MANAGING EXITS
FROM ARMED CONFLICT

UNIDIR — UNITED NATIONS INSTITUTE FOR DISARMAMENT RESEARCH

UNITED NATIONS UNIVERSITY — **Centre for Policy Research**

MEAC EVIDENCE & LEARNING CONFERENCE
Expert Workshop Days
28 - 29 March 2023
Ford Foundation Center for Social Justice

WORKSHOP REPORT

WORKSHOP AGENDA

MEAC PUBLICATIONS

The Managing Exits from Armed Conflict (*MEAC) Evidence & Learning Workshop* brought together a wide range of policymakers, practitioners, and researchers to share empirical findings about individual transitions out of armed groups in Iraq, Nigeria, Chad, Niger, Cameroon, and Colombia and discuss how this emerging evidence can inform policy and practice.

Building off the high-level panels on 27 March, where MEAC's top-line findings were shared at UN Headquarters, the two-day expert-level event at the Ford Foundation Center for Social Justice sought to chart a way forward in light of the emerging evidence on factors that influence recruitment and those that promote reintegration progress.

The workshop days featured ten thematic panel discussions. Each panel opened with a short introduction to contextualize the practical and policy challenges in a particular area by a member state representative or subject matter expert, followed by short presentations by panellists on empirical evidence from MEAC and other empirical studies. Each panel concluded with remarks from a practitioner discussant, who helped interpret the findings and their implications through the lens of policy and practice.

Panels were followed by interactive workshop sessions, sometimes held in parallel, which allowed participants to collectively think through practical ways to incorporate the various findings into policy and practice. Some workshops were specifically aimed at influencing a subsequent policy process or event or contributing an associated output. All sessions followed Chatham House rules to encourage productive exchanges. Ultimately, the workshop asked participants to collaboratively identify how programme design and implementation could be adjusted to advance innovative, empirically-based, cross-sectoral approaches to prevention and reintegration. The summary that follows captures some of the highlights from the panel presentations.

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS [9:00 - 9:20]

Dr. Cécile Aptel (Deputy Director, UNIDIR)
In her welcoming remarks, Dr. Aptel emphasized the collaborative nature of the MEAC project, particularly the importance of involving local researchers and its focus on ensuring that research is grounded in the realities of the context where it is being conducted. Dr. Aptel also expressed her gratitude to everyone involved in the project's transition and encouraged attendees to use the workshop days as an opportunity to exchange ideas and learn from each other.

Dr. Erica Gaston (Senior Policy Advisor & Head of the Conflict Prevention & Sustaining Peace Programme, UNU–CPR)
Dr. Gaston highlighted MEAC's inception at the UNU Center for Policy Research in 2018 and UNU's continued collaboration with the project after its transition to UNIDIR in 2023. She noted that MEAC's work is critical to the UN system and specifically mentioned the importance of MEAC's longitudinal studies and cross-comparison analysis. She concluded by applauding the MEAC project for bringing together people from academia, the field, UN institutions, and member states together to address these key challenges.

Dr. Siobhan O'Neil (Project Lead, MEAC, UNIDIR)
Dr. O'Neil provided a short introduction to the MEAC project, which aims to enhance the understanding of how and why individuals leave armed groups and sustainably reintegrate into civilian life. Dr. O'Neil emphasized that the project focuses on people coming out of all types of armed groups, including rebel groups, insurgent groups, and community militias that have risen to defend their communities. Dr. O'Neil highlighted that the project is committed to understanding the 'whole journey' of individuals, including their life before, during, and after involvement with armed groups. MEAC measures several indicators of reintegration progress, including social networks, economic life, engagement in political and civic activities, physical and mental health, and access to services. The project uses a multi-method approach in every country where it works, including panel surveys of the same individuals over time to see how they are doing. The project has interviewed almost 20,000 people and registered 40,000 people to be part of future surveys across its case studies.

Ms. Rafea Arif (First Secretary, Permanent Mission of Norway to the United Nations) – Moderator

Ms. Arif expressed gratitude to MEAC for creating a space for an important conversation. She emphasized the need for Member States to take preventive measures to address the drivers of recruitment into armed groups and enhance protective factors, including by involving children and families. Ms. Arif also discussed the impact of environmental changes on vulnerable segments of the population, especially children, and the need to address these issues head-on.

Dr. Remadji Hoinathy (Senior Researcher, Institute for Security Studies)

Research Presentation: Factors that Increase the Probability of Boko Haram Association in the Lake Chad Basin Region

Dr. Hoinathy presented findings from surveys in 70 communities across Cameroon, Chad, Niger, and Nigeria with more than 11,000 respondents and a series of focus groups with both former armed groups associates and their non-affiliated peers. He noted that research shows that engagement with Boko Haram is usually the result of a combination of factors. MEAC's study found that for many people, coercion played a role in their recruitment. In addition, in Cameroon, Nigeria, and Niger, having a poor economic situation increased the likelihood of involvement with Boko Haram by 12-20 percentage points (controlling for age, gender, and abduction). Relatedly, ex-combatants (16 per cent of former Boko Haram associates and 18 per cent of former affiliates of community security actors (CSA) in Nigeria) have reported climate-change-related livelihood challenges were among the reasons for their involvement with armed groups. Having a family member in Boko Haram was associated with a much higher likelihood of involvement across all four countries in the region. For example, in Cameroon, those who had family members in the group were 16 percentage points more likely to be associated themselves than those without associated family members. Dr. Hoinathy provided key recommendations based on these findings, including developing cross-sectoral policies and practices, particularly those sensitive to climate change, and including family, social, and peer networks as potential intermediaries in prevention and reintegration interventions.

Ms. Ángela Liliana Olaya Castro (Researcher, CORE and MEAC, UNIDIR)

Research Presentation: The Factors that Drive Recruitment into Armed Groups in Colombia

Ms. Castro's research presentation focused on factors that influence recruitment and potential re-recruitment in Colombia, including the relationship between human-induced environmental degradation or climate change and recruitment. The component of the study that she presented included a small sample of 50 ex-combatants in the differential assistance process, which is for FARC dissidents and other criminal groups. Economic difficulties and/or the draw of a salary/payment, forced recruitment, and personal safety were cited by ex-combatants as the main reasons for joining a criminal or dissident group. In a community survey of 19 municipalities (4,319 respondents),

climate change and environmental degradation were also found to be linked to recruitment, with 14 per cent of respondents who reported changes in deforestation, mining, and oil drilling also reporting knowing of people who joined armed groups due to difficulties associated with these activities. Research has shown that dissident groups also seek to regulate the environment and create illegal economies to exploit it to finance themselves and as a way to recruit new members. Ms. Castro also provided some policy recommendations, such as linking strategies to reduce illegal economies and considering environmental governance in Total Peace strategies.

