



**UNIDIR**

**MANAGING EXITS**  
FROM ARMED CONFLICT

MEAC FINDINGS REPORT 40

# Trust Matters: Community Perceptions Towards Aid Organizations in the North East of Nigeria

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# Contents

## 4 Background

4 About MEAC

4 About This Series

4 About This Report

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## 5 Introduction

## 6 Methodology and Sample

---

## 8 Findings

9 Knowledge and Familiarity with the United Nations and Aid Organizations

13 Reported Trust Levels in the United Nations and Aid Organizations

17 Factors Driving Trust in the United Nations and Aid Organizations

29 What Can Aid Organizations Do Better?

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## 31 Policy Implications

This Findings Report, and the research that supported it, were undertaken as part of UNIDIR's Managing Exits from Armed Conflict (MEAC) project. MEAC is a multi-donor, multi-partner initiative 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 transitions. While the Findings Report benefited from feedback from MEAC's donors and institutional partners, it does not necessarily represent their official policies or positions.

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# Key Findings

- In the North East of Nigeria, awareness about aid organizations was generally high. Most of those surveyed in the region had heard about the United Nations and other International non-governmental organizations (INGOs). However, respondents rarely distinguished between the United Nations entities and INGOs, and often conflated local and international aid organizations.
- Awareness of, and ability to distinguish between, aid organizations varied across groups, with former Boko Haram associates struggling more than community security actors (CSAs) and unaffiliated community members. Additionally, men and boys were more likely to distinguish between local and international aid organizations, relative to women and girls.
- Despite the knowledge gaps, high trust levels were reported in the United Nations and both international and local aid organizations by respondents in the North East, irrespective of their affiliation. The active presence of aid organizations within communities was linked to greater trust in the United Nations.
- Receiving prior aid assistance was also associated with higher trust in the United Nations, for both unaffiliated respondents and CSA affiliates. Former associates who passed through a transit centre and received assistance afterwards expressed greater trust in the United Nations relative to those who did not receive aid afterwards, or relative to those who bypassed the centres altogether.
- When announcements about aid were made by local leaders within the communities, respondents were more likely to positively rate the work of international organizations (IOs).
- Additionally, those who disagreed with polarizing statements and misinformation campaigns were more likely to express higher trust levels in the United Nations.
- CSAs and unaffiliated community members generally perceived aid distribution as fair and felt they had input on the type of aid received. In contrast, former Boko Haram associates were more likely to perceive aid as unfair and felt they had less influence over the aid provided. Respondents, across affiliations, who perceived greater unfairness in aid distribution were also more likely to report lower trust in the United Nations.
- In terms of what aid organizations could do better, respondents unsurprisingly asked for more aid to be provided. On the specific forms of support, respondents cited the need for 'food or water,' 'cash support,' and 'shelter' as their top priorities.

# Background

## About MEAC

How and why do individuals exit armed groups, and how do they do so sustainably without falling back into conflict cycles? These questions are at the core of UNIDIR'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 seeks to inform evidence-based 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. The MEAC project benefits from generous support by the German Federal Foreign Office (GFFO); Global Affairs Canada (GAC); the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA); and the Irish Department of Foreign Affairs; and is run in partnership with UNICEF; and the International Organization for Migration (IOM); the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP); UN Department of Peace Operations (DPO); the World Bank; the Secretariat of the Regional Strategy for Stabilization, Recovery and Resilience in the Lake Chad Basin; and United Nations University Centre for Policy Research (UNU-CPR). For this findings report, MEAC benefited from a partnership with and support from OCHA in Nigeria, where the project is contributing to a separate stakeholder mapping.

## About This Series

The MEAC findings report series seeks to put evidence about conflict transitions and related programming into the hands of policymakers and practitioners in real time. The reports present short overviews of findings (or emerging findings) across a wide range of thematic areas and include analyses of their political or practical implications for the United Nations and its partners.

## About This Report

This MEAC findings report examines how aid organizations are perceived in the North East of Nigeria and what factors drive the increase or decrease in trust towards them. It looks at differences in awareness about, experiences with, and trust levels in aid organizations amongst three main groups: a) community members who were never with any non-state armed groups, b) those formerly associated with Boko Haram and its factions Jamā'at Ahl as-Sunnah lid-

Da'wah wa'l-Jihād (JAS) and the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), and c) those formerly or currently affiliated with community security actors (CSAs) like the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF).<sup>1</sup> It then explores how these different dynamics interact, and which factors meaningfully impact trust in the aid organizations operating in the North East of Nigeria. The report concludes by exploring the policy implications of the findings for humanitarian actors operating in the region.

# Introduction

The conflict in the North East of Nigeria, now entering its 15th year, has spiralled into a large-scale humanitarian crisis. The 2024 Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) alarmingly estimated that 7.9 million affected people required humanitarian assistance in the region.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, 4.4 million people were projected to face severe hunger during the lean season, including two million children suffering from acute malnutrition.<sup>3</sup> In attempting to respond to the widespread and acute needs in the region, aid actors, ranging from local to international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the different United Nations agencies operating in region are faced with a plethora of security, political, and funding-related challenges. These include limited access to target populations (especially outside so-called garrison towns), and significant information gaps for humanitarians and affected populations. Aid delivery is further hampered by security regulations, legal and operational risks regarding who receives support, threats to aid workers' safety, regional political considerations, scarcity of donor funding, and an overall lack of international prioritization.<sup>4</sup> These challenges not only determine which communities can be reached, but also influence the duration and modality of aid delivery.

As is the case in other conflict settings around the world, there are signs that the reputation of United Nations and other international NGOs (INGOs) as 'neutral' actors in Nigeria is challenged, and these organizations are increasingly considered a target by different armed and criminal groups. In light of this, and the need to overcome the aforementioned obstacles to reach populations in need, it is crucial to better understand how key stakeholders in the region – from community members to armed associates – fundamentally perceive aid organizations. To this end, this report provides insights on stakeholder perceptions and trust levels in aid

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<sup>1</sup> To differentiate between the different types of armed groups, those who were linked to Boko Haram (or one of its factions) are referred to as former 'associates,' whilst 'affiliates' is used to describe those who were with CSAs like the CJTF. This phrasing is used only to enhance clarity for the reader and is *not* intended to suggest varying degrees of 'voluntariness,' agency, or hierarchy within the group during an individual's time with an armed group.

<sup>2</sup> United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), "[Nigerian Humanitarian Response Plan](#)," Abuja: June 2024; European Commission, "[Nigeria](#)," last accessed 11 September 2024.

<sup>3</sup> Jon Edwards, "[Emergency gap: case study North-east Nigeria](#)," Medecins Sans Frontier, 2017.

<sup>4</sup> Abby Stoddard, Paul Harvey, Monica Czwarno, and Meriah-Jo Breckenridge, "[Humanitarian Access SCORE Report: Northeast Nigeria](#)," Coverage, Operational Reach, and Effectiveness (CORE), 2020.

organizations that can help shed light on how community members and armed actors perceive aid organizations and what factors guide and shape their trust.

Drawing on data from a large-scale primary survey conducted in the North East of Nigeria, this report delves into how different stakeholders perceive aid organizations and what factors drive the extent of trust in these actors. Recognizing the importance that – and differences amongst – a range of stakeholders play in helping aid organizations access populations in the North East, the report pays special attention to those formerly associated with the Boko Haram factions; those affiliated with community security actors (CSAs such as the CJTF), and unaffiliated community members. Where relevant, it accounts for gender differences, and displacement dynamics.

As the report will highlight, people in the North East of Nigeria did not always distinguish between different types of aid organizations, and any interaction with one aid organization appeared to impact the perceptions held about other aid organizations. Furthermore, which community actor announced the aid, whether prior aid was received by respondents, the extent of misinformation and perceiving fairness in aid distribution collectively exert influence on trust levels in aid organizations. Based on these findings, recommendations for how organizations can better tailor and deliver aid in the North East are provided. The report provides evidence-based insights that could inform efforts to enhance the effectiveness, access, legitimacy, and relevance of aid within conflict-impacted communities in the region.

## Methodology and Sample

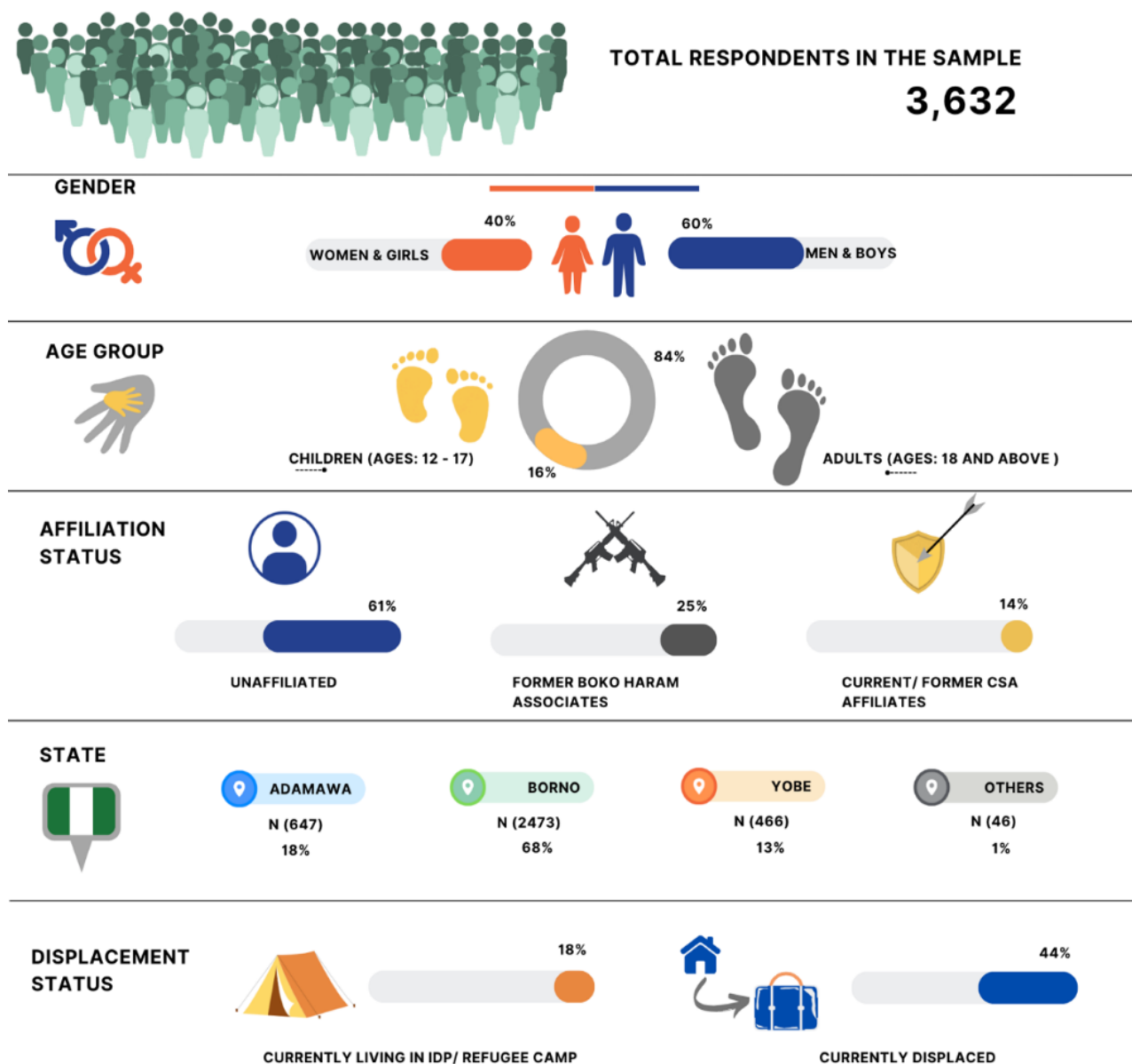
The data examined in this report was drawn from the baseline wave of a large-scale, multi-year MEAC panel survey on trajectories of individuals in and out of armed groups across the region. The survey data used in this report was collected between April and June 2024 by phone with 3,632 respondents based in the North East (mainly Borno, Adamawa and Yobe states). Forty per cent of the sample consisted of women and girls, while men and boys constituted 60 per cent.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, 84 per cent of the respondents were adults, and 16 per cent were minors.<sup>6</sup> Other relevant demographics including the displacement status, geographic breakdown, affiliation and related demographics are visualized below in Figure 1.

