PERCEPTIONS AND EXPERIENCES OF CHILDREN ASSOCIATED WITH ARMED GROUPS IN NORTHEAST NIGERIA

Research Report 2017

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The Nigeria Stability and Reconciliation Programme (NSRP) is a £33 million Department for International Development (DFID) funded programme designed to prevent conflicts from becoming violent, to promote appropriate responses when violence breaks out, and to support reconciliation processes in the aftermath of conflicts. Through its various interventions, the programme aims to reduce the number of deaths and injuries due to violence, and help transform conflict prone areas into more stable environments where wealth creation, service delivery and poverty reduction can take place.

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A horrific characteristic of the on-going insurgency in northeast Nigeria has been the recruitment and use of children by armed groups. Children have not only been used in support roles, but also in direct combat and to carry out so-called 'suicide' attacks. The recruitment and use of children by armed forces or armed groups is prohibited by international and regional legal instruments⁴, to which Nigeria is a party. Recruitment and use of children in conflict is considered to be one of the six grave violations of children's rights under United Nations Security Council Resolution 1612 (2005).

Where there is evidence of parties to a conflict committing violations, they will be 'listed' in the annual report of the Secretary General to the Security Council. This listing triggers a monitoring and reporting mechanism, administered by the United Nations in a country, which submits quarterly and annual reports documenting violations and the steps taken to prevent and respond to the violations.

Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal- Jihad (JAS), more commonly known as Boko Haram was listed for recruitment and use of children in June 2015² and for abduction of children (one of the other six grave violations) in April 2016,³ having been first listed in 2014⁴ for killing and maiming of children and attacks on schools and hospitals. The Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) was listed for recruitment and use in April 2016.⁵

Despite the scale of recruitment and use of children by armed groups, their plight has received little visibility; there is limited information and understanding about their experiences and extremely limited programming to support their recovery and reintegration. Failure to provide effective programming will not only impact the individual children but may also lead to criminality and future radicalization of the next generation of disaffected youth.

In the selected locations for this research in the conflict-affected states of Adamawa, Borno and Yobe, children have borne the brunt of the insurgency. They have been the victims of extreme violence and trauma. Over 900,000 children have been displaced from their homes in the three states with thousands being separated from their families. There are millions of people in need of emergency food aid. Poverty and malnutrition have been exacerbated as a result of the conflict in a region that already had poor infrastructure resulting in a lack of access to education, basic health care and food supplies and safe water. These elements have contributed to the background context that makes children easy targets for recruitment and conscription into the CJTF and JAS.

UNICEF and the British Council, through the Nigeria Stability and Reconciliation Programme (NSRP), partnered to carry out a study in the northeast Nigerian states of Adamawa, Borno and Yobe to improve understanding of the situation of children associated with JAS and the CJTF. The study examines the pathways and drivers for recruitment of children into these groups, the pathways for exiting the armed groups, and the challenges and opportunities for reintegration including the role of family and community perception and potential for stigmatization. The findings of the study will inform the development of policies, strategies and programmes that can effectively support the reintegration of children who have been associated with armed groups.

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1. UN Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989 (Article 38, which set the age of 15 years) and the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict 2000 (which sets the age of 18 years) and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child 1990 (Article 22). The Child’s Rights Act 2003 explicitly prohibits recruitment and use of children by the Nigerian Armed Forces (Art 34) and indirectly prohibits armed groups from using children by criminalizing the involvement or use of children in acts that constitute a criminal act (Art 26).


4. 13th Annual Report of the Secretary General on Children and Armed Conflict (S/2014/339) released in May 2014

Key findings include:

- Children have been associated with both JAS and the CJTF through several pathways, either by force or willingly and have been used in different ways, both in combat activities and in support roles.

- Children were used by Boko Haram in direct hostilities, for planting Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs)-landmines, burning of schools and houses as well as in support roles such as cooks, messengers and look-outs. Children have also reportedly been used as human shields to protect Boko Haram elements during military operations. Many children were also subjected to forceful religious conversions, forced marriages and used for sexual purposes. Children including girls as young as 10, were used by Boko Haram in the so-called 'suicide' attacks.

- Children associated with the CJTF were mainly used for intelligence related purposes, search operations, night patrols, crowd control and to man guard posts. Some reportedly conducted arrests of suspected Boko Haram elements while others allegedly participated in combat during the initial emergence of the CJTF and were reportedly exposed to high levels of violence, including taking part in killings, body mutilation and even parading body parts.

- JAS has used abduction, threats to children and threats of violence towards family members to recruit both boys and girls. Children have also been forcibly conscripted or deceived into joining the CJTF.

- Children have also joined both groups willingly for a variety of reasons. For children who willingly joined either JAS or the CJTF, they were mostly recruited with no understanding of the implication of their association with the group.

- Testimonies of those who were separated from JAS underlined that children not only ended up in the ranks of the group through abduction, but also due to financial incentives, peer pressure and familial ties. These included instances of parents giving up their children for economic gains such as food, money and or to obtain security guarantees.

- Some children (especially male children) joined the CJTF mainly to protect their family and community members from JAS attacks. Throughout the conflict, communities have celebrated individuals associated with the CJTF as heroes, irrespective of their age, making it easier for the CJTF to implement what was seen as a popular recruitment process.

- Children continuously accounted for a higher percentage of the victims during attacks or in clashes between JAS and the security forces, including the CJTF.

- Thirteen percent of the incidents (191 total) of suicide bombings recorded in northeast Nigeria between January 2014 and December 2016 were perpetrated by children. 44 children including 40 girls and four boys were used in the so-called 'suicide' attacks during this period.\(^6\)

- Some girls were forced into association with JAS by their boyfriends using traditional patriarchy to forcefully conscript their 'wives' into JAS (with or without parental/guardian consent).

- JAS uses moral teachings and religious doctrines to recruit. They preach against western ideologies and injustice, capitalizing on the anger arising from the actions of government security forces.

- At the beginning of the conflict, some families were supportive of their children joining JAS, oblivious of what many later came to perceive as the 'evil intent' of the organization until it was too late.

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6. Annual Report of the UN Secretary General on Children and Armed Conflict, 2017 (yet to be published)
members related that it was the only means to avoid being conscripted to join JAS groups.

- Geographical differences were seen between the three States for recruitment into the CJTF, which has been in operation longer in Borno and therefore has more members (both male and female) than the other States. However, women and girls were first recruited in Borno to fill the security gap that forbade men from conducting body searches on female suspects.

- The research also revealed that community perceptions fuel the challenges for children associated with both the CJTF and JAS. While respondents acknowledged a difference in perceptions of children who had been forced to join and those who had joined willingly, there were overwhelming high levels of distrust, hatred, fear and reluctance to accept these children back into the communities.

- For boys and girls joining the CJTF, drivers included protection of their communities and exerting revenge against JAS, as well as earning positive status within their communities. In addition, joining provided protection from alleged indiscriminate killing and arrest following JAS raids. If boys were not part of CJTF they were often suspected of being part of JAS. Girls also joined to show their solidarity for those who had been abducted.

- Boys also inherited association with the CJTF through their membership in the hunter (vigilante) groups.

- Female CJTF members reported that membership liberated them from the fear of being forced to join JAS by their male counterparts. Similarly, some male CJTF

A child associated with an armed force or armed group is referred to as “any person below 18 years of age who is or who has been recruited or used by an armed force or armed group in any capacity, including but not limited to children, boys and girls who are used as fighters, cooks, porters, messengers, spies or for sexual purposes. It does not only refer to a child who is taking, or has taken direct part in hostilities.” ⁶
Key Recommendations:

• The federal government should enforce the criminalization of recruitment and use of children below the age of 18 years by armed groups as provided for in the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the involvement of children in armed conflict to which Nigeria acceded to.

• The federal and state governments and the CJTF should work together with the support of the United Nations and other bodies to immediately end the recruitment and use of children by the CJTF.

• The government with support of international organizations and the United Nations should put in place clear policies for the release, safe return, and rehabilitation and reintegration of children associated with both the CJTF and JAS. Such programmes must also address the needs of other conflict affected children.

• Civil society organizations and religious bodies should sensitize affected communities and families on peaceful co-existence, and to accept children formerly associated with armed groups, support their rehabilitation and reintegration in their communities.

• Even where families expressed a willingness to accept their children, they expressed concern that the community would not support their decision.

• Interestingly, few respondents were aware of ex-JAS members. But there was also a belief that some CJTF members were 'repentant' JAS members.

• There was a very low level of community awareness of any support services that existed, either run by governments or non-governmental services to support de-radicalisation and reintegration programme for children associated with armed groups.

• Respondents believed that children associated with JAS should face justice. However, there were three schools of thought reported:

  • Anyone who has ever been associated with JAS must be held accountable for his/her actions irrespective of age or sex.

  • Those who joined willingly and were the core members should be held accountable while those who were forced to join should not be held accountable and should be pardoned.

  • Accountability should depend on the magnitude of the offence.
BACKGROUND

The evolution of Jamaatu Ahlus Sunna Lid da awati Wal Jihad (JAS) has been well studied (Abdulkarim, 2010, Adesoji, 2012, Onuoha, 2013). ’JAS,’ or ’People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet’s Teachings and Jihad’, is more commonly known as ’Boko Haram’ which has also been translated as ’Western Education is Forbidden’. JAS is linked to the historical Islamic movement known as Jama’atu Izalat al-Bid’a wa iqamat al-Sunna (Izala or JIBWIS) that spread Salafism in Nigeria in the early 1970s. After splitting from Izala, JAS retained the commitment to Salafism but became a substantially jihadist movement. Gaining momentum in the 1990s in the al-Haji Muhammadu Ndimi Mosque in Maiduguri, Borno State, the strict adoption of Islamic doctrine by JAS’s former leader, Mohammed Yusuf, promoted a movement for the adoption of Islamic law in Northern Nigeria. This was unsuccessful. JAS perceived the government as a barrier to them spreading their religious views and began targeting Nigerian police and military - seen as representing the central and state government – with isolated attacks. A more radical, and violent, splinter group relocated to Yobe State under the leadership of Abubakar Shekau. With the death of Yusuf at the hands of the Nigerian authorities in 2009, the group’s tactics evolved to mass and more indiscriminate attacks against government and civilians, which were increasingly lethal and targeted far wider geographical areas. For example, in July 2009, JAS allegedly murdered over 700 people in the two north-eastern cities of Maiduguri and Bauchi targeting mainly non-Muslims rather than government positions. From 2011, the group began to indiscriminately target any and all Nigerians with hit and run attacks, bombings and suicide attacks, focusing on soft targets - churches, mosques, schools, markets, or assaulting and destroying entire villages. By 2014, JAS had shifted tactics from hit and run to hit and hold, and sought to establish control over territory, and by early 2015, it controlled 12 out of 27 Local Government Authorities (LGAs) in Borno State, 5 out of 21 in Adamawa State, and 2 out of 17 in Yobe State. The group notoriously surpassed ISIL as the most violent terror group in the world in 2015.

The Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) emerged in Borno in 2013 to protect communities against the attacks and atrocities being committed by JAS and in response to the perceived failure of security actors to protect the people. In Adamawa, a State which already had a strong presence of vigilante groups (hunter groups); CJTF does not have a large presence. In Yobe there is a mixture of vigilante groups and CJTF, following a call by the Governor for people to mobilise to confront JAS. In Borno state, there are two types of membership, the Borno Youth Employment Scheme (BOYES) and volunteer CJTF. The BOYES are paid by government, have been trained and equipped by the military, and are full time while the volunteer CJTF members are not paid and their role is part-time. Members of CJTF in Borno and vigilantes in Adamawa states are bi-vocational, also engaging in other work; some are students who come after school hours; some are business men; some are civil servants; some are farmers. Some do not report for duties when they have personal assignments. In Yobe state, CJTF were reported as full time as the members are not engaged in other activities. CJTF, whose membership is estimated at 1,800 BOYES and 26,000 members

are credited by many at community level for turning around the fight against JAS.¹²

Recruitment and use of children by armed groups has been widespread in the context of the insurgency in North East Nigeria. However, concrete numbers regarding the association of children with armed groups in the Nigerian context, remains extremely limited due to the highly volatile security situation, fear of disclosing identities by victims and families, and lack of access to the affected population in JAS controlled areas. According to the estimates provided by the Office of National Security Advisor in 2015, at least 8,000 children are believed to have been recruited and used by JAS since the conflict began. Compounded by social injustice as well as high levels of poverty, high rates of illiteracy and unemployment, JAS had a fertile recruitment ground for young recruits in its early days. In Maiduguri, for example, two Mallams operated schools for Mohammed Yusuf, the then leader and founder of JAS. These schools targeted school drop-outs and were major platforms for child indoctrination and recruitment. Children from these schools would go on to become JAS ideological mouthpieces, challenging their parents and peers on aspects of belief and spreading radical views. Accounts from some residents in Maiduguri have indicated association of children, both boys and girls, as young as four years old with JAS. Testimonies from children rescued or escaped from JAS captivity revealed that children not only ended up in the ranks of the group through abduction, but also through financial incentives in the absence of educational or employment options, false religious indoctrination, peer group pressure, personal threats and threats to their family and familial ties, including instances of parents giving their children to the armed group for economic gain and to obtain security guarantees from the group.

There are also no concrete figures for recruitment and use of children by CJTF. While no age restriction was in place at the time of the establishment of the CJTF, in the course of 2013, a rule was introduced as part of the CJTF's oral code of conduct that 'no child below the age of 15 will be allowed to join the CJTF'. It is said that persons, including children, often start by performing ‘freelance’ tasks before becoming volunteers and then formal members.

Children recruited by JAS and CJTF/vigilante groups took a direct part in the conflict. However, direct participation was more common for children used by JAS than CJTF, where children more often played a support role as cooks, porters, messengers, lookouts, informers, guards, Manning check points and in IDP camps etc. While these roles look more benign, these roles often place children in danger. A horrific characteristic of the conflict has also been the use of children by JAS in ‘suicide’ attacks – across the north east Nigeria and neighbouring countries, 44 children were used in suicide attacks in 2015; three quarters of these were girls.¹³ According to anecdotal reports, children recruited by JAS went through training to prepare them for combat. There are accounts of children being forced to destroy property in their own villages or kill family and community members to break their ties with their communities and desensitize them to committing atrocities. In addition to being recruited and/or abducted to play a support role, girls have also been used as sexual slaves for JAS fighters and to create the next generation of jihadists.

As the Nigerian Armed Forces take back swathes of territory from Boko Haram, they are encountering large numbers of children who had been abducted, recruited, held and used. It is critical that there is an effective programme of reintegration in place not only to support the individual child to recover from their experiences, but also to work with the child, their family and their community to facilitate return and reintegration, or to resettle the child if return is impossible. The planned programme under the Office of the National Security Advisor, which had envisaged running this programme, was largely disbanded in November. Operation Safe Corridor, established by the Nigerian Armed Forces for JAS defectors, is

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¹² The volunteer who helped beat back boko haram are becoming a problem. The Economist 1 October 2016.  
¹³ Brent Swails and David McKenzie CNN, April 2016. Kidnapped to kill: How boko haram is turning girls into weapons.
not designed to respond to the specific needs of under-18s.

Likewise, children who have been part of CJTF and vigilante groups, who are finding that they are no longer required to contribute to the fight against Boko Haram, require programmes to ease their transition back to 'civilian' life. Current programmes for demobilization of CJTF are not taking into consideration the specific needs of under-18s.

Despite the scale of recruitment and use of children by armed groups, their plight has received little visibility, there is limited information and understanding about their experiences and extremely limited programming to support their recovery and reintegration. Failure to provide effective programming will not only impact the individual children but may also lead to criminality and future radicalization of the next generation of disaffected youth.
UNICEF Nigeria and the Nigeria Stability and Reconciliation Programme (NSRP), composed of British Council, Social Development Direct (SDD) and International Alert conducted a research in order to increase understanding of the situation of children associated with JAS and with the CJTF and other vigilante groups in Northeast Nigeria and how this impacts on obstacles for and possibilities for their rehabilitation and reintegration.

The research, carried out between March and May 2016, covered three north-eastern states; Adamawa, Borno and Yobe. Within Adamawa and Yobe States, the research was conducted in the state capitals (Yola and Damaturu respectively) while in Borno, data collection took place in Bama (rural area) and in Maiduguri (Urban area and state capital). The choice of research location in rural Borno was to discover the manifestation of community security groups and address the complete lack of evidence concerning areas outside Maiduguri.

Key informant interviews were carried out with: 24 children associated with JAS and CJTF/vigilante groups; and 57 key informants including leaders of CJTF and vigilante groups and members, security officials, government officials, representatives of women's organization and youth organisations, human rights and peace-building organisations, community leaders and religious leaders at state level and at the Federal level representatives of Presidential Initiative on the North East (PINE), Victim Support Fund, Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution, National Human Rights Commission and Ministry for Women Affairs and Social Development. There were six focus groups in each of the six research locations with men over 35, women over 35, young men aged 18-35, young women aged 18-35, boys aged 13-17 and girls aged 13-17.

Specifically, the assessment sought to answer these questions:

1. What are the various pathways of association of children to JAS and CJTF? Are the pathways for children to join the same for both groups? If they are different, in what ways and what is the rationale for the difference?
2. What is the perception of the members themselves? Do they carry positive or negative views of themselves and their counterparts? What are their desires for the future?
3. What are the community perceptions of the children associated with JAS and CJTF? Do communities have positive or negative views of the children associated with JAS? If so why? If not, why not? Do communities have positive or negative views of the children associated with CJTF? If so why? If not, why not?
4. What has been the impact of membership in JAS and CJTF on the children associated with these groups? Are they seen in a positive or negative light?
5. What does the community believe should happen to the children that have been associated with these groups? Should the children be held accountable for their association and any crimes that occurred during their association with these groups? If so, are there any special circumstances or conditions that could alter their opinion on what counts as “justice” for any crimes committed by these children?
6. What are the experiences of children during and after association with JAS and CJTF? Are their experiences similar or different? Are there differences between the children's experiences during and after association? If so, in what way do children perceive their realities during and after JAS as well as during and after CJTF?
KEY FINDINGS

PATHWAYS OF CHILD RECRUITMENT INTO ARMED GROUPS

Pathways to Boys Association with JAS

Many factors were cited as motivation for boys' association with JAS. Regardless of geographic location, respondents mentioned similar factors that contribute to recruitment: abduction, coercion, poverty, deception of the “wrong interpretation of religious ideology”, charismatic preachers, peer pressure or influence, idleness/unemployment, lack of parental care or families in general, lack of access to education/schools/illiteracy, monetary inducement and love of material things.

The first most frequently cited reason for joining JAS was poverty; about 73% of key informants, 71% of the FGDs and 50% of the children associated with JAS cited poverty as one of the main reasons for joining. Poverty was exacerbated by high rate of unemployment and low school attendance. Poverty, coupled with limited opportunities were seen as increasing the vulnerability of children to the lure of monetary inducement and alternative economic livelihood system that were offered as incentives by JAS for joining up.

“What brought this is poverty; some children don't have even breakfast so such children if you give them 100 Naira only they do for you whatever you ask them to do”
KII with Vigilant Male 1, Yola, Adamawa State

“Unemployment may be part of the reasons why they join. At times somebody is not employed he has nothing doing he walks in the street day and night, with nothing to do to keep him alive, they fall victims also. Definitely they say an idle mind is the devil's workshop. Sometimes they are also forced and sometimes they joined voluntarily without knowing the dangers”
KII with Stakeholder, Damaturu, Yobe State
“I joined about 3 years ago. I joined to earn a living. We had nothing to eat therefore when this group came they provided us enough food and we were forced. All my parents were killed so I was left with only brothers who encouraged me to join this group. I joined the group to earn a living.”
Interview with a 17 year old female child (CH4) associated with JAS, Damaturu, Yobe state

Poor economic conditions, poor development and lack of basic necessities underpin the current conflict dynamics in the Northeast. JAS also played on the sense of injustice and perception of corruption amongst government leaders that exacerbated poverty and a lack of opportunities for children and young people to attract members. The perceived failure of government to provide for its citizens paved the way for JAS to fill the gap and attract recruits. It was highlighted that orphans or unaccompanied children, many of whom had no means of survival, were highly susceptible to being recruited through such incentives.