Mr. Sajad Jiyad (Researcher, MEAC, UNIDIR and Managing Director, Bridge)
Research Presentation: The Factors that Drive Recruitment into Armed Groups in Iraq
Mr. Jiyad presented research findings from studies in Sinjar, Ninawa Plains, and Basra in Iraq. The government has no policy to prevent recruitment, and there are over 100,000 official members and combatants in the Popular Mobilization Force (PMF), which has now been incorporated into the state security forces. The reasons for recruitment vary by region. In Sinjar, the main reason people joined was initially for community security, and later on, it was access to services and the ability to move freely and generate livelihood income. In the Ninawa Plains area, the primary reasons driving recruitment were security forces. Legal cover, access to income, and the fact that the community sees belonging to these groups as honourable were important dynamics that influenced recruitment in all cases. Of late, the recruitment rate has decreased significantly due to budget constraints that limit the addition of more active members to an already over-saturated PMF. Mr. Jiyad reported that most people do not want to leave these groups, and those that were forced to demobilize (often due to injury) are eager to rejoin.

Ms. Nirina Kiplagat (Governance and Peacebuilding Coordinator/Regional Peacebuilding Advisor, UNDP Regional Service Center for Africa)
Research Presentation: The Journey to Extremism in Africa— Pathways to Recruitment and Disengagement
Ms. Kiplagat presented findings from the UNDP report titled 'The Journey to Extremism in Africa— Pathways to Recruitment and Disengagement,' which explored what drives young men and women to join violent extremist groups and the 'turning point' prompting individuals to leave such groups. UNDP found that 25 per cent of voluntary recruits identified employment as their primary reason for joining. UNDP also found that low levels of access to information and communication increased vulnerability to recruitment. Male recruits were more likely to join with friends, while female recruits joined with family. Ms. Kiplagat highlighted related policy recommendations, including improving service delivery, strengthening state legitimacy, embedding a conflict-sensitive approach to address violent extremism, up-scaling community-based prevention approaches, and investing in cost-effective prevention and long-term development.

Ms. Akossiwa Lea Koudjou (Policy and Planning Officer, DDRS, DPO) – Discussant
Ms. Koudjou, serving as a discussant for this panel, highlighted that lack of access to livelihood, climate change, and environmental change are key factors that push individuals to join armed groups. Ms. Koudjou emphasized that practitioners need to factor in these key aspects when developing any intervention. She also noted the need for working closely with community members and addressing the lack of good governance. Ms. Koudjou stressed that local realities must be factored into programming, and offering individuals alternatives to reduce the draw of armed groups is essential.

Mr. Evan Cinq-Mars (Senior Policy Advisor, Permanent Mission of Canada to the United Nations) – Moderator

Mr. Evan Cinq-Mars opened this panel by noting that Canada is proud to support the MEAC project with an $800,000 grant and highlighted the project's valuable work on policy issues related to children in armed conflict. Mr. Cinq-Mars also stressed that the recruitment and use of children is the most prevalent grave violation committed against children in armed conflict and called attention to the fact that despite years of policy and normative development to respond to this issue, the number of children recruited and used continues to be high year after year.

Ms. Fatima Yetcha Ajimi Badu (Nigeria Researcher, MEAC, UNIDIR and Mobukar Consultancy Services)

Research Presentation: Child Recruitment in the Lake Chad Basin

Ms. Badu highlighted that since the start of the conflict, children have been recruited by Boko Haram and armed community security actors in the Lake Chad Basin. She shared some of the personal stories that children who have been with an armed group had shared with her and emphasized the difficulties faced by children living in conflict zones. Key findings from MEAC's study on child recruitment found that proximity to armed groups increases the likelihood of children's association with them. Family and social networks play a significant role in child recruitment—it is notable, for instance, that 19 per cent of CSA-affiliated children in Nigeria had a parent with the group. Meanwhile, children without parental care were often vulnerable to becoming associated with Boko Haram. The study found that girls and boys who are orphans were 43 and 46 per cent more likely to become associated. Ms. Badu explained that the study showed that formal education has a protective effect against child recruitment by Boko Haram, but it also appeared to increase the chances of affiliation with community security actors, which may signify how community mobilization efforts can target schools. Ms. Badu closed her presentation by outlining several recommendations based on the study, including sensitizing the international community to the constraints children operate under in conflict settings, involving the family unit in prevention efforts, and improving access to safe education.

Dr. Jacqueline Parry (Iraq Case Study Coordinator, MEAC, UNIDIR) [Video]

Research Presentation: Reintegration of Children from Families with Perceived ISIL Affiliation – Experiences from Iraq and Al Hol.

Dr. Jacqueline Parry joined the panel discussion through a video presentation. Her research drew on two separate surveys, one completed with over 1,800 respondents (69 children) in Al Qaim, Tooz, Muhalabiya and Habbaniya, and another survey with 223 residents (40 children) in the Jeddah-1 camp in Iraq. The presentation revealed that mental well-being, missing civil documentation, and perceptions of safety and trust in institutions are critical factors affecting the reintegration of children returning from Al-Hol in Syria. Exposure to violence during the war and living under ISIL occupation had a significant impact on the mental well-being of children, with 60 per cent of children who lived under ISIL occupation reported frequently feeling in danger of being hurt or killed. Missing civil documentation is a significant

barrier to reintegration since children without documentation cannot attend government schools, access government services, travel through checkpoints, work formally, or get married legally. Furthermore, children who lived under ISIL occupation were significantly less likely to trust formal institutions and perceive their environment as safe, which can have long-term implications for their reintegration into their communities.

Ms. Brigid Kennedy Pfister (Sr. Child Protection Specialist, Child Protection in Emergencies, UNICEF) – Discussant
In reacting to the presentations, Ms. Pfister emphasized that after armed group association there is a need to trace and reunite children with their families to ensure their safety. She also noted that education, while considered a protective factor for children, can also be a site of recruitment. Furthermore, Ms. Pfister highlighted the role of local authorities and the importance of civil documentation, safety, and trust in institutions in children's reintegration progress. She also highlights the significance of understanding local community definitions of certain words and not assuming that our definitions are the same. Instead, she suggests focusing on the process and services that people think are necessary, as delivering those services can lead to greater acceptance, regardless of what they are called.

PANEL 3: HOW TO REINTEGRATE EX-ASSOCIATES FROM ACTIVE ARMED GROUPS: OBSERVATIONS FROM COLOMBIA AND NIGERIA.
[13:35 – 14:20]

Mr. Chris O'Donnell (Chief of Field Coordination Section, UNOCT)
Mr. Chris O'Donnell opened the panel by commending the MEAC project for its rigorous, evidence-based approach. He emphasized the need to pay more attention to context when crafting approaches to armed groups, including active ones. Mr. O'Donnell noted that focusing on acronyms is not always helpful in getting to adopting more granular, evidence-based decision-making rooted in the realities on the ground. He also lauded the presenters for linking evidence to practice in their research.