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<sup>5</sup> While MEAC strived for a 50-50 gender split, it proved challenging to reach certain sub-populations, especially women affiliated with non-state armed groups. Furthermore, some sub-populations of interest were inherently unbalanced, such as the CSAs (where 17 women and girls were interviewed relative to 491 men and boys).

<sup>6</sup> In line with the international norms for defining childhood, any respondent reporting their age as 18 or above at the time of the survey qualifies as an adult. Anyone who reported their age as 17 or below at the time of survey is considered a minor. Minors below the age of 12 years were not allowed to participate. Minors could only participate if a parent or guardian provided consent on their behalf. The authors recognize, however, that the international norm for defining childhood up to the age of 18 might not always reflect local perceptions about child- and adulthood.

**FIGURE 1 – SAMPLE**



Within the sample, 2,230 respondents (61 per cent) were never with any non-state armed actor. This sample of unaffiliated community members included 1,144 women and girls, and 1,086 men and boys. In addition, 905 respondents (25 per cent of the total sample) reported having been with at least one of the different factions of Boko Haram (JAS and ISWAP). This included 304 women and girls, and 601 men and boys. Finally, a sample of 508 respondents (14 per cent of the total sample) reported having been with at least one CSA (e.g., the Civilian Joint Task Force or CJTF and other vigilante groups). Out of those affiliated with CSAs, only 11 per cent

were former CSAs while most (89 per cent) reported currently being affiliated.<sup>7</sup> Both former and current CSAs were analysed together, unless explicitly mentioned in the findings section.

The survey respondents were sampled using a range of methods. Unaffiliated community members and those with non-state armed groups were recruited from communities and IDP camps across the Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe (BAY) states, with the aim of being demographically representative (and within the constraints of access and security).<sup>8</sup> Additionally, respondents affiliated with CSAs and formerly with Boko Haram were recruited through UN-supported programs and within interim transit centres.<sup>9</sup>

The findings presented in the following section were generated following the cleaning, processing, and statistical analysis of the baseline survey data. Claims of statistical significance and any causal relationships have been substantiated by relevant statistical tests, such as chi-square tests and regression analyses. Furthermore, summary statistics are explained in the text or in footnotes.<sup>10</sup> Any caveats for visuals are also provided wherever relevant.<sup>11</sup>

## Findings

The sections below explore how armed group association (Boko Haram, CSA, or lack thereof) align with perceptions towards aid organizations, and the factors that drive levels of trust. To set the stage, the first section will explore how familiar people in the North East are with aid organizations, and if they are able to distinguish between different types of organizations (for example, the United Nations versus INGOs). Next, the report will delve into whether they generally trust these organizations, and what are the potential drivers of trust. This includes, among others, the impact of having received different types of aid, perceiving aid distribution as (un)fair, having a say in aid, and believing in misinformation about aid. The final section will

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<sup>7</sup> The sample of CSA-affiliated respondents only included 17 women, reflecting the male-dominated composition of these groups.

<sup>8</sup> The earlier MEAC's recruitment surveys involved enumerators targeting communities, and within them, randomly selecting persons to be included in the pool for future surveys. From the subset of respondents who agreed to be interviewed in future surveys, respondents were stratified on gender, age and location and selected. Additionally, protocols such as not interviewing children younger than 12 years of age and women and girls being interviewed by only female enumerators were strictly followed. Occasionally, through the recruitment in communities, ex-associates from Boko Haram and affiliates from CSAs like the CJTF were also recruited.

<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, during data collection, where necessary, small-scale snowball recruitment was conducted for specific sub-populations (e.g., to bolster the sample of women and girls who were with Boko Haram) to ensure their adequate representation in the baseline survey.

<sup>10</sup> Respondents always have the option to skip a survey question. People did so at low rates, on average between zero and four per cent. Skipping a question could happen for multiple reasons (e.g., lack of knowledge, or refusing to answer). In the calculation of summary statistics, 'refused to answer' rates are dropped unless explicitly mentioned. They are included for regressions, however.

<sup>11</sup> The graphs may sometimes just exceed 100 per cent if questions are of select-multiple categories.

highlight what respondents themselves think aid organizations could do better, and what type of aid they would provide to others like them, if they could decide.

## Knowledge and Familiarity with the United Nations and Aid Organizations

To gain a clearer understanding of how people in the North East perceive aid organizations, it is necessary to first understand their knowledge and awareness of such organizations. It is well known among aid practitioners in the region that while community members are aware of the presence of the United Nations and INGOs, they often do not differentiate amongst these organizations. Survey data collected by MEAC supported this finding, indicating that aid actors in the region—including various United Nations agencies, INGOs, and local NGOs or implementing partners—were frequently conflated with one another.

### 1.1 Presence of Aid Organizations

The presence of, and awareness about, aid organizations in the region was considerable. When all respondents were asked if international organizations (IOs) were active in the communities where they lived, 64 per cent confirmed that this was the case.<sup>12</sup> In fact, the variation in responses between Boko Haram associates (67 per cent), CSA affiliates (65 per cent), and unaffiliated community respondents (62 per cent) was minimal, implying that respondents irrespective of their affiliation status were aware of IOs active in the community where they live. When disaggregated by gender, the variation continued to be minimal. Fifty-nine per cent of women and 67 per cent of men respectively said that IOs were active in the communities where they lived.

As expected, respondents who lived in internally displaced people (IDP) camps had greater exposure to the work of IOs. Out of the respondents living in IDP camps who were posed this question, 78 per cent said that IOs were active in their communities. Additionally, out of those living in an IDP camp, 58 per cent said that their camp was supported by the government or an international organization like the United Nations.<sup>13</sup> The higher awareness amongst IDPs was anticipated given that IOs routinely managed programming activities within camps across the North East.<sup>14</sup> This presumably increased the likelihood of camp residents noting the presence of IOs.

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<sup>12</sup> "Are any aid organizations active in the community where you currently live?" Posed to adults.

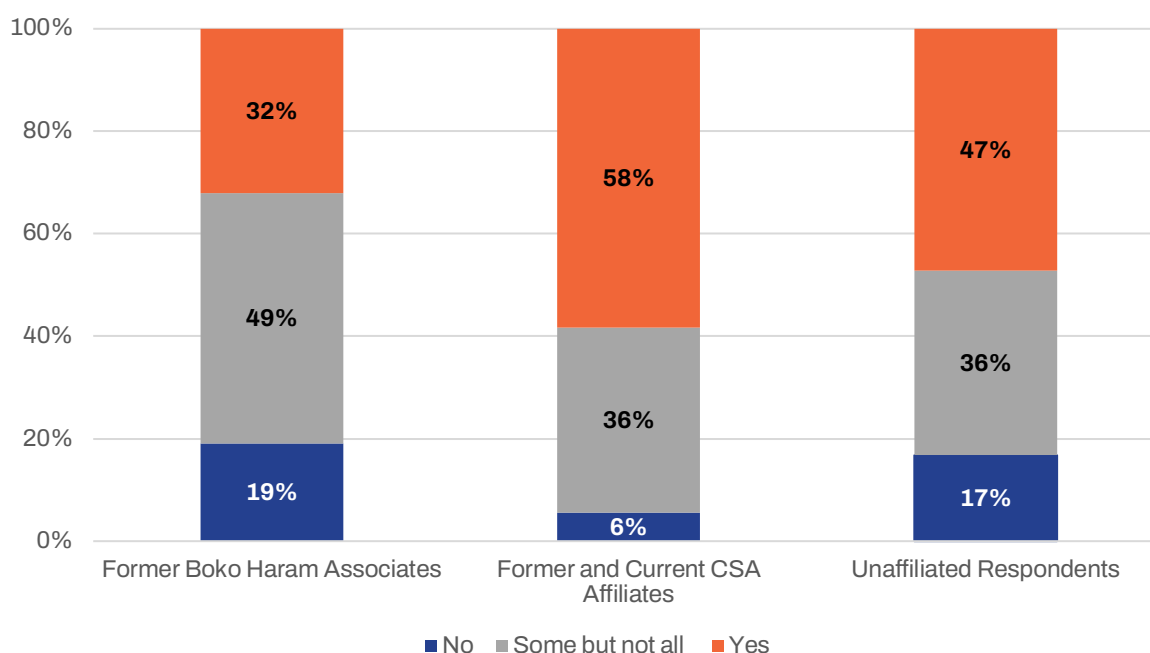
<sup>13</sup> "Is this camp supported by the government or any international aid organizations like the UN?"

<sup>14</sup> International Organization for Migration (IOM), "[Displacement Tracking Matrix](#)," (Abuja, Nigeria: March 2023).

## 1.2 General Awareness of the United Nations and INGOs

The survey also revealed that most respondents were aware of the United Nations and INGOs, and often recognized the United Nations through its various subsidiary agencies. Notably, when given examples of specific agencies, respondents were more likely to say that they were familiar with the United Nations.

**FIGURE 2 – BESIDES THE UN, THERE ARE ALSO INTERNATIONAL NGOs THAT PROVIDE AID, LIKE THE RED CROSS, ACTION AGAINST HUNGER, OR RESCUE. HAVE YOU HEARD OF ANY OF THEM?**



For instance, when all respondents were asked if they had heard of “the United Nations, also known as the UN,” 57 per cent said they had heard of it. For those affiliated with CSAs, this increased to 78 per cent, but for those formerly associated with Boko Haram, this number fell to 50 per cent. However, when asked whether respondents knew of agencies such as UNICEF, UNDP, IOM, WFP, or OCHA, a much larger proportion of overall respondents (81 per cent) said yes or that they had heard of some of them.<sup>15</sup> A similar trend was observed for children who reported that they knew of at least some of the agencies.

People affiliated with CSAs had more visibility on aid organizations and were able to differentiate amongst them to a greater extent. For example, 95 per cent of CSA-affiliated respondents had heard of at least some of the different United Nations agencies relative to 76

<sup>15</sup> "The UN is an international organization made up of countries from around the world. The UN has different agencies, including UNICEF, UNDP, IOM, WFP, or OCHA. Have you heard of any of them?" Answer options: Yes, No, Some but not all.

per cent of former Boko Haram associates. The greater awareness about the United Nations by those affiliated with CSAs could potentially be attributed to the position they hold in the communities where they operate. The nature of their work gives them a unique vantage point on who operates within the communities (e.g., providing security services at IDP camps and transit centres for former Boko Haram associates, or manning checkpoints and traffic control). Former Boko Haram associates in turn seemed less aware about the United Nations relative to their unaffiliated peers. This could be because they have often spent extended periods in remote and isolated areas without United Nations' presence. Presumably, the longer that they had been out of the armed group, the more likely they would have been to hear about, or interact with the United Nations or its implementing partners.

