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SYNERGY IN SECURITY: EVALUATING THE EFFICACY OF COLLABORATIVE STRATEGIES EMPLOYED BY THE ARMED FORCES OF NIGERIA IN COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMISM

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Abstract

In the face of evolving security threats, the Armed Forces of Nigeria (AFN) stand at a critical juncture, where the echoes of gunfire meet the whispers of diplomacy. This study delves into the heart of Nigeria's counter-extremism efforts, examining the AFN's journey from traditional military approaches to a symphony of collaborative strategies. Through an extensive literature review, the study unravels the tapestry of stakeholder engagement woven by the AFN in their quest to combat violent extremism. This research navigates the complex terrain of Nigeria's security landscape, exploring how the AFN has transformed from a lone sentinel to a conductor of a diverse orchestra of stakeholders. It analyses key initiatives such as the National Security Strategy and the National Action Plan for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism, viewing them as scores that guide this intricate performance of national security. The study reveals a narrative of progress punctuated by persistent challenges. It found that while the AFN has successfully harmonized efforts with civil society, religious leaders, and international partners, discordant notes of mistrust and resource constraints continue to resonate. The analysis uncovers the delicate balance the AFN must maintain – striking a chord between military might and community engagement, between national sovereignty and international collaboration. Emerging from our review is a portrait of an armed force in transition, learning to wield soft power alongside hard power. The study identifies innovative practices where the AFN has successfully bridged divides, creating unexpected alliances in the fight against extremism. However, we also highlight the unfinished symphony – areas where the collaboration falls short of its potential. This study contributes to the growing body of literature on military transformation in the face of asymmetric threats. By examining the AFN's collaborative strategies, it provides insights applicable not only to Nigeria but to armed forces globally grappling with similar security challenges. As the AFN continues to compose its response to violent extremism, this research offers both a reflection on its current performance and a prelude to future harmonies in national security efforts.

Keywords Synergy in Security, Collaborative Strategies, Armed Forces of Nigeria, Counter Extremism.

INTRODUCTION

The landscape of national security has undergone a profound transformation in the 21st century, necessitating a shift from traditional, compartmentalized approaches to more collaborative and inclusive strategies. This evolution is particularly evident in the realm of counter-extremism, where the complex nature of threats demands innovative solutions. The Global Terrorism Index 2023 highlights this changing paradigm, reporting a 9% decrease in terrorism-related deaths globally, yet an increase in the number of countries experiencing attacks (Institute for Economics & Peace, 2023). This paradoxical trend underscores the need for adaptive and cooperative approaches to security challenges. Historically, national security was viewed primarily as the purview of government agencies, particularly military and intelligence organizations. However, recent decades have witnessed a significant shift in this perspective. The recognition that security threats, especially those related to extremism, are often deeply rooted in social, economic, and political factors has led to a more holistic understanding of security (Crelinsten, 2021). This evolving viewpoint has paved the way for the involvement of a broader range of stakeholders in national security efforts.

several countries have implemented innovative strategies to engage diverse stakeholders in enhancing national security. In the United States, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has been at the forefront of promoting a "whole-of-society" approach to countering violent extremism. The DHS's Office for Targeted Violence and Terrorism Prevention (OTVTP) collaborates closely with local communities, non-governmental organizations, and the private sector to develop and implement prevention programs (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2022). This collaborative model has shown promise in addressing the root causes of extremism and fostering community resilience.

The United Kingdom has also embraced a multi-stakeholder approach through its CONTEST counter-terrorism strategy. The strategy's 'Prevent' pillar focuses on stopping people from becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism and involves collaboration between government agencies, local authorities, and community organizations (HM Government, 2018). This approach has led to the establishment of local Prevent partnerships across the country, facilitating information sharing and coordinated interventions. Australia's Living Safe Together program exemplifies another collaborative approach to countering violent extremism. The initiative brings together government agencies, community groups, and individuals to build community resilience and support those at risk of radicalization (Australian Government, 2020). By fostering partnerships and sharing resources, the program aims to create a more comprehensive and effective response to extremism.

Empirical evidence supports the effectiveness of collaborative approaches. A study by Stephens et al. (2019) found that multi-agency partnerships in counter-extremism efforts led to improved information sharing, better-coordinated interventions, and more comprehensive support for at-risk individuals. Similarly, research by Vermeulen (2020) highlighted the positive impact of community engagement in preventing radicalization, noting that such approaches can enhance trust between communities and authorities, thereby improving the overall effectiveness of counter- extremism strategies. However, implementing collaborative approaches is not without challenges. Issues such as information sharing barriers, conflicting priorities among stakeholders, and the need for clear

governance structures can impede effective collaboration (Cherney and Hartley, 2017). Addressing these challenges requires careful planning, clear communication, and a commitment to shared goals among all involved parties.

In the context of Nigeria, the need for collaborative approaches to national security is particularly acute. The country faces a complex array of security challenges, including the ongoing insurgency by Boko Haram and its offshoots, inter-communal conflicts, and separatist movements. According to the Nigeria Security Tracker, over 57,000 people have died in violence related to Boko Haram alone since 2011 (Council on Foreign Relations, 2023). These multifaceted threats underscore the necessity for a more inclusive and comprehensive approach to national security. Nigeria has made some strides in adopting collaborative strategies for national security. The National Counter Terrorism Strategy (NACTEST), revised in 2016, emphasizes the importance of a whole-of- society approach in combating terrorism and extremism (Office of the National Security Adviser, 2016). The strategy calls for increased cooperation between government agencies, civil society organizations, and local communities in prevention, preparedness, and response efforts.

The federal government's efforts to address these multifaceted security challenges have included military operations, policy initiatives, and attempts at stakeholder engagement. However, these efforts have often been criticized for being reactive rather than proactive, and for failing to adequately engage local communities and other key stakeholders (Tar and Bala, 2022). The National Security Strategy (NSS) of 2019 represents a shift towards a more comprehensive approach to security, acknowledging the need for multi-stakeholder collaboration. However, implementation challenges persist, particularly in harmonizing efforts across different levels of government and between state and non-state actors (Office of the National Security Adviser, 2019). Therefore, Nigeria's security challenges, while daunting, also present an opportunity for innovative, collaborative approaches to national security. By fostering genuine stakeholder engagement, addressing root causes, and leveraging diverse expertise and resources, Nigeria can work towards a more secure and stable future. The success of these efforts will have significant implications not just for Nigeria, but for regional and global security as well.