Mr. Mohammed Bukar (Nigeria Field Research Coordinator, MEAC, UNIDIR and Managing Director, Mobukar Consultancy Services)
Research Presentation: Exit Trajectories out of Armed Groups and Implications for Reintegration Support
Mr. Bukar presented research findings on reintegration after armed conflict involvement based on several surveys and a number of focus groups with ex-Boko Haram associates and ex-community security providers in the North East of Nigeria. He began by providing an overview of the various exit pathways out of Boko Haram, including Operation Safe Corridor, the Sulhu Programme, the Borno Model, and informal self-reintegration. In terms of exit expectations, 67 per cent of respondents believed it possible to leave Boko Haram while involved with the group, but a significant minority of Boko Haram members (27 per cent) believed the military would kill them upon exiting. Only 1 per cent of respondents believed they would receive some reintegration support. The key policy reflections highlighted by Mr.

Bukar included the priority of communicating defector pathways to spark exits, the primacy of basic needs support, and the need to focus on economic and social reintegration to ensure permanent exit. He also noted that ongoing conflict and the continued presence of armed groups will impact whether these exits are permanent.

Ms. Ángela Liliana Olaya Castro (Researcher, CORE and MEAC, UNIDIR)
Research Presentation: How to Reintegrate Ex-associates from Active Armed Groups in Colombia
Ms. Olaya began by providing a brief overview of the history of Colombian reintegration, reincorporation, and defector programmes. The latter – often referred to as the "differential assistance process for criminal groups," covers the defectors from ELN, FARC dissident groups, and other criminal groups in the country who were not part of the 2016 peace agreement (or another negotiated settlement). She discussed the findings of MEAC's survey and interviews with participants in the differential assistance process, many of whom face a series of challenges in their transition, including security threats, legal uncertainty, and the lure of reconnecting with active armed groups and other criminal elements. Many ex-combatants participating in the process have been threatened by armed actors during their transition (60 per cent of respondents) or invited to rejoin an armed group since they entered the process (50 per cent). As a result, those threatened often change their place of residence, impacting their participation in the process. There is also a lack of clarity across agencies about the status of the defectors in the differential assistance process, which can contribute to mixed messages and unmet expectations for participants, discouraging people from staying in the process. In light of these findings, Ms. Olaya noted the importance of addressing legal uncertainty, protecting defectors from armed group retribution, strengthening service provision to reduce the draw of illegal outside options, and building on lessons learned from past reintegration-related programming.

Dr. Lila Kazemian (Professor, John Jay College of Criminal Justice, CUNY)
Research Presentation: Insights from evidence-based criminological research
Dr. Lila Kazemian's presentation highlighted the similarities between exiting an armed conflict group and the process of desistance from crime and disengagement from criminal groups. The criminological literature has shown exiting a criminal group is best viewed as a process rather than a finite event, and relapses in offending are a normal part of behavioural change. From an intervention standpoint, we need to better identify periods when individuals are at a turning point that may indicate 'ambivalence' about engaging with the group. During these crucial periods, providing additional support, resources, and alternative options may facilitate the transition out of criminal activity, and enable stronger paths to redemption. Offering incentives to exit may prove to be more effective than focusing solely on punitive responses. Challenges in returning to society after exiting a conflict group parallel those faced by individuals returning to society after a period of incarceration. Dr. Kazemian explained that criminological research has shown that coerced change is less effective in achieving lasting effects; in contrast, the desistance paradigm places the actor, rather than the intervention, at the heart of the change process. Imprisonment impedes the desistance process in important ways. As a result, confinement should be used as a last resort, especially among adolescents and emerging adults who are most likely to age out of crime.

Mr. Mario Nascimento (Policy and Planning Officer, DDRS, DPO) – Discussant
Mr. Mario Nascimento discussed the challenges of reintegrating ex-associates from armed groups, stressing the need for flexible and evolving approaches based on best practices and national ownership. He stressed how field evidence and innovative approaches guide the constant revision of UN policies and standards to ensure that interventions are fit for purpose. He emphasized the importance of comprehensive solutions that include both individual support and community-based reintegration, prevention of recruitment, and political solutions for sustainable impact. He also highlighted the need to change the mindset of how ex-members are viewed, as they are not only beneficiaries of support, but they also have responsibilities.

PANEL 4: COMMUNITY RECEPTIVITY TO RETURN AND APPROACHES TO JUSTICE AND ACCOUNTABILITY
[14:20 – 15:05]

Randolph Wallace Rhea (Senior DDR Specialist & Security Transitions, FBA) – Moderator
Dr. Randolph Wallace Rhea opened the panel discussion on community receptivity to return, justice, and accountability. He mentioned the recent increase in interest in these topics and that the proliferation of concepts, frameworks, and guidance on them are not always aligned. He also acknowledged there are different centers of gravity or competing imperatives of legal frameworks, political dynamics, and operational concerns. Dr. Rhea reminded the audience that building consensus on issues of justice and accountability takes a long time and is slow-moving, but noted a moment of opportunity, including with the occasion of this panel.

Mr. Ulrich Garms (Implementation Support Section II/ Sub-Saharan Africa, UNODC)
Mr. Garms discussed the importance of accountability and justice in conflict contexts where terrorist groups operate, noting that while it is not the goal to prosecute everyone who has been associated with a listed group, holding those who have committed serious terrorist crimes accountable can improve community receptivity to those returning home after involvement. Mr. Garms explained that accountability is important for three reasons: The first is meeting communities' demands for justice and accountability for victims. The second reason is that criminal justice can play a decisive role in providing security for the community. The third reason is that the lack of basic services, including justice, is often a contributing factor to recruitment. Mr. Garms suggested that traditional and customary law justice mechanisms could be an alternative to formal justice systems but acknowledged the potential shortcomings of these in protecting women's and children's rights.

Dr. Rebecca Littman (Assistant Professor, University of Illinois Chicago) [Video]
Research Presentation: Community Receptivity to Return in Northeast Nigeria
Dr. Rebecca Littman joined the panel by vide and presented her research and MEAC research she contributed to related to community receptivity to the return of former Boko Haram affiliates in the North East of Nigeria. She found that receptivity to return is relatively high (and increasing over time), with about 55 per cent of people willing to accept a former male affiliate and 75 per cent willing to accept a female abducted back into their community. Receptivity increases when former affiliates are thought of as repentant (87 per cent of respondents are willing to forgive), and desire for punishment is low, with only 25 per cent of respondents wanting Boko Haram associates to be punished. Almost nobody wants capital or physical punishment. Dr. Littman noted that of those surveyed who want former members punished, referred punishments include prosecution, obligatory rehabilitation, imprisonment, public apologies, and renouncement.