People were also aware of other INGOs operating in the region. When respondents were asked if they knew of other organizations that provided aid, like the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC – locally referred to as 'the Red Cross'), Action Against Hunger, and the International Rescue Committee (IRC – locally referred to as 'Rescue'), 84 per cent of all respondents confirmed that they had heard of at least some of these organizations. As with awareness about the United Nations, and shown in the visual above, CSA affiliates were the most likely to have heard about well-known INGOs in the region, and former Boko Haram associates the least.

### **1.3 Differentiating Between Different Types of Aid Actors**

While aid organizations were broadly recognizable to respondents, many – particularly women and girls – did not make specific distinctions between international aid organizations. In fact, only 43 per cent of all respondents said that they did see the United Nations as different from an organization like the Red Cross.<sup>16</sup> This pattern persisted even when the data was analysed by affiliation.<sup>17</sup> Thus, interactions with or stories about the United Nations likely influenced how respondents perceived other INGOs, and vice versa. This conflation becomes particularly significant when designing interventions for former Boko Haram associates, as they might more easily blur the lines between expectations of different aid organizations operating in similar domains.

Respondents not only struggled to differentiate between various international aid organizations but also between international organizations (IOs), non-governmental organizations (NGOs),

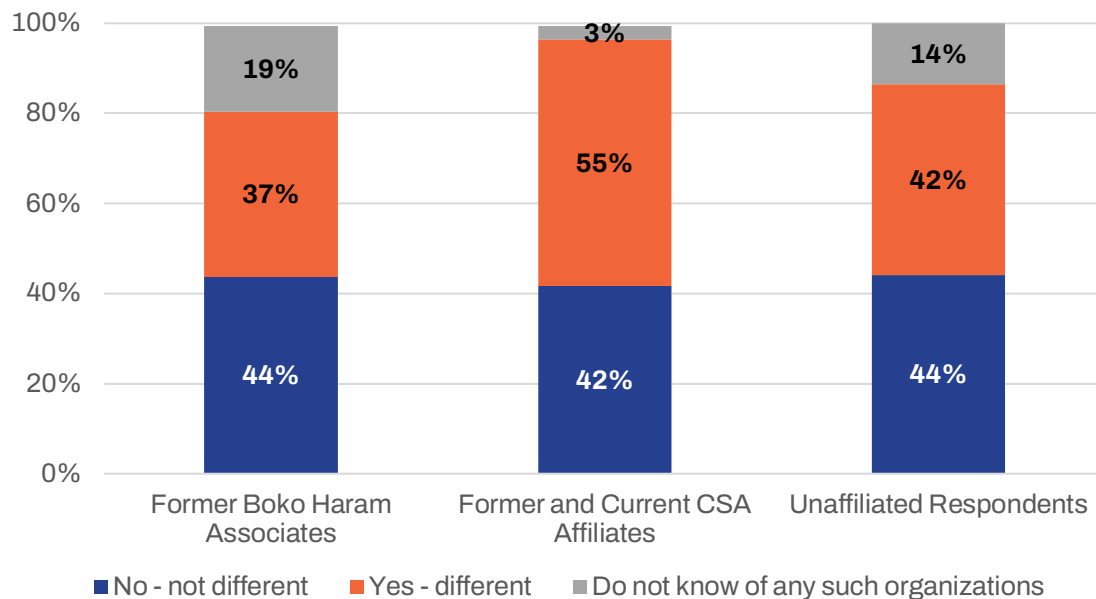
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<sup>16</sup> "Do you see an organization like the UN, as different from an organization like the Red Cross?" Answer options: Yes - different, No - not different, Don't know of any such organizations.

<sup>17</sup> Even though the rates of not seeing the United Nations as different from 'the Red Cross' was similar across the different populations of interest (44 per cent of unaffiliated respondents, 44 per cent of former Boko Haram associates, and 42 per cent of CSA affiliates reported not seeing them as different), the rates of reporting a difference showed more variation. This was because of a third answer option ("do not know such organizations"). More former Boko Haram associates said that they did not know of these organizations compared to other respondents.

and local aid providers operating in their communities. Sixty-eight per cent of respondents said they did not know the difference between 'international NGOs and international organizations' on the one hand, and 'local associations and national organizations' on the other hand.<sup>18</sup>

**FIGURE 3 – DO YOU SEE AN ORGANIZATION LIKE THE UN, AS DIFFERENT FROM AN ORGANIZATION LIKE THE RED CROSS?**



Some degree of conflation between local organization and international ones was anticipated given that many IOs and INGOs work through local implementing partners who become the face (and logo) of their interventions. This likely impacted the extent to which specific aid organizations were known to local populations and could make it difficult for respondents to distinguish amongst them.

Different respondent profiles exhibited varying levels of difficulty in distinguishing between local aid organizations and international ones. For instance, 78 per cent of the children stated that they did not make a distinction between international and local aid organizations. When disaggregated by gender, almost twice the number of men and boys (40 per cent) made a distinction between types of aid organizations relative to women and girls (21 per cent). The gender discrepancy could be explained by the greater access to public information and spaces that men and boys possessed compared to women and girls, making them more aware of the

<sup>18</sup> "Do you feel like you generally know the difference between international NGOs and international organizations on the one hand, and local associations and national organizations on the other hand?"

different types of aid organizations.<sup>19</sup> Moreover, over half (57 per cent) of the CSA affiliates could not make a distinction between the types of aid organizations. This percentage was higher for former Boko Haram associates, almost three quarters of whom (73 per cent) said they could not make such a distinction.

Thus, while some community members in the North East were aware of various aid organizations, the distinctions amongst INGOs and the United Nations, and between international versus local organizations were blurred. This lack of differentiation matters because it can lead to misaligned expectations and confusion about the roles and responsibilities of different humanitarian actors, which could, in turn, undermine community trust and the effectiveness of interventions. For women and girls, who reported the lowest levels of awareness, this is particularly significant. Without a clear understanding of which organizations are providing specific services or support, they may be less likely to engage with aid efforts or have their specific needs met.

## Reported Trust Levels in the United Nations and Aid Organizations

### 2.1 Trust Levels in the United Nations

Despite the lack of distinction made between the different actors, trust in the United Nations and other international organizations was found to be high across most demographics. When all respondents who knew of the United Nations or some of its agencies were asked how much they trusted the United Nations, 74 per cent said, 'a lot.'<sup>20</sup> When disaggregated by affiliation status, 73 per cent of those formerly associated with Boko Haram and 80 per cent of those affiliated with CSAs cited 'a lot' of trust. In the same vein, there were no major gender differences in trust levels towards the United Nations.<sup>21</sup> Children, including those formerly associated with Boko Haram, also reported very high levels of trust in the United Nations. The consistent levels of high trust could be attributed to the fact that the respondents were broadly aware of the United Nations or at least one of its entities.

To examine the impact of armed group association on perceptions towards aid organizations, simple regressions were run. Prior Boko Haram association had no statistical relationship with

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<sup>19</sup> For another example of the impact of the gendered information gap on conflict dynamics, see Zoe Marks, Fatima Yetcha Ajimi Badu, and Rebecca Littman, "[Understanding Receptivity to Returning Former Boko Haram Associates Through a Gender Lens](#)," Findings Report 30, UNIDIR, Geneva, 2023.

<sup>20</sup> "How much do you trust the UN - a lot, some, or not at all?" Answer options: A lot, Some, Not at all.

<sup>21</sup> Results showed that 75 per cent of women and 73 per cent of men reported 'a lot' of trust in the United Nations, but neither was found to be statistically more likely to express higher trust. Multinomial logistic regressions were run to test this hypothesis. The dependent variable was "trust in the UN," and the independent variables were gender, age, education, and displacement status. Gender was statistically insignificant.

trust in the UN. For current and former CSAs, the result was statistically significant: association with the CJTF or another CSA was tied to greater trust in the UN. The result is not surprising and explored in depth later in the report. Given, however, that there are several other factors that could be confounded with prior association, particularly for former Boko Haram associates, the sections that follow examine the different drivers of trust and how it varies by association.

Similarly, respondents living in IDP camps mirrored the sentiments and expressed 'a lot' of trust in the United Nations (76 per cent). This is likely explained by the increased visibility and presence of aid actors in IDP camps, which in turn impacts trust. Seventy-eight per cent of those living in IDP camps confirmed that IOs were indeed active in their communities.<sup>22</sup> Within the IDP camp, no statistically significant link was found between association of the respondents and trust levels. This implies that former Boko Haram associates and unaffiliated respondents living within IDP camps were not likely to report different levels of trust in the UN, solely based on their affiliation.<sup>23</sup>

## **2.2 Trust Levels in Aid from International and Local Organizations**

High levels of trust were observed not just with respect to the United Nations, but also other international and local aid organizations. When half of the respondents were randomly assigned the question of how much they trust aid coming from international organizations, 70 per cent said they trusted the aid 'a lot'.<sup>24</sup> Similarly, when the other half was asked about trust in aid coming from local organizations, 69 per cent said they trusted the aid 'a lot'.<sup>25</sup> These high levels of reported trust were further reinforced when respondents who reported IOs being active in their communities were asked to rate the work of IOs. Ninety-six per cent rated their work as 'very good' or 'good' when asked what they thought of the work that aid organizations do in their community.<sup>26</sup> Only a very small proportion (0.6 per cent) of the respondents rated the work of aid organizations as 'bad' or 'very bad.' Despite MEAC having a clear consent process which stressed that participation in the survey would not influence aid distribution, it is possible that respondents reported high trust in aid actors, in the hope of receiving further aid.

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<sup>22</sup> "Are any aid organizations active in the community where you currently live?" Posed to respondents currently in an IDP camp. Filtered for adults.

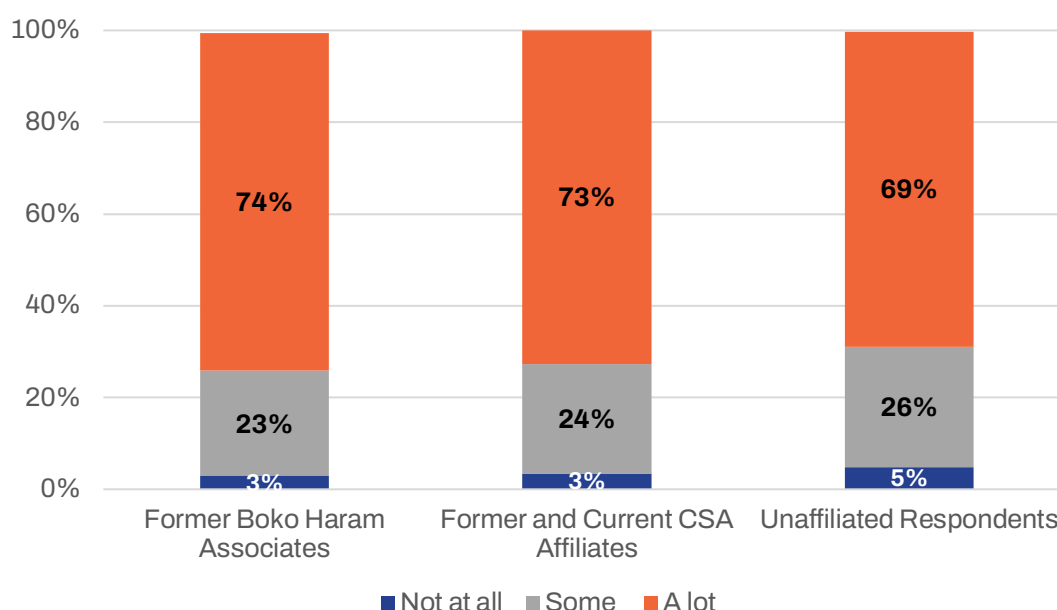
<sup>23</sup> N = 422 former Boko Haram associates reported currently living with an IDP camp. For unassociated respondents, this number stood at N = 163. A multinomial regression was run to test the effect of affiliation of trust in the UN. The dependent variable was "trust in the UN" and the independent variables were affiliation, age, and gender. Affiliation variable was statistically insignificant.