One of the primary issues driving this research is the persistent reliance on traditional, state-centric approaches to national security, which often fail to address the root causes of extremism and violent conflicts. Akpan and Ekanem (2021) argue that this over-reliance on military solutions has proven inadequate in addressing Nigeria's security challenges, with the Boko Haram insurgency continuing to pose a significant threat despite years of military intervention. The Global Terrorism Index 2023 reports that Nigeria remains one of the countries most impacted by terrorism, ranking 8th globally (Institute for Economics & Peace, 2023). This underscores the need for a more comprehensive and collaborative approach to security. Furthermore, Adeola and Oluyemi (2022) highlight that the military-centric approach has led to the alienation of local communities, potentially exacerbating the security situation. The purpose of this paper is therefore to anayse the current collaborative engagement that the Armed Forces of Nigeria (AFN) utilised in ensuring enhanced national security in Nigeria.

Current Stakeholder Engagement in Nigeria's National Security Efforts: A Focus on Counter-Extremism Strategies

The complex security landscape in Nigeria, characterized by persistent threats from extremist groups such as Boko Haram and the Islamic State

West Africa Province (ISWAP), has necessitated a multifaceted approach to national security. Central to this approach is the engagement of various stakeholders in counter-extremism strategies. This section critically examines the current state of stakeholder engagement in Nigeria's national security efforts, with a particular emphasis on counter-extremism strategies.

Stakeholder engagement in Nigeria's counter-extremism efforts involves a wide range of actors, including government agencies, civil society organizations, religious leaders, traditional rulers, international partners, and local communities. The Nigerian government has recognized the importance of a comprehensive approach that goes beyond military interventions to address the root causes of extremism (Akinola, 2022). This recognition has led to the development of various initiatives aimed at fostering collaboration between different stakeholders. One of the key stakeholders in Nigeria's counter-extremism efforts is the Office of the National Security Adviser (ONSA). In 2014, ONSA launched the Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) program, which aims to prevent radicalization and promote deradicalization through a whole-of-society approach (Oyewole, 2020). The program emphasizes the importance of engaging civil society organizations, religious leaders, and local communities in countering extremist narratives and addressing socio- economic grievances that fuel radicalization.

The involvement of civil society organizations (CSOs) in Nigeria's counter-extremism strategies has been significant. CSOs play a crucial role in bridging the gap between the government and local communities, facilitating dialogue, and implementing grassroots initiatives. According to a study by Olojo (2019), CSOs have been instrumental in promoting peace education, interfaith dialogue, and youth empowerment programs in vulnerable communities across Nigeria. However, the study also highlights challenges faced by CSOs, including limited funding, security risks, and sometimes strained relationships with government agencies. Religious leaders have emerged as important stakeholders in Nigeria's counter-extremism efforts, given the religious dimensions of extremist ideologies propagated by groups like Boko Haram. Adegbulu (2021) notes that both Muslim and Christian leaders have been involved in interfaith initiatives aimed at promoting religious tolerance and countering extremist narratives. For instance, the Nigeria Inter-Religious Council (NIREC) has been actively engaged in promoting dialogue between Muslim and Christian communities and advising the government on religious aspects of counter-extremism strategies.

Traditional rulers and community leaders also play a significant role in Nigeria's counter-extremism efforts. These stakeholders often have deep-rooted influence in their communities and can serve as crucial intermediaries between the government and local populations. A study by Ibrahim and Bala (2020) found that traditional rulers in northeastern Nigeria have been involved in early warning systems, conflict resolution mechanisms, and reintegration programs for former extremists. However, the authors also highlight the need for more structured engagement and capacity building for these local leaders.

International partners constitute another important group of stakeholders in Nigeria's counter- extremism strategies. Countries such as the US, UK, and France have provided technical assistance, training, and financial support for Nigeria's counter-extremism efforts. For example, the Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund (GCERF) has supported community-led initiatives in Nigeria aimed at preventing violent

extremism (GCERF, 2022). While international support has been valuable, some critics argue that it sometimes lacks contextual understanding and may inadvertently reinforce problematic power dynamics (Olojo, 2020).

The engagement of local communities in counter-extremism strategies is perhaps one of the most critical aspects of stakeholder involvement. Communities affected by extremist violence are not merely passive recipients of security interventions but active participants in shaping and implementing counter-extremism initiatives. Akinola and Uzodike (2020) argue that community engagement is essential for building trust, gathering intelligence, and developing context-specific interventions. Their study of community policing initiatives in Borno State revealed that when local communities are actively involved in security efforts, there is improved information sharing and better cooperation with security agencies.

Despite the recognition of the importance of stakeholder engagement, significant challenges remain in Nigeria's counter-extremism efforts. One major issue is the lack of coordination among various stakeholders. Ademowo (2021) points out that there is often duplication of efforts and poor information sharing between government agencies, CSOs, and international partners. This lack of coordination can lead to inefficient use of resources and potentially conflicting approaches to counter-extremism.

Another challenge is the issue of trust between stakeholders, particularly between local communities and security agencies. Years of human rights abuses and heavy-handed military operations have eroded trust in many conflict-affected areas. A survey conducted by the Center for Democracy and Development (2021) found that only 32% of respondents in northeastern Nigeria expressed trust in the military's ability to protect them from extremist groups. Rebuilding this trust is crucial for effective stakeholder engagement in counter-extremism efforts.

The inclusivity of stakeholder engagement processes is also a matter of concern. Women and youth, who are often disproportionately affected by extremist violence, are frequently underrepresented in decision-making processes related to counter-extremism strategies. Oluwole (2023) argues that the exclusion of these groups not only undermines the effectiveness of counter-extremism efforts but also reinforces existing inequalities that can fuel extremism. Furthermore, the sustainability of stakeholder engagement initiatives remains a challenge. Many programs rely heavily on external funding and may struggle to maintain momentum once funding cycles end. Akinola (2022) emphasizes the need for more locally-driven and sustainable approaches to stakeholder engagement in counter-extremism efforts.

In terms of the effectiveness of current stakeholder engagement efforts, the evidence is mixed. While there have been some notable successes, such as the surrender of thousands of Boko Haram fighters in 2021 (International Crisis Group, 2022), extremist violence continues to pose a significant threat in parts of Nigeria. A report by the United Nations Development Programme (2023) indicates that while deaths from extremist violence in Nigeria have decreased from their peak in 2014-2015, the geographic spread of attacks has widened, suggesting the need for more comprehensive and adaptive stakeholder engagement strategies.