Ms. Fatima Yetcha Ajimi Badu (Nigeria Researcher, MEAC, UNIDIR and Mobukar Consultancy Services)
Research Presentation: Community Receptivity and Accountability Preferences in the North East of Nigeria

Ms. Badu presented findings from a MEAC survey that was first conducted at the end of 2020 and the beginning of 2021, and then again two years later, at the end of 2022, to compare community perception and acceptance changes towards returning Boko Haram associates in the Northeast of Nigeria over the years. Acceptance is high in the North East, which is a positive indication of the potential for reintegration efforts. Two years ago, 53 per cent said they would hypothetically accept people in their community who had willingly joined Boko Haram. Now, this number is at 77 per cent. When people are presented with returning family or community members, actual acceptance is higher compared to hypothetical acceptance since people are more likely to accept back those close to them. Respondents were more likely to know of those who had returned from Boko Haram and who had been good community members compared to those who had caused problems. Ms. Badu highlighted that repentance is an important factor for communities in the North East. For example, 76 per cent of respondents approve of the government detaining those who come out of Boko Haram, but approval for detention goes down significantly (down to 40 per cent) when former associates are described as repentant. Finally, Ms. Badu ended her presentation with a finding that shows that many people indeed want peace and say that they are willing to forgive Boko Haram if that is what it takes. When asked what should happen to Boko Haram and offered several options, many people selected "other" and explained that nothing should happen to them, or that they should come home. Although these factors can change over time, Ms. Badu's presentation ended on a positive note and highlighted the window of opportunity for peace in the region.

Dr. Mara Revkin (Associate Professor of Law, Duke University)
Research Presentation: Reintegration After the Islamic State— Evidence from Iraq
Dr. Revkin presented findings on the reintegration of people perceived as affiliated with the Islamic State (ISIL) in Iraq. The research draws on a perception survey Dr. Revkin conducted with UNDP in Iraq in 2022 that applied a similar approach to MEAC's surveys in the country. The populations of interest are people who may have actual or perceived family ties or may have worked for ISIL in non-combatant roles. Dr. Revkin found that the factors that influence reintegration outcomes are the individual readiness for voluntary return, economic conditions, infrastructure in areas of return, and community attitudes. Individual readiness to return appears to be influenced by fear of violence and rejection, positive contact with family and friends, and the need for documentation to obtain security clearances. Economic conditions and infrastructure in areas of return are important, particularly for female-headed households (who often lack access to affordable housing) and IDPs who have experienced gaps in employment. A significant majority (80 per cent+) believe that the Iraqi government should be primarily responsible for decisions about the return of perceived ISIL-affiliated IDPs and justice for the victims of ISIL. For example, communities have more trust in the Government's screening process (52 per cent) than in tabriyya (38 per cent) and kafala/sponsorship (37 per cent). Most respondents were in favour of restorative non-carceral mechanisms (e.g., psychological rehabilitation 72 per cent), and only a minority were in favour of prison sentences (6 per cent). Dr. Revkin explained that the study showed that children are by far the most likely to be accepted (83 per cent) back by communities, followed by women involuntarily married to ISIL members (79 per cent) and young men with family members who joined (57 per cent), a finding which has implications for reintegration and reconciliation efforts in Iraq.

Mr. Peter Knoope (Fellow, Human Security Collective)
Research Presentation: From DDR to Reconciliation
Mr. Knoope discussed the history and trajectory of DDR, counterterrorism, and CVE/PVE approaches and noted that in highly complex conflict environments, they alone are unlikely to build peace. Rather, these efforts need to be situated in a broader transitional justice approach that places community reconciliation at the center. He emphasized that reconciliation is an outcome that relies on the process of truth, which includes investigations, establishing facts, documenting memories, taking witness statements, and sharing experiences. Mr. Knoope noted that such an approach is inclusive, and it includes all types of violence, including state terror, rather than applying a narrow approach that only addresses terrorist crimes. He concluded by raising important questions related to how conflict definitions, fact-finding efforts, and ownership and buy-in to such processes impact their prospects for success.

Dr. Akinola Olojo (Project Manager, Lake Chad Basin Team, ISS) – Discussant
In the pursuit of reintegration and in order to promote justice and accountability for terrorist crimes, Dr. Olojo discussed the potential of dialogue, emphasizing the role it could play in promoting community receptivity to returns. He emphasized that a two-way exchange of ideas was useful for better understanding how local communities view

justice and accountability, and which approaches and mechanisms would be acceptable to them. Dr. Olojo posed questions on how to apply dialogue in complex environments, engage stakeholders at different levels, and leverage existing platforms and communities to promote community receptivity of returning ex-armed group members while simultaneously advancing accountability and justice for those victimized by the same armed group.

PANEL 5: APPROACHES TO ASSESSING THE TRANSITION TO CIVILIAN LIFE: OVERVIEW OF APPROACHES TO EFFECTIVELY GATHER EVIDENCE AND MEASURE IMPACT DESPITE CHALLENGES IN THE FIELD.
[16:50 – 17:50]

Dr. Prabin Bahadur Khadka (Lecturer, Department of Government, University of Essex) – Moderator
Dr. Khadka opened the session on methods for assessing transitions to civilian life by highlighting two of his recent studies on reintegration. The first study found that formal channels such as government-run amnesty and prison programs were effective in mitigating threat perception among civilians of ex-combatants. The second study found that certain attributes of returnees, such as having been forcefully recruited, had a significant effect on whether returning women and children were accepted back by the community. The study also found that UN vocational training was important in the reintegration process. These studies highlighted some of the ways UN-supported interventions can be assessed, further examples of which were provided by the subsequent panelists.

Dr. Cyrus Samii (Associate Professor of Politics, NYU)
Research Presentation: Randomized Control Trials to Test (Re)integration Strategies
Dr. Cyrus Samii discussed the use of randomized control trials (RCTs) for evaluating reintegration strategies, including prevention strategies for at-risk youth in conflict-affected areas. RCTs are the gold standard of social science research and can help practitioners understand the value of programme mechanisms and generate evidence that can withstand scrutiny. Dr. Samii focused on studies that have looked at individual-level reintegration strategies, which involve addressing needs related to psychological, economic, and ideological/political factors. He also provided examples of three RCTs that examined the impact of cash transfers, vocational training, and psycho-social support. To expand the use of RCTs in reintegration research, Dr. Samii suggested building networks of local civil society and government partners and establishing global research networks for quality assurance. He also urged the continued support of several key funding mechanisms.

Ms. Kato Van Broeckhoven (Senior Researcher, MEAC, UNIDIR)
Research Presentation: Randomized Control Trials to Test (Re)integration Strategies
Ms. Broeckhoven presented the MEAC Agreed Framework for assessing reintegration progress, and various MEAC toolkits, including a survey template and accompanying contextualization guide, professional enumerator training, and show cards. MEAC tools are flexible enough to respond to specific conflicts and armed groups while also enabling

comparison across settings for strategic learning. The Agreed Framework includes key impact indicators that signal a shift in orientation away from conflict, such as refraining from conflict-related violence, disidentifying with armed groups, and committing to non-violence. Additionally, the framework considers a range of conditions that support (or signal) conflict exits, such as economic, social, and psychological well-being, civic engagement, as well as the rule of law. The project gathered academics from different disciplines to design the tools and then pilot-tested them in six different countries, data from which is being featured at the workshop.

