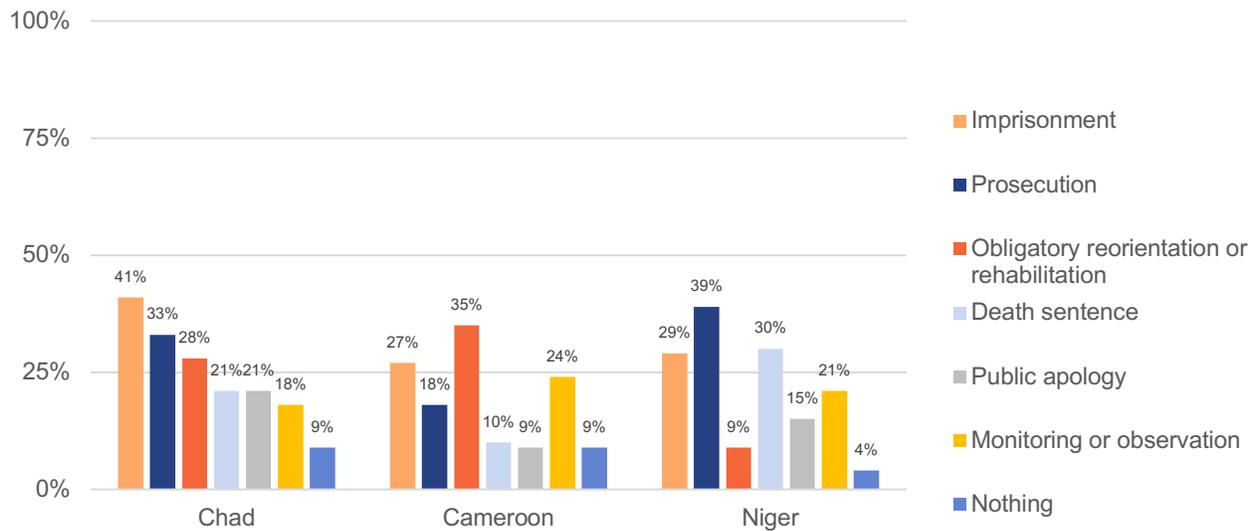
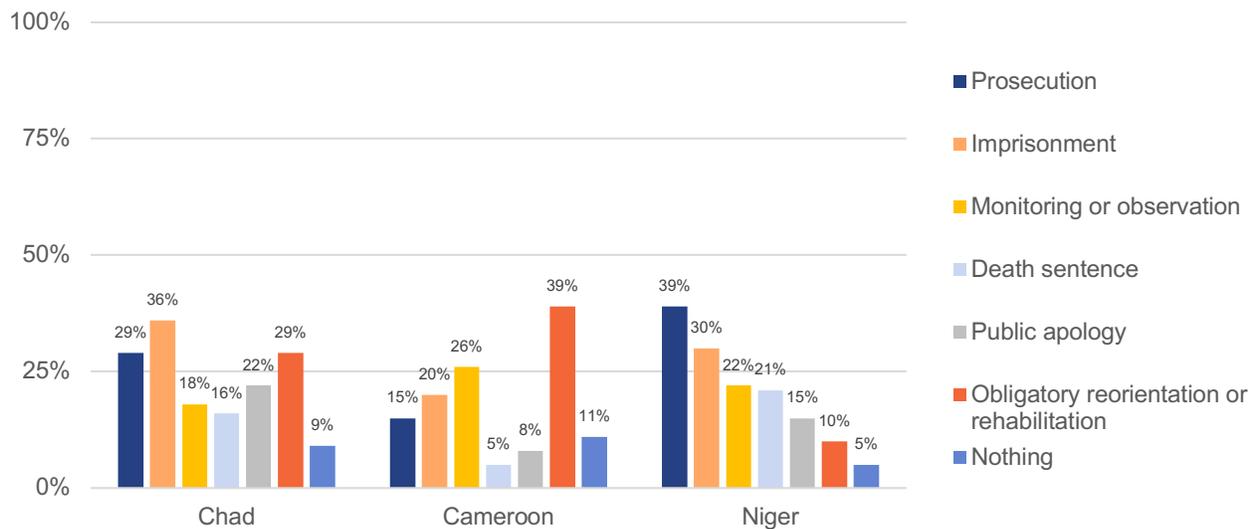
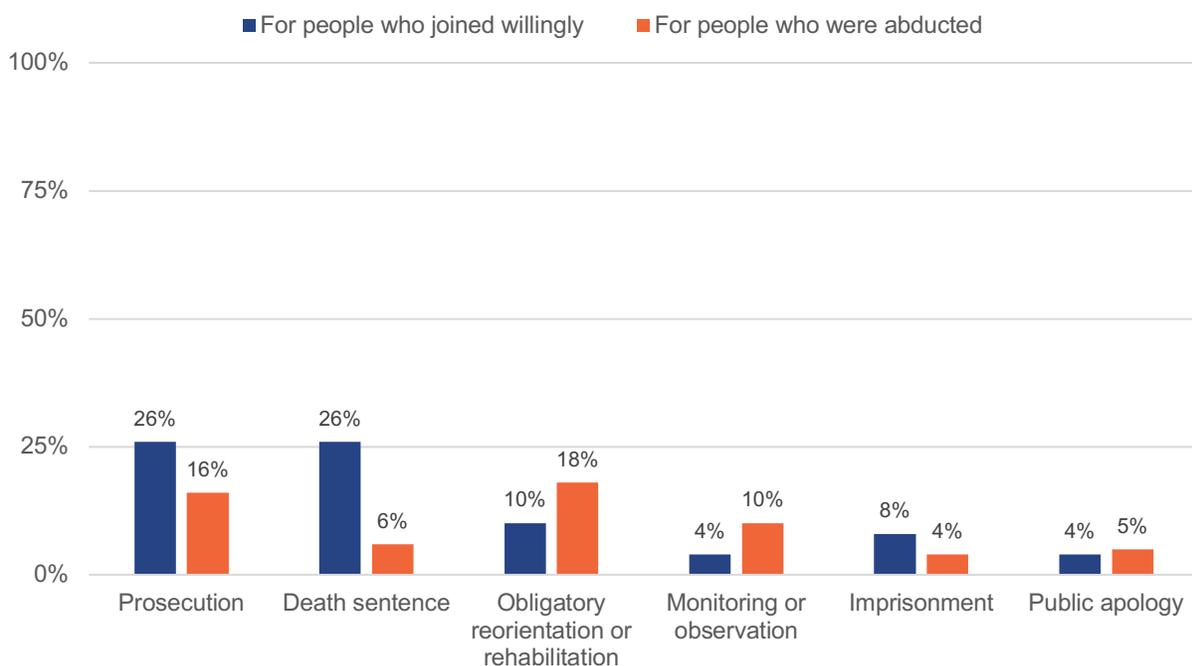


Figure 31b – Punishment preferences towards women who were with Boko Haram (Chad, Cameroon, Niger)



The survey data shows that in Chad, Cameroon, and Niger, the overwhelming majority of respondents favour a more severe punishment for the persons who joined the group willingly, compared to those who were abducted. The trend is also seen in the Nigeria baseline survey data, which provides more details as to the type of punishment preferences for individuals who joined willingly or who were abducted. It appears clearly in figure 32 that respondents favour hard-line forms of punishment for those who joined willingly (death sentence and prosecution) and conversely forms of support or reorientation for those who were abducted. It is relevant to note here that non-associated community members would often lack the necessary detailed information to determine punishment based on how and why someone joined the group, and what their roles were while with the group. As noted earlier, other MEAC findings show that when presented with a more detailed profile of a former associate, but one that does not detail crimes, respondents are less likely to prefer hard-line approaches. Furthermore, beyond hypothetical questions, people seem more accepting when they are actually confronted with real people who are returning.⁷¹

Figure 32 – Punishment preferences towards ex-associates (Nigeria baseline survey)

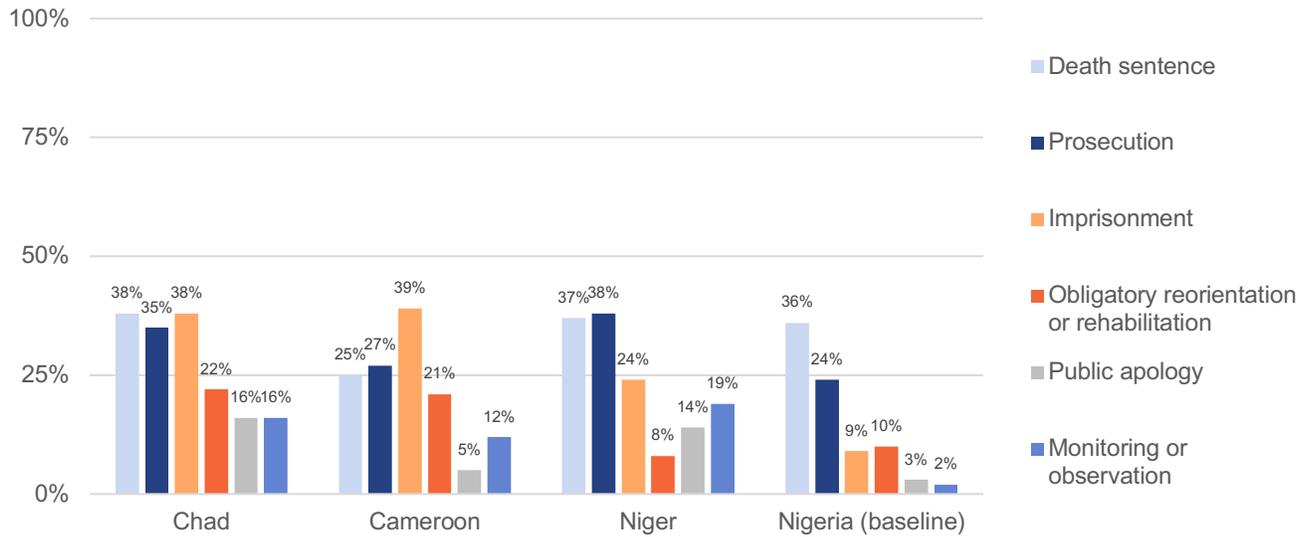


Across all four countries, and as illustrated by figure 34, when asked about ex-associates who fought for Boko Haram and killed people, non-associated community members express preferences for the most severe forms of punishment (death sentence) and traditional criminal justice responses (prosecution, imprisonment) and less preference for transitional justice and rehabilitation responses,

⁷¹ Rebecca Littman et al., "[Community Acceptance of Former Boko Haram Affiliates](#)," *MEAC Findings Report 7* (New York: United Nations University, 2021)

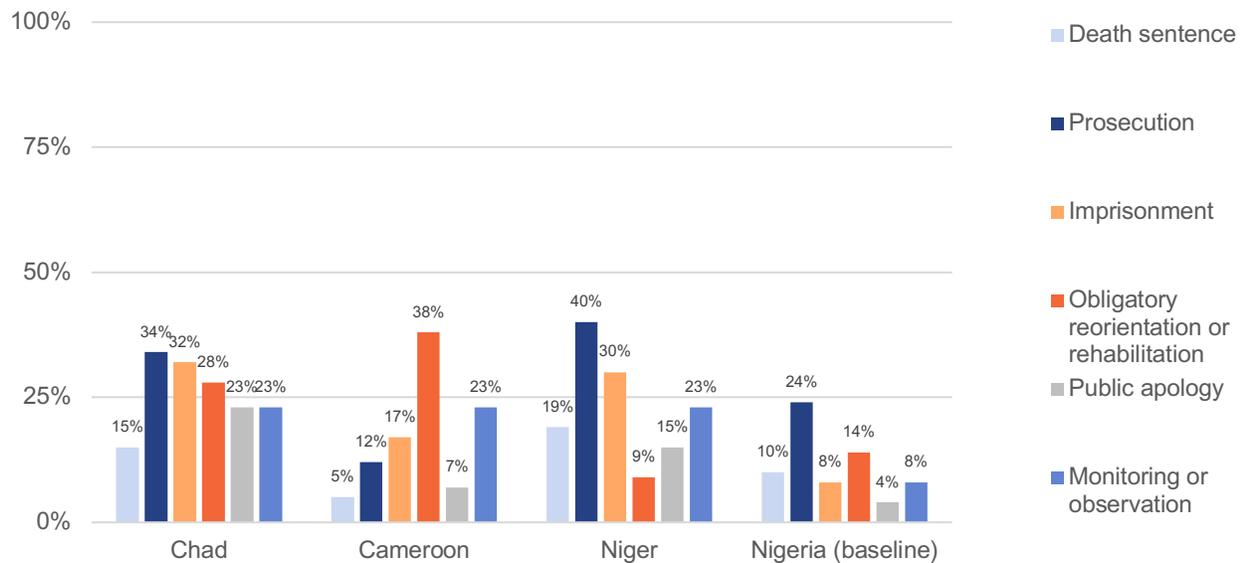
than when asked about generic men and women associates and people who only served in support roles.