“Poverty also is associated with high vulnerability to monetary incentive and material things which were also listed as predisposing facts to children’s association with JAS. Boko Haram promised an alternative system in which some form of livelihood is provided for those that join. In a situation of poverty and failure of government to provide the basic needs of its citizens, the Boko Haram system becomes very attractive to the children especially as it is also camouflaged with religious teaching of their ideology”.
KII with representative of Victim Support Fund, Abuja 20 March 2016

The delay of government in repelling JAS from the major towns and villages was one of the factors responsible for children joining JAS

“To me it was the delay in repelling the Boko Haram from the major towns and villages that made children join the group. If they were repelled on time, more than 95% of the children would not have joined Boko Haram”
KII with Community Leader, Damaturu, Yobe State

Another most often cited response for why boys joined JAS was a perception among respondents that the boys were “deceived by the wrong interpretation of religious ideology”. From the key informants, 56% were of the view that deception by wrong interpretation of religious ideologies was a motivating factor for children joining JAS and was echoed by 79% of the FGDS; ironically, only 25% of the children associated with JAS cited this reason. These respondents recalled very charismatic leaders, starting with Mohammed Yusuf, who was able to attract parents and children to the ideology being preached. Respondents also referred to the true character of JAS being camouflaged behind teachings on morality and religious doctrine. Respondents noted that Islamic teachings appeared similar to what was being preached elsewhere on the surface, yet once individuals joined, they realized “too late” that there was a more sinister doctrine being followed.
“Deception is the most frequent way of getting them involved. They are deceived initially either in term of religious information that is given to them, then introduced into the soft area of Boko Haram business and then as they get more involved they became exposed into the more intricate aspects of carrying arms and being used to carry out bombings”.
KII with Representative of National Human Rights Commission, Abuja. 20 April 2016

“Another reason is the ignorance of the religion itself. Those leaders of Boko Haram they claimed to be learned in the Qur’an and they pretended to give a correct interpretation of the Holy Qur’an. Because the youths are ignorant they thought they were being given the correct version of the Holy Qur’an not knowing that they were using religion as a tool to destroy them”
KII with Security Personnel 1, Damaturu, Yobe State

“In the first instance when you look at the sect it all started as a good Islamic group, they started by preaching what Allah (God) said and they were using the hadith and the Quran which are the two main source of Islamic knowledge, until after people reluctantly joined the sect. The youth and the children were given fast Quranic knowledge and it was only when it became a killing squad that children got to know. Unemployment, drug addiction, frustration and destitution are what make children join JAS. They are called destitute because they have no directions in life, we have large numbers of them in Maiduguri town-ship, most of them have not even gone beyond primary school, most of them are children abandoned by their parents in the guise of Almajiri. Most of them are ignorant of western education and

“Another often cited reason for why boys are recruited into JAS is peer pressure/influence. Peer influence was cited by all groups – 20% of children associated with JAS, 54% of the FGDs and 65% of key informants cited peer group influence as reasons for children joining JAS. Children also saw their friends enjoying a better lifestyle.

“I suffered a lot before the insurgency. I attended Islamiya School. When I was 15 years old, it was not good. It was my friend that convinced me to join because of his money that I was not able to pay back. He dragged me to the group”
Interview with 16 year old male child (CH7) associated with JAS from Michika, Adamawa state

The present study indicates a link between Almajiri and recruitment. According to about 42% of key informants interviewed in Maiduguri some of the children that joined JAS were Islamic school pupils who were sent by their parents (or in some cases were abandoned by their parents as they could not afford to care for them) to attend such schools. Ideally such children should have been attached to a Mallam but most of the time they are left to fend for themselves on the streets where they become very vulnerable to recruitment. This linkage however did not resonate with FGDs or interviews with children in Maiduguri, neither was it expressed in any other locations

Many respondents also cited neglect by parents, poor parental care and the inability of parents to provide basic necessities because of poverty as contributing to children being vulnerable to recruitment. 30.7%, 16.7%, 41.7% and 20% of
high vulnerability to manipulation and control of children that makes them more attractive than adults as they are more likely to accept without question ideological justifications for fighting especially as the conflict continues. They target children so as to ensure continuity and succession.

“Some of these children are Almajiris (Islamic pupils), they are going on the street with nothing to eat so when you give them some small amount, something to eat, they get convinced to join”.  
KII with Women Representative Maiduguri, Borno State. 31 March 2016

“Most of the cause of children joining this group is hunger and starvation and the fault is from the parents that normally send their children to do “Almajiri”. They will be roaming up and down begging on the street, these kinds of children can be deceived with just N5000 because they have never seen such money before.”
FGD, 13 – 17 years girls, Respondent 5, Maiduguri, Borno state. 27 March 2016

“Pull risk factors include the rewards for joining a radical group in the form of material gains, sense of belonging to a “moral” or “religious” group, support and camaraderie from fellow radicals.”

Unlike the other “pull risk factors” mentioned above, there was a very clear narrative that supported the understanding that boys and girls were also forced into JAS through individually-targeted and mass abductions in communities. While the most cited example, the abduction of 276 school girls from the Government Girls Secondary School in Chibok, there were numerous other case of abductions, including of young children - over 350 children went missing when Mubi was overrun by JAS in November 2014. Respondents pointed to the malleability and

JAS members were also recruited through different forms of coercion. For some, their lives or those of their families were threatened. While only 19% of KIIls and 21% of FGDs mentioned coercion as a push factor, 75% of the children interviewed associated with JAS saw coercion and abduction at the same level. For some, they joined when they were unable to pay back loans given by Boko Haram. In Michika and Mubi, JAS gave money and employment forms to some children and later followed them to their houses telling them to join or return the money and forms.

Children are coerced and then JAS used deception to calm them and also attract them with material things and of course totally turned their minds as they are hypnotized and promised heaven and earth both
There were people who also joined out of anger because of the behaviour of certain state structures, especially the security agencies who would go and attack or just sweep people away. In anger and as an act of revenge, people joined JAS as a way of getting their own back on whatever they thought they had suffered from the state. And that was more likely to be the case with young people than older ones.

KII with Representative of the National Human Rights Commission, Abuja. 20 April 2016

Pathways to Girl’s Association with JAS

The same drivers cited for boys joining JAS were also cited for girls being attracted by charismatic leaders, peer pressure and influence, including from neighbours, lack of opportunities for education and employment, and financial incentives. However, not all respondents believed that girls joined voluntarily.

materially and in the religion, that even if they die they are martyrs that would be rewarded with 70 virgins in heaven.

KII with Representative of the National Human Rights Commission, Abuja. 20 April 2016

Once children had been recruited by force, coercion or through incentives, respondents highlighted that members monitored each other to ensure that no one escaped. This was reported by 25% of the KII in Bama where the JAS members surrounded the town and anyone who tried to escape were killed.

“The Boko Haram network stationed their members all around Bama, anyone that wants to escape is captured and killed if he dares to try to escape”.

KII with Civilian JTF Male Leader, Bama, Borno State. 2 April 2016

At the national level, the representative of the NHRC highlighted that some joined because of perceived injustice over their treatment or treatment of community or family members by security forces.

UNICEF/Nigeria/2016/Doune Porter

related sexual violence. This report builds on the findings from the Bad Blood report.

It started differently. From the first instance it was only the boys; the sect was not interested in the females but later it became both sexes because they really needed the girls to keep the boys psychologically happy, to keep them in control.

KII with Youth Leader, Maiduguri, Borno state. 30 March 2016

From the end of 2012, the number of teenage girls abducted by JAS and forcibly married to JAS combatants began to increase. Though the abductions and forced marriages received little coverage in Nigerian or international media, this marked the earliest period of JAS' use of sexual violence against women and girls as a tactic in the conflict. This phenomenon made headlines only in April 2014 when 276 female school goers were abducted from a school in Chibok. Though 56% of key informants cited abduction as a pathway for joining, there were some variations across the locations with the highest from Bama (83%), Maiduguri (69%), Yobe state (67%) and Adamawa state (20%); all children associated with JAS cited abduction as a major pathway to association.

We were sleeping in the night, they sneaked into our house like thieves and they caught us. Later on they took us away with them. They told me that their religion is good, it is jihad. I told them I did not like it. I was even trying to escape but they caught me and told me “you are not going anywhere. You will die here with us. Allah released me from them after two years”.

Interview with 15 year old female child (CH2) associated with JAS in Madagali, Adamawa state

However, there were other pathways for girls joining JAS. Abduction has been one of the pathways into JAS. The 'Bad Blood' report by UNICEF and International Alert noted that early in the insurgency, there was no specific targeting of women. On the contrary, women and children were largely spared. However, reports of forced marriage of teenage girls began to be recorded in 2012 in the Bulabulin Ngarannam neighbourhood in Maiduguri – Borno state capital.

An assessment, published in February 2016, focused on the situation of, perceptions of and challenges to reintegration for girls and women associated with JAS and children born out of JAS
Girls also joined to protect their maternal and paternal families from violence. Girls who were abducted or forced to join the group were used in support roles, especially as cooks, as well as for sexual purposes. Respondents highlighted that it was later on that some women and girls were trained and forced to become combatants, spies and suicide bombers.

The current research also notes that girls found themselves as part of the group through their husbands. Gender relations are patriarchal in the Northeast Nigeria - women are subservient to men. This includes following the directions and ideologies of their husbands. Girls were married to husbands who did not express their support for JAS prior to their marriage but then forced their wives to join the group once they were married. There were also incidents cited by respondents, of girls consciously marrying JAS members to gain status in a community.

"As a married man my wife must follow me and my ideology because I own her, I give her directives, even if the husband dies she will not part"

Interview with 17 year old male child (CH6) associated with CJTF in Damaturu, Yobe state

"Of course, the little monies they are getting from the errands by members of CJTF and other vigilante groups mean a lot to a child who has no means of feeding or livelihood".

KII with women leader 1 from Damaturu, Yobe state

Pathways for Boy’s Association with CJTF and other Vigilante Groups

Some of the push and pull factors for boys' recruitment to JAS are also common for boys' recruitment to CJTF across all three states - poverty, peer pressure or influence, idleness/unemployment, lack of parental care or families in general, and monetary incentives and love of material things.

"Of course, the little monies they are getting from the errands by members of CJTF and other vigilante groups mean a lot to a child who has no means of feeding or livelihood".

KII with women leader 1 from Damaturu, Yobe state

"Some youths including I and my friends felt that joining this group is as good as contributing to the society. But to other people, members of this group are there because they are redundant; it is not their duty to safeguard the community or nation. This is the duty of the security agents. The fifty, hundred and sometimes one hundred and fifty Naira we get also motivates many children to join this group".

Interview with 17 year old male child (CH6) associated with CJTF in Damaturu, Yobe state
Lack of schooling/closure of schools due to insurgency was also cited as reason why children join CJTF, as well as the fact that their elder brothers and friends were already members. This concurs with the UN report that between 2009 and 2015, more than 910 schools were destroyed, while 1,500 others were closed and no fewer than 611 teachers were killed and 19,000 forced to flee the North-Eastern part of Nigeria due to Boko Haram attacks.¹⁶

“Also, they have no option, these days there are no schools, they don't go anywhere they only stay at home. Most times “…you know feeding becomes a problem. So by joining this vigilante group they get token”.

KII with Stakeholder from Damaturu, Yobe State

However, there are a number of distinct reasons for children joining CJTF. Some respondents stated that membership of CJTF was associated with positive community image or becoming a positive role model for society and that parents and communities actively encouraged children to join. An often cited reason for joining was to take revenge on JAS for violence they had inflicted on their families and communities and to play their part in protecting their communities.

“The reason is to protect their community, state and country and to protect every Muslim. They also want to contribute their own quota in fighting insurgency. Many children whose fathers, mothers or relations were killed by Boko Haram joined the Civilian JTF. There is anger in them and they wanted revenge. “There was a time I saw one under 18 child carrying sticks and knives and I asked him why he was holding those arms; he told me that Boko Haram killed his father and his mission is to grow up and join the army”.