<sup>24</sup> N = 1,796 - "How much do you trust aid coming from international organizations - a lot, some, or not at all?" Posed to fifty per cent of respondents randomly selected.

<sup>25</sup> N = 1,823 - "How much do you trust aid coming from local organizations - a lot, some, or not at all?" Posed to fifty per cent of respondents randomly selected.

<sup>26</sup> N = 1,940 - "What do you think of the work that aid organizations do in your community?" Answer options: Very bad, Bad, Neither good nor bad, Good, Very good.

**FIGURE 4 – HOW MUCH DO YOU TRUST AID COMING FROM INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS?**



A variation by gender on trust was also observed, where the women and girls showed significantly higher trust in aid coming from both international and local organizations relative to men and boys.<sup>27</sup> This was confirmed by regression analysis which found that men and boys were 39 per cent less likely to express high trust in aid from international organizations and 41 per cent less likely to trust aid from local organizations, relative to women and girls.<sup>28</sup> This trust differential could stem in part from the fact that women and girls were disproportionately affected by the conflict in the North East, which could drive dependency and lead them to express higher levels of trust in aid organizations.<sup>29</sup> Additionally, it is important to note high levels of reported trust in aid coming from international and local organizations may be biased by the large-scale need for humanitarian assistance. In fact, the MEAC survey showed that women and girls within the communities were indeed less likely to receive any form of aid

<sup>27</sup> Same as footnote 24. Filtered for gender. Seventy-seven per cent of women and girls reported ‘A lot’ of trust in aid from international organizations, while this number stood at 66 per cent for men and boys. Similarly, 77 per cent of women and girls reported ‘A lot’ of trust in aid from local organizations, compared to 63 per cent of men and boys.

<sup>28</sup> Multinomial logistic regressions were run to test this hypothesis. The dependent variable was “trust in aid from international organizations” and “trust in aid from local organizations,” and the independent variables were gender, age, education, and displacement status. Gender was statistically significant at the 90 per cent confidence level with a coefficient of -0.460\* and -0.383\* respectively for the two dependent variables. These coefficients were then transformed into per cent change in probability by applying the inverse logit function.

<sup>29</sup> See Joyce Amadhu and Umar Ahmed, “[Intersectional Gender Analysis in Northeast Nigeria](#),” UN Women, OCHA & United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), Abuja, Nigeria: 2023. and See: Fatouma Zara Laouan and RGA Cooperative members, “[Rapid Gender Analysis Northeast Nigeria- Borno, Adamawa and Yobe States](#),” June 2022.

assistance.<sup>30</sup> In addition, because of their higher awareness of IOs, men and boys were also more likely than women and girls to be able to distinguish between different types of aid organizations. This could perhaps explain their more nuanced responses to the trust questions, as compared to women and girls. Thus, the gender variation vis-à-vis trust should be interpreted with caution and contextualized appropriately.

### **2.3 Contextualizing Trust in Aid Organizations**

The strong trust placed in aid organizations raised the question of whether similar trust levels also extended to other public institutions. The results showed that trust in aid organizations was not an outlier and that it aligned with generally high levels of trust reported in other public institutions.

The survey asked respondents the extent to which they trusted the military, and leaders in the state and federal government of Nigeria, as well as their local leaders. Despite the fact that their experiences with them might not always be positive (e.g., instances of violence against civilians by the military), most of the respondents reported high levels of trust in these institutions. Notably, 81 per cent of respondents expressed 'a lot' of trust in the military and 14 per cent expressed some trust.<sup>31</sup> Similarly, a majority (77 per cent) trusted their respective BAY state government leaders 'a lot' and 73 per cent trusted the federal government leaders 'a lot'.<sup>32</sup> At the community level, 79 per cent of the respondents expressed 'a lot' of trust in their Bulama (a tier of traditional leadership with the closest connections to and visibility within local communities).<sup>33</sup> This affirmed that respondents generally tended to express high levels of trust in most public institutions, and particularly those at the state and local level. Aid organizations, which could be perceived to work closely with such public institutions, were not an exception. That said, trust is a complex, multi-dimensional concept that cannot be fully captured in a single metric or quantitative data alone.

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<sup>30</sup> A multinomial logistic regression was run to test this hypothesis. The dependent variable was "receiving any form of prior aid" and the independent variables were gender, age, education, and displacement status. Gender was statistically significant at the 99 per cent confidence level. Men and boys were more likely to receive some form of aid, relative to women and girls.

<sup>31</sup> "How much do you trust the military - a lot, some, or not at all?"

<sup>32</sup> "How much do you trust the leaders in your state government - a lot, some, or not at all?"

<sup>33</sup> "How much do you trust the leaders in the Federal Government in Abuja - a lot, some, or not at all?"

<sup>33</sup> "How much do you trust your Bulama - a lot, some, or not at all?" Posed to all respondents except for Bulamas.

# Factors Driving Trust in the United Nations and Aid Organizations

While the previous sub-sections broadly looked at respondent familiarity and perceptions towards aid organizations, this next sub-section delves into the specific drivers of trust in them, including prior presence of aid organizations, receiving specific forms of aid, who announces the aid within communities, narratives and rumours about aid organizations, and perceptions of fair aid distribution.

## 3.1 Presence of Aid Organizations

Respondents who indicated active presence of aid organizations within their communities also exhibited greater trust in aid organizations. As flagged earlier, 64 per cent of respondents confirmed that IOs were active in their communities.<sup>34</sup> Regression results confirmed that the presence of aid organizations in the community where the respondent lived was indeed statistically associated with higher reported trust in the United Nations. Precisely, the presence of aid organizations was associated with a 65 per cent increased probability of reporting 'a lot' of trust in the United Nations relative to reporting 'no trust'.<sup>35</sup> No significant differences across affiliation statuses were observed.

Similar results were found for other types of aid organizations. The probability of trusting 'aid coming from international organizations' increased by 70 per cent if aid organizations were already active in the respondent's community.<sup>36</sup> This finding aligned with the idea that direct exposure to aid organizations allowed individuals to observe their activities and impact firsthand, fostering familiarity and increasing confidence in the aid organizations.

## 3.2 Receiving Prior Aid

Receiving any form of prior assistance was broadly associated with higher trust in the United Nations, notably for unaffiliated respondents and CSA affiliates. For former Boko Haram associates, this depended. Former associates who passed through a transit centre and

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<sup>34</sup> "Are any aid organizations active in the community where you currently live?" Posed to adults.

<sup>35</sup> A multinomial logistic regression was run to test this hypothesis. The dependent variable was "trust in the UN" and the independent variables were gender, age, education, displacement status and whether IOs are active in the community. The variable indicating whether IOs were active was consistently statistically significant at the 95 per cent confidence level with a coefficient of 0.604\*\*. This coefficient was then transformed into per cent change in probability by applying the inverse logit function.

<sup>36</sup> A multinomial logistic regression was run to test this hypothesis. The dependent variable was "trust in aid from international organizations" and the independent variables were gender, age, education, displacement status and whether IOs were active in the community. The variable indicating whether IOs were active was consistently statistically significant at the 99 per cent confidence level with a coefficient of 0.845\*\*\*. This coefficient was then transformed into per cent change in probability by applying the inverse logit function.

received aid assistance afterwards expressed greater trust in the UN, relative to other former associates.

Across the entire sample, receiving any form of aid (possibly from the government, international organizations, or NGOs) was associated with a 66 per cent increase in the probability of community respondents reporting 'a lot' of trust in the United Nations.<sup>37</sup> Specifically for unaffiliated community respondents (44 per cent of whom received some form of aid), receiving prior aid was associated with a 71 per cent higher probability of reporting greater trust in the United Nations.<sup>38</sup> For CSA affiliates (44 per cent of whom received some form of aid), receiving prior aid was also associated with greater trust in the United Nations, although their CSA status was not statistically significant.

For those formerly associated with Boko Haram, the relationship between receiving prior aid and reported trust was more complex to measure. Since respondents associated with Boko Haram could have exited the group through formal or informal pathways, they may have received aid at different stages (or not at all).

Out of the 905 former Boko Haram associates in the sample, 86 per cent (or 775 respondents) passed through a transit centre and exited Boko Haram through some sort of formal pathway that included different levels of support (e.g., the provision of food or medical care while at a transit centre). Out of those respondents, 77 per cent reported staying at the Hajj camp, 15 per cent at the Bulumkutu interim care centre, 16 per cent at the Shukari centre in Maiduguri, and five per cent at the Operation Safe Corridor centre in Gombe.<sup>39</sup> Former Boko Haram associates might have also received aid in a community setting: either after they left the centre, and/or, if they bypassed centre-based support, in the community where they settled after self-demobilizing. Thirty-four per cent of former Boko Haram associates were in this category, having reported receiving some assistance outside of a centre environment (which included those who spent time in a centre and those who completely bypassed them).

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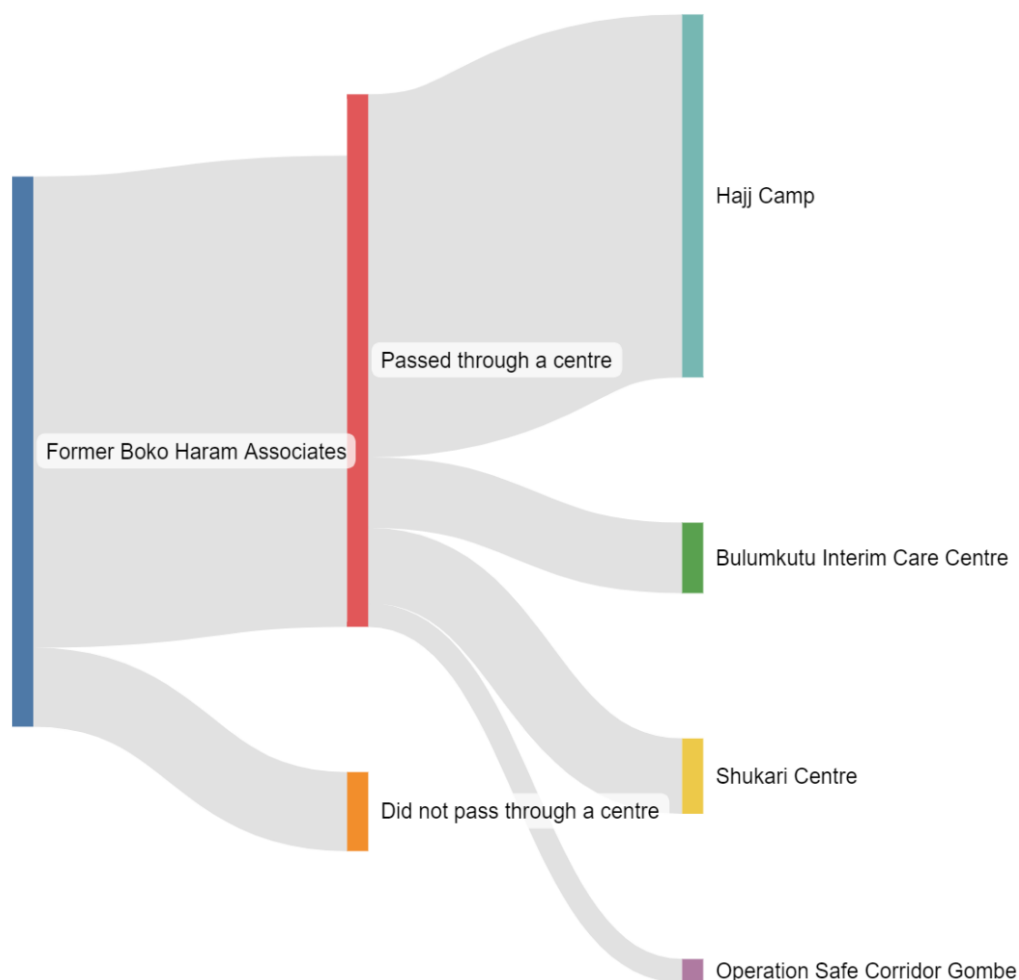
<sup>37</sup> A multinomial logistic regression was run to test this hypothesis. The dependent variable was "trust in the UN" and the independent variables were gender, age, education, displacement status and whether any form of prior aid was received by the respondent. The variable indicating whether prior aid was received was consistently statistically significant at the 99 per cent confidence level with a coefficient of 0.676\*\*\*. This coefficient was then transformed into per cent change in probability by applying the inverse logit function.