Figure 33 – Punishment preferences towards ex-associates who killed during their time with Boko Haram



When asked if ex-associates who did *not* have active roles but served in functions like cooks or drivers should be punished the same as the people who were combatants in the group, majorities in Chad and Niger said yes (53 per cent in Chad and 60 per cent in Niger but 39 per cent in Cameroon). When asked further about the preferred punishments for people who served in such support roles, however, the percentage of respondents in favour of the death penalty drops. Figure 34 below illustrates the punishment preferences towards ex-associates who had support roles.

Figure 34 – Punishment preferences towards ex-associates who had only support roles during their time with Boko Haram



2. Preferences for Harsh Punishments for Boko Haram Ex-associates

In addition to the summary statistics above, MEAC ran a probit regression model to determine if different types of victimization impacted preferences for the most hard-line form of “punishment”: the death penalty. The theorizing behind this was that people who had been personally victimized, or their family/community had been, might want stronger punishments for men and women who had previously been associated with Boko Haram. There was no consistent relationship between certain types of victimization and support for the death penalty across Niger, Chad, and Cameroon. That said, there were some interesting results worth highlighting. In each country, the same victimization factors affected the likelihood a respondent would favour the death penalty as a punishment for former affiliates (men and women).

In Cameroon, having lived in a community that was occupied by Boko Haram increases the probability of considering the death penalty as a punishment (by 10-15 percentage points depending on the gender of the former associate). This may be explained by the fact that people living in communities under the Boko Haram occupation personally witnessed atrocities, although one might then expect to see statistical significance for this relationship in Chad and Niger too. Moreover, in Cameroon, having a close relative who was beaten, tortured, or shot as a result of the Boko Haram conflict increases the probability of considering the death sentence for a former affiliate by 9-13 percentage points. In each case, the percentage increase was higher for male former affiliates, suggesting non-associated community members in these situations may be slightly more tolerant towards female ex-associates than towards their male counterparts, perhaps due again to beliefs that women are less culpable for their actions or possibly because they are perceived to pose less of a threat to the community.

In Niger, the finding of note is that women and girl respondents are more likely than male respondents to prefer the death penalty as a punishment for ex-associates. In addition, if a respondent had a close relative who was killed as a result of the Boko Haram conflict, there was an increased probability that they would choose the death sentence for a male former associate (8 percentage points).

In Chad, having experienced direct physical harm (having been beaten, tortured, or shot) during the conflict raises the probability that a respondent will want the death sentence for a male former associate by 12 percentage points.

The questions around punishment in the Nigeria community phone survey were asked slightly differently than in Chad, Niger, and Cameroon. In the latter countries, the model examined the relationship between victimization and preference for the death penalty for a generic woman or man who had been with Boko Haram. In Nigeria it looked at whether those who reported victimization were more likely to say yes to the question “Should [Usman/Fatima] be punished for [his/her] involvement with Boko Haram?”. In Nigeria, the community phone survey asked these questions as part of a survey experiment with two fictional profiles of Fatima and Usman.⁷² The results suggest that in and around Maiduguri, overwhelmingly, the public did not want Fatima or Usman punished regardless of their age or the exit process details provided (74-79 per cent). Of the roughly one quarter of respondents who wanted Usman/Fatima punished, the most frequently mentioned “punishments” were prosecution (6-8 per cent for Usman/Fatima depending on the age profile), obligatory reorientation (4-5 per cent), imprisonment (3-5 per cent), public apology (2-4 per cent), or a public renouncement of Boko Haram (2-4 per cent). Support for capital or corporal punishment was very low (1-2 per cent and 1-3 per cent respectively), which is very different from the answers in Chad, Niger, and Cameroon.⁷³ Additionally, respondents who know about a community member who has returned from Boko Haram, and those who heard about a former associate who has returned and been a problem in the community, were more likely to want punishment.

This difference may be explained by several alternate (or overlapping) factors, first earlier work by MEAC: “highlighted the real possibility that hypothetical questions of reintegration yield lower support, but as scenarios become more specific, or as people are actually presented with returning family or community members, support for reintegration increases.”⁷⁴ Thus, respondents may have been more receptive – and less prone to punish – someone they knew a little about, even if it was the briefly described Fatima over a more anonymous woman who had been with Boko Haram.

⁷² The survey experiment varied three conditions: gender (“Usman” or “Fatima”), age (12- or 28-years old), and some information about the process s/he had been through (cleared by the government after completing a reorientation (reintegration) programme, expressed a willingness to publicly apologise and ask the community for forgiveness, or no additional information provided). The goal of the experiment was to isolate how an ex-associate’s age, gender, and exit pathway influenced community receptivity to them returning.

⁷³ The question was asked in an open-ended way, and enumerators classified respondent answers against a list that included classic criminal justice punishments and obligatory transitional justice or reintegration programming. While not all of the responses may be considered punishments by the Nigerian Government or humanitarian community (e.g., mandatory reorientation and public apologies), they represent what people in Maiduguri think of as punishments.

⁷⁴ Rebecca Littman et al., “[Community Acceptance of Former Boko Haram Affiliates](#),” *MEAC Findings Report 7* (New York: United Nations University, 2021):12.

Substantively, it is also possible that as the conflict has impacted each country in different ways at different times. People in North East Nigeria, for whom the crisis has been longer and more acute, may have different preferences as a result. Indeed, focus groups conducted in March 2022 captured a sense of fatalism about returns: “I do not feel good about it but what can I do? I hope they have truly repented.”⁷⁵ In addition, association with Boko Haram is pervasive in the area and many people personally know someone in their family or community who has been with Boko Haram. For example, in this community phone survey, 28 per cent of respondents reported having a close relative(s) who was abducted by Boko Haram, while 12 per cent reported having a close relative who voluntarily joined the group. Since these are sensitive questions that people may be wary of answering, it is possible the actual numbers could be higher. Beyond knowing someone who was associated, a significant portion of the populace appears to know ex-associates who have returned to the community. Many respondents (29 per cent) reported knowing a close relative or community member who had been with Boko Haram or one of its factions but had since returned to the community. This was confirmed during focus group discussion as well: “I had a sister who followed her husband to the bush together with their 5 children. Her husband is a JAS member, and I hope that she will be accepted whenever she returns. There are about 3 people who had returned to our community who were formally associates of Boko Haram. They are living peacefully, and people have accepted them. They had even married from the community.”⁷⁶

Furthermore, the survey findings and the focus groups confirm that many respondents see exit as a necessary part of the pathway to peace: “We now really want people to come back because it is for our own benefit. If more people come back, it means more peace is coming back, which is very beneficial to society in general. The truth is a lot of people joined forcefully or were abducted or deceived. I really would not differentiate when accepting returnees. It is enough that they decided to come back.”⁷⁷ For those living in and around Maiduguri at least, reintegration of ex-associates of Boko Haram is not theoretical. It is something that has been going on for a while and continues to this day.

In Nigeria, of those community phone survey respondents that wanted Fatima or Usman punished, the overwhelming majority said they would forgive her/him (86-92 per cent) and would be okay with them returning to live in the community (84-89 per cent) if they received the respondent’s selected punishment. This finding relates to **RSS indicator 10.4** and provides an indication that if their policy preferences are enacted, non-associated community members may be more open to the reintegration of ex-associates.

⁷⁵ Focus group with female non-associated community members in Maiduguri, Borno State, Nigeria, March 2022.

⁷⁶ Focus group with male current affiliates of the CJTF in Maiduguri, Borno State, Nigeria, March 2022.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

D. Familiarity of Non-associated Community Members with the Reintegration, Screening, and Transit Centres

To understand community receptivity to returning former affiliates as well as community perceptions on criminal and transitional justice, it is essential to gauge familiarity with government policies toward Boko Haram and its factions and the exit pipelines that exist for those leaving the group(s). At the institutional level, the countries surrounding Lake Chad adopted different approaches for managing the exits of former Boko Haram associates.

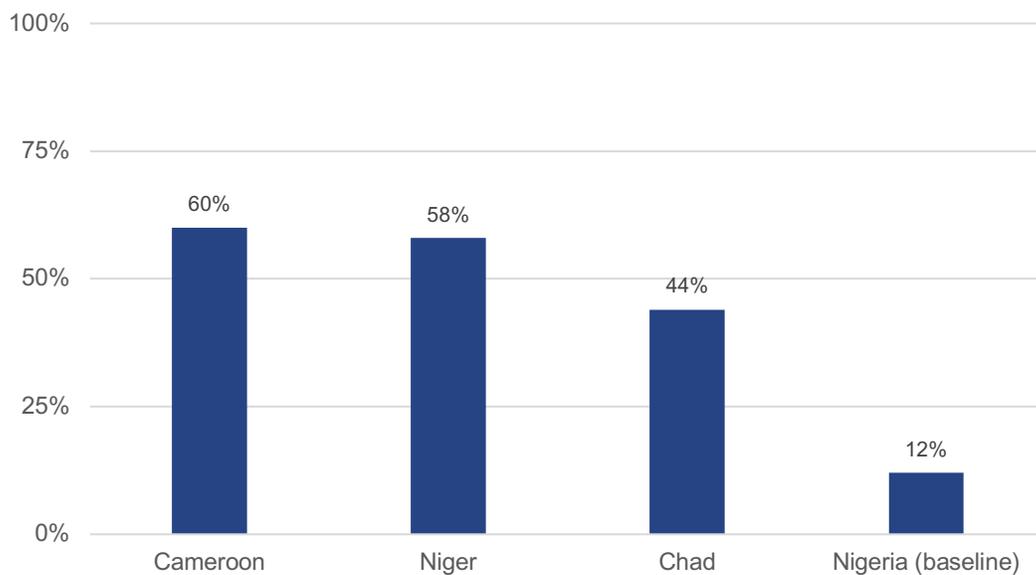
- Niger adopted a National Programme for the Management of the Surrender of Boko Haram Elements in February 2019 to govern the rehabilitation of ex-associates who voluntarily surrendered. The Goudoumaria Centre, in the Diffa region, is the central element of the programme and receives, rehabilitates, and trains ex-associates before reintegrating them into a community of their choice.⁷⁸ The Centre has already received more than 400 people to date, most of whom have been reintegrated into various communities in the Diffa region, while others are still on site in Goudoumaria.
- Cameroon has set up a “Comité National de Désarmement, Démobilisation, et Réintégration” (CNDDR – National Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Committee, or NDDRC) to organize, supervise, and manage the disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration of former Boko Haram combatants and Anglophone separatist fighters in the North West and South West regions who surrender voluntarily. The CNDDR has a coordination Centre in Mora and a transit centre in Meri in the Far North. A rehabilitation centre is planned to be opened in Meme but is not yet operational. The transit centre in Meri is therefore under pressure because all the ex-associates who have surrendered so far have remained in this centre waiting to be sent to Meme. The latest figures add up to about 1500 people.
- In Chad, no such centres have been set up. Unlike other countries, Chad does not have a designated transit or rehabilitation centre; the Bagasola centre is used only as a place to screen those coming out of Boko Haram and its factions. For the management of the first waves of ex-associates, a multidisciplinary anti-terrorist unit in Bagasola conducted basic profiling before returning ex-associates directly into their communities of origin or IDP sites. A steering committee was set up to help address the issue.
- The Nigerian Government established Operation Safe Corridor in 2016 to offer a pathway out for Boko Haram voluntary defectors who were deemed low risk. After receiving rehabilitation support in a facility in Gombe, defectors usually spend several months in ‘transit’ centres in Maiduguri, before reuniting with their families. In the last year, this pipeline has been accompanied by other processes – Sulhu – for higher level defectors, as well as mass defections that have been taking place since Shekau’s death in May 2021, which have created an influx of ex-associates into Maiduguri, crowded the transit and other camps there, and blurred understanding of how defectors are exiting the group(s).