KII with Female Government Representative Maiduguri, Borno State, 4 April 2016

Respondents also cited joining because of fear of security forces. This fear emanated from alleged indiscriminate killings and detention by security agents in their hunt for members of JAS. If you were not a member of CJTF then it could be perceived that you were a member of or sympathetic to JAS. Being a member of CJTF provided protection.

“Also, they have no option, these days there are no schools, they don't go anywhere they only stay at home. Most times “…you know feeding becomes a problem. So by joining this vigilante group they get token”.

KII with Stakeholder from Damaturu, Yobe State

“The highly militarized culture which is partly the outcome of the venture of the military into politics in Nigeria is an attraction for a young man to voluntarily go to join the Civilian JTF to fight. And in a situation where there is some stipend that is paid by the state government, the economic component will also be a significant attraction. And also a situation where the insurgency itself has shut down many schools, there are so many out-of-school young people. They become more easily available to join any group including the CJTF”

KII with Representative of Victim Support Fund, Abuja. 24 March 2016

“There was a need to have community based protection because of the perceived failure of the military in protecting the community. Actually, the military was antagonistic at a point to the host community. Initially, most of [CJTF] were members of JAS who repented and renounced Boko Haram when they saw that the thing was not going in their own interest and organized into CJTF and they are now complementing the efforts of the military in terms of identification of the Boko Haram whenever they come into town”.

Interview with representative of the Presidential Initiative on the North East, Abuja, 24 March 2016

Adamawa will be related to the historical traditions of vigilantism than specific desires to become a CJTF group for the state.

Pathways for Girl’s Association with CJTF and other Vigilante Groups

The drivers for girls to join were found to be similar to those of boys including to defend their own communities. In addition, it was reported by respondents that girls and women became sought after as members as women were needed to search female suspects, because of culture and religion that prevented men carrying out these searches. Some girls were said to have been motivated to join as a show of solidarity with their female colleagues who they saw as being frequently abducted. Some followed CJTF and other vigilante groups because they have boyfriends among them. Some joined to protect themselves from the risk of sexual violence that was perceived to have increased in communities during the insurgency.

In terms of joining vigilante groups, especially the hunters, membership is often inherited from their parents and/or it is part of their lives from a young age.

There was an important geographic difference found between Borno, Yobe and Adamawa regarding both boys and girls recruitment into CJTF with Borno and Yobe using CJTF as a semi-professionalized force whereas Adamawa co-opted vigilante group members to loosely form them into a ‘CJTF’ in order to combat JAS. This suggests that the recruitment dynamics in Adamawa will be related to the historical traditions of vigilantism than specific desires to become a CJTF group for the state.

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**EXPERIENCES OF CHILDREN DURING AND AFTER ASSOCIATION WITH ARMED GROUPS**

**Experiences of Boys during and after Association with JAS**

Interview with children associated with JAS and perceptions of respondents are that children associated with JAS were exposed to extreme levels of violence. Many took a direct part in the fighting and witnessed killings. Many respondents believed that children were brainwashed, given drugs and brutalized to prepare them for battle. The use of hard drugs (cocaine and heroin) and prescription drugs (cocaine, morphine and tramol) to control and to prepare children for battle was perceived as common across the three States according to respondents.

“I was taught how to shoot and given some hard drugs. I did not know what I was doing most of the time. Boys were taught how to hold guns and fight and burn properties”.

Interview with 16 year old male child (CH7) associated with JAS from Michika, Adamawa State.

There has been a report of significant increase in the use of drugs and we believe that those drugs were used to drug very young people to go join so that they could be more daring and more fearless in what they did”.

KII with representative of the Victim Support Fund, Abuja. 24 March 2016

Respondents highlighted that life was difficult for the children involved and that they were given dangerous roles. Children were also hunted by security agents. Some surrendered because of the difficulties they faced:
Experiences of Girls during and after Association with JAS

The girls who took part in the research reported that they were subjected to sexual violence and forced marriage, a perception that is widespread amongst communities. Respondents also believed that JAS fighters wanted to impregnate as many girls as possible in order to create the next generation of jihadists. Respondents believed that many of the girls were infected with sexually transmitted diseases. Respondents also highlighted that girls were used to carry bombs.

“They are exposed to all forms of violence - physical, sexual and emotional violence. The girls are taken as sex slaves; they just do anything they want to do with them”. 
KII with Youth Leader, Yola, Adamawa State

“Girls are much more vulnerable; they used to rape them and sometimes they will be impregnated and also infected with different, different disease but sometimes boys can escape”. 
KII with Security Personnel Maiduguri, Borno State, 5 May 2016

I was with them for 10 months. Some were treated badly especially if they try to run away or disobey their rules. I also was treated badly; they even put

Their way of life is not good at all, they are suffering, they have been hunted by security agents, some were killed, and some are surrendering their weapons because of the difficulties they encountered. It was said that they (JAS) are giving the children some writing to drink (Rubutun Allo). Some people are saying that they are given some hard drugs to take; some are saying they were left hungry without feeding”.
KII with Vigilante member 1, Yola, Adamawa State

“We were suffering because even our daily bread was hard to get. There is nothing in this movement but hardship. We did not gain anything; not even the Islamic education they are talking and boasting about.”
Interview with 17 year old female child (CH4) associated with JAS in Damaturu, Yobe State

“They carry ammunition for the group. They pass by where we stay carrying 'bagco' bags. One child who was about 14 years complained that the ammunitions he carries for the group are too heavy and that he is maltreated at the slightest provocation. He escaped”.
Interview with 16 year old female child (CH2) associated with JAS in Damaturu, Yobe State

“…..they experienced all manner of violence. They do many roles based on the directive of their commander, they may be asked to go and kill people, burn houses, fetch information, explode bombs etc”.
KII with Police from Yola, Adamawa State

“The boys are just like foot soldiers; they give them any assignment to do no matter how hard it is, no matter how dangerous it is like being forced or commanded to go and kill their own family as a sign of loyalty and promotion in the hierarchy Most of the time they do that under drugs they are not in their real senses”.
KII with Stakeholder from Damaturu, Yobe state

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or victims of sexual violence. They have also seen a lot of things which children their age ought not to have seen.

“The children are being treated as armies. They are not treated as children. You know it went to an extent where they will send children to go and assassinate their parents, by the time they assassinate their parents, they are upgraded; they are given a higher level in the Boko Haram army. Yes that was what we have been hearing. They have been exposed to sexual violence; they have been seeing a lot of things which they ought not to have seen... In Boko Haram they don't differentiate between a boy and a girl. You know their aim is just to kill. So whatever they will do even if you are a boy or a girl they can use you to kill. The Boko Haram army used children to kill a lot of people. The children have contributed if not 50 to 60 % to the success, negative 'success' ... of Boko Haram”.

KII with Community Leader from Damaturu, Yobe state

Leaving JAS – Experiences and Challenges

Some respondents believed that at earlier stages of the conflict, there were children that were deceived by the preaching into joining but when they found out that they had to kill innocent people they left. Respondents believed that some members of the CJTF include some of these repentant JAS members.

However, there was a common perception across all three States that it is extremely difficult for children to leave JAS. There was a common perception that JAS is cult like and once you are a member, whether voluntarily or forced, you cannot leave without risking your own life. This was echoed by the children’s experiences:

Lost Childhood under JAS

One consensus that came out clearly from all locations is that once the children (irrespective of sex) join JAS by whatever means they are no longer treated as children but as adults/foot soldiers. They have had early exposure to sexual activities either as perpetrators of sexual violence
They beat and torture people and prevent them from getting food. I was threatened so many times especially after I attempted to escape. “You are not going anywhere. You will die with us here”

Interview with 15 year old female child/widow (CH3) associated with JAS from Mubi, Adamawa state

“Yes, it was difficult for them because some of them had to pay the supreme price with their life, it is a group that is easy to join but difficult to leave. You have to device so many means for you to escape”.

KII with Female Government Representative 3 Maiduguri, Borno state, 4 April 2016

“There is nothing like children that have join Boko Haram and are no longer with them, Once you have joined Boko Haram there is nothing like quitting because the members will go and kill you; Once you join Boko Haram you will not be allowed to leave”

KII with CJTF member 2 Maiduguri, Borno state, 2 April, 2016

Three 'pathways' out of JAS were identified by respondents – rescue by the military or CJTF, escape and abandonment by JAS because of a shortage of food, water and other basic necessities or because they are sick. Respondents pointed to the fact that children decided to escape because they felt they had suffered a lot and would continue to suffer if they stayed or because they believed their actions when they were part of JAS were not right.

Respondents were asked if they were aware of or knew of any children who had been part of JAS. There were significant differences amongst respondents as to whether they knew of any child who had left JAS and if they did, the extent to which such a child had been involved. Some pointed to large numbers of children in IDP camps. Some noted that the ones they knew of in their communities were not involved in direct combat and/or they have renounced their membership. However, some respondents said they did not know of any children because they would not be allowed into their community and are instead handed over to security forces; they are believed to be in detention.

The challenges of reintegration were noted by the majority of respondents. Stigma and distrust were common, even where children had renounced their membership. Being a child did not seem to diminish these negative perceptions. Overwhelmingly participants believed that the children would not be welcomed back into their communities.

“Regardless of whether the child is under 18 the perception of the community in terms of discrimination or stigmatization remains the same. So long as your name is associated with Boko Haram”.

KII with Community Leader 1, Damaturu, Yobe State

“We don’t allow them in the community, because it is not possible to join the group and later quit”.

KII with CJTF member 3 Maiduguri, Borno State, 1 April 2016

“They are not welcomed. These are people that killed or are accomplices in the murder of the people in the communities. There is no way they can be accommodated in the communities”.

KII with CJTF Male Leader from Bama, Borno state, 2 April, 2016

However, the age of the child was perceived to make a difference by some respondents, with younger children more readily accepted because they are seen as having been forced or manipulated.

“Those who are young it is easier to believe that they enter ignorantly than the matured ones who people will actually believe they say they wanted to join; it is easy to accept the smaller ones than the bigger ones”.

KII with Female Government Representative 2 Maiduguri, Borno state, 10 April 2016
Respondents differed in their opinion as to whether families would accept their children back.

“The parents hide them sometimes; a mother is always a mother. The members of the communities hate them so much so that they cannot even enter the public places by any means. Some are rejected by their families because of the fear of being implicated and some will turn them over to security.”
KII with CJTF Women Leader Maiduguri, Borno state, 8 April 2016

“The findings indicate that where children could not go back to their own community, they were forced to go to other communities. Many respondents pointed to the fact that the children were living in fear of members of JAS finding them and killing them. There were some accounts of children also being at risk of violence from CJTF and vigilante groups, which aligns with the drivers cited by respondents for joining CJTF.

