

NIGERIA STABILITY AND RECONCILIATION PROGRAMME (NSRP)

RESPONDING TO RADICALISATION:

LESSONS FROM OTHER COUNTRIES AND THEIR RELEVANCE FOR NIGERIA

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RESPONDING TO RADICALISATION:

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A. INTRODUCTION

Increasing insecurity in northern Nigeria has resulted in thousands of civilian deaths and significant population displacements as well as dangerously exacerbating economic, political and religious divisions within the nation. The underlying causes of violence include poverty, inequality and youth unemployment as well as poor governance and political exclusion. The Nigerian government is not yet in control of the situation. The military response, with the deployment of the Joint Task Force (JTF) and the declaration of a State of Emergency, has led to allegations of the excessive use of force and extra-judicial arrests and killings, and often deeply alienated local communities. This resentment, and the root causes of grievance, can only be met effectively through a combination of active political engagement, a review of approaches to security, and a sustained development response.

While the circumstances and causes of conflict of each country are unique, the Nigeria Stability and Reconciliation Programme (NSRP) has reviewed the lessons from other countries that have experienced increased instability due to radicalisation and extreme violence and considered its relevance to northern Nigerian. ¹Drawing on the experience of Yemen, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Somalia, Indonesia, Bangladesh, Guatemala and Northern Ireland **eight main lessons** were identified, and are summarised below.

B. EIGHT LESSONS ABOUT CONFLICT AND RADICALISATION

1. An intelligence-led approach to security and counterterrorism must respect core counter-insurgency principles: Central to these principles is gaining (or regaining) the confidence and support of local communities by making it a priority to assure their safety and security, treating them with respect, and working closely with them.

2. Where force is used, it must be proportionate and accountable: The security forces must be seen to respond proportionately, to act within the law, and to make every attempt to minimise the risk of civilian casualties. Excessive violence by security services against militant groups or civilians only spurs further grievance, alienates communities and erodes the legitimacy of government, leading to a further cycle of violence and instability. The evidence shows that wider population can be 'won back' – even if they have earlier been alienated – if security tactics change.

3. Dialogue is essential: Without dialogue, a practical and sustainable resolution to violent conflict is unlikely to be reached. Initial communications between government and

¹NSRP is an independent programme managed by the British Council and funded by DFID.

militant groups may need to be publicly denied by both sides. Nevertheless, such dialogue can be invaluable.

4. Avoid ethnic and religious labels: Groups that define themselves through some collective identity (e.g. their ethnicity or religion) often use that identity to articulate their grievances and mobilise for violence. It is important to refer to perpetrators *by their acts* (bombers, killers, criminals), and not by any religious or ethnic label, which only helps to cement their identity and encourage others to take their side.

5. Sever international links: National militant groups are often manipulated by international terror groups who will “recruit” them to their international cause. They will offer them financial, training and tactical support. It is important to minimise the ‘pull’ of international terror groups by addressing national grievances quickly, through the offer of dialogue (no matter how unpalatable), and by working with regional and international partners to fight international terror networks.

6. Address political and economic grievances and social exclusion: Long standing political and economic grievances can lead any population to seek radical alternatives, especially if state systems are perceived as corrupt or unfair. Educated young men without jobs, whose expectations have been dashed, are particularly susceptible to recruitment by radical groups. Both short-term employment provision and longer-term strategies for expanding economic opportunity and social empowerment are needed to reduce the vulnerability of populations to radical messages. Demonstrable moves towards more accountable and democratic governance and more consultation with affected communities can also be effective in defusing the drivers of discontent.

7. Promote conflict sensitive and balanced reporting by national and local media: Militant groups are often effective in using or manipulating media to deliver their messages to the public. Strategic communications—and supporting a stronger independent media and conflict sensitive reporting —can reinforce a society’s resilience.

8. Recognise that grievances get transmitted into action through social networks (family, friends, places of worship, mobile technology). To counter such influence, local and social networks can be encouraged to communicate more constructive messages around moderation, the need for dialogue, and the resolution of conflict through non-violent means.