As illustrated in figure 35, non-associated community members in Chad, Cameroon, and Niger are somewhat familiar with the different screening, reintegration, and reorientation centres – especially

⁷⁸ Jeannine Ella Abatan and Remadji Hoinathy, “[Getting Goudoumaria right: are Boko Haram defectors reintegrating safely?](#),” *ISS Today*, 8 December 2021.

in comparison to knowledge rates about similar processes in Nigeria. Around 60 per cent of non-associated respondents in Cameroon and Niger respectively knew about the CNDDR centres in Mora and Meri and the rehabilitation centre in Goudoumaria. Fewer non-associated respondents were familiar with the Bagasola screening centre in Chad, which is to be expected given that the centre was a more *ad hoc* arrangement and had been closed for more than four years by the time the survey was administered. By contrast, in Nigeria, many people do not seem to be familiar with particular policies or processes. In and around Maiduguri, only 21 per cent of respondents of the MEAC community phone survey had ever heard of Operation Safe Corridor – the government-run programme for low-risk Boko Haram affiliates.⁷⁹ In the more recent baseline survey, this number is even lower, with only 12 per cent of respondents reporting ever having heard of Operation Safe Corridor. When disaggregated by gender, it becomes clear that women respondents are less informed about Operation Safe Corridor than men (5 per cent of female respondents versus 20 per cent of male respondents).

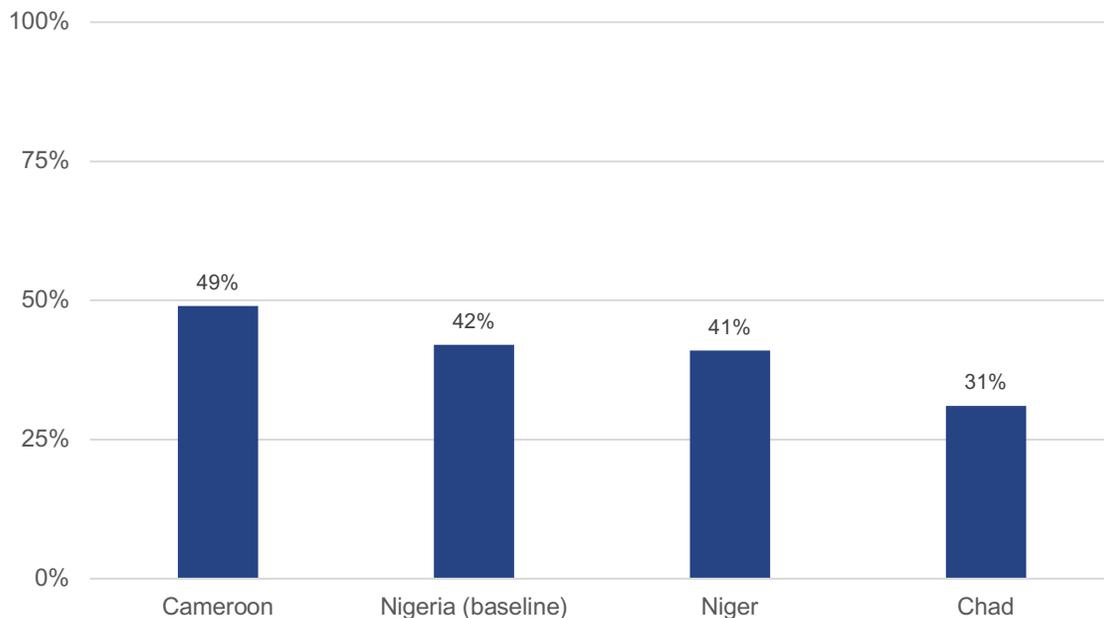
Figure 35 – Familiarity of non-associated respondents with country-specific transit, screening, or rehabilitation centres



Knowing about government efforts to rehabilitate ex-associates does not necessarily result in high confidence in their work, but it is hard to imagine having confidence in a process you have never heard of, especially when the stakes are seen as high. A sizable minority of respondents across the four countries think that people getting out of the various centres still pose a threat to society.

⁷⁹ Rebecca Littman et al., "[Criminal and Transitional Justice Preferences for Former Boko Haram Associates](#)," *MEAC Findings Report 12* (New York: United Nations University, 2021).

Figure 36 – Percentage of non-associated respondents considering that ex-associates getting out of the centres still pose a threat to society



On the other hand, when asked whether the government had officially recognized their civilian status, ex-associates in Chad and Niger overwhelmingly said yes (80 per cent and 85 per cent respectively). In Cameroon, fewer ex-associates reported their civilian status being recognized most of the time (59 per cent) and 13 per cent said they did not know in response to the question. In the Nigeria midline survey, 50 per cent of ex-associates who answered this question said that their civilian status was recognized by the government, 28 per cent said this was not the case, and 21 per cent did not know. In Chad, Niger, and Nigeria, higher percentages of men reported that their legal status was recognized compared to women. For example, 83 per cent of men and 75 per cent of women in Chad, and 58 per cent of men and 46 per cent of women in Nigeria reported that their civilian status was recognized. The trend is reversed in Cameroon, where 63 per cent of women reported recognition of their civilian status, compared to 53 per cent of men. Across the four countries, adults are far more likely to have their civilian status recognized compared to children.

It is interesting to analyse these answers in light of the lack of legal frameworks governing these exits and legal recognition of being a former associate across the region, where many of the offers of amnesty have not been enshrined in law. Ex-associates who reported their civilian status was recognized were confident that their respective governments would continue to recognize their status (73 per cent in Chad, 97 per cent in Cameroon, and 85 per cent in Niger). This confidence is one of several metrics mentioned herein that speaks to a broader optimism about the future that many ex-associates report, which can feed into reporting on **RSS Indicator 12.3b**.

VIII. Potential Impacts of Armed Group Association on Transitions to Civilian Life

This section looks at the impact of conflict on well-being and how having been associated with Boko Haram or one of its factions influences economic well-being, social relationships, and civic and political engagement after one exits. It should be recalled that the overwhelming majority of respondents are living in situations of displacement, and many are in IDP camps, hence the community well-being metrics of comparison themselves might be low and the relative reintegration progress of ex-associates should be viewed with this in mind.

A. Economic Indicators

Respondents in Chad, Cameroon, Niger, and Nigeria were asked a set of questions in order to measure their current economic well-being compared to before the conflict. In addition to examining the impact of conflict on economic well-being, this section briefly explores a summary of statistics regarding economic indicators disaggregated between ex-associates and respondents who have never been associated with an armed group. Additional analysis would, however, be needed to establish a causal relationship between armed group association and current economic well-being.

The Impact of Conflict on Economic Well-being

Across three key indicators (land ownership, food insecurity, and income), the survey data suggests that overall, the population of the Lake Chad Basin region has suffered economically as a result of the Boko Haram conflict. Today, in Chad, Cameroon, and Niger, only around 37 per cent of total respondents possessed land at the time of the survey, in stark contrast to the 70-90 per cent of the respondents who reported owning land before the conflict started. For food security and income, similar declines are seen across the three countries. The current situation of many respondents reinforces the alarms sounded by the international community. The majority of respondents in Chad (53 per cent), Cameroon (64 per cent) and Niger (50 per cent) confirmed that they had sufficient food over the last week.

Economic Well-being Today— Ex-associates and Non-associated Community Members

Overall, there appear to be some disparities between ex-associates and non-associated community members across the four countries as laid out in table 1 below, which includes the three present day economic indicators. In Niger and Cameroon, ex-associates are worse off economically than non-associated community members. This may be due in part to the fact that 70 per cent of ex-associates in Niger and 32 per cent in Cameroon still reside in transit centres, which limits their economic activity (as compared to only 9 per cent in Chad). In Nigeria and Chad, ex-associates are often roughly on par economically with non-associated community members. In Nigeria, in the midline sample, for example, 65 per cent of non-associated community members and 66 per cent of ex-associates have a source of income. It is important to note that even for those respondents who report engaging in activities that are providing them with some income, this does not necessarily speak to whether they are making sufficient money to meet their needs. Despite some positive indications that ex-associates have at least a similar livelihood and economic situation as their non-aligned peers, there are still signs many respondents are struggling. This is a relevant metric when reporting on **RSS Indicator 12.3**. It should be noted that despite relatively high percentages of the aggregate population reporting a source of income in Nigeria, roughly two-thirds of the entire sample still report food insecurity.

Ownership of land is reported at relatively similar rates by women and men in Chad and Niger overall. There is a noticeable difference between land ownership reported by men/boys and women/girls in Cameroon and Nigeria, where 43 per cent and 35 per cent of men/boys report owning land, compared to 33 per cent and 21 per cent of women/girls respectively. This gender disparity is similar for the ex-associates and non-associated samples.

Regarding food security, there are drastic differences among men and women, and adults and children, in Chad where 47 per cent of men overall said they had enough food to eat over the last week, compared to 62 per cent of women. The gender breakdown between ex-associates and non-associated respondents is similar. A similar disparity is seen by age, whereby 48 per cent of adults in Chad said they had enough food, compared to 65 per cent of children. Nigeria presents a similar gap but even lower food security (43 per cent of men compared to 28 per cent of women), highlighting the extent of the humanitarian crisis there.

As expected, there were far more men (between 10 per cent and 20 per cent more men) reporting a source of income compared to women. This was the case in Niger, Cameroon, and Nigeria and a similar gap was seen for ex-associated and non-associated sample populations. In Chad, however, the trend is reversed, even though the difference is less striking (35 per cent of men and 41 per cent of women).

Table 1 – Economic indicators by country (in per cent)

Country	Respondents type	Land	Food security	Source of income
Chad	Ex-associates	38	53	42
	Non-associated community members	37	53	34
Cameroon	Ex-associates	21	54	44
	Non-associated community members	55	75	68
Niger	Ex-associates	34	42	39
	Non-associated community members	37	52	52
Nigeria	Ex-associates	24	29	66
	Non-associated community members	22	32	65

There are concerns that if ex-associates are unable to find sustainable civilian livelihoods they may return to their armed group (or another one) or turn to criminality. The surveys asked if all respondents had been tempted to do things like steal from people's homes, market stalls, or fields. Of those surveyed, 80-90 per cent of the respondents answered that they were not tempted to do so (but there were slightly higher rates of positive answers to this question for ex-associates, notably in Chad - 6 per cent, and Cameroon - 11 per cent). Higher levels of temptation among ex-associates in Cameroon make sense in light of the economic well-being differential with non-associated community members outlined in table 1 above. Only 1 per cent of ex-associates in Nigeria report that they were tempted to steal since they left Boko Haram in the midline survey. This section suggests that to achieve further progress against **RSS Indicator 12.3a**, and reduce the likelihood of re-recruitment and criminal activities, particularly in Cameroon and Niger, more focus on supporting income-generating activities and related livelihood skill sets is needed to close the gap between Boko Haram ex-associates and the communities they are reintegrating into.