<sup>38</sup> A multinomial logistic regression was run to test this hypothesis. Only the community respondents who were unaffiliated with any armed group were considered. The dependent variable was "trust in the UN" and the independent variables were gender, age, education, displacement status and whether any form of prior aid was received by the respondent. The variable indicating whether prior aid was received was consistently statistically significant at the 99 per cent confidence level with a coefficient of 0.916\*\*\*. This coefficient was then transformed into per cent change in probability by applying the inverse logit function.

<sup>39</sup> "Did you ever stay at any of these transit or rehabilitation centres, even if just for a short time?" Answer options: Bulumkutu centre, Shukari centre, Hajj camp, Operation Safe Corridor in Gombe, None. Posed to former Boko Haram associates or those who were detained.

## FIGURE 5 – EXIT PATHWAYS FOR FORMER BOKO HARAM ASSOCIATES WITHIN THE MEAC BASELINE 2024 SAMPLE

Note: Twelve per cent of respondents stayed in more than one transit centre. If respondents selected multiple centres, they are counted under each of them.



Regression results showed that those who were in a centre *and* received aid afterwards reported greater trust in the United Nations and higher IO ratings, relative to individuals who did not receive aid afterwards or who were not at a centre.<sup>40</sup> This could be driven by the fact that continuity of aid for former Boko Haram associates translated to increased trust levels. On the

<sup>40</sup> A multinomial logistic regression was run to test this hypothesis. Only former Boko Haram associates were considered. The dependent variable was "trust in the UN" and the independent variables were gender, age, education, whether respondent was in a centre, whether any form of prior aid was received by the respondent, and their interaction. The variable indicating being in a centre was statistically significant at the 99 per cent confidence level with a coefficient of -10.040\*\*\*. The interaction term for being in a centre and receiving aid outside was 10.246\*\*\*.

flip side, those who had no follow-up support after they left a centre may have been frustrated by their unmet expectations of continued support or be unsure about who any support would ultimately come from. While one could argue that the trust levels could be influenced by which specific centre the former Boko Haram associates exited through, the analysis was limited in addressing these differences due to the absence of nuanced data on the different experiences within each centre. The context and conditions at these centres varied significantly over time, likely impacting the type and continuity of aid provided to former associates.<sup>41</sup>

Within and outside centres, Boko Haram associates reported receiving different forms of assistance, which appeared to influence trust levels. As anticipated, 67 per cent of those who bypassed a centre received *no* assistance. Those who bypassed the centres and received support after having left Boko Haram mostly reported food or water (27 per cent), shelter (14 per cent), and medical care (12 per cent). Those who were in a centre – as expected – reported higher rates of services received while they were there. They mostly reported receiving assistance in the form of food or water (88 per cent), cash (74 per cent), shelter (50 per cent), and medical care (48 per cent). Other services such as skills training, clothing, formal education, and reorientation programming among others were reported to a smaller extent. After leaving the centres, 65 per cent reported *not* receiving any further assistance, and smaller percentages of respondents reported receiving support in the form of cash, food or water, shelter, and medical care. For those former associates who did receive something once back in their communities (be it coming from a transit centre, detention, or directly from Boko Haram-held territory), this was not necessarily reintegration-specific support. Given the types of assistance reported (e.g., food or medical care), it is also possible that this was support received as part of broader humanitarian efforts in the North East (e.g., by accessing food distribution or a healthcare clinic in an IDP camp).

For former Boko Haram associates, higher trust levels were observed amongst those who reported receiving 'shelter,' and to some extent 'reorientation or reconciliation programming' and 'skills training' while in a transit centre, as compared to those who did not receive them in a centre. Those who received shelter while being in a centre were 92 per cent more likely to express 'a lot' of trust in the United Nations, as compared to 'not at all.'<sup>42</sup> Most of those who reported receiving shelter stayed at Hajj camp (75 per cent). Unlike the other centres with brick-

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<sup>41</sup> Given the temporal variability, this report cannot confidently attribute differences in UN trust or IO ratings solely to the centre, and instead, any observed differences in trust amongst centres likely reflect both the aid received and the broader shifts in the operational environment during the respondents' time of demobilization. Thus, while the analysis suggests a relationship between continuity of aid and increased trust, it is challenging to pinpoint how specific transit centres or timelines shaped these outcomes.

<sup>42</sup> A multinomial logistic regression was run to test this hypothesis. Only the former Boko Haram affiliates who received aid while in the centre, but nothing after leaving the centre (N = 473) were considered. The dependent variable was "Trust in the UN" and the independent variables were the services that the respondent could have received while at the centre in which they stayed the longest. The coefficient for 'shelter,' among others was statistically significant at 99 per cent confidence interval (2.501\*\*\*). This coefficient was then transformed into per cent change in probability by applying the inverse logit function.

and-mortar structures, it is possible that the use of United Nations Logos on tents or tarps at Hajj camp could have increased the visibility of the services provided by aid organizations.<sup>43</sup> This could have shaped the recipients' perceptions towards aid organizations. In addition, weak but positive associations with trust were found amongst affiliates who received 'reorientation or reconciliation programming' and 'skills training' in the centre.<sup>44</sup> It is possible that because skills training required repetitive engagement with the providers (versus a brief exchange to receive material goods), participating in this type of programming increased visibility on who was providing such support, and thus, overall trust levels.

As with former Boko Haram associates, the type of aid also mattered for understanding trust levels for unaffiliated respondents and CSA affiliates. Figure 6 provides an overview of the types of aid and services that were reportedly received by these two sub-groups since the start of the conflict. It does, however, not provide information regarding the quantity, quality, the relevance, nor the frequency of aid.

While most received no support, amongst those that did, 'skills training' and 'psychological support' were associated with increased trust in the United Nations for unaffiliated respondents.<sup>45</sup> Out of those unaffiliated community members who received skills training, 76 per cent stated that the skills training, out of all the support they had received, indeed had the most positive effect on their life today.<sup>46</sup> This was particularly noteworthy as the long-term potential for sustaining a livelihood with these skills may have pushed the respondents to value it more than the other forms of assistance. In terms of influencing increased trust, skills training may necessitate repetitive engagement and ongoing interactions with aid organizations, which could drive the greater trust. For CSAs, those who received assistance in the form of 'medical care,' 'food or water,' 'shelter,' 'formal education,' and 'cash' (with the caveat that each of these

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<sup>43</sup> Out of 243 former Boko Haram affiliates who received shelter while in a centre but received nothing after they left the centre, 182 were in Hajj camp for the longest duration (while 28 were in Bulumkutu, 30 were in Shukari and 3 in Gombe).

<sup>44</sup> A multinomial logistic regression was run to test this hypothesis. Only the former Boko Haram affiliates who received aid while in the centre, but nothing after leaving the centre (N = 473) were considered. The dependent variable was "Trust in the UN" and the independent variables were the services that the respondent could have received while at the centre in which they stayed the longest. In addition to shelter, coefficients for 'reorientation or reconciliation programming' and 'skills training' were statistically significant at 99 per cent confidence interval (129.835\*\*\* and 273.182\*\*\* respectively, albeit with relatively smaller sample sizes).

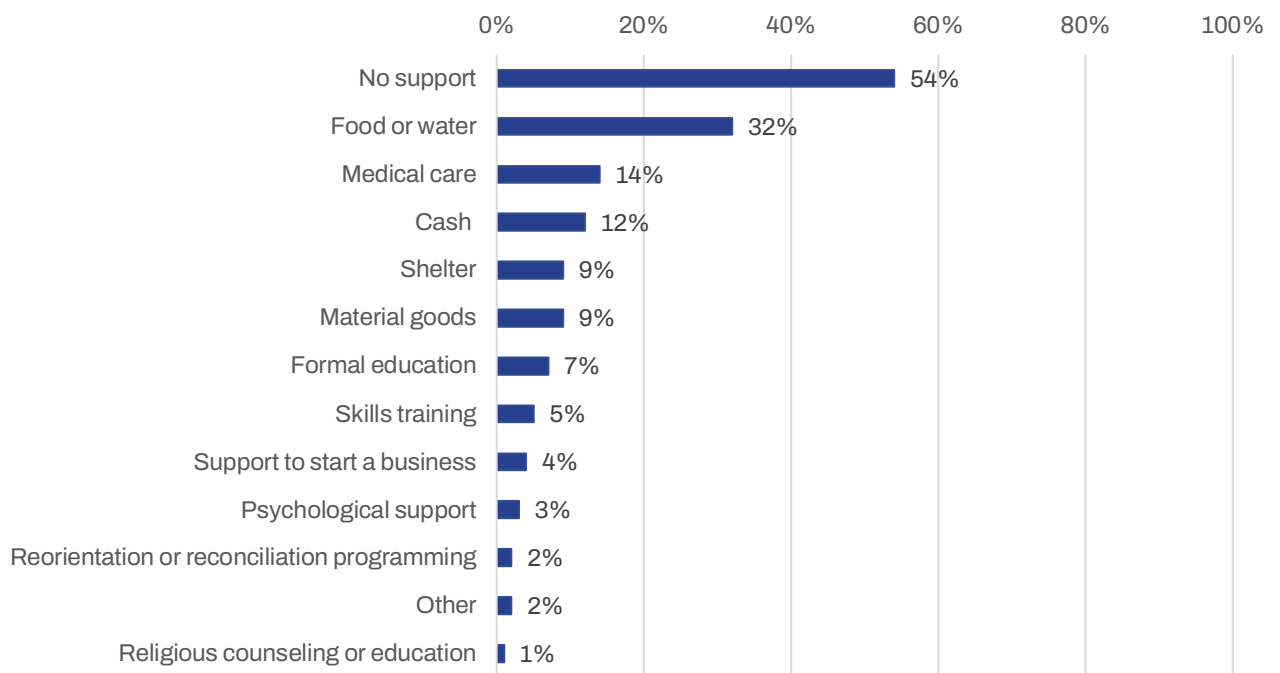
<sup>45</sup> It should be noted that only a small sample of 55 non-associated/affiliated respondents reported receiving 'psychosocial support,' which was not surprising given the general lack of MHPSS support/capacity in the North East.

A multinomial logistic regression was run to test this hypothesis. Only the community respondents who are unaffiliated with any armed group were considered. The dependent variable was "trust in the UN" and the independent variables were different forms of aid that the respondent could receive. The variable for 'skills training' (N = 108) and 'psychological support' (N = 55) was statistically significant at the 99 per cent confidence level with a coefficients of 109.079\*\*\* and 38.432\*\*\* respectively. Other coefficients for forms of aid were also significant but had a small size and hence were not considered.