Dr. Andrés Casas (Brain and Behavioral Science Consultant, Pontificia Universidad Javeriana) [Video]
Dr. Andres Casas' work was represented by a short film. The clip documented stories of positive ex-combatant involvement in Colombia and a RCT to test a video intervention to address the sociopsychological barriers to reintegration in communities. The five-minute video intervention was shown to 50 percent of the community members in the sample, to measure the effect of the video on their perceptions of FARC ex-combatants. The 2018-2020 study found that the video intervention reduced the belief that ex-combatants are unwilling and unable to change, and increased humanization and support for peace and reincorporation of former combatants. The study also demonstrates the possibilities of remote assessments. Dr. Casas later partnered with the MEAC team to reproduce the RCT with PDET communities in Colombia in 2022, which have historically been marginalized, economically depressed, and conflict-affected. Even in places hit hard by conflict violence and economic struggles, the video intervention had a similar impact and improved receptivity to reintegration.

Dr. Armando Torres Munguia (Data Scientist, MEAC, UNIDIR)
Research Presentation: The Prospects for Remote Assessment— A Comparison of Phone vs In-person Interviews in Nigeria
Dr. Armando Torres Munguia presented the potential of remote assessment approaches to reduce the cost and security risks associated with in-person follow-up. The MEAC project conducted a test of two different interview methods - in-person and by phone surveys – for studying reintegration in the context of the Boko Haram insurgency in the North East of Nigeria. The MEAC team selected five sensitive questions that someone might lie to the enumerator about, including questions about drug use, willingness to join armed groups, forced marriages, experiences of violence, and sexual assault. The test found that the survey modality had no impact on non-response rates. The survey method had almost no impact on misreporting, with one exception. People who were interviewed by phone were more likely to admit to using drugs than people interviewed in person. Dr. Torres Munguia concluded by stating that amid the ongoing insecurity and the COVID-19 health crisis, surveying people via mobile phone is an effective method for gathering high-quality data, comparable to the data collected via in-person interviews at least in Nigeria, and possibly beyond.

Ms. Sophie Bray-Watkins (Youth Advocacy and Participation Adviser, War Child UK)
Research Presentation: Participatory Approaches in Research
Ms. Bray-Watkins discussed participatory approaches to research in relation to children affected by armed conflict, emphasizing the advantages of Participatory Action Research (PAR), including enhancing the contextual metrics for assessment, trust-building, and improving accountability. She emphasised the need for commitment to the action element to ensure research leads to tangible change led by groups involved. She highlighted challenges, such as a lack of funding, expertise, and insecurity. Ms. Bray-Watkins spoke about how research topics and agendas being decided by I/NGOs or researchers alone was creating 'blind spots' in our understanding of CAAFAG experience. She also posited that categorising participants based on Western concerns and preoccupations was unhelpful. For instance, some young people may not regard being CAAFAG as the most prominent or important aspect of their identity, however by labelling it as such we impact constructs of identity and data and evidence collected. Ms. Bray-Watkins advocated for genuine participatory research, including PAR, which necessitates involving young people as partners throughout the entire research process and empowering them to take ownership. She encouraged researchers and agencies to be more aware of power imbalances and to try and let go of own agendas and assumptions. Ms. Bray-Watkins recommended investing in participatory action-oriented research, being conscious of what this entails, and utilizing the relationships, skills, and trust built during the research to build more genuinely community-owned initiatives.

DAY 2: WEDNESDAY, 29 MARCH, 9:00-19:00

Ms. Anna-Lena Schluchter (First Secretary, Women, Peace and Security Expert, Permanent Mission of Switzerland to the United Nations)

Ms. Schluchter opened the panel by highlighting the historical gender bias in DDR programs, which have often been designed on the assumption that men and boys are the ones primarily engaged in armed groups. However, there is now a better understanding of the many ways women and girls can be associated and involved with armed groups, including in combatant and support roles. Ms. Schluchter emphasized the importance of avoiding gender stereotypes in programme design and implementation and working to better understand the actual barriers faced by women and girls who are in the process of reintegrating. In addition to gender, age-specific needs and considerations should be central to programme planning, and access to education and sexual and reproductive healthcare should be part of any DDR program for all genders.

Dr. Melisande Genat (Researcher, MEAC, UNIDIR)

Research Presentation: Examining Reintegration through the Lens of Gender in Iraq

Dr. Genat discussed the challenges faced by female-headed households (FHH) with perceived affiliation to ISIL in accessing reintegration programs in Iraq, whether they are returning home from within Iraq or returning from Syria. FFHs face longer stays in the Jeddah-1 camp, higher barriers to return, opposition to return, and discrimination post-return. Access to civil documentation is also a challenge for these families. Female heads of household are also at an increased risk of exploitation and gender-based violence, in part because of the requirements of the return system. In addition, these women need to obtain notification of offense (ikhbar) to access civil documentation, but this is difficult due to the cost of hiring lawyers and the need for witnesses. FHHs also face difficulties in obtaining sponsorship and often end up re-marrying local security actors and leaving their children behind. Dr. Genat finished her presentation with an impassioned plea for the international community to help these women in Iraq, as they are extremely vulnerable.

Dr. Zoe Marks (Lecturer in Public Policy, Harvard University)

Research Presentation: Gender Dynamics of Conflict and Reintegration – Findings from North East Nigeria

Dr. Marks discussed the need to apply a gender lens when designing reintegration interventions in order to better support women and girls during their transition back to civilian life in conflict-affected contexts. Focusing on her

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research with MEAC in North East Nigeria and in other African contexts, she noted that women and children are often codified as civilians, leading to services being oriented toward men. Men hold almost all of the command and leadership roles in conflict parties, and most armed groups have little to no female frontline participants. However, women participate in armed groups in diverse ways, including providing logistical and intelligence support and social roles, including being encouraged or forced to reproduce to contribute to the community or new society. Reintegration resources, however, are allocated predominately based on perceived security risk posed by returnees and are not based on needs. As a result, women and girls are often underserved. Women, however, are in as much need or possibly more than men. They face as much or more social exclusion as men, they lack economic self-sufficiency, and are responsible for children's care. "Empowerment" of women requires considering multiple pathways to re-entry and multidimensional elements of well-being. Dr. Marks ended her remarks by emphasizing the importance of understanding gender roles outside of the male-female binary and applying gender-responsive insights and policy.

Dr. Aleksandra Dier (Legal Officer and Gender Coordinator, CTED)
Ms. Dier emphasized the importance of gender considerations throughout interventions, highlighting examples where gender issues have been neglected. She discussed the blurred lines between victims and perpetrators in many contexts, particularly in the context of women's involvement with terrorist groups, noting the need for proper screening and assessment to ascertain whether individuals are victims, perpetrators, or both. Ms. Dier also spoke about the issue of prosecutions of women in the context of terrorist crimes, where gender bias and gendered challenges in the prosecutorial process have been observed. Ms. Dier called for greater efforts to train practitioners on the ground on how to make interventions gender-sensitive and for policymakers to recognize gender as an integral part of their considerations.