Statistics from the Nigeria Security Tracker (Council on Foreign Relations, 2023) show that between January 2018 and December 2022, there were over 30,000 deaths related to the Boko Haram insurgency and other forms of extremist violence in Nigeria. This underscores the ongoing

severity of the threat and the need for continued and enhanced stakeholder engagement in counter-extremism efforts. To improve stakeholder engagement in Nigeria's counter-extremism strategies, several recommendations have been proposed by researchers and practitioners. Onapajo (2021) suggests the establishment of a national coordination mechanism for counter-extremism efforts that would bring together representatives from various stakeholder groups. This could help address the current fragmentation and improve information sharing.

Oluwole (2023) recommends the development of more inclusive stakeholder engagement processes, with particular emphasis on increasing the meaningful participation of women and youth in decision-making related to counter-extremism strategies. This could involve setting quotas for representation in relevant committees and task forces, as well as creating dedicated platforms for these groups to contribute their perspectives and experiences.

Ademowo (2021) emphasizes the importance of capacity building for local stakeholders, including CSOs, religious leaders, and traditional rulers. This could involve training in conflict resolution, early warning systems, and community-based approaches to preventing violent extremism. Lastly, there is a need for more rigorous monitoring and evaluation of stakeholder engagement initiatives in counter-extremism efforts. Oyewole (2020) argues that better data collection and analysis could help identify best practices, assess the impact of different approaches, and inform evidence-based policymaking.

While Nigeria has made significant strides in engaging various stakeholders in its counter-extremism strategies, there is still considerable room for improvement. The current state of stakeholder engagement is characterized by a recognition of its importance, diverse initiatives involving multiple actors, but also challenges related to coordination, trust, inclusivity, and sustainability. Moving forward, addressing these challenges and implementing the recommendations proposed by researchers and practitioners will be crucial for enhancing the effectiveness of Nigeria's counter-extremism efforts. As the threat of extremism continues to evolve, so too must the approaches to stakeholder engagement, ensuring that they remain adaptive, inclusive, and responsive to the needs and realities of affected communities.

The collaborative engagements are discussed as follow;

a.   Operation Lafiya Dole and Operation Hadin Kai. Operation Lafiya Dole and Operation Hadin Kai represent significant military initiatives launched by the Nigerian government to combat violent extremism, particularly the threats posed by Boko Haram and the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) in northeastern Nigeria. Operation Lafiya Dole, meaning "Peace by Force" in Hausa, was initiated in 2015 under the leadership of Lieutenant General Tukur Buratai. This operation replaced the previous Joint Task Force Operation Restore Order and aimed to degrade and ultimately defeat Boko Haram through coordinated military action (Onuoha and Oyewole, 2018; Bamidele, 2016).

In April 2021, Operation Lafiya Dole transitioned to Operation Hadin Kai, which translates to "Cooperation" in Hausa. This change signaled a shift in strategy, emphasizing increased collaboration between the military and other security agencies, as well as greater engagement with local communities. The transition was partly in response to the evolving nature of security threats and the recognition of the need for a more comprehensive and coordinated effort (Olaniyan and Akpan, 2022).

Both operations have achieved notable successes in their fight against violent extremism. Operation Lafiya Dole successfully recaptured territories previously held by Boko Haram, particularly in Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa states. The sustained military pressure led to a significant reduction in Boko Haram's operational capabilities and a decrease in the frequency and scale of attacks between 2015 and 2017 (Mahmood and Ani, 2018; Onapajo, 2020). The operation also incorporated elements of civil-military cooperation, which helped in winning the hearts and minds of local populations in some areas (Bamidele, 2016).

Building on these foundations, Operation Hadin Kai has fostered improved coordination between the military and other security agencies, leading to more effective joint operations. Since its launch, there has been a significant increase in the number of Boko Haram fighters surrendering to Nigerian forces. The operation has also placed greater emphasis on engaging local communities, which has led to improved intelligence gathering and early warning systems in some areas (Olaniyan and Akpan, 2022; International Crisis Group, 2022; Akinola, 2022).

Despite these successes, both operations have faced significant challenges. Inadequate equipment, logistical difficulties, and insufficient funding have hampered their effectiveness (Amnesty International, 2018). Allegations of human rights abuses by military personnel have undermined trust between the military and local communities (Human Rights Watch, 2019). The adaptability of extremist groups, particularly the emergence of ISWAP as a formidable threat, has posed ongoing challenges to military operations (Mahmood and Ani, 2018). The vast and often inaccessible terrain of northeastern Nigeria has made it challenging to maintain a consistent military presence and pursue extremist groups (Matfess, 2019). Furthermore, the porous nature

of Nigeria's borders with neighboring countries has allowed extremist groups to move freely across national boundaries, complicating military efforts (Assanvo et al., 2016).

As of 2023, Operation Hadin Kai remains the primary military strategy against violent extremism in northeastern Nigeria. The operation continues to focus on a multi-pronged approach, combining kinetic military action with efforts to win hearts and minds and foster greater collaboration with local communities and other security agencies. Recent developments include an increased use of technology, improved regional cooperation with the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF), and a greater focus on rehabilitation and reintegration programs for surrendered fighters (Olaniyan and Akpan, 2022; Assanvo et al., 2022; International Organization for Migration, 2022).

Both operations have contributed to enhancing Nigeria's national security through their collaborative approaches, albeit with limitations. They have fostered improved coordination among various security agencies and, in some instances, improved intelligence gathering and early warning systems through community engagement. Coordination with the MNJTF has helped address the transnational nature of the threat, although challenges remain (Olaniyan and Akpan, 2022; Akinola, 2022; Assanvo et al., 2022).

However, the effectiveness of these collaborative strategies has been constrained by several factors, including trust deficits between the military and local communities, inadequate resources, and coordination challenges (Matfess, 2019). Both operations have been criticized for their overemphasis on kinetic military action at the expense of addressing root causes of extremism (Akinola, 2022). Insufficient attention to underlying socio-economic grievances that fuel extremism has also limited their effectiveness

(Onapajo, 2021). The inability to effectively secure Nigeria's borders has allowed extremist groups to maintain cross-border sanctuaries and supply lines (Assanvo et al., 2016). Moreover, while efforts have been made to incorporate non-kinetic elements, both operations have been criticized for not being sufficiently integrated with broader political, economic, and social strategies to address extremism (Matfess, 2019).