<sup>46</sup> N = 108 - "Of the support you've received, what had the most positive impact on your life today?" Eighty-two mentioned 'skills training.' Filtered for unaffiliated respondents who previously received 'skills training.'

categories had relatively small sample sizes) were most likely to express ‘a lot’ of trust in the United Nations.<sup>47</sup>

**FIGURE 6 – SINCE THE BOKO HARAM CONFLICT BEGAN, DID YOU RECEIVE ANY OF THE FOLLOWING THINGS FROM THE GOVERNMENT, INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS OR NGOS? PLEASE SELECT ALL THAT APPLY. (UNAFFILIATED RESPONDENTS AND CSA AFFILIATES)**



### 3.3 Who Announces Aid?

In the North East, who announced the aid appeared to impact respondent perceptions towards aid organizations. Specifically, announcements by local community leaders translated to greater trust.

Aid organizations often navigate complex local hierarchies within the communities they serve, collaborating with local leaders to announce and distribute aid. In North East Nigeria, this involves working closely with village Bulamas, Lawans, local organizations, and other key stakeholders. This collaboration is crucial not only for ensuring access to aid but also for maintaining the safety and security of all parties involved. A large majority of respondents who

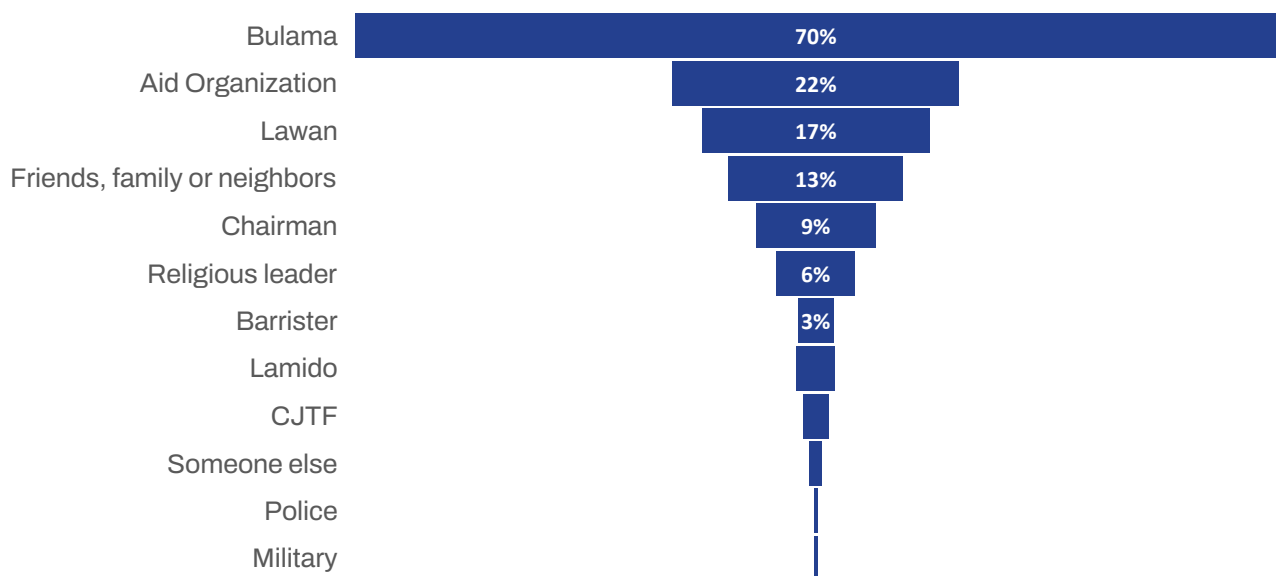
<sup>47</sup> A multinomial logistic regression was run to test this hypothesis. Only the respondents affiliated with CSAs (N = 508) were considered. The dependent variable was "trust in the UN" and the independent variables were different forms of aid that the respondent could receive. The variable for ‘medical care’ whose N = 106 (258.569\*\*\*), ‘food or water’ whose N = 196 (371.395\*\*\*), ‘shelter’ whose N = 58 (81.312\*\*\*), ‘formal education’ (95.700\*\*\*), whose N = 47, and ‘cash’ whose N = 76 (219.979\*\*\*), were statistically significant at the 99 per cent confidence level.

reported that aid organizations were active in their community indicated that their Bulama was the one who announced the availability of goods or services (70 per cent), followed by the organization itself (31 per cent), or the Lawan (17 per cent).

Regression results confirmed that when announcements about aid are made by local leaders – namely a respondent’s Lamido or Bulama – respondents were more likely to rate the work of IOs as ‘good’ relative to ‘bad.’<sup>48</sup> This finding underscores the legitimacy that most community members in the North East conferred upon local community leaders. For example, the Lamido, a traditional ruler or emir, oversees a local government area (LGA) or emirate in Hausa-Fulani communities. Their significant influence and authority in decision-making could contribute to the high legitimacy granted by the survey respondents. The inherent legitimacy conferred to these figures implies that when they announced about aid within the communities, respondents positively perceived the aid organizations. Even though announcements by the Bulama also had a positive effect, the association was slightly weaker relative to announcements made by the Lamido.

**FIGURE 7 – IN YOUR COMMUNITY, WHO ANNOUNCES THAT GOODS AND SERVICES ARE PROVIDED BY AID ORGANIZATIONS?**

*Note: Select multiple question, answer options not read out loud.*



<sup>48</sup> A multinomial logistic regression was run to test this hypothesis. The dependent variable was "Rating international organizations" (reference category: 'bad' rating) and the independent variables were binary variables for all the different actors who could announce aid in the communities (the aid organization itself, lawan, lamido, bulama, chairman, barrister, religious leader, COVI, military, police, family). The coefficients for the following emerged statistically significant at 99 per cent confidence levels for the 'good' rating relative to the 'bad' IO rating: Lamido (18.652). The Bulama was significant at 95 per cent confidence interval with the coefficient (2.053\*\*). No significant differences based on gender of respondents were observed.

Qualitative research by MEAC in the region has further highlighted that people often deeply respect their Bulama, but do not always feel that their Bulama facilitated completely fair distribution. Focus group respondents expressed potential concerns about the aid being diverted to the networks of the Bulama, and not to those who need it most.<sup>49</sup> Thus, the survey results demonstrate that it can be advantageous for aid organizations to announce their activities within communities through the appropriate community-level actors who are conferred greater legitimacy by community members broadly.

### 3.4 Narratives About Aid Organizations

The North East of Nigeria has long been plagued with misinformation and conspiracy theories surrounding aid organizations and aid workers.<sup>50</sup> The misinformation campaigns are often orchestrated by propaganda channels or even insurgent groups looking to leverage unsubstantiated claims against aid actors.<sup>51</sup> The survey found that most respondents were not swayed by such narratives. Those who disagreed with select statements also expressed greater trust levels in the United Nations.

To understand how local populations were influenced by such narratives, they were asked to rate the extent to which they agreed to the following statements commonly echoed by misinformation campaigns across the region:<sup>52</sup>

- *“International organizations and NGOs are against my way of life.”*
- *“International organizations and NGOs are providing support to Boko Haram.”*
- *“International organizations and NGOs are making hunger worse.”*

The majority of respondents, irrespective of their affiliation status, disagreed with the claim that *“International organizations and NGOs are against my way of life.”* Most former Boko Haram associates (74 per cent) disagreed or strongly disagreed that Ios and NGOs were against their way of life.<sup>53</sup> This was striking, given the anti-aid organization doctrines promoted by their former group’s leadership. In fact, half of the former Boko Haram associates reported that their group considered aid workers as an enemy.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> MEAC, MEAC, Focus Group with girls formerly associated with ISWAP (Maiduguri, Borno State, Nigeria, 28 April 2024).

<sup>50</sup> Siobhan O’Neil, [“Armed group opportunism in the face of recent crises,”](#) UNU-WIDER 2023, and Aliyu Zakayu, Siobhan O’Neil, [“Armed groups messaging on Covid-19 in Nigeria,”](#) Findings Report 6, UNIDIR, Geneva, Switzerland, 2021.

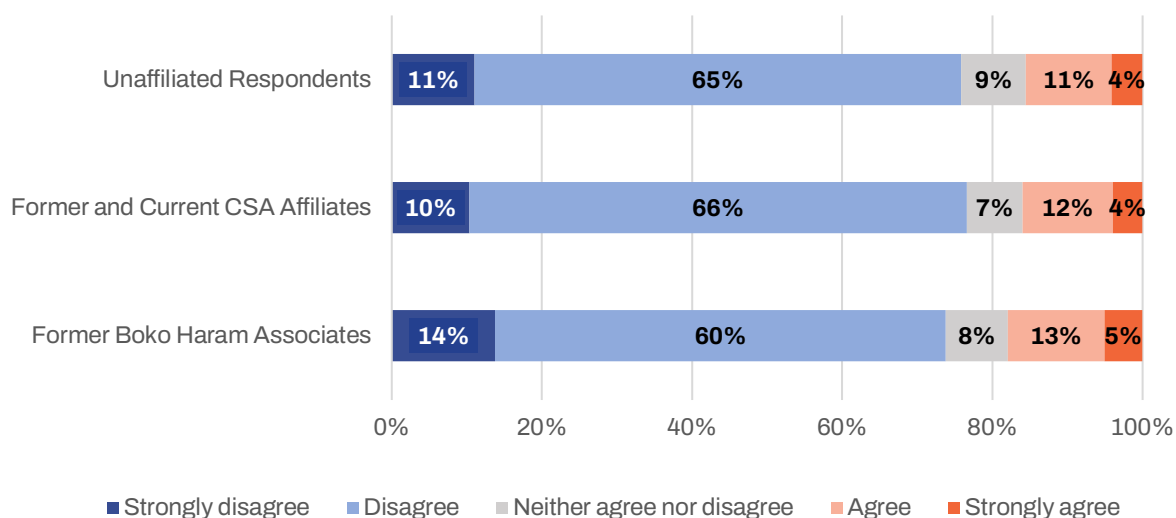
<sup>51</sup> See: IOM, [“DDR Compendium \(2010-2017\),”](#) 2019.

<sup>52</sup> Respondents were given a five-point scale (from Strongly disagree to Strongly agree) for each statement.

<sup>53</sup> “International organisations and NGOs are against my way of life.” Answer options: Strongly disagree, Disagree, Neither agree nor disagree, Agree, Strongly agree.

<sup>54</sup> “While you were with [Boko Haram faction], as far as you were aware, did the group consider aid workers as an enemy?” Answer options: Yes, No, Some but not all.