B. Social and Civic Engagement

The civic and political engagement indicators in the survey included a range of political activities (strike, protest, voting, volunteering, running for office) and engagement in a range of organizations and groups (religious, community, unions, politics, youths, women or homemakers, sports). This section briefly presents disaggregated data around civic and political engagement between non-

associated community members and ex-associates of Boko Haram *at the time of the survey*. Across the three countries, the majority of both ex-associates and non-associated respondents reported that they did not participate in these types of activities or groups, either before the conflict (as discussed [in section III](#)) or currently.

Across the four countries, the rates of engagement were low for most political activities (less than 1 per cent for all of the activities above, except voting). At the time of conducting the survey in Chad, Cameroon, and Niger, non-associated respondents were more likely to report voting than ex-associates (for example, 22 per cent versus 14 per cent in Chad, 20 per cent versus 13 per cent in Cameroon, and 19 per cent versus 7 per cent in Niger). In the Nigeria midline survey, the rates of engagement towards voting are lower than in the other countries, and similar for both non-associated community members and ex-associates (9-10 per cent).

Engagement in social groups varies depending on the country. Today, in Chad and Cameroon, non-associated respondents report higher participation rates in certain types of social groups than ex-associates. For example, in Chad, 14-15 per cent of non-associated community members reported participating in religious organizations or community groups, but only 8-9 per cent of ex-associates reported participating in them. In Cameroon, less than 3 per cent of ex-associates participate in religious organizations or associations of women or homemakers, whereas 7-8 per cent of non-associated community members report engagement in these groups. By contrast, in the Nigeria midline survey, social group engagement is much lower than in the other countries (around 1-3 per cent) and rates of engagement are similar for ex-associates and non-associated respondents.

C. Psychological Functioning

Using a probit regression model, MEAC examined the relationship between armed group association and one's mental health and psychological functioning. The results suggest that association with Boko Haram or one of its factions has a negative impact on one's psychological functioning – answering “sometimes” or “most times” to a series of questions about how often people have experienced anxiety, depression, and symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Across Chad, Niger, and Cameroon, being associated with the group was associated with a 9-18 per cent percentage point increase in the likelihood that the respondent would admit to experiencing anxiety. In addition, association with Boko Haram or one of its factions was associated with a higher likelihood of suffering from several PTSD and depression symptoms.⁸⁰ In Cameroon, association with Boko Haram or one of its factions increases the respondent's likelihood of reporting being plagued by the memories of bad things and engaging in avoidance behaviours (by about 12 percentage points each) and experiencing depression (by almost 17 percentage points). In Chad, association with Boko

⁸⁰ Metrics of interest include; PTSD: Bad Memories – “In your life now, how often do thoughts about the bad things that happened to you keep bothering you?”; PTSD: Psychosomatic Effects – “In your life now, when you think about the bad things that happened, how often do you instantly feel something in your mind or your body, like you feel very sad, you start to sweat, or your heart starts to beat fast?”; PTSD: Avoidance – “In your life now, how often do you stay away from things that remind you of the bad things that happened?”; and Depression – “In your life now, how often do you feel sad or uninterested in life?”.

Haram or one of its factions increases the respondent's likelihood of reporting being plagued by the memories of bad things that have happened to them (14 percentage points) and having psychosomatic effects from those memories and experiencing depression (both by about 6 percentage points). Beyond anxiety, all these indicators move in a similar direction in Niger, but none of them is statistically significant. In Nigeria, the midline survey showed that having been associated with Boko Haram or one of its factions increased the probability the respondent would report being anxious (9 percentage point increase), having memories that haunt them (16 percentage points increase), and feeling depressed (11 percentage point increase).

IX. Life After the Centre or IDP Camp

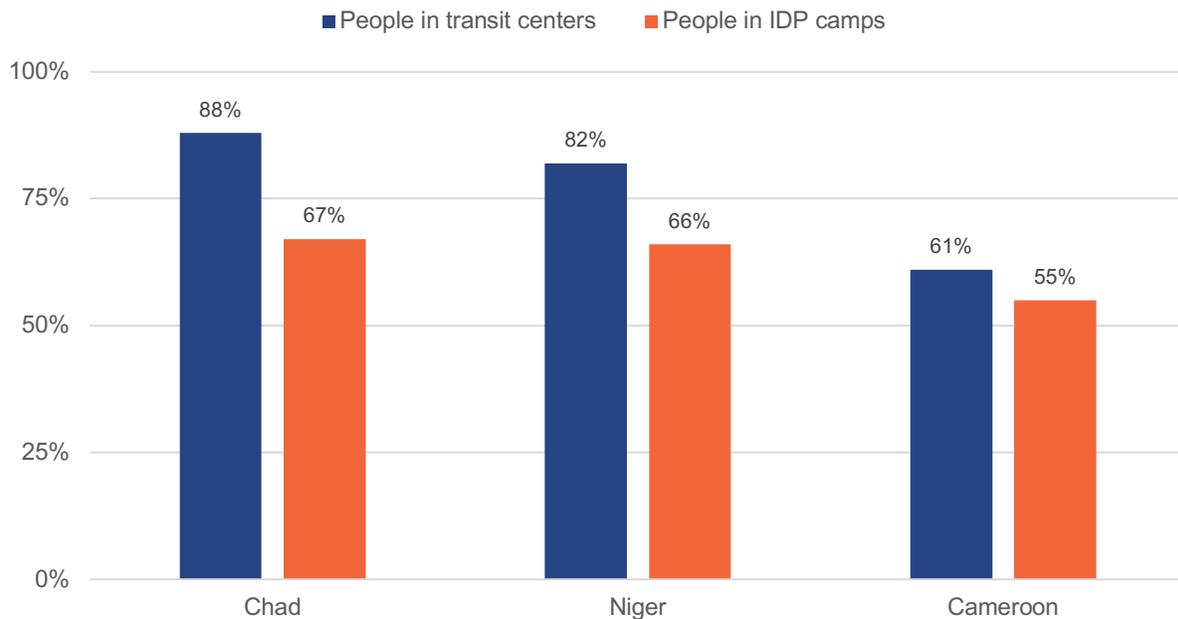
This section focuses on people currently living in transit/reintegration centres and IDP camps (namely Meri in Cameroon and Goudoumaria in Niger), their desire to return to their communities,⁸¹ and expectations in the future, and, in turn, the knowledge of the transit centres by the non-associated community members.

A. Expectations of IDPs and Persons in Transit Centres

Respondents who are currently displaced and/or in transit/reintegration centres generally want to go back to their communities (on average, 63 per cent in Chad, 54 per cent in Cameroon, and 70 per cent in Niger), with this desire being strongest among transit centre residents. In Nigeria, 74 per cent of respondents who are interviewed while in a transit centre report that they would like to go back to their community.⁸²

⁸¹ Respondents residing in IDP camps and those who were in transit centres were both asked if they wanted to go back to their communities, if so, why, and what challenges they were concerned about for life after. Respondents in transit centres were also specifically asked what they wanted to do with their lives after they got out of the centre.

⁸² This data point comes from a separate survey that is currently being administered by MEAC at three different transit centres in Maiduguri, Borno State (Bulumkutu centre, Shokari centre, and Hajj camp), and is therefore not included in figure 38. This number might change in the future, as the centre registration survey is still ongoing at the moment of writing this report.

Figure 37 – Desire to return to communities (Chad, Cameroon, Niger)

To reunite with family and friends is the main reason why respondents want to go back to their communities of origin in Cameroon and Chad. For example, 70 per cent of the respondents in transit and IDP camps altogether selected the answer “be with parents” to the question “why do you want to go there?” in Cameroon and Chad (versus 45 per cent in Niger).⁸³ Economic and professional considerations (starting a business, working for someone, learning a skill) are very important motivations as well. They are the second main reason for wanting to return (first in Niger).

Displaced ex-associates were asked why they did not return to their communities in an open-ended question. Insecurity and fear of Boko Haram were frequently stated as reasons why ex-associates do not want to go back. These ex-associates intend to remain in displacement because they assume Boko Haram fighters are still active in or around their communities. Most still fear being killed or kidnapped if they return, especially when their villages are in areas without a military presence. A sizable minority of respondents also expressed concern that their villages are now empty and that all of the surviving members of the community reside in IDP camps. For some of those whose villages no longer exist, they prefer to remain in IDP camps in order to access humanitarian aid or government assistance.

While IDPs and ex-associates have had different trajectories, they do share some of the same challenges, particularly around their displacement (or being away from their community for long periods). Respondents in both transit centres and IDP camps were asked, as an open-ended question, about the challenges they might face after getting out of the IDP or transit centre they were residing in. Three main challenges emerge from the majority of the responses. The first challenge,

⁸³ Contrary to what may be assumed, this response is given by the majority of adult respondents, and only by a few children - except in Cameroon, where a larger number of children expressed this.

expressed in Cameroon, Niger, and Chad, is linked to economic well-being. A majority of respondents pointed out their lack of financial means to start an income-generating activity, difficulty accessing arable lands, and rates of unemployment. A sizable minority of respondents in Niger also pointed out the lack of food security. In Cameroon and Niger, some respondents worried about difficulties reuniting with their families who were displaced because of the conflict,⁸⁴ and where they should settle now that their villages (and homes) had either been destroyed or abandoned.⁸⁵ Some ex-associates also expressed fears that they might be rejected by their communities, and even killed. Safety is the third most identified challenge by ex-associates in Niger, which is related to concerns about being attacked or killed because they are seen as traitors to Boko Haram or the other faction with which they were once associated. Ex-associates residing in transit centres also expressed their fear of being rejected or stigmatized upon return or being targeted by Boko Haram as a reprisal for leaving or defecting the group. These concerns are important to understand and address as they likely inhibit reintegration progress as would be measured by **RSS Indicators 12.3b and 12.3c**.

X. Existing Institutional Structures for Prevention and Reintegration

This section aims to provide an overview of the existing structures of government, security, and humanitarian aid in the region, as well as public trust in them. The purpose of providing this overview is to contextualize how communities respond to different government counter-terrorism and reintegration policies and programmes and discern if there are existing structures that are trusted that might be brought to bear to advance regional stabilization efforts.

A. Trust and Perceptions Around State and Non-state Institutions

Despite the ongoing conflict and the difficulties of curbing insecurity and violence, the majority of respondents across the Lake Chad Basin continue to express high trust in State institutions (i.e., federal, and provincial/regional governments, government courts, and security structures such as police and military). Moreover, State-affiliated security forces and especially the military remain perceived as the main providers of security in the communities.