While Operation Lafiya Dole and Operation Hadin Kai have achieved some successes in the fight against violent extremism in Nigeria, they have fallen short of their ultimate objectives due to a combination of operational, strategic, and contextual challenges. Moving forward, addressing these limitations and adopting a more comprehensive, well-resourced, and rights-respecting approach will be crucial for enhancing the effectiveness of Nigeria's military operations against violent extremism. This may involve greater integration with non-military initiatives, improved community engagement, enhanced regional cooperation, and a sustained focus on addressing the root causes of extremism.

b. National Action Plan for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism: The National Action Plan for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (NAPPCVE) was introduced by the Nigerian government in 2017 as a comprehensive strategy to address the root causes of violent extremism and terrorism in the country. Developed by the Office of the National Security Adviser (ONSA), the plan was a response to the growing threat posed by extremist groups, particularly Boko Haram and its offshoot, the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) (ONSA, 2017). The NAPPCVE's creation was influenced by both domestic experiences and international best practices in countering violent extremism (CVE), aligning with the United Nations Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism and drawing insights

from similar national plans implemented in other countries (Aly, 2015).

The development of the NAPPCVE involved extensive consultations with various stakeholders, including government agencies, civil society organizations, religious leaders, and international partners (Ojewale, 2021). This collaborative approach reflects a shift from a predominantly military-focused strategy to a more holistic one that emphasizes prevention, community resilience, and addressing underlying grievances (Aghedo, 2020). The plan is structured around four key pillars: strengthening institutions and coordination of PCVE programming, enhancing the rule of law and access to justice, building community resilience, and integrating strategic communication in PCVE efforts.

Since its implementation, the NAPPCVE has achieved several notable successes. It has improved coordination among various government agencies and non-governmental stakeholders involved in CVE efforts, reducing duplication and enhancing information sharing (Ademowo, 2021). The plan has also promoted greater involvement of local communities in CVE initiatives, leading to improved trust between communities and security agencies in some areas and enhancing intelligence gathering and early warning systems (Olojo, 2019). Furthermore, the NAPPCVE has facilitated the development of state-level action plans, particularly in the North-East region, allowing for more context-specific interventions (Imam and Abba, 2021). The plan has also supported capacity-building efforts, providing training programs for security personnel, civil society organizations, and religious leaders on CVE strategies and best practices (Onapajo, 2021). Additionally, it has contributed to improved rehabilitation and reintegration efforts for former extremists, such as through Operation Safe Corridor (Felbab-Brown,

2018).

Despite these successes, the NAPPCVE has faced significant challenges. Inadequate funding has hampered the full implementation of many initiatives, with many proposed programs remaining unrealized due to budgetary limitations (Akinola, 2022). The ongoing insurgency in parts of Nigeria has made it difficult to implement some NAPPCVE programmes, particularly in areas most affected by extremist violence (International Crisis Group, 2021). Many implementing agencies and local partners also lack the necessary expertise and resources to effectively carry out CVE programs (Ojewale, 2021). Coordination among various stakeholders remains a challenge, with some agencies still operating in silos despite improvements (Ademowo, 2021). Moreover, there is a lack of robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to assess the effectiveness of NAPPCVE initiatives, making it difficult to measure their impact on reducing violent extremism (Olojo, 2020).

As of 2023, the NAPPCVE remains the primary framework guiding Nigeria's CVE efforts, having undergone revisions and updates to address emerging challenges and incorporate lessons learned (ONSA, 2022). Recent developments include an increased focus on digital interventions to address online radicalization (Chiluwa and Chiluwa, 2020), greater emphasis on gender dimensions of violent extremism (Oluwole, 2023), enhanced regional cooperation within the Lake Chad Basin region (Assanvo et al., 2022), and increased attention to the rehabilitation and reintegration of former extremists (International Organization for Migration, 2022).

The NAPPCVE has contributed to enhancing Nigeria's national security through its collaborative approach in several ways. By involving a wide range of stakeholders, it has fostered a more comprehensive and inclusive approach to national security (Akinola and Uzodike, 2020). The plan's focus on addressing underlying grievances and factors that contribute to radicalization has the potential to create more sustainable security outcomes compared to purely military approaches (Agbiboa, 2019). Enhanced community engagement has led to better information sharing and early warning systems, contributing to improved national security (Olojo, 2019).

By enhancing the capacity of various stakeholders to prevent and counter violent extremism, the NAPPCVE has strengthened Nigeria's overall resilience to extremist threats (Onapajo, 2021). The plan's emphasis on promoting interfaith dialogue, peace education, and social cohesion contributes to long-term national security by fostering a more peaceful and resilient society (Imam and Abba, 2021). However, while the NAPPCVE has made important contributions to enhancing national security through collaboration, its full potential has yet to be realized due to the challenges mentioned earlier. The ongoing threat posed by extremist groups in Nigeria underscores the need for continued refinement and robust implementation of the plan.

The NAPPCVE indeed represents a significant step towards a more comprehensive and collaborative approach to countering violent extremism in Nigeria. While it has achieved notable successes and contributed to enhancing national security, persistent challenges highlight the need for continued efforts to strengthen its implementation and effectiveness. Moving forward, addressing funding constraints, improving coordination, enhancing local capacity, and developing robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms will be crucial for maximizing the NAPPCVE's impact on Nigeria's national security.

c.   Operation Safe Corridor: Operation Safe Corridor (OSC) stands as a pivotal component of

Nigeria's multifaceted approach to countering violent extremism, particularly in response to the Boko Haram insurgency in the country's northeastern region. Launched in 2016, this initiative marked a significant shift from a purely military strategy to a more comprehensive approach that incorporates deradicalization, rehabilitation, and reintegration (DRR) of former extremists (Brechenmacher, 2018). The concept of Operation Safe Corridor emerged from the recognition that military force alone was insufficient to address the complex challenge of violent extremism in Nigeria. Officially established by the Nigerian government in 2016 under President Muhammadu Buhari's administration, OSC was designed as part of a broader counter-terrorism strategy (Ojewale, 2021). Its origins can be traced to earlier experiences with amnesty programs in Nigeria, particularly the Presidential Amnesty Programme for Niger Delta militants launched in 2009 (Nwankpa, 2014). However, OSC was specifically tailored to address the unique challenges posed by Boko Haram and other extremist groups operating in northeastern Nigeria.

The program aims to offer an exit pathway for individuals who had been involved with Boko Haram but were willing to surrender and renounce violence. It seeks to address the root causes of radicalization and provide former extremists with the skills and support necessary to reintegrate into society (Felbab-Brown, 2018). Implemented at a dedicated facility in Gombe State, Nigeria, the program involves a 16-week course that includes various components such as vocational training, religious re-education, psychosocial support, and civic education (Brechenmacher, 2018). This curriculum is designed to address the ideological, psychological, and socio-economic factors that contribute to radicalization.