**FIGURE 8 – HOW MUCH DO YOU AGREE WITH THE FOLLOWING STATEMENT?  
“INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS AND NGOs ARE AGAINST MY WAY OF LIFE”<sup>55</sup>**



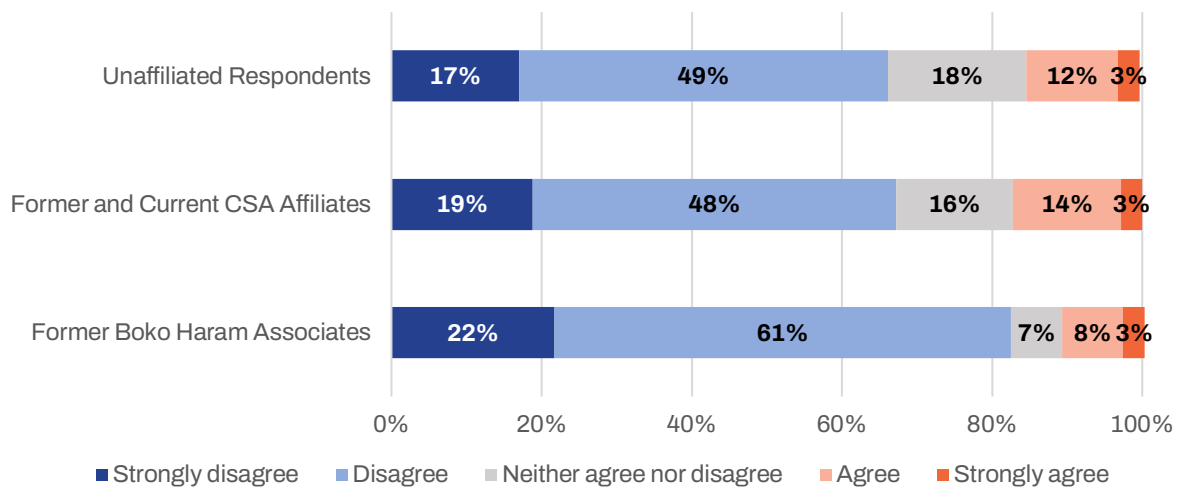
Given that these respondents had previously been with an armed group that actively targeted aid workers, it is perhaps reassuring to see that they themselves are not actually more likely than others to think that aid organizations are against their way of life. As anticipated, across the sample, respondents who disagreed with the statement were more likely to express greater trust in the United Nations.<sup>56</sup>

For other polarizing statements such as "*International organizations and NGOs are providing support to Boko Haram,*" 83 per cent of former Boko Haram associates either 'disagreed' or 'strongly disagreed.' However, the level of disagreement was lower among CSA affiliates and unaffiliated respondents, at 67 per cent and 66 per cent, respectively. No major variation by gender was found.

<sup>55</sup> Specific elements within the graphs may sometimes exceed or just fall short of 100 per cent as the percentages are rounded up.

<sup>56</sup> A multinomial logistic regression was run to test this hypothesis. The dependent variable was "Trust in the UN" and the independent variables were the likert options for "International Organizations and NGOs are against my way of life," gender, age, and education. The coefficients for the disagreeing with the statement relating to agreeing aid organization was statistically significant at 95 per cent confidence interval (1.305\*\*), indicating greater trust in the United Nations relative to no trust.

**FIGURE 9 – HOW MUCH DO YOU AGREE WITH THE FOLLOWING STATEMENT?  
"INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS AND NGOs ARE PROVIDING SUPPORT TO BOKO  
HARAM"<sup>57</sup>**



This finding suggests that conspiracy theories that say that IOs and INGOs support Boko Haram may be influencing public perceptions towards aid, but that those who had greater visibility on the group’s activities more often disagreed. It is also important to note that respondents could have interpreted the question of "support to Boko Haram" in different ways—either as reintegration support for former Boko Haram associates or as support for the armed group itself. Despite concerns about the perceived unfairness of service distribution to former associates amongst communities, survey results showed that respondents, regardless of affiliation, actually believed that fewer services were directed towards former Boko Haram associates than towards those who were never with Boko Haram.<sup>58</sup> This could also help explain why former Boko Haram associates disagreed with the statement to such an extent, as some may have interpreted the question as support 'for' former associates. Unlike other statements, no statistically significant effect of the extent of (dis)agreement with this specific statement on reported trust in the United Nations was observed.

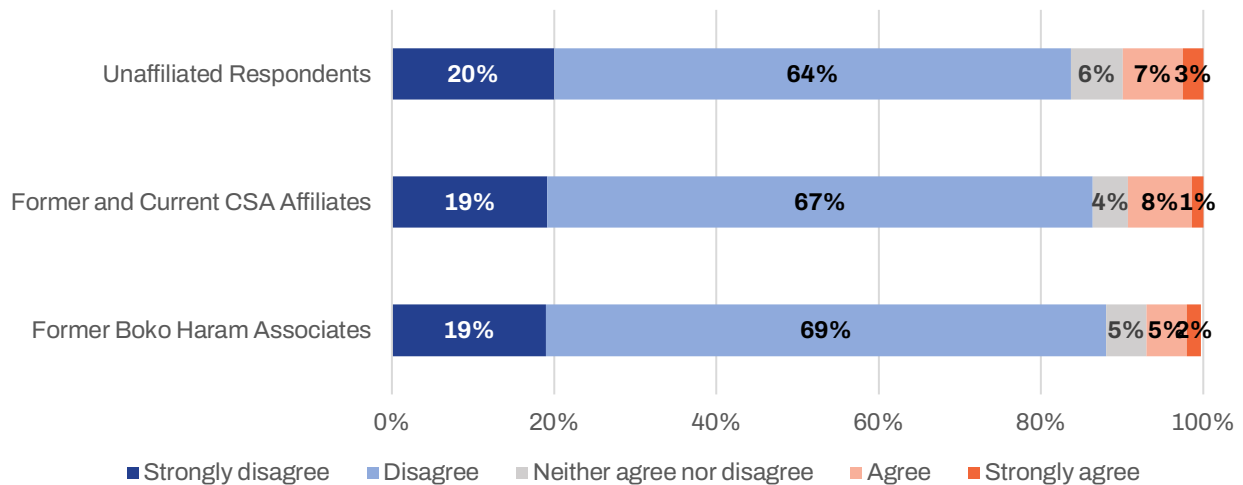
When respondents were asked if they agreed that "*International organizations and NGOs are making hunger worse,*" respondents overwhelmingly disagreed. This finding held across the formerly associated/affiliated/unaffiliated sub-populations and with only minor gender

<sup>57</sup> Specific elements within the graphs may sometimes exceed or just fall short of 100 per cent as the percentages are rounded up.

<sup>58</sup> N = 1,990 - "Do you think people who were with Boko Haram or a group like it are getting more or fewer services than those who were not?" Answer options: They get more services, They get the same amount of services, They get fewer services.

variations.<sup>59</sup> As expected, across the sample, respondents who disagreed with the statement were slightly more likely to express higher trust in the United Nations.<sup>60</sup>

**FIGURE 10 – HOW MUCH DO YOU AGREE WITH THE FOLLOWING STATEMENT? "INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS AND NGOs ARE MAKING HUNGER WORSE"**<sup>61</sup>



Thus, as anticipated, the results show that respondents who did not buy into the propaganda about IOs and INGOs making hunger worse or being against their way of life expressed greater trust in the United Nations.

### 3.5 Fair Distribution and Having a Say in Aid

Perceptions of fairness and agency in aid distribution varied depending on affiliation status. Survey results indicated that more CSA affiliates and unaffiliated community members viewed the aid distribution process as fair, while a greater number of respondents formerly associated with Boko Haram perceived it as unfair. Similarly, when asked about having a say in aid decisions, former Boko Haram associates more frequently reported feeling excluded, relative to CSA affiliates and unaffiliated respondents.

As seen in Figure 11, 52 per cent of Boko Haram affiliates found aid distribution to be ‘very unfair’ or ‘unfair,’ as compared to only 31 per cent of CSA affiliates and 43 per cent of unaffiliated

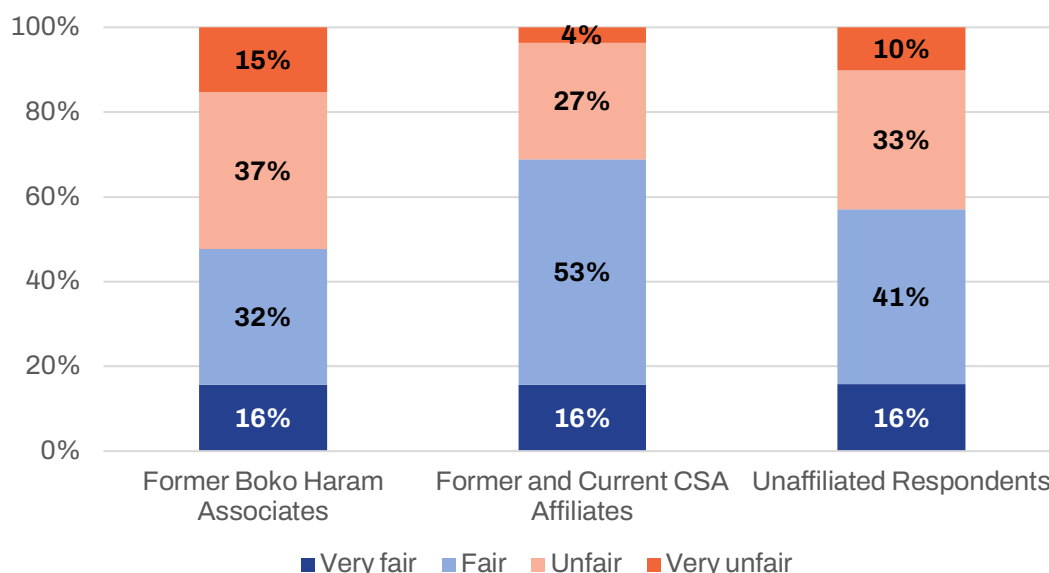
<sup>59</sup> Less than 10 per cent of respondents within each association/affiliation category demonstrated any form of agreement with this statement.

<sup>60</sup> A multinomial logistic regression was run to test this hypothesis. The dependent variable was "Trust in the UN and the independent variables were the likert options for "International organisations and NGOs are making hunger worse," gender, age and education. The coefficients for 'strongly disagreeing' with the statement relative to agreeing was statistically significant at 90 per cent confidence interval (1.220\*), indicating greater trust in the United Nations relative to no trust.

<sup>61</sup> Specific elements within the graphs may sometimes exceed or just fall short of 100 per cent as the percentages are rounded up.

respondents. While the percentage of respondents perceiving aid as 'very fair' remained consistent across the 3 groups, more variation was observed amongst those who stated 'fair.'

**FIGURE 11 – IN YOUR COMMUNITY, WHEN GOODS OR SERVICES ARE PROVIDED BY AID ORGANIZATIONS, ARE THEY GENERALLY DISTRIBUTED FAIRLY?**



In addition to the perceived fairness of distribution, the survey asked whether people felt like they had a say in the type of support that they received. It was found that perceiving greater fairness and having a say in aid were associated with greater trust levels in the United Nations. Notably, 61 per cent of the unaffiliated community members and 73 per cent of CSA affiliates felt they had a say in the type of aid they received. However, for former Boko Haram associates, only one in two respondents felt they had a say in the aid provided.<sup>62</sup>

Past research has indeed shown that how aid recipients assess fairness and their own participation in aid distribution directly influences the extent of local acceptance and effectiveness of aid programs.<sup>63</sup> Analysis of MEAC's survey affirms this finding. Survey respondents who perceived greater unfairness were also more likely to report lower trust levels in the United Nations.<sup>64</sup> This is intuitive as those who believe that aid distribution is 'unfair'

<sup>62</sup>"Did you have a say in the type of support you received?" Posed to eligible Boko Haram associates, CSA affiliates and unaffiliated respondents who had received support.

<sup>63</sup> See here: Ben D'Exelle, "[Conflicting views of fairness in aid distribution: Evidence from rural Nicaragua](#)," *The European Journal of Development Research*, vol. 25, no. 1, February 2013.

<sup>64</sup> A multinomial logistic regression was run to test this hypothesis. All respondents were considered. The dependent variable was "Trust in the UN" and the independent variables was how fair the respondent thought the aid distribution was. Saying 'very unfair' relative to 'fair' was statistically significant at 99 per cent confidence interval (-1.981\*\*\*). The negative sign implied that the likelihood of reporting a 'lot of' trust in the United Nations reduced.