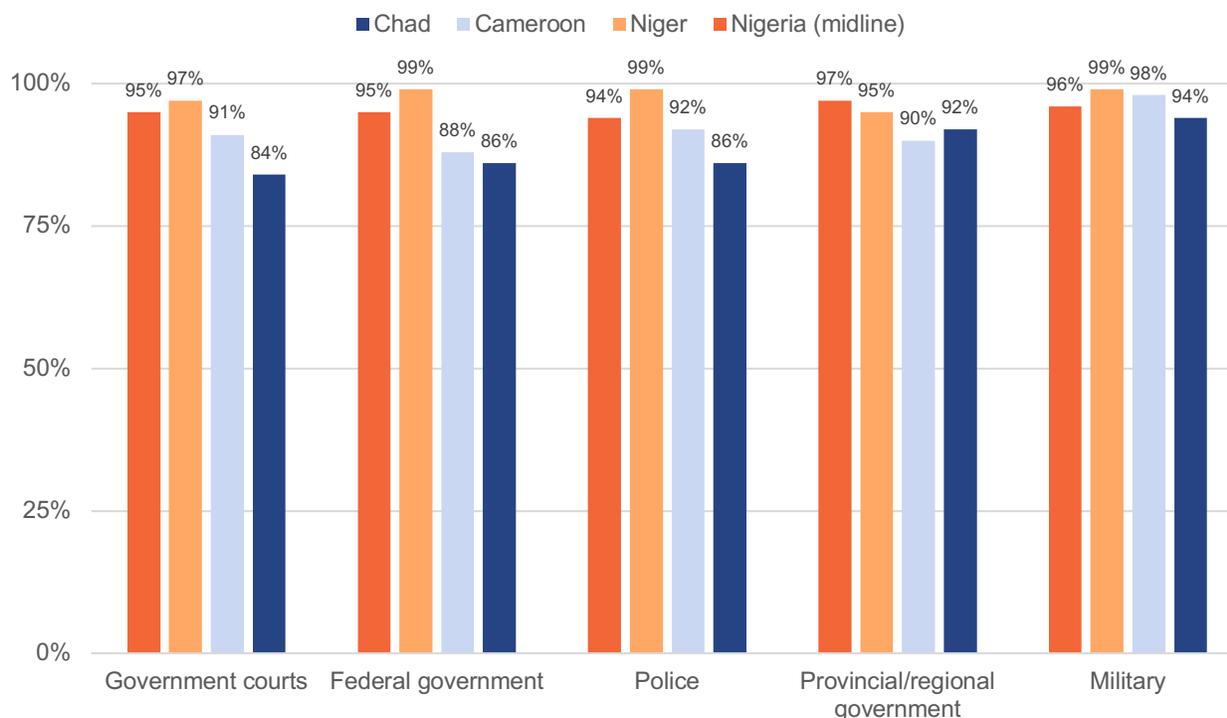
Between 70 per cent and 95 per cent of the respondents across the four countries express trust in State institutions. Large portions of those respondents in Chad, Cameroon, and Niger express trust

⁸⁴ "Retrouvez ma femme et mes enfants sera un vrai défi pour moi car ils sont restés au Nigeria dans un camp de réintégration"

⁸⁵ "Trouver un village où m'installer est un défi car mon village a été détruit par boko haram"

in them (whether “a lot” or “some”) as noted in figure 38.⁸⁶ The military is the most trusted institution among the different State institutions across all four countries (trusted by 96 per cent of respondents in the Nigeria midline survey). The central Government is next in Niger and Chad. Conversely, the police and the military were named as the main providers of security by respectively 40 per cent and 71 per cent of the respondents in Chad, 42 per cent and 80 per cent of the respondents in Cameroon, and 30 per cent and 68 per cent of the respondents in Niger.

Figure 38 – Trust in state institutions



Even more so than central State institutions, community leaders are the most trusted form of authority across the three countries (over 95 per cent of trust was expressed in Chad, Cameroon, and Niger,⁸⁷ and 97 per cent in the Nigeria midline survey). Moreover, the majority of respondents in Chad, Cameroon, and Niger would go to their local leader if they had a dispute with another member of their community (89 per cent of respondents in Chad and 90 per cent of respondents in Cameroon).

Figures 39 and 40 below illustrate respondent perceptions of security providers within their communities. In Nigeria, defensive security responsibilities have been distributed differently than in Chad, Niger, and Cameroon. In the midline survey, 48 per cent of respondents designated the CJTF, 20 per cent Yan Gora, and 11 per cent Hunters and Charmers as the main providers of security in

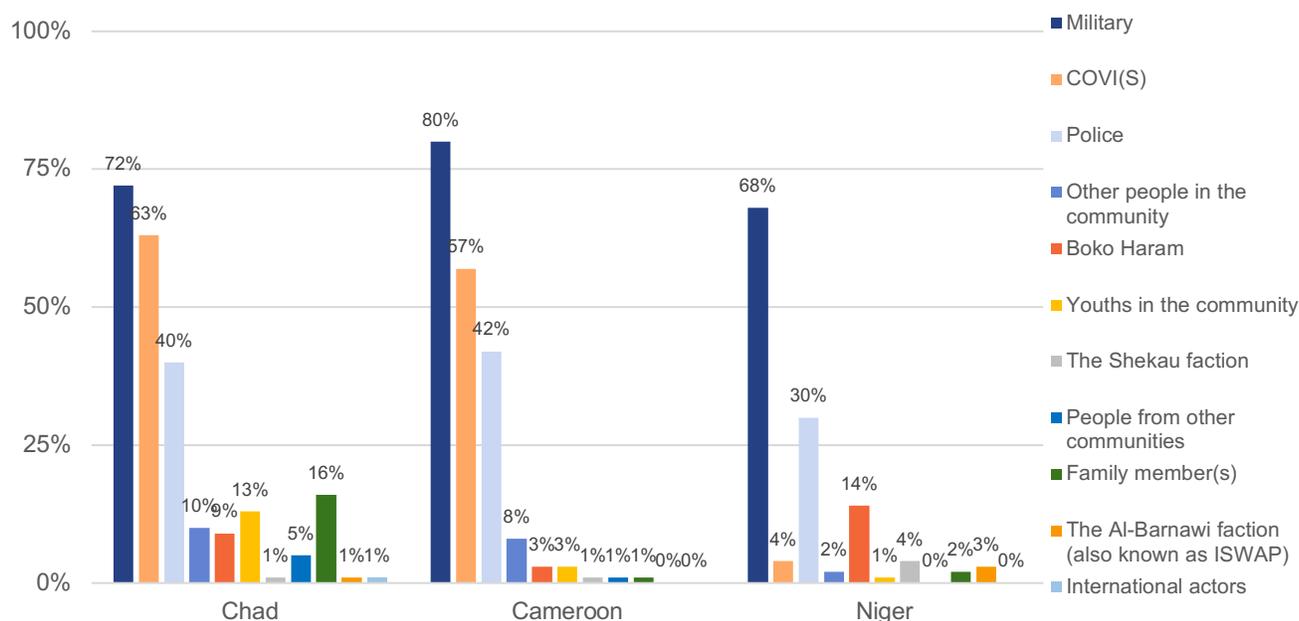
⁸⁶ The graph below only shows the per cent of respondents who answered, “a lot” to the question “how much do you trust [federal, provincial / regional governments, government courts, police and military].” The remaining bulk of the respondents answered “some” to these questions, which gives the overall percentage given in the text.

⁸⁷ The majority of respondents answered, “a lot” to the question “how much do you trust your community leader?” (84 per cent in Chad; 87 per cent in Cameroon, 71 per cent in Niger). The remaining bulk answer “some” to this question, which gives the overall percentage given in the text.

their communities. Non-state security outfits like the COVI in Chad (63 per cent) and the COVIS in Cameroon (57 per cent) were reported as the main security providers. In contrast, only 4 per cent of non-associated respondents in Niger named the COVI as a main security provider, despite the fact that COVI is active in almost all the communities where the survey was rolled out in the country. Trust in the COVI/COVIS is also rather high, especially in Chad and Cameroon.⁸⁸ In Chad, 63 per cent of respondents trust the COVI “a lot,” and 23 per cent “some.” In Cameroon, 70 per cent trust the COVIS “a lot” and 20 per cent “some.” By contrast, in Niger, 28 per cent trust the COVI “a lot” and 26 per cent “some”, although these figures should be viewed with caution as only half of the respondents had ever heard of COVI before.⁸⁹

In some communities, it is not the State or non-State security outfits who are noted as providing security, but rebel/terrorist groups. In Niger, 14 per cent of respondents said Boko Haram is a main provider of security, compared to 9 per cent of the respondents in Chad, and 3 per cent in Cameroon. The Shekau faction and ISWAP were specifically named, but less frequently (3-4 per cent of the respondents in Niger, and even lower in Chad and Cameroon). No other armed groups are considered as providing security.

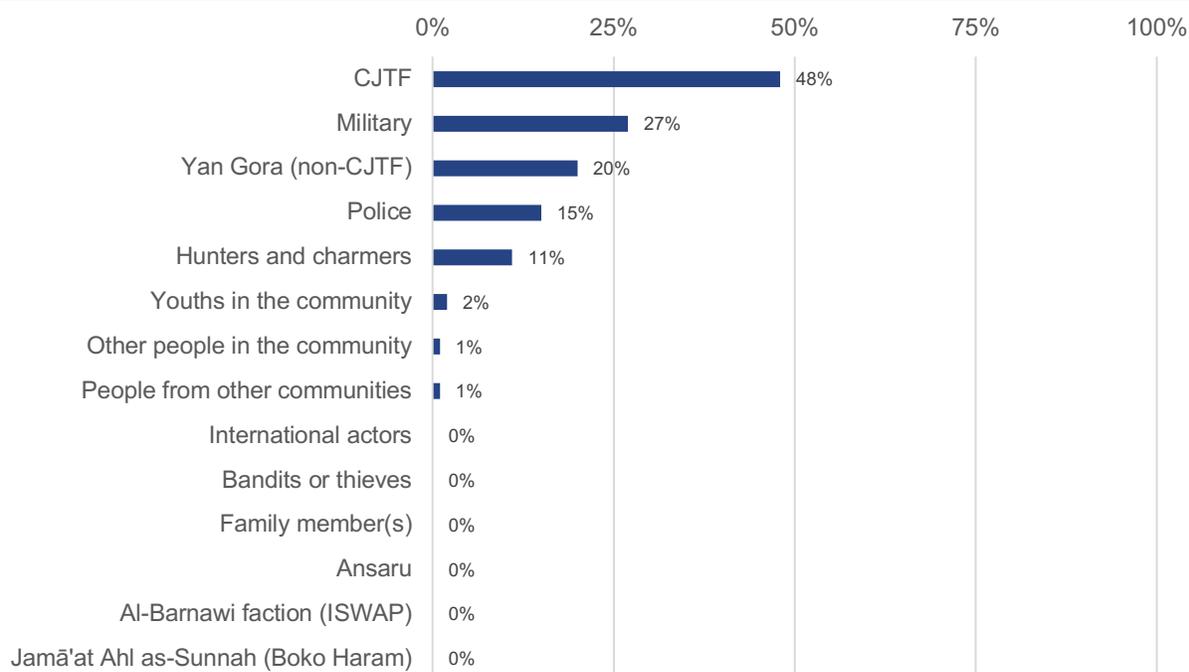
Figure 39 – Main providers of security (Chad, Cameroon, Niger)



⁸⁸ Knowledge of COVI/COVIS is high in the three countries: 81 per cent of total respondents have heard of COVI in Chad, 50 per cent in Niger, and 88 per cent in Cameroon have heard of COVIS.

⁸⁹ Other non-State entities were named as security providers in Chad: 17 per cent of respondents noted family members; 13 per cent noted youths in the community (13 per cent) or people from their (10 per cent) or other communities (5 per cent) as providers of security. These categories of security providers were selected by only about 1-2 per cent in Niger and Cameroon (except for “other people in the community” - 8 per cent in Cameroon). Despite some security functions being played by local actors, most security functions are still predominantly performed by the Chadian military. Additionally, international actors were selected by only 1 per cent of the respondents in Chad, and less than 1 per cent in Cameroon and Niger.

Figure 40 – Main providers of security (Nigeria midline survey)



B. Non-state Security Actor Transitions

The MEAC survey is designed to assess transitions of those leaving non-State security outfits like the CJTF and COVI/COVIS, but despite this focus, the studies in Niger, Cameroon, and Chad had limited visibility on involvement and exits from these types of groups. People involved with the COVI/COVIS represent only 4.7 per cent of this random community sample in Chad, 3 per cent in Cameroon, and 0.5 per cent in Niger. Overwhelmingly, those interviewed were active, not exiting members. Thus, it is difficult to speak to **RSS Indicators 7.3⁹⁰, 7.5⁹¹ and 7.6⁹²** in the RSS in these countries. In Nigeria, however, the study is longer running, enjoys different access to volunteer security outfits (VSOs), and has benefited from working with partners who programme for exiting and current VSO members.