Overseen by a multi-agency committee that includes representatives from various government bodies, including the military, police, and intelligence services, as well as civil society organizations, OSC employs a multi-stakeholder approach to ensure a comprehensive and coordinated effort in the rehabilitation process (Felbab-Brown, 2018). Participants in the program, often referred to as "clients," are individuals who have voluntarily surrendered or have been captured and deemed eligible for rehabilitation. The selection process involves screening to determine the level of involvement in extremist activities and the potential for successful rehabilitation (Okoli and Ogayi, 2018).

Operation Safe Corridor has achieved several notable successes since its inception. It has incentivized a significant number of Boko Haram members to surrender, with over 1,000 former fighters processed through the program by 2020, according to the Nigerian military (International Organization for Migration, 2021). Participants receive vocational training in areas such as carpentry, welding, and agriculture, potentially enhancing their economic prospects upon reintegration (Felbab-Brown, 2018). The religious re-education component has shown some success in challenging extremist ideologies, with some graduates reporting a shift in their understanding of religious teachings (Brechenmacher, 2018). Moreover, the program has provided valuable intelligence about Boko Haram's operations, structure, and recruitment tactics, informing broader counter-terrorism efforts (Okoli and Ogayi, 2018). OSC has also gained recognition as a potential model for deradicalization programs in other countries facing similar challenges with violent extremism (Clubb and Tapley, 2018).

Despite these successes, Operation Safe Corridor faces numerous challenges and limitations. One of the most significant is the resistance from communities to accept rehabilitated former

extremists. Many communities, having suffered from Boko Haram's violence, are skeptical of the program and fear the return of former fighters (International Crisis Group, 2021). There are also concerns about the potential for program graduates to return to extremist activities, and while the program includes measures to monitor graduates, the long-term effectiveness of these measures remains uncertain (Brechenmacher, 2018).

The program's capacity is limited compared to the scale of the problem, with thousands of Boko Haram members still active (Felbab-Brown, 2018). It has been criticized for not adequately addressing the specific needs of women and children associated with Boko Haram, whose experiences and rehabilitation requirements often differ from those of male combatants (Matfess, 2020). There have been concerns about the lack of transparency in the selection process and limited access for independent monitoring and evaluation of the program (Human Rights Watch, 2019). The program also faces difficulties in ensuring sustainable economic opportunities for graduates in a region already grappling with high unemployment and poverty rates (Ojewale, 2021). Furthermore, there are ongoing debates about the appropriate balance between accountability for crimes committed and the need for reconciliation and reintegration (Brechenmacher, 2018).

Operation Safe Corridor represents an attempt to counter violent extremism through a collaborative, multi-stakeholder approach. This approach has several potential advantages, including comprehensive rehabilitation that addresses multiple facets of radicalization, community engagement in the reintegration process, enhanced information sharing between agencies, and the potential for international support and collaboration (Clubb and Tapley, 2018; International Crisis Group, 2021; Okoli and Ogayi,

2018; Brechenmacher, 2018). However, the effectiveness of this collaborative approach has been limited by coordination challenges between stakeholders with different mandates and priorities, trust deficits between communities, former extremists, and government agencies, and resource constraints that restrict the program's ability to implement comprehensive, long-term strategies (Ojewale, 2021; International Crisis Group, 2021; Felbab- Brown, 2018).

As of 2023, Operation Safe Corridor continues to operate, processing surrendered and captured Boko Haram members. The program has evolved based on lessons learned, with increased emphasis on community sensitization and post-graduation monitoring (Olojo, 2022). However, there is a clear need for improved action in several areas. These include enhancing community engagement to address resistance to reintegration, implementing more rigorous monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, expanding the program's capacity while maintaining quality, developing more tailored approaches for women and children, strengthening economic reintegration efforts, addressing root causes of radicalization, and enhancing regional cooperation on deradicalization and reintegration efforts (International Crisis Group, 2021; Brechenmacher, 2018; Felbab-Brown, 2018; Matfess, 2020; Ojewale, 2021; Akinola, 2022; Assanvo et al., 2022).

In summary, Operation Safe Corridor represents a significant shift in Nigeria's approach to countering violent extremism, moving beyond purely military strategies to incorporate rehabilitation and reintegration efforts. While the program has achieved notable successes, it faces substantial challenges in community acceptance, risk management, and sustainable reintegration. The collaborative nature of the program offers potential benefits, but realizing these benefits

requires overcoming coordination challenges and addressing resource constraints. Moving forward, the effectiveness of Operation Safe Corridor will depend on its ability to adapt to emerging challenges, enhance community engagement, improve monitoring and evaluation, and address the complex socio-economic factors that contribute to radicalization. As Nigeria continues to grapple with the threat of violent extremism, programs like Operation Safe Corridor will likely remain a crucial component of a comprehensive counter-terrorism strategy, necessitating ongoing refinement and support to maximize their impact.

d.   Multinational Joint Task Forces: The Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) stands as a significant collaborative effort to address transnational security threats, particularly terrorism and violent extremism, in the Lake Chad Basin region of Africa. This comprehensive analysis delves into the MNJTF's history, participating countries, successes, challenges, and its effectiveness in countering violent extremism through collaborative strategies. The MNJTF's roots can be traced back to 1994 when it was initially established to combat cross-border banditry and criminality in the Lake Chad region (Assanvo et al., 2016). However, the rise of Boko Haram in northeastern Nigeria and its subsequent expansion into neighboring countries necessitated a reimagining of the MNJTF's mandate and structure. In 2012, the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC) member states agreed to transform the existing MNJTF into a more robust force to counter the growing threat posed by Boko Haram (Tar and Mustapha, 2017). This decision was formalized in 2014 when the African Union Peace and Security Council authorized the deployment of the MNJTF for an initial period of 12 months (African Union, 2014). The renewed MNJTF was officially launched in 2015 with an expanded mandate to create a safe and secure environment in the areas affected by Boko Haram

and other terrorist groups, facilitate the implementation of overall stabilization programs, and enable humanitarian operations (Ikpe, 2017).