C. NORTHERN NIGERIA TODAY

What bearing do these lessons have on the situation in Nigeria today? The situation is currently characterised by:

- A militant movement in the North - Jama'atu Ahli Sunnah Lidda'awati Wal-Jihad (JAS)² - that has rapidly expanded its spread and ambition resulting in almost daily violent attacks in its Borno heartland, regular attacks in Jos, Kaduna and Sokoto, and periodic spectacular episodes of violence across Nigeria. This group (or groups) is now well versed in terror attacks and sophisticated in their use of technology (weaponry and social media). The sophistication and rapid scale up suggest links with international terror networks;
- A northern population with long-standing grievances around political and economic exclusion, exacerbated by declining confidence in their own leadership to bring about real economic and social change (which even while in power they failed to do);
- A government that has opted almost exclusively for a security response to instability. JTF forces have been deployed and a State of Emergency has been declared in high risk areas;
- Security services (military/JTF, police, intelligence/SSS) that are perceived as confrontational, unaccountable and potentially extremely violent, and thus alienate the public rather than win their respect, trust and cooperation;
- Local populations unwilling to provide intelligence to the security services for fear of both the militants and the security services themselves;
- A political, traditional and religious leadership in the north failing to speak out in public against extreme political violence (albeit with some encouraging exceptions), leading to quite a wide perception that they tolerate, or even promote, instability as a political counter, in particular over the future of the Presidency;
- Very limited federal support for broader political or economic responses to radicalisation and absence of any joint strategy by federal and northern state governments;
- Increasing anger among Christians at the growing polarisation in society between the north and south and its impact on Christians in the north and middle belt.

D. APPLYING LESSONS FROM OTHER COUNTRIES TO NIGERIA

The lessons from other countries indicate the need for a three-pronged approach to the increased instability in Nigeria:

- An intelligence based **security** response driven by counter-insurgency principles;
- A comprehensive and inclusive, **political** process; and

² The acronym JAS is used in this paper in preference to 'Boko Haram' on the basis that it reflects the group's name. Experience from other countries indicates that referring to groups by labels they reject can further increase a sense of grievance.

- A significant ***economic and development*** strategy for the north.

Security and counterterrorism response:

Lessons from other countries suggest that the **Nigerian leadership should:**

- Change their approach to security, adopting tried and tested counter-insurgency (COIN) principles and methods in order to take forward an intelligence-led approach to security and counterterrorism;
- Systematically train the security forces in key COIN approaches, in practical ways of engaging with local communities to (re-) gain their confidence and support;
- Work with regional and international partners, particularly within ECOWAS and African Union, to break links between international terror networks and the militants;
- End impunity within the security forces by conducting independent investigations of cases of alleged abuse;
- Ensure strong civilian oversight of all security forces, including clarifying the relationship and responsibility between forces;
- Repair the relationship between the police and local communities, for instance establish an independent, international commission on security and policing, including possible deployment of independent monitors.

Political process:

The federal and northern state governments should seek a political solution to northern radicalisation and instability involving:

- Consultations with affected populations around their grievances (initially those related to security responses, but later the context of governance and economic and social development);
- Measures to mitigate poor governance and improve political processes;
- Meaningful dialogue with those elements of JAS willing to engage and in a position to negotiate and implement significant change;
- Dialogue and agreement with Nigerian religious groups (and broader coalitions) to promote moderation and non-violence;

- Conflict-sensitive media training for media houses and government officials and provide greater support for an independent media;
- A major public communication initiative which would publicise the main security, political and economic measures being taken to restore stability to northern Nigeria, especially those relating to the tactics, behaviour and independent monitoring accountability of the security forces.

Economic and development strategy:

The northern state governments, supported by the federal government, should develop and implement economic and development strategies which would credibly:

- Provide short-term employment creation across northern Nigeria for men and women (where appropriate drawing upon subsidies from the federal level);
- Increase investments in agriculture in a way that increases food security and exports but also draws young men and women back to the sector and provides opportunities for long term employment;
- Increase transparency in public capital investment decisions, to improve the efficiency of infrastructure development and to reduce public grievances around political influence in decision making;
- Improve the delivery of social services to the poorest local communities (e.g. education, health, water and sanitation), in partnership with civil society groups and the private sector;
- Initiate additional empowerment programmes for women and girls so they can play a more substantial role in community and national decision-making, including in forums dedicated to countering violence and building peace.

If implemented with will, rigour, and coordination, these security, political and development interventions could build resilience and stability, and thereby reverse the dangerous and accelerating trajectory that Nigeria is now facing.