In April 2021, MEAC surveyed a small group of CJTF members that were part of an offboarding intervention in Nigeria. Interestingly, when asked about their current relationship with the group, many of the participants stated they were still active members. The answers from this small sample highlighted the challenge of applying a more rebel group conceptualization of exit to VSOs. In March

⁹⁰ 7.3: Percentage of former members from vigilante groups selected for a DDR process who successfully demobilize.

⁹¹ 7.5: Percentage of community leaders in communities with at least [insert number] ex-vigilantes that indicate that ex-vigilantes are very reintegrated or reasonably reintegrated into civilian life at least one year after DDR support has ceased (disaggregated by sex and age and location).

⁹² 7.6: Percentage of former vigilantes who indicate feeling very reintegrated or reasonably reintegrated into civilian life at least one year after DDR support] has ceased (disaggregated by sex, age, and location).

2022, MEAC explored what it means to “exit” a VSO when members never actually physically left their community, where members are held up as hometown heroes, and where there are continued social expectations to continue to protect the community in times of need. The focus group discussions with younger and older male members of the CJTF and Yan Gora, as well as women who were part of the group, yielded some important insights relevant for **RSS Indicators 7.5 and 7.6**. First, when it comes to exiting non-State security actors, both current and ex-affiliates of the CJTF and Yan Gora highlighted in the focus group discussions that there is not always a formal process for ‘unregistering’ from the group. Although some associates are registered officially with the CJTF, many are not. Leaving the group merely meant no longer joining the activities of the group. When active affiliates were asked what they wanted to do with their lives, most indicated that they wanted to be absorbed into government security branches, such as the military or the customs service. Second, the participants of the focus groups with active CJTF affiliates were adamant that their duties went far beyond merely providing security or defending their communities. When asked what type of tasks they are responsible for, emphasis was placed on the group’s role in enforcing certain social norms, such as resolving disputes between couples or children, policing youth, and enforcing dress codes, as well as enforcing certain rules for women and girls (e.g., a 21:00 curfew). When thinking about the roles these non-State security actors are playing in society, it is important to consider that their engagement and influence might go beyond security-related aspects, especially when security improves, and the conflict abates.

Much of the programmatic focus in Nigeria today is on the professionalization of the CJTF and other VSOs rather than on providing off-ramps during a still active conflict. MEAC had the opportunity in early 2022 to baseline a group of 344 UNP programme beneficiaries from various VSOs who were going through such a programme. Part of the sample was surveyed right before they began the training, and about half were surveyed right after the training, which included modules on human rights, leadership and civility, dialogue, community engagement including the protection of civilians, and transitional justice, among other topics. While not a panel survey with before and after interviews of the same participants, this research design still allows one to see if participation is likely to be associated with different outcomes of interest to the RSS (**Indicators 7.3, 7.5, 7.6**). In this study, the data suggest that being trained in protecting civilians, human rights, and alternate dispute resolution is associated with slightly lower support for using violence. There was a 7-percentage point drop in willingness to use violence to attack your community’s enemies among those who had attended the training compared with the subgroup who had yet to take it. Similarly, the same size drop was seen in the post-course cohort response to the positive framed question: “Are you prepared to use violence to protect your community?”. These results suggest that such interventions may help shift VSO member willingness to use violence, which given the reports of extrajudicial killings and human rights abuses by such groups, is welcome. It should be noted that such interventions would likely need to have a bigger and long-lasting impact to significantly alter relations with communities on the ground, but there is promise here for potential professionalization. This is an area that the longer-term study in Nigeria will continue to monitor as these cohorts are followed up with periodically. While this does not speak directly to the reintegration of vigilante groups (as outlined in **RSS Indicators 7.3, 7.4, and 7.5**), it does indicate that active vigilante/VSO members may be adopting norms more in line with a rights-based approach to community security provision.

C. Beneficiary Needs and Humanitarian Aid

Humanitarian organizations estimate that more than 10 million people are in need of humanitarian protection and relief across the Lake Chad Basin area.⁹³ Yet, the delivery of much needed humanitarian aid is often impeded by an inability to access certain populations, due to security concerns to bureaucratic and military restrictions. The COVID-19 pandemic has further complicated access, exacerbating existing barriers and creating new ones.⁹⁴

As a result, many communities are out of the reach of humanitarian actors: 30 per cent of non-associated community members in Cameroon and Niger, 56 per cent in Chad, and 60 per cent in the Nigeria baseline survey report that no NGOs have been active in their communities since the beginning of the conflict. Moreover, the majority of non-associated community members report that they did not receive anything from the aid sector since the beginning of the conflict (respectively 38 per cent in Niger, 42 per cent in Chad, 59 per cent in Cameroon, and 55 per cent in the Nigeria baseline survey).

The lack of support to the civilian population is mirrored in the experience of ex-associates.⁹⁵ Of ex-associates currently residing outside of transit centres in Chad and Cameroon, 46 per cent of respondents report that they did not receive anything while transiting out of the group to the place they live now. The situation seems less desperate in Niger, where 21 per cent of ex-associates report not receiving any kind of help (24 per cent for those currently in transit centres, which is unusual given this is where services are meant to be provided). The types of support ex-associates received, what impacted their lives positively, and what they would provide to others like them if they were in charge are detailed later in this section.

1. Support, Needs, and Preferences Among Non-associated Community Members

When non-associated community members could access humanitarian aid, they reported mostly receiving basic needs support (34 per cent in Chad, 21 per cent in Cameroon, 31 per cent in Niger, and 25 per cent in the Nigeria baseline survey), which fits the most pressing needs identified by respondents. Overall, respondents in Cameroon, and to some extent Nigeria, are less likely to report receiving support than those in the other countries, especially those in Chad, despite the fact that more communities in Chad are out of reach of the humanitarian sector. Beyond basic needs, there were fluctuations in other types of support received across Chad, Niger, Cameroon, and Nigeria (as seen in figure 41). Communities in Chad were more likely to report cash (28 per cent) and material goods (33 per cent) than in Niger (22 per cent and 19 per cent respectively), Cameroon (14 per cent and 19 per cent respectively), and in Nigeria (14 per cent and 13 per cent respectively in the baseline survey). Communities in Niger seemed to have received more medical care (25 per cent) and

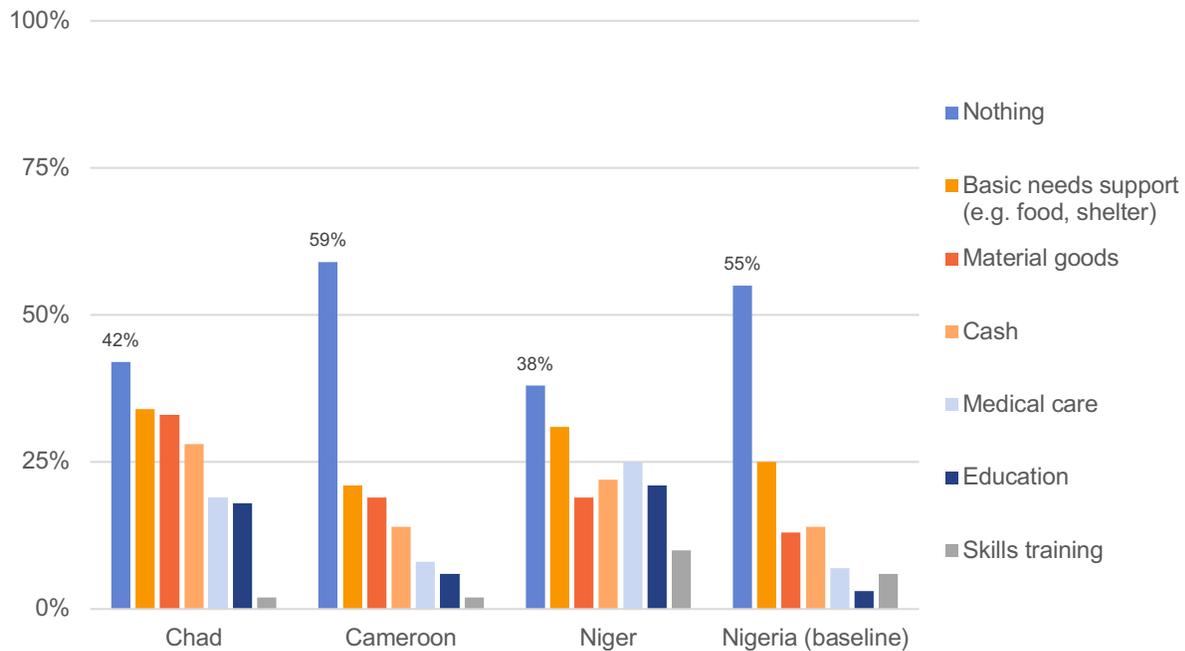
⁹³ OCHA, "[Lake Chad Basin: Humanitarian Snapshot](#)," United Nations, 17 January 2022.

⁹⁴ Malik Samuel, "[COVID-19: a missed chance to build trust in Lake Chad Basin](#)," *ISS Today*, 17 February 2022.

⁹⁵ Ex-associates in Chad, Cameroon, Niger, and Nigeria were asked "did you receive any of the following while you were there?" - "there" being any of the places they have been since they left the group. Non-associated community members were asked "Since the Boko Haram conflict began, what kind of help, if any, have you received from international organizations or NGOs?"

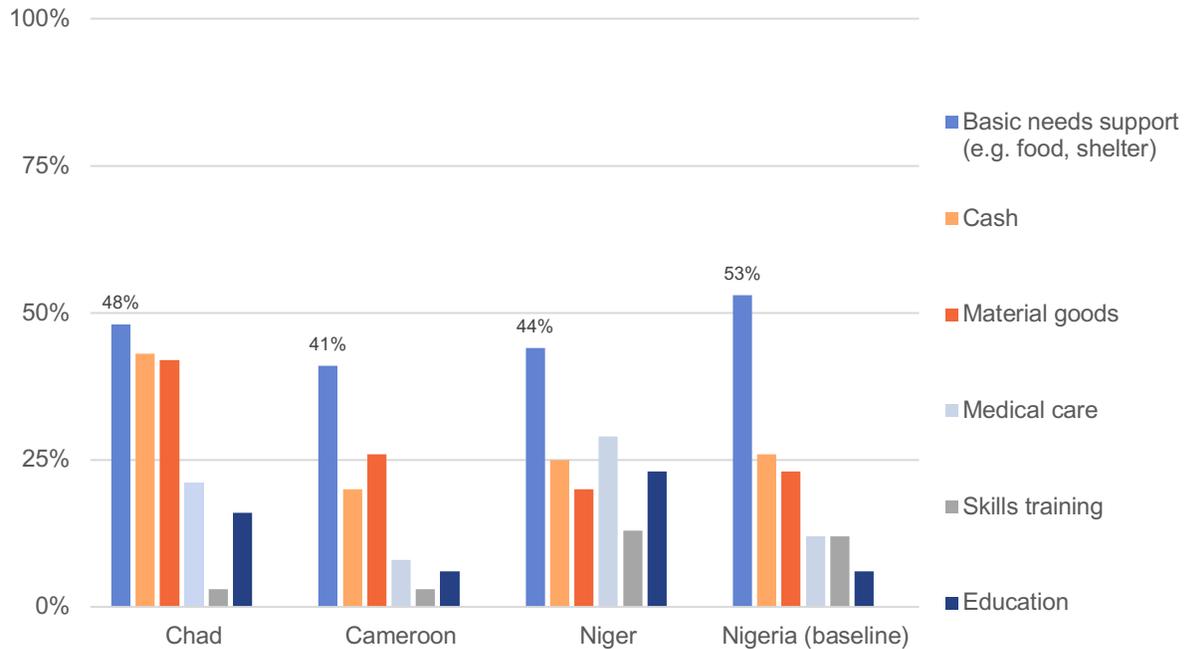
education (21 per cent) than in Chad (respectively 19 per cent and 18 per cent) and even more so than in Cameroon and Nigeria (respectively 8 per cent and 6 per cent in Cameroon, and 7 per cent and 3 per cent in the Nigeria baseline survey). These variations may respond to particular needs but may also be due to the constellation of international organizations and NGO actors operating in each country and the types of interventions the security situation allows.