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KII with Community Leader 1 Damaturu, Yobe state

If we catch Boko Haram we slaughter them by ourselves; we are not afraid because our parents too were killed in our presence. Sometimes we take them straight to the barrack. Sometimes, when we catch them we don’t normally kill or beat them; first we show them to the parents and they decide whether we should kill them or not. There was an instance when the mother said we should kill the child in her presence. Another one the father said we should kill him in his presence. We tie the suspects down and beat them very well before handing them over to the soldiers. Sometimes the suspect is so beaten up that before he reaches the soldiers he will be in coma.”
KII with CJTF member 1, Maiduguri, Borno state, 2 April 2016

“If they suspect you they don’t spare you. They will beat the person and hand him over to the military”.
KII with female government Representative 1 Maiduguri, Borno state, 6 April 2016

Some respondents believed that boys were able to reintegrate more easily than the girls – girls were perceived to suffer from a negative perception of themselves as well as from the stigma attached to being a victim of sexual violence and especially in giving birth to a child as a result. It was noted that it will be difficult for them to get married.
Experience of Boys during and after Association with CJTF and other Vigilante Groups

While some believe that children associated with CJTF and other vigilante groups are well treated by the groups, compared to their peers with JAS, there were concerns raised with regards to the long term impact of children's association with the groups. There have been cited cases where the children associated with CJTF have been involved in direct attacks on JAS and thus exposed to serious violations and harmful practices including drug abuse.

“We have learned that these children are being given some hard drugs to use before going and confronting JAS”.
KII with government official in Damaturu, Yobe state

“They are small children who do not know their left from right so it is very easy for them to pick up bad habits. They are more prone to maltreatment by the older ones; they have no reason to be there. I don’t know of any positive side or maybe they could be of help to the Civilian JTF on the duty post by buying things for them”
KII with CJTF leader, Maiduguri, Borno state, 2 April 2016

“Yes, actually they were exposed to physical, sexual and emotional violence. Also, their association with the military is very dangerous; they have not attained the age when they can reason for themselves. There is perpetration of sexual harassment in the state ... openly perpetrated by security personnel and they go along with these boys. As such, they are also exposing them”
KII with Community Leader 1, Damaturu, Yobe state

CJTF roles often do not involve much violence and therefore, the children are often shielded from heavy violent conflict roles. Even after they leave the groups; the CJTF are seen as a community asset and therefore, the children are able to seamlessly leave the group and rejoin society. Some feel that the association of the children with CJTF exposes them to all sorts of vices including drugs and to various forms of violence - physical, sexual and emotional violence. Another worrying aspect for some respondents is their association with the military.

Experience of Girls during and after Association with CJTF and other Vigilante Groups

The experiences of girls and boys are different based on the different roles that they play. Boys have been obviously largely exposed to more violent and combat activities compared to girls. For vigilantes, because of the harsh conditions under which they operate sometimes and the presence of the young girls who initially joined them voluntarily, there is sometimes a tendency to also exploit those young girls. Some members of the CJTF do acknowledge that it does not create a positive image for them to be associated with children as this has a long term negative bearing on a child's life and development. There was no indication from the findings that the girls associated with CJTF were being exploited by CJTF members.
Benefits of Association with CJTF and other Vigilante Groups
While adult members of CJTF and vigilante groups do receive benefits, the children associated with them do not receive any benefits from their association with CJTF and other vigilante groups. The Government does not pay the children salary so it was perceived they are at the mercy of the good will of the older members and depend on the small handouts from them; when they are sent on errands and on the members of the formal security sector that usually assist them with some token amount of money. The members of the 'BOYES' or Borno Youth Employment Scheme are paid a stipend of 15,000 Naira a month. These small children (whether they are boys or girls are not gaining anything from their association and in fact even the tokens they do get once in a while are at the whims and caprices of the CJTF members that are paid and the security agents. The fact that these children are being used without being paid for the services they are providing is in itself exploitation.

Awareness of Boys who have been Associated with CJTF and other Vigilante Groups who have left
There are many children who were associated with CJTF and left. Unlike JAS, it is not difficult to leave CJTF. They all joined voluntarily and therefore can leave at any time. The reasons for their leaving include the relative peace that is returning to states, going back to school, the perceived injustice by government of the discrimination in payment (some CJTF were selected and called “BOYES” and are paid a monthly stipend while the other category – the volunteers, are not being paid.

Many of them; in fact those that joined and decided to quit the group are more than those that are in the group now. The first reason for leaving is because there is victory over Boko Haram. Secondly most of

the children have something doing so they went back doing what they know best. It is not difficult, nobody will force you, you can decide to quit at any given point in time”.

CJTF Male leader, Maiduguri, Borno state, 2 April 2016

Also some parents felt that their children were picking up bad habits such as drug abuse and misuse, smoking and drinking. Also, when they joined they thought it was going to be an ad hoc operation that will not last long but when it became prolonged they left to do other gainful things. Some left because they were not getting any monetary gain.

According to respondents in Adamawa, for vigilantes, nobody has left except those who were dismissed by the group and it is usually announced that such a person has left the group and that anybody that interacts with him will do so personally not in the name of this group.

Experiences of Boys after they have left CJTF and other Vigilante Groups
The experience of children who left CJTF and other vigilante groups is different from those that left JAS. For example, the children joined them voluntarily and with the blessing of community members. When they dissociate, they are able to return to their life pre-JAS. Some of them have gone back to their business; the schools have reopened so many have gone back to school. Respondents overwhelmingly reported that there was no stigmatization or rejection of children who were with CJTF and other vigilante groups. They are welcomed and accepted by the families and communities. In fact, they are still approached when there is an operation especially if the person left on a clean record and is brave and courageous.
Community and other Perceptions of Young People Associated with JAS and CJTF and other Vigilante Groups

The following section focus on community perceptions of children associated with JAS and CJTF/vigilante groups with particular focus on not just how they are viewed but also their acceptability on return to the communities.

Community and other Perceptions of JAS, and the Boys and Girls Associated with them

From across all locations many adjectives have been used to describe children associated with JAS – evil enemies, criminals, evil, bad people, heartless, inhuman, not to be trusted, mad and senseless without rational reasoning, security threat, bad eggs, wrong doers, people fighting for religion, outlaws, saboteurs, traitors, etc.- These adjectives are indications of the hatred the communities have for them and begin to give an insight of the problem that children face as they try to reintegrate. These views are the same for boys and girls.

“The communities are looking at them as criminals and as killers and murderers”.
KII with Youth Leader Maiduguri Maiduguri, Borno state, 30 March 2016

“The communities are not happy about them and in fact are aggrieved about them because of the evil they brought to the society. They are a security threat and where there is unrest, government cannot do development”. The communities, the security forces and the government all view JAS and children associated with them as evil enemies”.
KII with Military Female, Yola, Adamawa state
Findings from the research indicate that girls are viewed more negatively than the boys. A key reason for this is that they were used more in suicide attacks which impacted negatively on communities.

"Girls more at risks and more used for bombing as they are less likely to elicit people’s suspicions."
KII with Representative of FMWASD, Abuja, 9 May 2016

While some respondents indicated that rehabilitation was possible, many indicated that the future of these children will be unknown for some time due to the heavy stigma and ostracism they find themselves subjected to by the community. Unlike CJTF children, respondents mentioned that JAS children often are not lucky enough to be able to leave the group due to the “cult like” quality of the organization. Also, for those that are fortunate enough to either escape or be captured/rescued by the Nigerian military and taken to military locations, the community perceptions of them indicate that they will not have an easy integration into the community if they are able to clear the government review process. Respondents did note that there is an important distinction between whether children are forced to join or they joined willingly; however, most respondents indicated that they will not be able to trust the children and are not sure what kind of future they will have due to high levels of stigma and distrust.

**Perceptions on whether communities support children’s participation in JAS, acceptance and their future**

The general consensus across the locations is that no community supports the participation of children in JAS.

"There is no community that will support that; it was from the initial stage that people misunderstood them thinking that if they kill a..."

KII with CJTF Male Leader Maiduguri, Borno state, 2 April 2016

The findings generally indicate that the communities are averse to accepting any ex JAS member in the communities whether they are children or boys or girls because of both what the children have perpetrated but also because of the danger they may still pose to their communities. Their future is seen as bleak.

"I don’t think they have a future. Their families will not like them to come back whether they are boys or girls because they are seen as threats. They are being perceived as dangerous, no body accepts them because they may do the unthinkable. A Boko Haram child is a potential danger even to the parents. We have heard stories of parents reporting their children who have left Boko Haram and come home to the security agents who take the children away."
KII with Religious Leader male, Adamawa state

"Some people know members of JAS who killed and burnt the houses of their families. They hate them, they even reject them. There is fear from the communities, because they are in doubt of their repentance, whether it is true or not. They perceive them as a threat."
KII with CJTF member 3 Maiduguri, Borno state, 1 April 2016

"When we escaped and first came home, we suffered because nobody believed whatever we said. When I approached one of my uncles he refused to accept me because to him I possessed bombs. So we..."
In about 33% of FGDs across all locations, the respondents felt that there are two categories; those that are core and joined willingly, and those that were forced. Therefore those who were forced to join could be accepted back into communities. This perception was re-echoed by 12% of key informants across all locations.

However, for reintegration to be possible, respondents were clear that there was a need for a proper programme of counseling with appropriate professionals and support to re integrate. In addition, intensive engagement with communities is imperative. However, many respondents (45%) and participants in the validation meeting (90%) felt it is too early to talk about reintegration; the pain is still too much and hence a lot of work has to be done.

Even in the face of community rejection, some respondents (12.5%) believed that families could accept children back and so working with the family will be a critical element of the reintegration process.

“Treatments by the communities may be different from that of the family because by the very nature of African culture, once somebody is your blood you tend to find it easy to let go of so many things, to forget so many things. With the community however it is a different ball game all together. The community takes it harsher on those children who have been involved in Boko Haram. So acceptance into the community may be more difficult than acceptance into the families but there is a need to work for acceptance into the families because that can provide an enabling environment for acceptance into the community because the family is the first element of the community of a society. If somebody is not accepted in the family at all, the possibility of accepting the person in the community is not there. But if somebody is accepted in the immediate family, then with time the community will be able to accept that person if deliberate effort is made towards that. So, the families can be assisted to provide an enabling environment; family may not accept them due to poverty for instance and...
made it difficult to send such a child to school, however if the family can be assisted to provide education to that child, we would have solved the problem which was the causative factor, the predisposition factor that even exposed that child to Boko Haram in the first instance”.
KII with representative of the National Human Rights Commission, Abuja. 20 April 2016

“The community people see them as messiahs as real heroes, they are the heroes of the society. If not because of the Civilian JTF we wouldn’t have been where we are today”.
KII with Female Government Representative 3 Maiduguri, Borno state, 1 April 2016

A few however, view them as drug addicts and miscreants who do not have any work doing and are capitalizing on their membership of CJTF to commit vices that ordinarily will make them culpable.