Mr. Ely Dieng (Senior DDR/PRR Advisor, UNDP Crisis Bureau) – Discussant
Mr. Dieng emphasized the need for increased gender representation in the field of security sector reform and reintegration. In addition, he called for more women's voices in planning, monitoring, and evaluation processes. He cited various obstacles to women's reintegration, such as biased requirements for return and repatriation, victimization, and gender persecution. Mr. Dieng also highlighted the importance of addressing the weight of social and cultural constraints on women and called for evidence-based responses to be implemented on the ground to better support women's reintegration.

PANEL 7: WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO 'EXIT' AN ARMED GROUP THAT PROVIDES COMMUNITY SECURITY? IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMMING AND POLICY FROM STUDIES IN NIGERIA AND IRAQ. **[9:55 – 10:40]**

Mr. Sven Schneider (Senior Stabilisation Adviser, Stabilisation Platform Commissioned by GFFO)
Mr. Schneider introduced the session by highlighting the changing role of community security actors, which have become more numerous, diverse, varied in their tasks, and linked with actors other than just states, including organized crime and terrorist groups. He noted that these groups have become an integral part of hybrid security arrangements, and as such, there is a need to better understand them and develop effective programmatic and policy responses. Such responses need to recognize the potential risk these groups may pose, and there needs to be guidance on how to mitigate that risk. Mr. Schneider raised key questions on the implications of exiting such groups and called for further research to inform the responses.

Mr. Mohammed Bukar (Nigeria Field Research Coordinator, MEAC, UNIDIR and Managing Director, Mobukar Consultancy Services) and **Ms. Kato Van Broeckhoven** (Senior Researcher, MEAC, UNIDIR)
Research Presentation: What Does it Mean to 'Exit' an Armed Group that Provides Community Security in the North East of Nigeria
Mr. Bukar and Ms. Broeckhoven jointly presented research on the different community security actors (CSAs) in North East Nigeria and their levels of centralization and cooperation with the government, including the Yan Gora, Civilian Joint Task Force, Hunters, ethnic militias, and vigilantes. They explained that communities formed these groups to protect themselves during the Boko Haram conflict. Some people joined to signal they were not Boko Haram supporters, while others were pressured by other community members, the military, or the groups themselves to join the fight against the insurgents. The presenters highlighted the importance of understanding the roles, recruitment, and exit pathways of CSAs to develop effective policy and programmatic responses to them. They emphasized that conflict dynamics would impact how CSAs stand down, transform, or scale up. Furthermore, the demarcations between different groups and the boundaries of "membership" remain blurry, which will complicate any formalization and demobilization efforts. Mr. Bukar and Ms. Broeckhoven ended by calling for the inclusion of girls and women in formalization efforts and programs that offer off-ramps from such groups.

Mr. Sajad Jiyad (Researcher, MEAC, UNIDIR and Managing Director, Bridge)
Mr. Sajad Jiyad discussed the challenges of exiting armed groups providing community security in Iraq. The Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF), recognized by the state, are divided into registered and unregistered members, which creates difficulties for the government. The most difficult issue for the government is the few thousand unregistered members who have access to the same legal status and ability to move as those who are registered. Exit from armed groups is viewed negatively by members, communities, and the groups themselves, and demobilization is discouraged (PMF has counter-demobilization offices in each brigade). Today, only 10 per cent of exits from the PMF are voluntary (often due to personal injury). Those who leave involuntarily face difficulties in accessing pensions, and their families often bear the burden. Mr. Jiyad concluded by saying that the pressures to rejoin the PMF are high, particularly if the individual is the sole earner.

Dr. Vanda Felbab-Brown (Director, Initiative on Nonstate Armed Actors /Senior Fellow, The Brookings Institution)
Dr. Felbab-Brown opened by challenging the accuracy of calling these groups "community security actors." She agreed that they are not accurately all affiliated with the government and, thus, should not be called "government-affiliated security actors," but also noted that many are not grassroots organizations that mobilized locally. Dr. Felbab-Brown discussed her research on paramilitary groups and militias in Nigeria and Iraq, and beyond. She noted that these groups often instigate and organize their activities through politicians, businessmen, and even government actors and perpetrate insecurity both within and beyond the communities they purport to serve. While these groups often provide some forms of security, they also engage in human rights abuses and engage in legal and illegal economies. Despite this, members often do not want to leave due to the social, political, and economic powers that membership offer, which Dr. Felbab-Brown noted could be impediments to demobilizing such groups (and possibly formalizing them).

Mr. Henry Smith (Director, First Call Partners)
Mr. Smith discussed First Call Partner's recent research on the characteristics of government-aligned security groups in conflict zones, highlighting their importance in the government's security response but their lack of legal accountability and the challenge presented by their political alignment. He identified several questions and dilemmas

these groups pose, including the balance of the short-term versus long-term objectives, the political economy of integration, and the role of these groups in communities. Asymmetric engagement was also highlighted as a challenge, as engagement with one group without engaging with others can have implications for longer-term peace and security.

PANEL 8: LAYING ASIDE WEAPONS IN CONFLICT EXITS: EVIDENCE ON HOW INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION IN THE RETENTION AND DISPOSAL OF WEAPONS— FROM SHARPENED STICKS AND ROCKS TO SMALL ARMS AND LIGHT WEAPONS —RELATES TO REINTEGRATION PROGRESS. **[13:25 – 14:10]**

H.E. Ms. Maritza Chan Valverde (Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary, Permanent Representative, Permanent Mission of Costa Rica to the United Nations)
Ambassador Valverde opened the panel by discussing the significance of disarmament in peacebuilding but acknowledged that disarmament efforts don't always result in safer societies. The UN is increasingly called to provide support and technical assistance for disarmament in conflict settings where no peace agreement exists. She raised concerns about the availability and use of weapons that threaten community safety and human security in such contexts, suggesting a more human-centred approach to disarmament – one that values the lived experiences of individuals and groups asked to lay down their weapons – may better advance the UN's goals of making the world less militarized and more peaceful.

Dr. Paul Holtom (Head of Programme, Conventional Arms and Ammunition Programme, UNIDIR)
Dr. Holtom presented the need for a holistic approach to arms control, conflict prevention, and peacebuilding. The Small Arms Survey estimates that there are at least 1 billion firearms in global circulation, with the majority in the hands of civilians, private security companies, or non-state armed groups. In Colombia, 88 per cent of the 5.6 million small arms in circulation are not with state security forces, and 86 per cent of them are unregistered. In Nigeria, about 90 per cent of the estimated 6.7 million firearms are held by civilians. Both Colombia and Nigeria have high rates of armed violence, but weapons and ammunition collection programs and supply-side measures to stop diversion alone are not sufficient. This was made clear by MEAC statistics on weapons in North East Nigeria, where the most commonly held weapons are not guns, but sharpened sticks, bow and arrows, and machetes. Dr. Holtom recommended taking stock of successful collection efforts, remaining cognizant of different local dynamics, and bringing supply-side arms control and measures together with efforts to address the drivers of demand.