The MNJTF comprises troops from five main contributing countries: Nigeria, Niger, Chad, Cameroon, and Benin. These nations form the core of the task force, with each contributing troops and resources to the joint effort (Assanvo et al., 2016). Nigeria, as the epicenter of the Boko Haram insurgency, plays a central role in the MNJTF. It hosts the Force Headquarters in N'Djamena, Chad, and contributes the largest contingent of troops (Onapajo and Ozden, 2020). Chad, with its experienced military and strategic location, has been crucial in cross-border operations against

Boko Haram (Thurston, 2017). Cameroon and Niger, sharing borders with Nigeria, have been instrumental in preventing the spread of the insurgency and conducting joint operations (Zenn, 2018). Benin, while not directly affected by Boko Haram, contributes troops as part of its commitment to regional security (Assanvo et al., 2016).

The MNJTF has achieved several notable successes in its fight against Boko Haram and other extremist groups in the Lake Chad Basin region. One of the most significant achievements has been the reclamation of territories previously held by Boko Haram. Joint operations have pushed the terrorist group out of many areas, particularly in northeastern Nigeria and along the borders with Cameroon, Niger, and Chad (Onapajo and Ozden, 2020). The MNJTF's coordinated military operations have significantly weakened Boko Haram's operational capabilities, destroying numerous camps, seizing weapons caches, and disrupting the group's supply lines (Tar and Mustapha, 2017). Moreover, the task force has fostered greater cooperation and intelligence sharing among participating countries, leading to more effective cross-border operations and a more

unified approach to regional security (Ikpe, 2017). By securing previously inaccessible areas, the MNJTF has facilitated the delivery of humanitarian aid to displaced populations and communities affected by the conflict (UNHCR, 2019). The pressure exerted by the MNJTF has also led to the surrender of numerous Boko Haram fighters, weakening the group's structure and morale (International Crisis Group, 2020).

Despite these successes, the MNJTF faces several significant challenges and limitations. Inadequate and inconsistent funding has been a persistent issue for the task force. While it receives support from international partners, including the European Union and the United States, financial shortfalls have hampered its operations and sustainability (Assanvo et al., 2016). Coordinating military operations among five sovereign nations with different military structures, languages, and operational procedures has proven challenging, sometimes leading to delays in launching joint operations or responding to emerging threats (Tar and Mustapha, 2017). The vast and often inhospitable terrain of the Lake Chad Basin poses significant logistical challenges, with inadequate infrastructure complicating troop movements and supply lines (Zenn, 2018). While improved, intelligence sharing among MNJTF member states remains a challenge, as national security concerns and trust issues sometimes hinder the full and timely exchange of critical intelligence (Onapajo and Ozden, 2020).

Furthermore, there have been allegations of human rights abuses committed by MNJTF troops, including extrajudicial killings and arbitrary detentions. These accusations undermine the task force's legitimacy and complicate its relationship with local populations (Human Rights Watch, 2019). Adding to these challenges, Boko Haram and its offshoots have shown a remarkable ability to adapt to MNJTF operations, shifting tactics,

fragmenting into smaller cells, and expanding their geographical reach (International Crisis Group, 2020). The MNJTF's effectiveness in countering violent extremism through collaborative strategies has been mixed. The task force has undoubtedly achieved significant military successes against Boko Haram and other extremist groups, reducing their ability to operate freely and recruit new members (Onapajo and Ozden, 2020). The MNJTF's multinational structure has fostered a more comprehensive regional approach to countering violent extremism, making it more difficult for extremist groups to exploit national borders and find safe havens (Ikpe, 2017). Improved intelligence sharing among member states has enhanced the ability to track and target extremist networks across borders (Tar and Mustapha, 2017).

Several factors limit the MNJTF's effectiveness in countering violent extremism. The task force's focus has primarily been on military operations, with less emphasis on addressing the root causes of extremism, such as poverty, unemployment, and lack of education (Zenn, 2018). Engagement with local communities, crucial for gathering intelligence and preventing recruitment by extremist groups, has been insufficient in many areas (International Crisis Group, 2020). While some MNJTF member states have implemented deradicalization programs for former Boko Haram members, these efforts are not uniform across the region and lack coordination (Botha and Abdile, 2019). Moreover, military operations alone have been insufficient in countering the ideological appeal of extremist groups, with the underlying narratives that fuel recruitment and support for these groups remaining largely unaddressed (Thurston, 2017).

As of 2024, the MNJTF continues to operate in the Lake Chad Basin region, maintaining pressure on Boko Haram and its offshoots. However, the

security situation remains fragile, with the extremist threat adapting and evolving (International Crisis Group, 2023). To enhance its effectiveness, several areas require attention and improvement. Establishing a more stable and sustainable funding mechanism is crucial for the MNJTF's long-term operations, potentially involving greater financial commitments from member states and exploring innovative funding sources (Assanvo et al., 2016). Improving coordination mechanisms among member states, including standardized operational procedures and communication protocols, would enhance the MNJTF's effectiveness (Tar and Mustapha, 2017).

Integrating military operations with broader socio-economic development initiatives is essential, addressing root causes of extremism through education, job creation, and governance improvements (Zenn, 2018). Investing in advanced intelligence gathering and analysis capabilities, coupled with improved information sharing among member states, would enhance the MNJTF's ability to anticipate and respond to threats (Onapajo and Ozden, 2020). Developing more robust community engagement strategies to build trust, gather intelligence, and prevent recruitment by extremist groups is crucial (International Crisis Group, 2020).

Strengthening human rights training and accountability mechanisms within the MNJTF is necessary to address allegations of abuses and maintain local support (Human Rights Watch, 2019). The MNJTF must continue to evolve its strategies to counter the adaptive nature of extremist groups, including addressing the growing threat of online radicalization and recruitment (Botha and Abdile, 2019). Coordinating with regional economic bodies and development partners to implement large-scale development projects in the Lake Chad Basin could help address underlying socio-economic factors

contributing to extremism (UNDP, 2022).

The Multinational Joint Task Force represents a significant effort by Lake Chad Basin countries to collectively address the threat of violent extremism in the region. While it has achieved notable military successes and improved regional cooperation, the MNJTF faces ongoing challenges in fully countering the complex and evolving threat posed by groups like Boko Haram. Moving forward, the task force's effectiveness will depend on its ability to address its current limitations, adopt a more holistic approach to countering violent extremism, and adapt to the changing nature of the threat. By combining military operations with robust socio-economic initiatives, improved intelligence capabilities, and stronger community engagement, the MNJTF can enhance its impact in creating lasting peace and security in the Lake Chad Basin region

e.   Community   Involvement   Initiative: Community involvement initiatives in countering violent extremism (CVE) in Nigeria have emerged as a crucial component of the nation's multifaceted approach to addressing the persistent threat of terrorism and extremist ideologies. These initiatives, rooted in the understanding that effective CVE strategies must engage local communities as partners rather than mere recipients of security interventions, have evolved significantly over the past decade. The history of community involvement in CVE in Nigeria can be traced back to the early 2010s when the escalating Boko Haram insurgency in the northeast highlighted the limitations of purely military responses to extremism. As the government and international partners began to recognize the complex socio-economic and ideological factors fueling radicalization, there was a gradual shift towards more inclusive and community-centered approaches (Botha and Abdile, 2019).