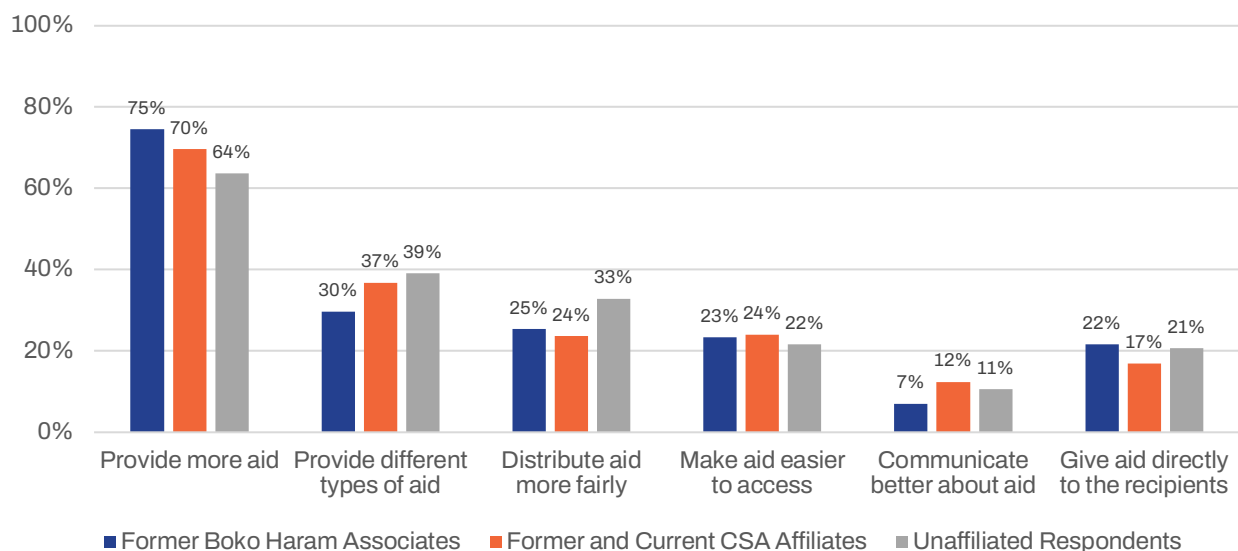
would be more skeptical about the work of aid organizations. For unaffiliated community respondents and CSA affiliates, respondents who felt they had a say were statistically more likely to report greater trust in the United Nations.<sup>65</sup> For former Boko Haram associates, no conclusive impact of having a say on trust levels was ascertained.

## What Can Aid Organizations Do Better?

In terms of what aid organizations can do better, respondents generally felt that more aid should be provided. As seen in Figure 12, the response rates for more aid were fairly consistent regardless of affiliation.<sup>66</sup> This is unsurprising given the scale of the needs in the North East, the underfunded humanitarian response, and the lack of safe access to those in need.

**FIGURE 12 – THE WAY YOU SEE IT, WHAT COULD AID ORGANIZATIONS DO BETTER TO HELP YOUR COMMUNITY?**

*Note: Select multiple question, and answer options not read out loud.*



Notably, more unaffiliated respondents relative to former Boko Haram associates and CSA affiliates cited 'fairer distribution of aid.' This might appear counter-intuitive considering the findings under Section 3.5, where former Boko Haram associates found aid to be the most unfair. This variation is likely explained by the different framing of the two questions.

<sup>65</sup> A multinomial logistic regression was run to test this hypothesis. The dependent variable was "Trust in the UN" and the independent variables were having a say in aid. The coefficients for respondents who stated 'having a say in aid' was statistically significant at 90 per cent confidence interval (1.014\*), indicating 'a lot' of trust in the United Nations relative to no trust.

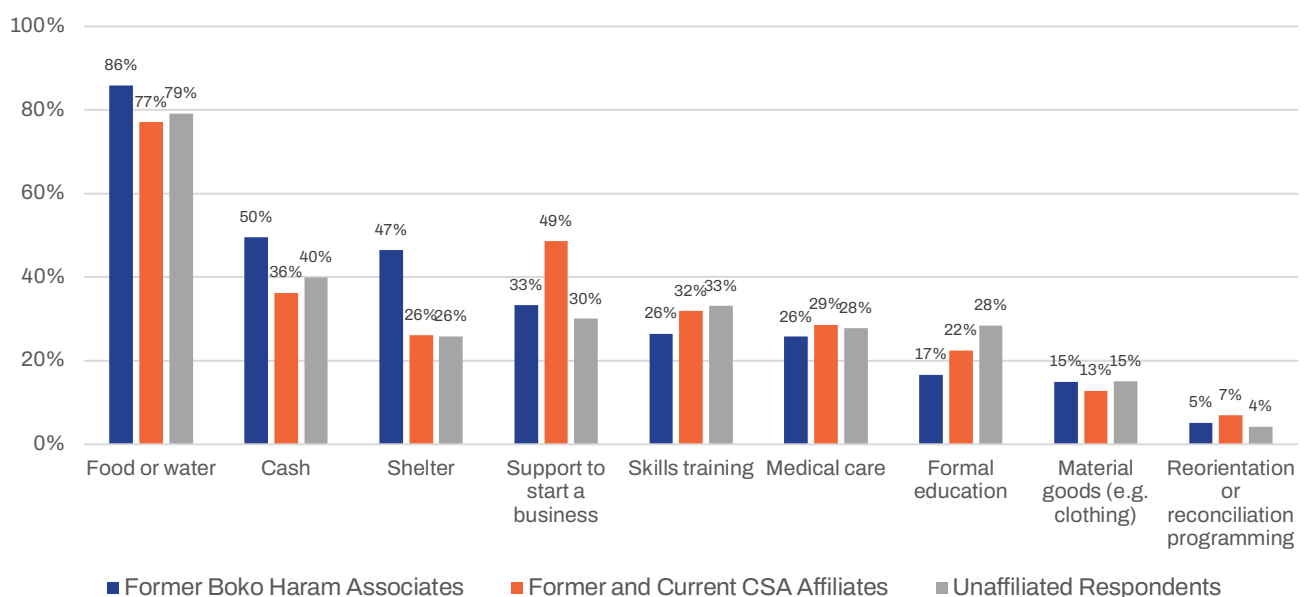
<sup>66</sup> Notably, three in four former Boko Haram associates cited the need for more aid (Out of the 905 Boko Haram affiliates, 675 cited the need for more aid). In the same vein, 70 per cent of CSA affiliates and 64 per cent of unaffiliated community members expressed wanting more aid (354 out of 508 CSA affiliates and 1,419 out of 2,230 unaffiliated community members cited the need for more aid).

Furthermore, respondents across different affiliations noted 'making aid easier to access,' which highlights the widespread access issues in terms of aid delivery. Respondents also reported 'providing different types of aid,' which could allude to the need for tailored aid interventions that meet the needs of specific sub-populations.

As shown in Figure 13, respondents also received a question about what services they would provide to people like them. A majority (79 per cent and 77 per cent of unaffiliated and CSA affiliates respectively, and 86 per cent of former Boko Haram associates) mentioned providing others like them with 'food or water.' This highlights the ongoing struggle that many people face in covering their basic needs amidst the humanitarian crisis across the region. The fact that 'shelter' featured in the top three options further reinforces the humanitarian need.

**FIGURE 13 – IF YOU COULD DECIDE, WHAT TYPE OF SUPPORT WOULD YOU MAKE SURE TO GIVE PEOPLE LIKE YOU?**

*Note: Select multiple question, and answer options not read out loud.*



Interestingly, 'cash' was the second-most cited form of support that respondents would give to others like them. Although cash transfers have a contentious history regarding their effectiveness, it is noteworthy that half of the former Boko Haram associates and 40 per cent of unaffiliated respondents reported receiving them. The high demand for cash-based interventions could be driven by the widespread need for economic assistance in light of the ongoing crisis. However, aid organizations may hesitate to provide cash due to the complex systems of checks and balances required to administer these programs effectively. As a result, cash assistance initiatives in the North East may be limited, prompting respondents to express

a heightened need for such interventions. Additionally, cash-based aid may be perceived as offering the greatest agency, allowing recipients to address their most immediate and pressing needs in ways they see fit.

Other notable responses included 'support to start a business' and 'skills training,' further underscoring the region's economic challenges. Medical care, formal education, material goods and psychological support were also cited, but to a relatively lesser degree.

## Policy Implications

### **Reputation of Aid Organizations Are Not Siloed**

The reputation of aid organizations is not siloed. Survey results showed that while respondents were familiar with the United Nations and major international NGOs operating across the North East, they struggled to distinguish among them. Yet, high levels of trust in these organizations were reported across affiliations, suggesting that perceptions towards international aid organizations were shaped collectively rather than through interactions with individual organizations. Positive engagement with one international actor could influence broader perceptions toward other aid organizations and vice-versa. Thus, aid organizations in the North-East should coordinate to ensure high-quality interactions with affected populations at the community level, as the reputation of one international organization may affect the credibility of all.

The findings demonstrated that respondents largely did not differentiate between 'local' and 'international' aid organizations. This suggests that partnering with local organizations may not have the intended impact on trust levels of community members unless clearly communicated and signposted. International aid organizations should ensure visibility and clarity around local partnerships to maximize the benefits of local engagement. This is especially important since it was found that when aid-related announcements were made by local leaders such as the Lamido and Bulama, respondents were more likely to express a positive perception towards international organizations. Therefore, aid organizations should continue to engage community-level leaders to deliver aid-related messages, leveraging their influence to enhance community trust and support.

## **Prior Interactions and Exposure to Aid Actors Matters**

Respondents were more likely to trust the United Nations and other aid organizations when IOs were already active in their communities, indicating that prior presence was strongly associated with higher levels of trust in aid providers. Therefore, increasing direct engagement and visibility in communities in the North East could have enhanced familiarity and confidence in aid organizations, leading to improved trust and support from local populations.

For former CSA affiliates and unaffiliated community members, prior reception of aid was linked to increased trust in the United Nations. It speaks to the importance of continuity in aid provision by humanitarian organizations in sustaining community trust.

For former Boko Haram associates, those who passed through a transit centre and received aid after also reported greater trust in the United Nations and higher ratings of international organizations, as compared to those who did not receive aid afterwards, and those who were not in a centre. Besides pointing to the importance of continuity in support, this finding also highlights a potential challenge in clearly signposting who is providing which type of assistance to whom. Unmet promises, a lack of differentiation between different aid actors, and confusion over who is expected to provide assistance could harm the reputation of aid organizations and result in frustration.

## **Optics of Aid Distribution Are Crucial**

Most respondents, including former Boko Haram associates, rejected polarizing rumours about international organizations and NGOs. Those who did reject them were more likely to trust the United Nations. This suggests that addressing misinformation is crucial and aid organizations should continue to proactively manage and counteract misinformation campaigns, ensuring that accurate information is disseminated to enhance trust within affected communities.

CSAs and unaffiliated community members generally perceived aid distribution as fair and felt they had a say in the type of aid received, unlike former Boko Haram associates. Additionally, respondents who perceived greater unfairness were more likely to report reduced trust in the United Nations. Therefore, aid organizations should enhance efforts to ensure transparent and inclusive aid distribution processes, particularly for groups such as former Boko Haram associates, through targeted mechanisms. This approach would improve perceptions of fairness and increase trust in aid programming.

# MANAGING EXITS FROM ARMED CONFLICT



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