Mrs. Eleonora Markella Mantika Dupire (Disarmament, Demobilization, Reintegration Officer, DDRS, DPO)
Research Presentation: Laying Aside Weapons in Conflict Exits and Perceptions on Reintegration in Colombia
In her presentation, Ms. Mantika discussed the differing perception of communities in Colombia towards the peace agreement and the reintegration of former FARC-EP combatants. While some saw it as an opportunity for victim

reparation, others perceived it as a difficult reintegration process. A considerable number of female former FARC-EP saw laying down their weapons as a 'precondition to motherhood', a human experience and a safety net to become mothers. The perception of ethnic community members of an ex-combatant of their ethnic group in the process of reintegration, was often that of an outcast, a 'traitor'; thus, constituting a threat, resulting in stigmatization and revictimization of these individuals. As the actions of the latter are perceived as unpardonable, to grant entry anew to the individual, they would have to go through a certain castigation - public censure- followed by purification. Being responsive to communities, particularly those who have been victimized, is central to crafting effective disarmament approaches. In Colombia, the laying down of the weapons process was entrusted to the UN and the tripartite mechanism (UN+FARC+GovCOL), very effective during ceasefire monitoring, helped generate trust in the peace process at the community level.

Ms. Katherine Prizeman (Political Affairs Officer, UNODA)
Research Presentation: Integrating Small Arms and Light Weapons and Ammunition Control Standards into DDR Operations: The Importance of Aligning Policy and Practice on the Ground.
Ms. Katherine Prizeman highlighted the joint initiative entitled "Effective weapons and ammunition management in a changing DDR context" by the UN ODA and the DDR Section of DPO that seeks to build linkages between conventional arms control and DDR processes. The initiative has developed a handbook for practitioners and training course for effective and tailored disarmament and WAM operations that comply with international and regional commitments. The project's goal is to enhance the UN's capacity to implement DDR and community violence reduction (CVR) programs in accordance with the highest international standards and guidelines, particularly the international ammunition technical guidelines and the modular Small Arms Control implementation support Compendium. This joint ODA-DPO initiative is a good step towards the more holistic, integrated, and human-centred approach to disarmament that other panelists have noted is needed to be effective.

Dr. Ntagahoraho Z. Burihabwa (Special Assistant to the Deputy Head of Mission, UNIFIL)
Dr. Burihabwa emphasized the importance of addressing the underlying causes and motivations for individuals or groups to take up or lay down their weapons. He highlighted the need to ensure specific guarantees for individuals and communities to lay down weapons and keep them down in post-conflict settings. He also called for building bridges between communities and individuals to contribute to these efforts. Dr. Burihabwa noted our approach to disarmament must acknowledge the diverse nature of weaponry being used, from sharpened sticks and stones to more sophisticated weapons depending on the context.

PANEL 9: THE REINTEGRATION JOURNEYS OF INDIVIDUALS WITH PERCEIVED ISIL AFFILIATION: EVIDENCE FROM THE IRAQ CASE STUDY. **[14:10 – 14:55]**

Dr. Mimmi Söderberg Kovacs (Specialist, Armed Groups and Peace Processes, Programme for Disarmament, Demobilisation, Reintegration & Security Transitions, FBA)
Citing the "Resolving Jihadist Conflicts? Religion, Civil War, and Prospects for Peace" project at Uppsala University, Dr. Mimmi Söderberg Kovacs discussed why armed conflicts in which self-avowed jihadists fight are more difficult to resolve via traditional conflict resolution means (e.g., negotiations, peace agreements). The study found that there has been an increase in armed conflicts with actors who promote an "Islamist" ideology since 2014 and that these conflicts are more difficult to resolve due to the transnational dimension of these conflicts and/or the way that governments and international community tend to respond to such conflicts, including counterterrorism frameworks and available support from allies. The conflict in Iraq highlights how states respond to these types of conflicts, and how this approach can have long term implications for reintegration and peacebuilding even after security improves.

Mr. Yousif Khoshnaw (Iraq Researcher, MEAC, UNIDIR)
Research Presentation: Supporting Return and Reintegration Journeys in Iraq
Mr. Khoshnaw's presentation focused on six factors found to influence return and reintegration processes in Iraq — how close the community thinks the person is to ISIL; the flow of information about the return process; the returnee's social network; conditions in Al Hol and Jeddah-1 camp; structural barriers, such as civil documentation; and access to livelihoods. The study found that families considered to be closely affiliated with ISIL faced more barriers to return and reintegration. In the return process, informal sources of information, such as friends and family, were relied upon, but those with weak social connections had difficulty accessing information about conditions in the area of origin or connecting with local authorities. Female heads of households were often disadvantaged due to weaker social ties and social norms that curtailed their ability to reach out to local leaders and identify sponsors. Access to civil documentation was found to be the most critical challenge for returnees, with more than 50 per cent of residents in Jeddah-1 lacking it. Positive experiences in the Jeddah-1 camp, such as improved security compared to Al Hol, respectful treatment by Iraqi authorities, and being able to receive guests at the visitor center, have helped residents re-socialize and begin their transition.

Dr. Melisande Genat (Researcher, MEAC, UNIDIR)
Research Presentation: The Vital Role Communities Play in Return and Reintegration in Iraq
Dr. Melisande Genat presented research on obstacles to return and reintegration for families with perceived ISIL affiliation in Iraq. The MEAC survey of 223 residents of the Jeddah-1 camp revealed that lack of access to civil documentation and security clearance issues were delaying their departure. Community receptivity is crucial for successful reintegration. Whether someone or a community rejects a returnee or responds to them with some range of acceptance depends on factors such as the sectarian makeup of the area of origin, tribal disputes, and personal conflicts. Dr. Genat's research found that many instances where someone sought revenge against a returnee were not, in fact, driven by conflict-related experiences, but were often tied to personal disputes. False or exaggerated accusations are frequently made against returning families. Relatives of ISIL members and daily wage workers who worked for ISIL are at high risk of false accusations and arrests by counterterrorism services in Baghdad.

Ms. Aleksandra Lukasiewicz (Senior Protection Advisor, North East Syria, Save the Children) [Video]
Ms. Lukasiewicz joined the panel by video intervention and described the early phase of the return and reintegration journey for many with perceived ISIL affiliation in Northeast Syria. She described the hardships faced by residents in detention camps there, including limited access to basic needs such as fresh and nutritious food, water points, and medical services. Children experience developmental delays due to limited access to education, and young boys perceived to be over 12 are arbitrarily removed from their mothers and sent to detention centers. Extremist ISIL ideology persists within the camps, particularly in the Al-Hol annexes, where third-country nationals are detained. Violence continues to be a real threat, and fear is pervasive amongst the residents in the camps. Ms. Lukasiewicz's description of the camp helps ground the subsequent presentations that describe the lived experience of Iraqis further down the return pipeline.