One of the earliest formal community involvement

initiatives was the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF), which emerged spontaneously in Maiduguri, Borno State, in 2013. The CJTF, comprised of local vigilantes, worked alongside the military to provide intelligence and support in combating Boko Haram (Bamidele, 2016). While not initially designed as a CVE program, the CJTF demonstrated the potential of community-based efforts in countering extremism and laid the groundwork for more structured initiatives. In 2014, the Nigerian government, with support from international partners, launched the Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) Program under the Office of the National Security Adviser (ONSA). This program marked a significant shift towards a more comprehensive approach to CVE, emphasizing community engagement, de-radicalization, and addressing root causes of extremism (Onuoha and Ugwueze, 2020).

The CVE Program introduced several community-focused initiatives, including the Counter-Narrative Program, which aimed to amplify moderate voices within communities and challenge extremist ideologies. This initiative involved partnering with local religious leaders, educators, and civil society organizations to develop and disseminate counter-narratives through various media channels (Botha and Abdile, 2019). Another significant development was the establishment of the Nigeria Stability and Reconciliation Programme (NSRP) in 2012, supported by the UK Department for International Development. The NSRP worked closely with local communities in conflict-affected states, implementing peacebuilding initiatives and supporting community-led efforts to address drivers of conflict and extremism (NSRP, 2017).

As these initiatives gained traction, there was a growing recognition of the need to involve women and youth in CVE efforts. The Women Without Walls Initiative (WOWWI), launched in 2015, focused on empowering women to play active roles in preventing and countering violent extremism in their communities. Similarly, youth-focused programs like the Youth Ambassadors for Community Peace and Interfaith Foundation aimed to engage young people in peacebuilding and interfaith dialogue (Idris, 2019). The successes of community involvement initiatives in CVE in Nigeria have been notable, albeit challenging to quantify precisely. One of the most significant achievements has been the improved relationship between security forces and local communities in areas affected by extremism. The CJTF, for instance, has been credited with enhancing intelligence gathering and reducing the trust deficit between the military and civilians (Bamidele, 2016).

Community-led early warning systems have also shown promise in preventing attacks and identifying potential recruits for extremist groups. In Yobe State, for example, a community-based early warning mechanism established with support from the NSRP has helped in timely reporting of suspicious activities and potential security threats (NSRP, 2017). The engagement of religious leaders in counter-narrative efforts has been particularly effective in challenging the ideological foundations of extremist groups. Initiatives like the Nigerian Inter-Faith Action Association (NIFAA) have brought together Muslim and Christian leaders to promote interfaith dialogue and counter religious justifications for violence (Olojo, 2019).

Women's involvement in CVE has led to more nuanced and comprehensive approaches to addressing extremism. Women-led organizations have been instrumental in identifying early signs of radicalization within families and communities, as well as in supporting the reintegration of former extremist group members (Idris, 2019). Youth engagement programs have shown promise in

reducing the vulnerability of young people to extremist recruitment. Initiatives focusing on vocational training, civic education, and interfaith dialogue have provided alternative pathways for youth at risk of radicalization (Onuoha and Ugwueze, 2020).

Despite these successes, community involvement initiatives in CVE in Nigeria face significant challenges and limitations. One of the primary obstacles is the persistent insecurity in many areas affected by extremism, which hampers the implementation and sustainability of community-based programs (International Crisis Group, 2021). Funding constraints have also limited the scale and reach of many community involvement initiatives. While international partners have provided support, there is often a lack of sustained, long-term funding for community-led CVE efforts (Botha and Abdile, 2019).

The stigmatization of individuals and communities associated with extremist groups remains a significant challenge. This stigma can hinder the reintegration of former extremist group members and their families, undermining the effectiveness of deradicalization and rehabilitation programs (Clubb and Tapley, 2018). There is also the risk of community fatigue and disillusionment, particularly in areas where CVE initiatives have not yielded tangible improvements in security or livelihood opportunities. This can lead to reduced community participation and support for CVE efforts over time (Olojo, 2019). The question of whether community involvement initiatives have been able to counter violent extremism through collaborative strategies effectively is complex and multifaceted. While there have been notable successes, the persistent threat of extremism in Nigeria suggests that these initiatives alone have not been sufficient to fully address the challenge.

However, it is important to note that CVE is a long-term process, and the full impact of community involvement initiatives may take years to manifest fully. Moreover, the effectiveness of these initiatives should be considered in conjunction with other security and development efforts (Onuoha and Ugwueze, 2020). The current state of community involvement in CVE in Nigeria is one of continued evolution and adaptation. There is growing recognition of the need for more localized and context-specific approaches, moving away from one-size-fits-all models of community engagement (International Crisis Group, 2021).

Efforts are being made to strengthen the evidence base for community-led CVE initiatives through improved monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. This includes the development of more nuanced indicators to assess the impact of soft approaches to countering extremism (Idris, 2019). There is also an increasing focus on leveraging technology and social media in community-based CVE efforts. Initiatives like the Peer-to-Peer: Challenging Extremism program have engaged Nigerian youth in developing online campaigns to counter extremist narratives (Botha and Abdile, 2019).

Looking ahead, there is a clear need for enhanced action to strengthen and expand community involvement in CVE in Nigeria. There may be the need for sustainable funding, establishing more sustainable funding mechanisms for community-led CVE initiatives, potentially through public-private partnerships and innovative financing models (Onuoha and Ugwueze, 2020). Investing in capacity building for local organizations and community leaders engaged in CVE work, focusing on project management, monitoring and evaluation, and conflict-sensitive programming (Clubb and Tapley, 2018), enhancing coordination between government agencies, international partners, and community-based organizations to ensure a more coherent and comprehensive approach to CVE (International Crisis Group, 2021). Also, there could be the need to integrate

CVE efforts more closely with broader development initiatives to address the underlying socio-economic factors that contribute to vulnerability to extremism (Olojo, 2019). Additionally, expanding programmes that empower youth and women as agents of change in their communities, providing them with the skills and resources to lead CVE efforts (Idris, 2019). How about incorporating trauma-informed approaches in community-based CVE initiatives, recognizing the impact of conflict and violence on individuals and communities (Botha and Abdile, 2019). Finally, there is the need to develop more sophisticated digital engagement strategies to counter online radicalization and leverage social media for positive messaging (Onuoha and Ugwueze, 2020) and invest in research to better understand the dynamics of radicalization and the effectiveness of different community-based CVE approaches in the Nigerian context (International Crisis Group, 2021).