“There are two perceptions in this respect. There are some that view them as patriotic citizens and thus respect them; and there are those that view them as drug addicts and miscreants. The second camp sees them as redundant people that don’t have any work doing. What they do is, go out to do ‘stop and search’, take their drugs and retire to their respective homes later in the day. They are capitalizing on their membership of the CJTF to commit vices that ordinarily will make them culpable”.
FGD Boys 13 – 17, Respondent 6, from Bama, Borno state, 17 April 2016

There appears to be gender discrimination with the acceptability by community/family. Though there is general stigmatization of children associated with JAS, whether boys or girls for atrocities committed (voluntarily or forced) the girls face more challenges of acceptability than the boys. This is because of the stigmatization associated with the sexual violence they suffered at the hands of JAS; the girls abducted by JAS have experienced sexual violence and when they returned to their communities as a result of rescue by the military, some of them came back pregnant eliciting more stigmatization from the communities who see them as carrying pregnancy for JAS members and mothers of potential JAS members. For the girls that come back pregnant, it is triple jeopardy – suffering from the trauma of sexual violence in JAS camp, pregnant through no fault of theirs and rejection by the community. But as reported by International Alert and UNICEF (2016)¹⁹, the girls may be accepted but not the children because of the bad genes inherited from their JAS fathers.

Community and Perceptions of CJTF and other vigilante groups and boys and girls associated with them
Respondents reported that communities see CJTF and other vigilante groups as having brought peace to Maiduguri and are working to ensure that normalcy returns to the affected states. Various positive adjectives were used for children associated with them - messiahs, heroes used by God to save the people, patriotic citizens, partners/colleagues of the military and security actors etc. There were no differences in perceptions of boys and girls, both of whom were highly appreciated and respected by them.

Perception of Children who Leave CJTF and other Vigilante Groups; whether Communities will have any Problems with Child Members of these Groups Returning to the Community
Overwhelmingly, respondents believed that children associated with CJTF and vigilante groups could return. In fact, most had remained in their communities and with their families while part of CJTF and the other vigilante groups.

“The CJTF is something that was developed by the community itself as a self-defense mechanism, as a survival strategy. So, already the community is well predisposed to the CJTF as well as the children who are associated with them. So the question of not accepting them does not arise; they have never been seen to do anything against the will of the community, nor at any point in time were they disconnected from their communities”.
KII with CJTF Member 4 Maiduguri, Borno state, 2 April 2016

“The community doesn’t have any problem with such a child. They are respected in as much they were not delisted for any wrongdoing. The organization is voluntary, now that the child has got another activity that he or she wants to engage in, his or her wishes must be respected”.
KII with Community Leader Bama, Borno state, 9 April 2016

“People will look at them as normal children. The only people that the community will be having fear of and problems with are the people that joined Boko Haram or sided with them. Anybody that volunteered to help the community will not be looked at with a bad eye. They don’t have problems with anybody in the community except the people that are siding Boko Haram”.
KII with Security personnel 2, Damaturu, Yobe state

However, concern is being raised on the overbearing attitude of some children who have left. This development underscores the need for rehabilitation even for children associated with CJTF and other vigilante groups. It is so easy to take for granted that they have not witnessed much violence as some respondents have indicated. But their exposure to drug use and misuse, combined with the authority given to them at the check points, lead to intoxication of power and this portends danger for the children themselves and the society at large.
Various reasons were given for the appropriateness of the 18 years - those below 18 are too young to join as they cannot reason rationally; when a child is 18 years that child at least would have finished secondary school of which he/she will be a bit matured and less prone to being negatively influenced by the activities of those with whom they are associated. The same minimum age and reasons for setting that age was given for boys and girls.

However, with regards to vigilante groups like the hunters in Adamawa state, children are born and grow into it but if you are joining from outside you must be 18 and above.

“Some children were born in it, I mean they inherited from their parents like me, in such a case, even a small child can join, but for anybody who would like to join and did not inherit, he must reach maturity age. It is the same for both boys and girls”.
KII with Vigilante member 2 Yola, Adamawa state

“Before there was no problem with the communities, but recently we have started receiving reports of some few members that are smokers and drunkard who have started misbehaving, some implementing new laws and rules”.
KII with CJTF Male Leader Maiduguri, Borno state, 2 April 2016

When these children when they came back they felt like they were superior to everybody. So they try to even molest other people in the community and do things that are not good. For example, there was one boy that sometimes collected money from community members promising that he will release those people that were captured or those that were been arrested by the security people. So sometimes it becomes problem.
KII with Vigilante Member, Damaturu, Yobe state

“Community perception on appropriate age for children to join CJTF and other vigilante groups
Eighteen (18) years is the most popular minimum age cited by respondents as the appropriate age for children joining CJTF and other vigilante groups. Those that are below 18 are too young to join. They cannot reason rationally”.
KII with CJTF member 3 Bama, Borno state, 3 April 2016
Impacts of membership of JAS on children associated with them

Association with JAS has only negative impact on the children – on their health, their education, their rights and dignity and their safety because CJTF are always hunting for them. Membership affects them physically and emotionally. According to findings, there is a perception that membership destroys their lives; makes them useless in the society with no good morals; and denies them their childhood, parental care, freedom and social amenities. In the area of education, respondents were of the view that JAS as a concept does not recognize western education. So the first victim of any child associated with JAS is the inability to further his or her education. This is a major loss for any child who is involved with JAS. Children associated with JAS have lost their innocence and are exposed to violence; they would have been involved in violence in all its forms. Such a child is not going to value human life because he would have witnessed violence in all ramifications, including scenes of devastation of human life to an extent that it will no longer mean anything to them. Such children would also be disposed to the possibility of becoming suicide bombers. Most people that have been used as suicide bombers are children.

“They are no longer normal children; they behave somehow and are always scared, by mere seeing them you will know that they are passing through trauma; they are not as normal as a children should be”.

KII with Female Government Representative I Maiduguri, Borno State, 6 April 2016

“Theyir physical and mental health will change completely from the normal person. You know, when they take a child to participate, they don’t give any formal education to that child. What they will just teach the child is violence, how to shoot, how to kill and to carry out suicide bombing and what have you. So a Boko Haram

Nigeria Stability and Reconciliation Programme/2016
child is a potential danger to the society. So even if that child comes back to the society I don't think the child will be accepted because the community may think that this particular child cannot be integrated back to the society because [they been] brainwashed by the activities of Boko Haram and the trauma and the training that that child received”.

KII with Ward Head, Damaturu, Yobe state

“Boko Haram as a concept does not recognize western education. So the first victim of any child associated with Boko Haram is inability to further his or her education. There is no known mechanism through which Boko Haram educates people in their fold not to talk of children. And from inception, Boko Haram is a revolt against Western education and even Arabic education. There is no known information that Boko Haram gives any of their members like children or adults any form of Arabic education. That is the major loss for any child who is involved Boko Haram”.

KII with CJTF member 4 Maiduguri, Borno state, 2 April 2016

With regard to the children's rights under JAS, the respondents were of the view that the children have no rights as all the rights of the children enshrined in the CRA are violated. CRA was passed in 2003 at the national level and 24 states; no state in the north east of Nigeria has passed the Lord law. The views of a few respondents on these are captured succinctly below:

“The children in the midst of Boko Haram people do not have any rights. There is no guarantee that necessities are provided for them; clothing, food and so on and so forth. There is no guarantee that they have a voice and they can express themselves. Of course, they are already in prison

KII with representative of National Human Rights Commission, Abuja on 20 April 2016

because their liberty is gone. Of course, they have no dignity because their conscience is already bastardized and their right to education is denied. So they don't have any rights. They just do what Boko Haram wants or their masters want them to do. And those things they want them to do hardly recognise their rights”.

KII with representative of National Human Rights Commission, Abuja on 20 April 2016

“They cannot go to school and anyway there is even no school to go to which means that development in that area will be stunted. Health wise, they live in the bush, an unhealthy environment and for sure no matter what they eat, they will eat in a hurry and not in a relaxed manner and what will they be eating in the bush? It is like a warfront so they are not safe; they can be used as bombers and can fall to the bullets. There are no rights because if they have rights they won't be there but in school. They have no dignity either”.

KII with representative of Federal Ministry for Women Affairs and Social Development, Abuja on 9 May 2016

Impact of Recruitment and Use on Children Associated with CJTF

More than 70% of interviews in the KII across all locations mentioned the negative impact on the children's education, as they are not going to school. Although it was noted that schools were closed in many areas until recently. The impact of not going to school was highlighted with respondents perceiving that these children will become future delinquents, criminals and even the future Boko Haram.

“It has negative impact on education, physical and mental health; also it has negative impact on safety and social acceptance”.

KII with female government official 2, Yola, Adamawa state
“They are small children who do not know their left from right so it is very easy for them to pick up bad habits. They are more prone to maltreatment by the older ones; they have no reason to be there. I don’t know of any positive side or maybe they could be of help to the Civilian JTF on the duty post by buying things for them. Education wise if they hang around the Civilian JTF they don’t go to school but then the schools are closed down so they have to hang around the Civilian JTF”.  
KII with female government representative, Maiduguri, Borno state, 4 April 2016

“We have learned that these children are being given some hard drugs to use before going and confronting Boko Haram. So by using these hard drugs, they may be losing a lot of things. So it has a negative impact on the children - both the boys and the girls”.  
KII with Government Official, Damaturu, Yobe state

The impact of participation in the fighting on physical and mental health was highlighted. They are killed in combat and are also being hunted by CJTF as well as members of JAS.

“Also, in addition to the risks of being killed in combat, one respondent highlighted that just as the members of CJTF are hunting for the members of JAS so also the members of JAS are hunting for the members of CJTF”.  
KII with Female LGA Official, Bama, Borno state, 2 April 2016

A few respondents however, feel that there is no negative impact of CJTF membership on children associated with them and see some positive development - employment without any formal qualifications: Some respondents also point to the fact that children only participated when they were not in school or were not enrolled in school.
ACCOUNTABILITY OF CHILDREN FOR CRIMES COMMITTED WHILE ASSOCIATED WITH ARMED GROUPS

With regards to accountability of children for crimes committed while associated with JAS, there are five schools of thought on this – the first is that everyone who has ever been associated with JAS must be held accountable for their actions whether it is a child or a girl or a boy.