Figure 41 – Support received since the beginning of the conflict



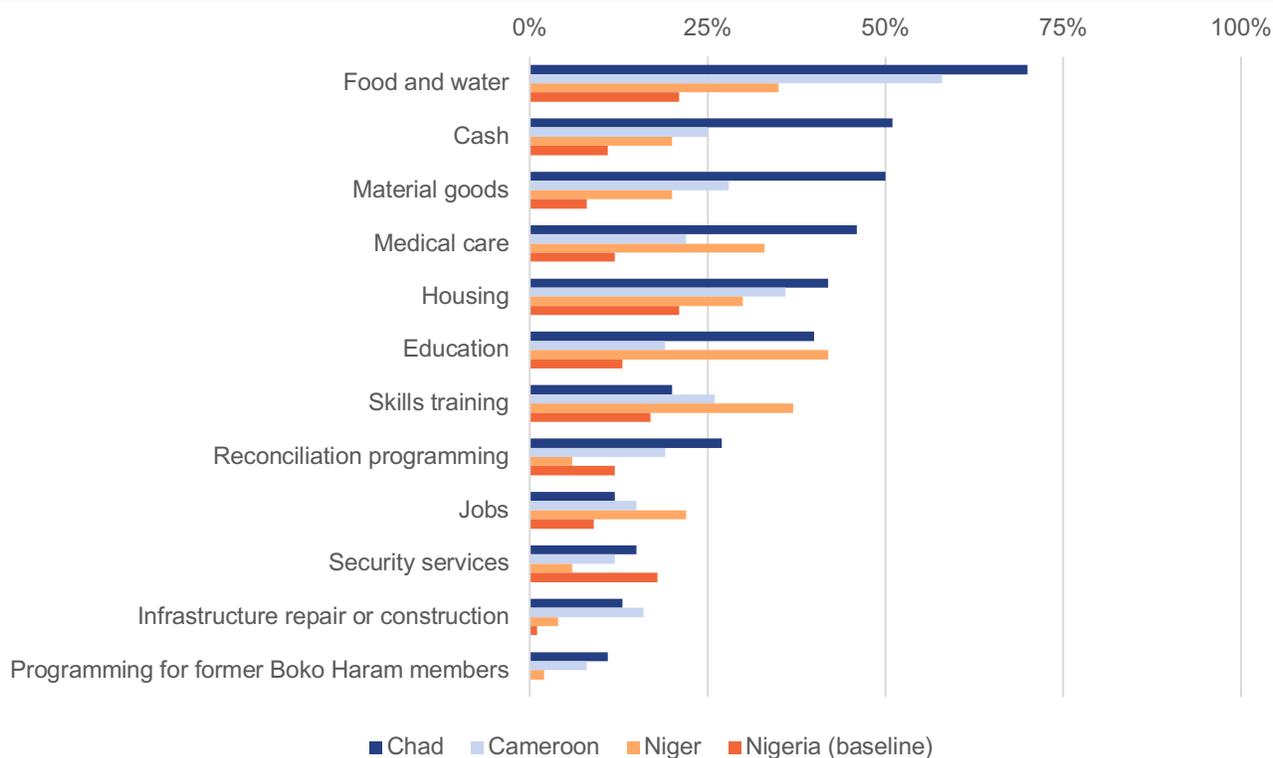
The majority of non-associated community members who received some form of support designate basic needs support as the most helpful type of aid they have received – which, again, makes sense given the predominant concerns of respondents regarding poverty and food insecurity in the Lake Chad Basin area (41-44 per cent in Chad, Cameroon, and Niger, and 53 per cent in the Nigeria baseline survey). Cash and material goods are also appreciated, especially by respondents in Chad, where they were reported as received at higher rates than in Cameroon and Niger. Despite non-associated community members receiving proportionally less cash and material goods in Nigeria than in Chad, these forms of help are also designated as most helpful by 23 per cent and 26 per cent of the respondents in the Nigeria baseline survey (followed by medical care and skills training, 12 per cent).

Figure 42 – Support received with the most positive impact on current life



Finally, when specifically asked what types of support would be most helpful for their communities in light of ex-associates reintegration, across the four countries, non-associated respondents seem to favour a wider range of forms of support that could bolster their communities. As shown in figure 43, the emphasis on support for basic needs – food, water, housing – remains high. There are also significant responses for medical care, education, and skills training. Interestingly, the support for specific programming for Boko Haram ex-associates is lower. In Chad, 11 per cent of respondents selected programming for former Boko Haram associates, in Cameroon 8 per cent, in Niger only 2 per cent, and in Nigeria less than 1 per cent. Support for reconciliation efforts is selected at higher rates (27 per cent in Chad, 19 per cent in Cameroon, 12 per cent in Niger, and 6 per cent in Niger). In Nigeria, 18 per cent selected security services (as did 15 per cent in Chad, 12 per cent in Cameroon, and 6 per cent in Niger), indicating that there is some concern for safety. These responses highlight that respondents are indeed placing some importance on peacebuilding and peacekeeping activities, in addition to addressing the many humanitarian challenges that continue to affect communities. The needs specific to reintegration identified by non-associated community members may indicate the types of interventions needed to make progress on **RSS Indicator 12.4a** and ensure communities are ready to receive former Boko Haram associates.

Figure 43 – Type of support desired if Boko Haram ex-associates moved into the community



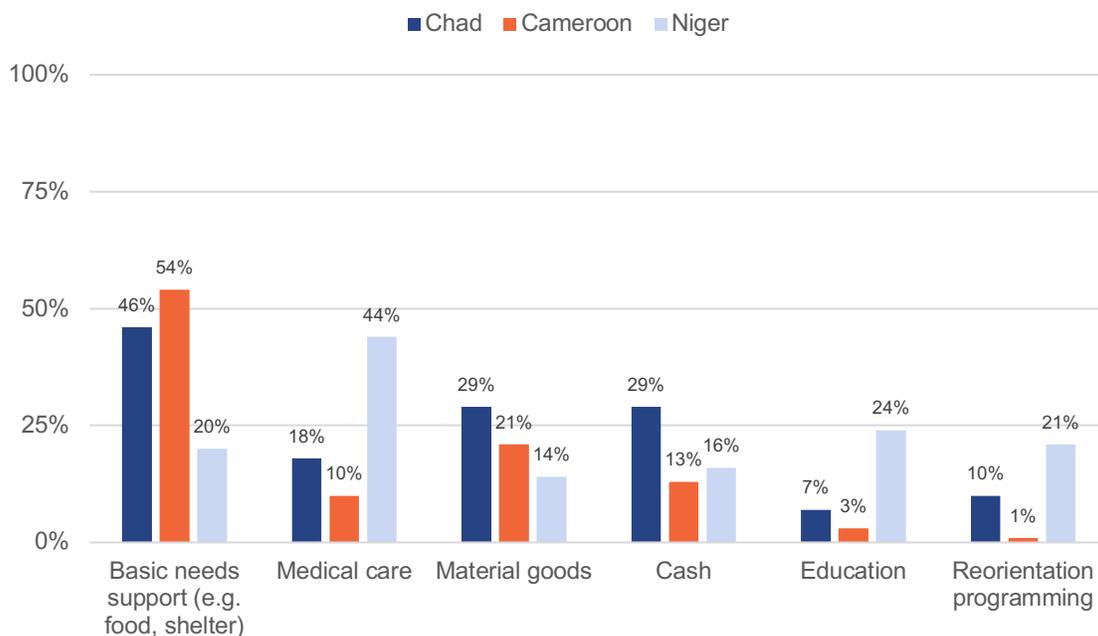
2. Beneficiary Needs and Support Preferences Among Boko Haram Ex-associates

The study sought to understand if ex-associates had received reintegration support in line with **RSS 12.3b** and, if so, what types of support were most useful in their transition. The proportion of ex-associates who said they came through a reintegration/rehabilitation centre was high in Niger (59 per cent) and Cameroon (33 per cent). In the Nigeria baseline sample, 67 per cent of those who had been with Boko Haram or ISWAP were identified through a reintegration programme. This is not surprising given the sampling method for identifying ex-associates and the focus on interviews in several reintegration and screening centres. Relatedly, such an approach does not necessarily provide a good metric of receiving reintegration support in every context. In Chad, for example, the Bagasola Centre is largely a screening point, and it does not appear if reintegration support is provided there. Additionally, some respondents may have received support at different stages, so a better indicator would be to look at the support ex-associates report having received and understand what has been most beneficial to that.

Given that the ex-associates interviewed across the Lake Chad Basin for this study were at different stages of their reintegration journey, it can be difficult to accurately measure progress across the sample. That said, it is possible to indicate which types of support are serving them in their transition – whatever stage they are at – and thus, provide data related to **RSS Indicator 11.2b**. In Chad, Cameroon, and Niger, when asked what type of support has been most beneficial to them, ex-associates – like their non-associated peers – reported basic needs support, and to a lesser extent

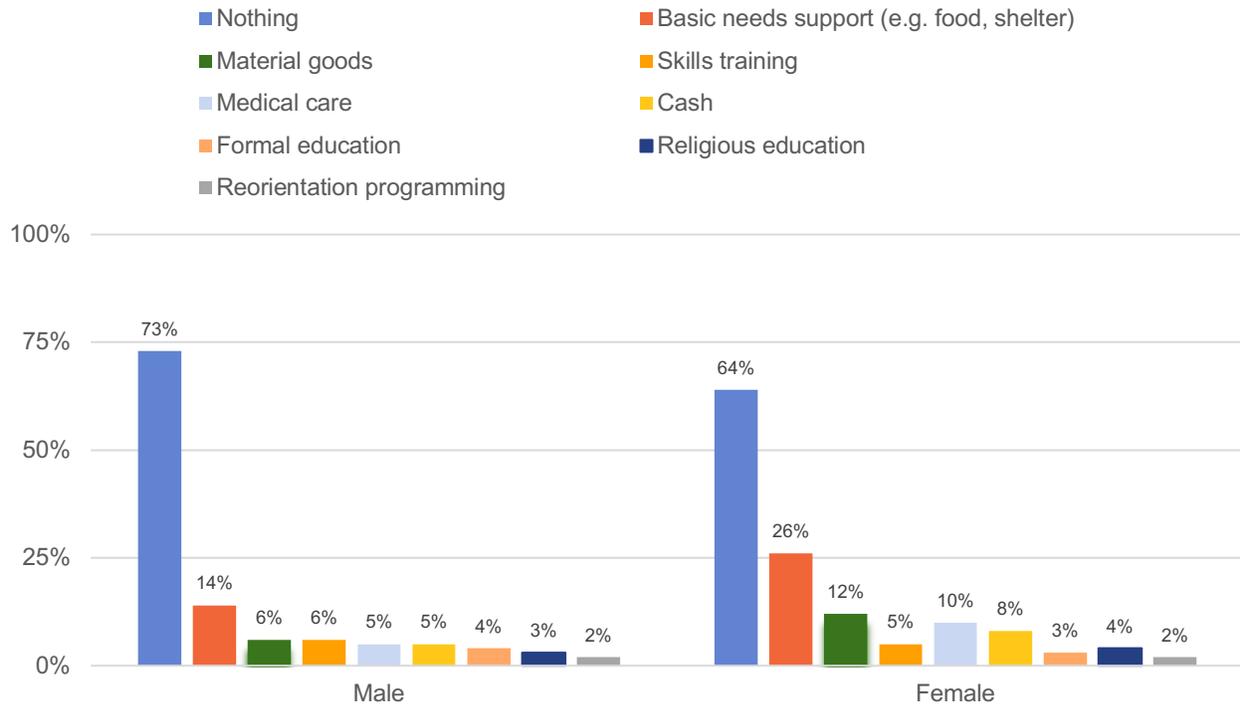
than non-associated community members, material goods and cash. Skills training, education, medical care, and reorientation programming are noted at high rates by ex-associates in Niger, especially compared to the other countries. This may be due to the differences in what was offered in the various reintegration/transit centres as well as differences in needs. Indeed, far fewer former combatant/former associate respondents said they received nothing in Niger than in Cameroon and Chad. Additionally, some of the differences in the value ascribed to various types of support may speak to the needs of the different subpopulations: Medical care was noted by more than half of all former combatants/former affiliate respondents who received the question in Niger, which may indicate those exiting Boko Haram and its factions in Niger had more acute medical needs than others coming out of the group in Chad and Cameroon.