Dr. Anne Charbord (Senior Legal Advisor, Office of the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights while Countering Terrorism)
Dr. Charbord presented on the dire humanitarian, human rights, and security situation in Syria, with approximately 65,000 individuals, including 28,000 Iraqis and 15,000 third-country nationals, detained in harsh conditions. The

majority of the population in these camps are children, of which 80 per cent are under the age of 12, and 30 per cent are under the age of five. Dr. Charbord discussed their experiences from a legal perspective, highlighting that many are detailed arbitrarily without due process of law and that the conditions of their detention amount to inhuman and degrading treatment. Men and boys are also held in situations of arbitrary detention, in dire prison conditions, and with no way to communicate or access the detained. There are also some examples of enforced disappearances, where detainees' locations or bodily remains have not been releaved. Dr. Charbord noted that while some repatriations have happened, a large population in the camps and detention centers are unlikely to be able to repatriate.

Mr. Abdelmoneim Mustafa (Programme Manager, Social Cohesion Pillar, UNDP Iraq) – Discussant
Mr. Mustafa discussed the challenges in dealing with families of perceived ISIL affiliates who are not actual fighters. He noted that the real fighters have either been killed, injured, imprisoned, or fled the country, leaving families behind. This has created a challenge in determining how to treat them from both a security and human rights perspective. Community acceptance is a significant factor in the reintegration process, which requires addressing the grievances of families, providing rehabilitation, and compensating victims.

PANEL 10: WHAT DOES EFFECTIVE REINTEGRATION PROGRAMMING LOOK LIKE? INDIVIDUAL TRANSITIONS TO CIVILIAN LIFE AFTER CONFLICT INVOLVEMENT. **[16:25 – 17:40]**

Dr. Siobhan O'Neil (Project Lead, MEAC, UNIDIR)— Moderator
Dr. O'Neil highlighted three critical reflections to keep in mind when working on reintegration: 1) reintegration is a two-way street, and the onus of reintegration cannot be solely on the ex-armed group associate, 2) addressing the reasons someone joined a group does not necessarily promote exit and reintegration, and 3) lastly, it is essential to understand the impact of the time spent in detention on reintegration success. Finally, Dr. O'Neil suggested that while challenges exist, progress can still be made by generating evidence and not letting the perfect be the enemy of the good.

Dr. Mary Beth Altier (Associate Professor, Center for Global Affairs, NYU)
Research Presentation: Lessons Learned from the Meta-analysis of Over 30 Years of Research on DDR
Dr. Mary Beth Altier presented a meta-analysis of over 30 years of research on DDR based on 372 sources. This analysis suggests that successful reintegration is the process of establishing a pro-social, conventional role within society and a non-armed group identity. Dr. Altier highlighted three dimensions of reintegration: economic, social, and political. She also reviewed four broad lessons for reintegration programming: consider who is reintegrating and into what environment, focus on social reintegration, take a comprehensive and holistic approach, and prioritize long-term

planning. Successful programs involve the community in designing, implementing, and monitoring the reintegration process; addressing individuals' needs; and ensuring long-term planning, coordination, and funding.

Dr. Remadji Hoinathy (Senior Researcher, ISS)
Research Presentation: Reintegration in the Lake Chad Basin Region
Dr. Hoinathy began by discussing the high victimization rates experienced by individuals associated with armed groups in the Lake Chad Basin. This includes property loss, family member deaths, physical abuse, and sexual abuse. These experiences must be addressed in programming as it appears that many exiting armed groups come out with psychological wounds. Many ex-associates do not receive reintegration support, but those who do find essential needs support such as food, housing, and water to be most helpful. Self-reported recidivism rates are low, but it is challenging for individuals to disassociate entirely from armed groups during the ongoing conflict when armed groups are still proximate and powerful.

Mr. Sajad Jiyad (Researcher, MEAC, UNIDIR and Managing Director, Bridge)
Presentation: Prioritizing Social Status and Dignity: Ensuring Effective Reintegration Programming for Former Combatants
Mr. Jiyad emphasized that effective reintegration programming must maintain a person's social status, preserve their dignity, and avoid harm in the long run. He cautioned against shutting down programs and removing resources right as the security situation improves. He proposed that successful programs should receive support from the government and at least some approval from the armed groups to promote buy-in (or at least reduce the chances of being undermined). Programs should not be seen as threatening mobilization or group membership; instead, they should be considered compensatory. Successful reintegration programs can help inspire individuals to seek other pathways in society, and reduce the need to join armed groups.

Ms. Valerie Chmara (Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice Office, UNODC)
Ms. Chmara emphasized the importance of working with children associated with armed and organized criminal groups and highlighted the dichotomy between security actors and child protection actors. She recommended treating children recruited or exploited by armed groups as victims and focusing on their strengths and potential to succeed rather than narrowly approaching them as a risk to be assessed. She also highlighted the concern of risk assessment and collecting information that could be used against children, stressing the need to move away from the negative aspects of risk assessment to instead focus on a holistic needs assessment of a child, that includes consideration of their strengths and potential to succeed. Ms. Chmara introduced UNODC's new needs assessment toolkit for children associated with armed groups as a tool that can help practitioners reorient and enhance their engagement with formerly associated children.

Ms. Nathalie Gendre (Senior DDRR Program Coordinator, IOM)
Ms. Gendre highlighted the importance of government ownership and institutional coordination for successful reintegration programs, emphasizing practitioners' responsibility to provide clear, coordinated messages. She stressed the importance of acknowledging the blurred line between perpetrators and victims and building mutual understanding between the community and the formerly associated individual. Ms. Gendre noted the need for tailored processes, proper care management, and longitudinal monitoring for sustained efficiency. She also highlighted that reintegration programming could be an opportunity to transform cultural norms, particularly in the context of gender and women's roles in society.

CONCLUDING REMARKS [17:40 – 18:00]

Ms. Akossiwa Lea Koudjou (Policy and Planning Officer, DDRS, DPO)
Ms. Koudjou emphasized the importance of bridging the gap between research and practice in addressing the factors driving recruitment into armed groups and thanked the MEAC project for taking a step in that direction. She discussed the need to examine the loss of livelihoods, lack of access to essential services, and family/community influence and how better addressing these issues could thwart recruitment and promote reintegration. She emphasized the need to bridge the gap between research and practice and operationalize evidence into recommendations and practice on the ground. She also highlighted the need to conduct additional research and implement gender-sensitive programming to address the root causes of conflict.

Dr. Glaucia Boyer (Global Advisor on Reintegration-DDR-PRR, Recovery Solutions and Human Mobility Team, Crisis Bureau, UNDP)
Dr. Boyer emphasized the need for evidence-based research to inform conflict prevention. She stressed the importance of generating evidence without preconceived notions and assumptions; linking evidence to policy, programming, and learning; and being strategic in formulating reintegration policies and strategies. She highlighted the importance of capacity building to generate evidence and the need to convene researchers and set up assessment tools and questionnaires to support research. Finally, Dr. Boyer noted the need to bring communities together to improve conflict prevention and reintegration policies and programming.