“Any child that joined Boko Haram should not be spared and cannot be allowed among members of the public”
KII with CJTF member 1, Maiduguri, Borno state, 2 April 2016

The second is that there are two types of JAS; those that joined willingly and are the core members of JAS and those that were forced or deceived into it. For this latter category, they are of the view that they should be pardoned and after rehabilitation should be reintegrated. Found in this school of thought are 16% key informants across all locations

“It depends on how he joined, those who joined willingly should be held responsible, but for those who were forced should not be held responsible. They are not responsible, because they were overcome by the JAS, and all they have done was not willingly, they were forced to do it. For children, no, because they are still young, they have no independent mind and they follow what adults tell them to do”.
KII with Police, Youth Leader, Vigilante 1 and NAWOJ representative, Adamawa state

The third school of thought is that these are children and should not be held accountable and their being held accountable would mean a redefinition of who a child is and anyone who holds children accountable must himself/herself be re-examined.

“Children by their definition are those not able to take rational decisions for which they can be held accountable. Even for those ones that one may say joined JAS voluntarily, what is their rational capacity to be held accountable? If children are held accountable for their actions, then they have been redefined as children; the definition of children then will become questionable because the term children is associated with innocence, not being able to take rational decisions for which they can be held accountable. Anyone who holds children accountable must himself/herself be re-examined”.
KII with representative of Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution, Abuja, 6 April 2016

To me any child that is below the age of eighteen and he was found in the group of Boko Haram should be considered as somebody that should not be treated like an adult. They have to consider the national laws that considered the right of the children who are below the adult age so they should not be responsible for adult actions. What they need is rehabilitation”.
KII with Community Leader 2, Damaturu, Yobe state

These views are in consonant with that of the Paris Principles – Principles and Guidelines on Children associated with Armed Forces and Armed Groups, that children who are accused of crimes under international law allegedly committed while they were associated with armed
forces or armed groups should be considered primarily as victims of offences against international law; not only as perpetrators. They must be treated in accordance with international law in a framework of restorative justice and social rehabilitation, consistent with international law which offers children special protection through numerous agreements and principles.

The fourth school of thought is of the view that accountability would depend on the nature of the offence and recognized that for heinous crimes children should be held accountable. Those in this school of thought opined that the whole component of transitional justice is so critical that it must be addressed as part of the recovery programme from the JAS insurgency.

“However, in addressing transitional justice, the role of different individuals, groups etc., needs to be critically looked at and how you address it whether they are underage or not. Underage, depending on the role they play. Even in regular situations, there are certain crimes that under 18 people are tried as adults in regular courts. Certain crimes might be so heinous and the way it has been carried out, is such that the court rules that those juveniles would be tried as adults and convicted as adults. In most other cases, they will be tried as juveniles. In this situation too, whatever transitional justice mechanism is put in place will determine how to handle the underage if when established as underage depending on the role they would have played”.
KII with representative of Victim Support Fund, Abuja, 24 March 2016

This lone view re-echoes section 3.6 of the Paris Principles: Children who are accused of crimes under international law allegedly committed while they were associated with armed forces or armed groups should be considered primarily as victims of offences against international law; not only as perpetrators. They must be treated in accordance with international law in a framework of restorative justice and social rehabilitation, consistent with international law which offers children special protection through numerous agreements and principles.

The above view however has not taken into cognizance the Paris Principle Section 3.7 that states that wherever possible, alternatives to judicial proceedings must be sought, in line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other international standards for juvenile justice.

The fifth school of thought in which there is only a respondent is that these children are themselves victims of JAS.

“They are themselves victims of JAS with complete disorientation in all the areas – education, perception of life. They become people requiring special help; children generally require help but these ones require special help which only professionals can give”.
KII with Representative of Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution, Abuja, 6 April 2016

AVAILABILITY AND EFFORTS FOR SUPPORTING CHILDREN ASSOCIATED WITH ARMED GROUPS

Efforts by Communities, Government and Security Actors to Prevent and Respond to Children’s Association with JAS

At the start of the conflict, respondents highlighted that communities were not ready to do anything and in fact were even encouraging JAS when they started killing policemen; they were laughing and jubilating. Another reason given for the initial reluctance of communities and encouragement of children to join JAS was the ignorance of the people concerning laws and regulations against using children in armed conflicts. But when the insurgency escalated, respondents stated that communities and the government became afraid to do anything for fear of being killed.

“I must confess that no effort to prevent recruitment was made. We were all afraid of the repercussion of being identified as someone that is preventing children from joining the group. The members will just assassinate you when they get to know that you are preventing people from joining the group”.
KII with Government Official 1 from Bama, Borno state, 6 April 2016

Though this fear exists, many respondents see CJTF as the response that was taken by community to combat JAS and thereby preventing children from joining the group.

Corruption at the level of the ward heads was thought to be constraining the response from some communities.

“The ward heads are not on salary so are susceptible to any financial inducements even from nefarious and dubious characters and even strangers, and in so doing, members of Boko Haram have been harbourred and later on perpetrated havoc within the communities”.
KII with Vigilante Male, Yola, Adamawa state

The Government was perceived by 16% respondents from Maiduguri, Bama and Yobe to have had a lukewarm attitude towards the issue of the insurgency and did not give support to the security forces. Adamawa did not allude to this issue. This may not be unconnected to the fact that Adamawa state was the last location to have experienced the insurgency and hence may not have witnessed the initial response of government to the emergence of JAS. The lukewarm attitude of government was associated with the essence of a democratic government and the fundamental right to freedom of thoughts, conscience and religion; the religious issue touches the life of all people by the respondents.

“A democratic government does not force anything on the people when it comes to the issue of Islam in Borno State. The government in the first place did not go into the issue directly, because they were thinking this is an Islamic issue; all they were thinking is the right way, you are touching the lives of people”.
KII with Youth Leader, Maiduguri, Borno state, 30 March 2016

Some respondents felt that government tried but unfortunately they did not get support from the communities.

“The government tried its best but the communities frustrated the government’s effort. When the Boko Haram people came, they disguised as preachers admonishing the youths to join in the fight for the establishment of an Islamic state. The government sent Operation Flush to checkmate their activities but the people in the communities did not support the government’s intervention”.
KII with CJTF member 1 from Bama, Borno State, 3 April 2016

22. Interview with female government representative Maiduguri Metropolitan Council, Borno state
Some respondents believe that the attitude of government has changed, as government has become more proactive in creating awareness on the dangers and consequences of children joining JAS.

"Government has tried because it uses media like Radio and TV, to enlighten people about the dangers of associating with JAS. But this sensitization is not enough it should increase. Again government has been posting the pictures of members of Boko Haram that were killed on the social media. This has minimized the desire of children to join the group. People don't want to die. Even those that are in the group will prefer fleeing the group".

FGD with boys 13 – 17 years, Respondent 1, from Bama, Borno state, 17 April 2016

Concerning the security actors, views were similar to those on government — they are not doing anything to stop the children

"The security forces are doing nothing to stop these children, they only prosecute those that have been caught".

KII with Male Leader CJTF, Maiduguri, Borno state, 2 April 2016

However, some feel that the security actors are trying also but they are not getting support from the communities. This lack of cooperation from the communities may not be unconnected with the fear of the identities of those assisting security actors being revealed.

"As the crisis continued the people in the community became apprehensive about revealing some information to the military so as to make them checkmate children joining the group but they were afraid that their identity could be revealed thus endangering their lives."

KII with Community Leader 1, Damaturu, Yobe state

Some respondents are of the view that the security actors under the present administration have become more proactive especially in rescuing those that are held captives by the group.

The security actors under the present administration have become more proactive especially in rescuing those that were held captives by the group and are technically able to screen out those who joined willingly from those who joined by force.

KII with Community Leader 1, Damaturu, Yobe state

Efforts by Communities, Government and Security Actors to Prevent and Respond to Children’s Association with CJTF and Other Vigilante Groups

CJTF is a community emanated initiative and so communities did not do anything to prevent it, rather they encouraged it for their own protection so you will not hear of any parents or community member that will stop any child from joining because if you dare you will be seen as a member of JAS.

"Actually in the community you will not hear of any parents or community member that stopped a child from joining the Civilian JTF, if you dare it that means you are also a Boko Haram member. For government, normally, if we are going for patrol the government usually removed children and returned them to the town to take care of things or put things in order, but government have never tried to stop children from joining Civilian JTF. Security forces are even the ones that encourage children to join the Civilian JTF”

KII with CJTF Member 1, Maiduguri, Borno state, 2 April 2016
Thus, there is also an element of coercion as any attempt at preventing children from joining would be tantamount to support for JAS; such families and children are forced to remain in CJTF. It is the belief of the respondents that it is only when peace has returned to the states that children will stop joining CJTF and other vigilante groups.

**Awareness of Support Services that are Available for Children after Dissociation with JAS**

Support services are critical for children who have been associated with armed groups whether JAS or CJTF/Vigilante groups as this will enable them to adjust and become normal and functional members of the society.

“Anybody leaving JAS and the CJTF must have had a traumatic experience. And trauma is troubling. So there is need to subject them to some psycho-social assistance, to some trauma counselling. There is certainly need to support people who have left these armed groups and also try to deal with those issues because traumatic experience for a young person if not properly handled well, can only make such a child hate society in the future and create more problems for law enforcement and communities.”

KII with representative of Federal Ministry for Women Affairs and Social Development, Abuja. 9 May 2016.

Unfortunately, 54% of key informants across all locations are not aware of support services for children after disassociation with JAS. Only a few respondents (18%) mention government programmes such as the rehabilitation centre in Kaduna where 371 children were taken to for rehabilitation and the recently established ‘Safe Corridor’ programme headquartered in Gombe. This may have implications for the reintegration of the children into their communities; if people are not aware of government support especially in terms of de-radicalization and other rehabilitation programmes, the fear of JAS children indicated in other sections of this report may continue to be a hindrance to the re-integration process.

“There is a de-radicalization project of the Office of the National Security Adviser (ONSA) that was supposed to be addressing issues of de-radicalization. But whether these are people who left voluntarily or not, there are those who have been recovered from BH. ONSA moved this group which included a lot of children including a lot of underage children to Kaduna”.

KII with representative of Victim Support Fund, Abuja, 24 March 2016

The Defence HQ this morning was talking about a Safe Corridor project for such children. It will be important to use such defectors to get to the mind of the JAS people. Such stories will help to achieve further definition if properly handled.

KII with representative of Institute for Peace and Conflict Resolution, Abuja. 6 April 2016

Yes, de-radicalization is being done by the military and the government with NGOs and other support groups. Yes, they are aware. Yes, they participate in psychological support. More is required to meet the needs of the children.