Figure 44 – Support with the most positive impact on current life



To support reporting on **RSS Indicator 12.2b**, the Nigeria midline survey asked this question separately to women and men ex-associates, as shown in the graph below. Overall, female ex-associates reported receiving slightly more help, regardless of the type of support, than their male counterparts. This is visible when it comes to basic needs support (26 per cent for females and 14 per cent for males), medical care (10 per cent for females and 5 per cent for males) and material goods (12 per cent for females and 6 per cent for males). It is important to take into account that these numbers might be impacted by the sampling method for this study. Qualitative work, as well as anecdotal evidence from conversations with policymakers and practitioners, highlight that women very often bypass any type of reintegration support. They often briefly pass through detention and are subsequently released as they are not considered a security risk. Almost all of the women who participated in focus groups in March 2022 reported that they did not receive any support, and that no one ever followed up with them after they had been released.

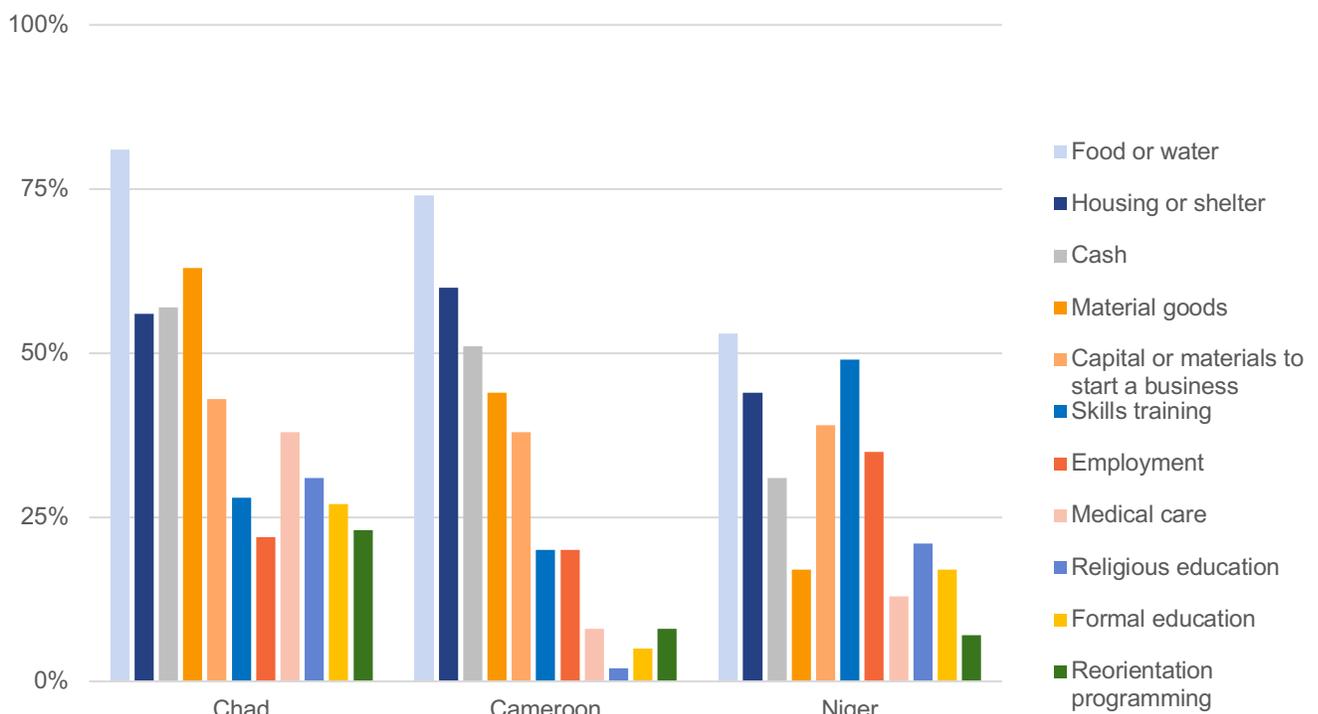
Figure 45 – Type of support received by ex-associates during their time between group exit and present (Nigeria Midline Survey)



To some extent, the preferences of ex-associates for the forms of support contrast with what they received so far (which becomes clear when comparing figure 46). The needs for basic necessities such as food, water, and shelter are very high, which fits with existing support. When asked, however, what support they would give to people like them, significant percentages of ex-associates across all four countries say material and economic support, whether cash or material goods, or the means to earn an income and become self-sufficient (e.g., capital to start a business, employment). Moreover, whereas in Niger, an important percentage of ex-associates receive reorientation programming and medical care, these forms of support are not the ones that would be recommended by these same ex-associates if they could choose. By contrast, whereas few ex-associates received these forms of support in Chad, they are in high demand – much higher demand than among ex-associates in Niger. That said, when asked what type of support they would give people like them, 38 per cent of Chadian ex-associates said medical care, suggesting that rather – at least in Chad – there is an unmet need. In Nigeria, this question was asked in the baseline survey as a form of open-ended question, so it is not possible to provide ranges of per cent to illustrate support preferences, but most common terms are linked to economic independence (“empowerment,” “employment,” “money,” “capital,” “livelihoods,” “business”) and to basic needs support (“food,” “clothing,” “shelter”). A sizable part of the sample of respondents also mentioned “education.” When crafting reintegration interventions, it is important to balance both the objective needs of the target population, but also their perceived needs as well.

There is also an interesting contrast between men/boy and women/girl ex-associates on the type of support received that they found to be the most helpful. Across the four countries, there are higher percentages of men reporting that medical care was useful (e.g., 28 per cent of ex-associate men compared to versus 2 per cent of women in Cameroon), which may indicate different armed group roles and conflict experiences. Men and boys were more likely to report “material goods” as being helpful (e.g., 59 per cent of men ex-associates compared to 5 per cent of women ex-associates in Cameroon). In Chad, 25 per cent of men chose “medical care” compared to 10 per cent among women, 35 per cent of men chose “material goods”, compared to 19 per cent of women, and 52 per cent of men chose “basic needs”, compared to 39 per cent of women. This is noticeable, because these were specific types of aid that were received in higher percentages among women, compared to men, as described in the paragraph above. Basic needs, however, are selected as having the most positive impacts by higher percentages of women across Cameroon, Niger, and Nigeria (but not in Chad).

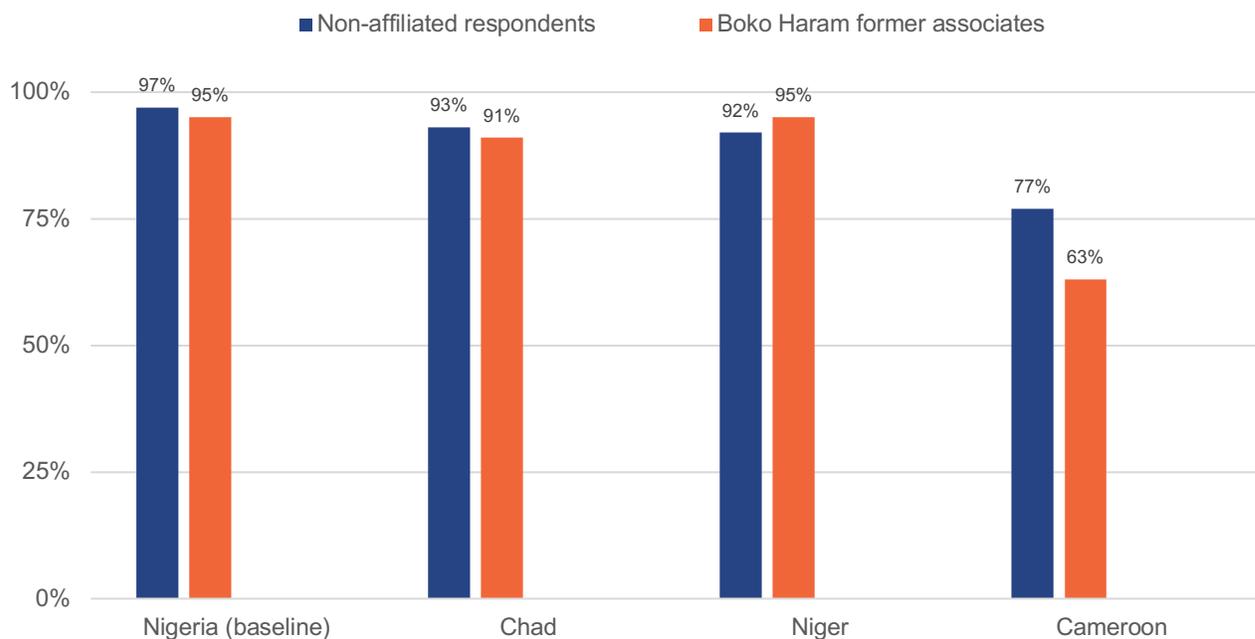
Figure 46 – Preferred forms of support (Chad, Cameroon, Niger)



XI. Conclusion: Optimism for the Future

Despite the many challenges they face, most ex-associates exiting Boko Haram and its factions feel some optimism about the future. When asked if they thought they would be able to be successful and respected members of their communities, most ex-associated respondents say yes. Optimism about their prospects to have status and recognition in their communities was extremely high and in line with non-associated respondent responses in Chad, Niger, and Nigeria (baseline survey) (see figure 47). Confidence was lower in Cameroon, and the differential between ex-associates and non-associated respondents was larger. While this difference is notable, optimism is still relatively high, especially in light of the challenges these populations face today. Thus, these findings provide a glimmer of hope and speak to a positive first indication towards progress on **RSS Indicator 12.3b**.

Figure 47 – Ability to become a successful and respected member of the community



This optimism towards the future varies depending on gender and age, among both ex-associates and non-associated respondents. In Cameroon and Chad, among non-associated respondents, women and girls express confidence in their ability to become a respected member of their communities in much higher percentages than men and boys (83 per cent of female non-associated in Cameroon and 97 per cent in Chad, while the numbers drop to 69 per cent of male non-associated

in both Cameroon and Chad). Still in Cameroon, higher rates of female ex-associates express confidence in their prospects to become successful and respected members of the community (67 per cent), compared to male respondents (58 per cent). In Niger, however, male respondents are slightly more confident than women respondents, both among ex-associates and non-affiliated respondents. There are also noticeable differences between adults and children ex-associates in Chad and Cameroon: higher percentages of adult ex-associates express confidence in their ability to become respected members of their communities, compared to children (respectively 93 per cent of adults and 86 per cent of children in Chad, and 66 per cent of adults and 47 per cent of children in Cameroon).