KII with female representative of Human Rights Organization, Maiduguri, Borno state

Though respondents mentioned these programmes, the true situation of these programmes needs to be ascertained. For example, the rehabilitation centre in Kaduna is no longer operational. The Nigerian Government through the defence headquarters in line with the federal government’s commitment to the fight against insurgency in the North East and in furtherance of its efforts to rehabilitate and re-integrate surrendered and repentant JAS members established the Operation Safe Corridor in April 2016. The focus of this centre is the rehabilitation and the re-integrating of repentant and surrendered JAS members back into normal life in the society. The program comprises various vocational training with a view to empowering them for meaningful contribution to the economic...
growth of the country. However, awareness on the existence of this programme and what it entails is quite low especially among the respondents at the state/community levels and this has serious implications for the reintegration of children who have been associated with JAS.

Apart from those by Federal Government mentioned above, some others at the state level were also mentioned by respondents;

In the barracks they are given help - money for capital and some yards of clothing are given to them after investigation shows that they are not Boko Haram. They know about it; some have even started their business. Those in our area have all received help but I do not know of others. They consider the boys more than the girls.
KII with CJTF Female Leader, Maiduguri, Borno State, 8 April 2016

Sometimes NGOs come to the aid of these children in different ways to give them some skill acquisition and small jobs to help them sustain themselves. It’s now that they are telling us the government wants to take them back to school; most of these boys are in the camps so the government should note their list because most of these children do not have parents.
KII with Women Representative, Maiduguri, Borno State, 31 March 2016

According to 4% of the respondents from Maiduguri and Yobe, NGOs sometimes come to the aid of these children in different ways to give them some skill acquisition and small jobs to sustain themselves; the international non-governmental organizations help those children associated with armed groups in terms of sensitization, de-radicalization, capacity development and cash-based transfers so that they have money to buy food and engage themselves in some activities that will keep them busy.

“There is profiling going on during which many suspects are questioned, trying to find out what they know about the Boko Haram as well as trying to deconstruct their minds so as to once more start to live like children, to start thinking in their innocent way; trying to erase the bad experiences they have had with Boko Haram and at the same time look at those things that predispose them to joining the Boko Haram; whether it is economic, lack of going to school, poverty; lack of food and things like that. The profiling process helps to bring out all that and helps to know how to deal with the particular problems of every child”
KII with representative of Federal Ministry for Women Affairs and Social Development, Abuja. 9 May 2016

Awareness of Support Services which are Available to Children after Dissociation with CJTF and other Vigilante Groups

There were varied views on the support services available for children who have left CJTF and other vigilante groups. Even if available, people are not aware of it. Some respondents said there is assistance from the public, especially during the Ramadan period but nothing from government. The small children are not members of CJTF or other vigilante groups but they are appreciated for what they are doing and so given something once in a while. Where support was given, respondents feel that it is not enough and government should do more. Both boys and girls were beneficiaries of such assistance.
“There are some that were given support to go back to school to gain employment and trade. The support was for both boys and girls but the government could do better. The ones that did not benefit are more than those that benefitted from the support services. So these people need assistance, especially jobs, their gender notwithstanding”.
KII with CJTF Male Leader from Bama, Borno state, 2 April 2016

A few respondents in Borno state mentioned the programmes by the Borno State Ministry of Poverty Alleviation and Youth Empowerment to cater for youths associated with armed groups and youths generally; the federal government programme for young people through the CBN and through the Bank of Agriculture, Borno State Micro Finance Bank with a financial facility of 2 billion Naira for building the capacity of youths for economic activities. The status of these programmes needs to be ascertained to ensure that their purposes are being attained.
The present study has raised issues of concern with children associated with armed groups, from the pathways of association, through experiences within these groups and after dissociation with the groups, community perception of such children and the problems the communities will have with such children returning and possible implications for the social re-integration within their communities, impact of membership on children and accountability of the children for crimes they committed while with the armed group as well as support services available to them after dissociation. Based on these findings, the following recommendations have been made. Some of these recommendations emanated from the respondents in all the locations and from experts at the validation meetings.

Manipulative Ideology and Promoting Provocative Preaching
- The Nigerian Government should as a matter of urgency reactivate the Boards for regulation of preaching or establish a new body that will take on the responsibility. This reactivation would involve budgetary allocation and capacity building. This is a pre-emptive measure against future occurrence of similar groups and extremism
- The international community and Development partners should provide the necessary support to the state governments to ensure the proper functioning and impact of the Board to forestall future reoccurrence of violent extremism arising from the preaching of fundamentalism
- Civil Society Organizations should embark on advocacies to elicit the political will from government to reactivate the boards and also be a member of the board
- Community/Religious Leaders should monitor preaching in their communities to identify those who preach provocative and hate messages.

Rehabilitation and Reintegration
The Federal and State Governments should:
- Put in place clear policies and strategies for reintegration of children associated with armed groups (JAS, CJTF and vigilante groups) with a focus on long-term education plan, skills acquisition, job creation and provision of counselling services
- Make clear statements at the highest political level calling for tolerance, acceptance and reintegration
- Establish and fund state level reintegration programmes that provide short, medium and long term support. The programme should comprise transit centres that can support children associated with JAS and prepare them for reintegration following release and rescue.

• Handover all children currently in detention to civilian authorities responsible for the reintegration programme and handover those arrested subsequently within 72 hours of arrest. Develop a handover protocol to govern handover of children.
• Create a cadre of professional counsellors and psychologists who are able to provide support for children in the medium and longer term.
• Engage with communities, especially through religious and community leaders, to promote reintegration of children associated with armed groups. Community engagement needs to form part of wider efforts of reconciliation and peacebuilding. Utilise radio to engage in mass communication to promote tolerance and acceptance.
• Approach reintegration through whole community strategies – where economic empowerment, education, skills acquisition programmes, etc. do not only target those associated with armed groups but benefit communities as a whole. This will mitigate further resentment against JAS members who may be seen as being rewarded for their participation.

• Ensure the specific needs of children associated with CJTF and vigilante groups are met in the wider efforts to demobilise and re-integrate members.
• Create a special office under the Ministry for Reconstruction, Rehabilitation and Resettlement to tackle, rehabilitate and re-integrate the children associated with armed groups.

Civil Society Organizations should:
• Be involved in training community based trauma counsellors with the support of development partners.
• With support from development partners revive some voluntary organizations such as boys’ scout, girls’ guide, man-o-war, etc. to rekindle the spirit of service and volunteerism.
• Advocacy to policy makers on the need for specific policies and programme for addressing needs of CAAFAG.
• Awareness creation within the communities on peace-building, peaceful coexistence and non-violent approach to victims of conflict and conflict resolution.
• Carry out research on alternative narratives that can counteract the negative ideologies on peace, forgiveness, etc. and develop strategic programme and projects to counter the negative narratives formed by JAS
• Public sensitization and orientation on stigmatization of CAAFAG
• Facilitation of the establishment of community peace partnership comprising community peace actors (Community & Religious Leaders, Youth and Women Leaders, Opinion Leaders, security actors (police, Vigilante, CJTF and local government personnel). Their work will be to mediate in conflicts, promote reconciliation and community security as well as communication between community peace actors and security actors and local government with a view to promoting sustainable peace

Community and Religious Leaders should:
• Sensitize communities on peaceful co-existence among community members
• Encourage community members to accept CAAFAG through love, peace and forgiveness
• Provide special protection for the vulnerable – gender sensitivity, re-orientation of values and norms
• Facilitate formation of community peace partnership
• Facilitate the establishment of community centres/town halls as a place of dialogue on issues that affect the community members to engender the spirit of oneness
• Establish door to door and family to family dialogues between host communities and displaced persons to promote culture of tolerance and harmony
• Be part of the Community Peace Partnership

International Community and Development Partners should:
• Provide technical support to government for the reintegration programme and assist in the development of the policy and strategy on reintegration
• Ensure coordination of resources for reintegration, including for survivors of conflict related sexual violence and linkages are made with other relevant programmes such as peace-building, livelihoods, education etc.
• Provide support for the implementation of the reintegration strategy and programme, including technical support for the capacity building to create a cadre of psychologists and counsellors
• Support the establishment of community radios for the purposes of creating awareness on these programmes and discuss issues of peaceful co-existence, peace, leadership and share experiences and good practices.
• Share best practices on rehabilitation of children associated with armed groups, with the Nigerian Government as they embark on their rehabilitation programme.
• Support the development of a Handover Protocol for children detained by Armed Forces
• Support training for the Nigerian Armed Forces and Civilian Joint Task Force on child protection, the handover protocol and children’s rights
• Support government’s economic empowerment programme for parents
• Support Community Peace Partnership activities such as capacity building, mediation and communication

Immediate Separation of Children During Future Demobilization and Disarmament of CJTF
Children associated with CJTF must be prioritised and considered as part of the formal future disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) programme;
• Government should embark on programmes that will identify, document and separate all children during the disarmament and demobilisation of CJTF. Children should not be integrated into regular security forces during integration of CJTF members.
• Development Partners should provide technical and financial resources to facilitate separation of children from the formal DDP programme while ensuring that they benefit from the reintegration assistance when they are back in their communities.
• Community leaders together with CSOs should sensitize community members on the need to support return and reintegration of children formerly associated with armed groups.
• Government should establish an independent institution at federal and state levels with a specific mandate and overarching accountability on DDRR programmes and activities and a child protection department should be created within such institutions.
Gender Specific Recommendations

Federal and State Governments should:

• Ensure that counselling for victims of sexual violence is a key component of Government's reintegration programme.
• Review, revise and implement the National and Borno State Action Plan on UNSCR 1325. The Borno state government should make budgetary allocation for the implementation of Borno State Action Plan
• Develop state action plans for Adamawa and Yobe states
• Set up a state steering committee for the implementation of Borno State Action Plan comprising the line ministries and other key stakeholders

International Community and Development Partners should:

• Support the process of review and development of the new NAP for SC1325 and the review, development and implementation of state level action plans
• Civil Society Organizations with support from development partners should:
• Facilitate the establishment of an 'Anti-discrimination, Anti-stigmatization and re-integration committee at the community level to work to change the negative mind-set of members of communities towards ex-JAS children. The work of the proposed committee would be the sensitization of the communities on government's programme on de-radicalization and rehabilitation, issues of love and forgiveness. Their work generally would be geared towards preparing the communities to be favourably disposed to accepting children associated with JAS back into their various communities.
• Create safe spaces for women and girls impacted by conflict related sexual violence, to share their experiences

Accountability of Children Associated with JAS and Responsibility for Crimes Committed while with them

The Federal Government should:

• Seek alternatives to judicial proceedings in line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other international standards for juvenile justice
• Encourage state governments in northeast Nigeria to domesticate the Child Right Law

Civil Society Organizations should:

• Advocate and lobby for the domestication of the Child Right Law in northeast Nigeria
• Be involved in creating awareness on the CRA and Paris Principle and training of the security actors on the content and operationalization of the above instruments

Development Partners should:

• Provide both technical and financial support for the above activities
## ACRONYMS

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<th>BH</th>
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