In summary, community involvement initiatives have become an integral part of Nigeria's approach to countering violent extremism. While these efforts have shown promise and achieved notable successes, they continue to face significant challenges and limitations. The evolving nature of the extremist threat in Nigeria necessitates ongoing adaptation and innovation in community-based CVE strategies. By addressing current limitations, enhancing coordination, and investing in sustainable, locally-driven approaches, Nigeria can strengthen its community involvement initiatives and build more resilient communities capable of resisting the allure of extremist ideologies. The path forward requires sustained commitment, resources, and a willingness to learn and adapt based on evidence and community feedback.

Deradicalization, Rehabilitation, and Reintegration (DRR): The DRR Programme consists of three main phases: deradicalisation, which involves psychological and ideological interventions to change extremist mindsets; rehabilitation, which includes vocational training and psychosocial support to prepare individuals for reintegration; and reintegration, which provides support for former extremists as they return to their communities (Barkindo and Bryans, 2016).

The programme has achieved several significant successes since its inception. Perhaps most notably, it has encouraged defections from Boko Haram, providing an alternative path for those seeking to leave the group. According to the Nigerian Military (2021), over 1,000 former Boko Haram members had voluntarily surrendered and entered the DRR Programme by 2021. This represents a substantial number of individuals potentially diverted from extremist activities and given the opportunity for rehabilitation and reintegration.

The DRR Programme has also made significant strides in providing vocational training to participants, equipping them with skills that can facilitate their economic reintegration into society. A report by the International Organization for Migration (2020) indicated that 85% of programme graduates had acquired at least one marketable skill. This focus on skill acquisition is crucial for addressing one of the potential drivers of extremism – economic marginalization – and providing former extremists with alternative livelihood options.

Moreover, the programme has provided crucial psychological support to former extremists, recognizing the complex trauma and ideological indoctrination that many have experienced. A study by Clubb and Tapley (2018) found that 70% of participants reported improved mental health outcomes after completing the programme. This psychological support is essential not only for the

well-being of the individuals involved but also for their successful reintegration into society.

The DRR Programme has also facilitated community sensitization efforts to support the reintegration of former extremists. According to the Office of the National Security Adviser (2021), over 200 community dialogue sessions had been conducted in affected areas. These efforts are crucial for preparing communities to accept returning former extremists and for addressing potential tensions and stigma that could hinder successful reintegration.

However, despite these achievements, the implementation of the DRR Programme has faced several significant challenges. One of the most persistent issues has been the stigmatization of programme graduates upon their return to their communities. Many former extremists face discrimination and suspicion, complicating reintegration efforts (Barkindo, 2018). This stigmatization not only affects the individuals involved but also potentially undermines the effectiveness of the programme by discouraging participation and hindering successful reintegration.

There are also ongoing concerns about the potential security risks posed by reintegrated former extremists (Zenn, 2019). Balancing the goal of rehabilitation and reintegration with the imperative of ensuring community safety remains a significant challenge for the programme. This concern highlights the need for robust monitoring and support systems for reintegrated individuals, as well as continued efforts to build community trust and acceptance.

Resource limitations have also posed a significant challenge to the DRR Programme. The initiative has faced constraints in terms of funding and trained personnel, limiting its capacity to process large numbers of defectors (Omenma et al., 2020). This resource shortage can potentially create

bottlenecks in the rehabilitation process and limit the programme's overall impact.

Furthermore, assessing the long-term effectiveness of the programme in preventing recidivism has proven challenging due to the difficulty of tracking participants over time (Botha and Abdile, 2019). This challenge in measuring long-term impact is common in deradicalization programmes worldwide and highlights the need for continued research and the development of robust evaluation methodologies.

The Deradicalisation, Rehabilitation, and Reintegration Programme represent significant components of Nigeria's comprehensive approach to combating extremism and terrorism. This initiative demonstrates a recognition of the need for multifaceted strategies that address both the prevention of radicalization and the rehabilitation of those who have been involved in extremist activities. The DRR Programme, addresses the critical need for pathways out of extremism for those already involved. Its success in encouraging defections, providing skills and psychological support to former extremists, and facilitating community dialogue is significant. However, the challenges of stigmatization, security concerns, and resource limitations underscore the complex dynamics involved in rehabilitation and reintegration efforts.

Assessment of the Armed forces of Nigeria's Collaborative Strategies

The Federal Government of Nigeria has increasingly recognized the importance of collaborative stakeholder engagement in enhancing national security. This approach acknowledges that security challenges are complex and multifaceted, requiring the involvement of various actors beyond traditional security agencies. This essay critically examines the efforts made by the Nigerian government to enhance national security through collaborative

stakeholder engagement, analyzing the strategies employed, their successes, challenges, and potential areas for improvement.

One of the primary ways the Nigerian government has pursued collaborative stakeholder engagement is through the development and implementation of comprehensive national security strategies. The National Security Strategy (NSS), first introduced in 2014 and revised in 2019, explicitly emphasizes the need for a whole-of-society approach to security (Office of the National Security Adviser, 2019). This strategy recognizes that effective security management requires the involvement of not only government agencies but also civil society organizations, community leaders, the private sector, and international partners.

The NSS outlines several key areas for stakeholder collaboration, including intelligence gathering, community policing, and counterterrorism efforts. For instance, the strategy emphasizes the importance of community engagement in preventing and countering violent extremism. This approach has led to the establishment of various community-based initiatives aimed at building resilience against radicalization and extremism. According to a study by Aghedo and Eke (2020), community engagement programs implemented under the NSS framework have resulted in a 30% increase in community reporting of suspicious activities to security agencies in northeastern Nigeria between 2015 and 2019.

Another significant initiative that demonstrates the government's commitment to collaborative stakeholder engagement is the National Action Plan for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (NAP-PCVE). Launched in 2017, this plan explicitly calls for the involvement of a wide range of stakeholders in preventing and countering violent extremism (Office of the National Security Adviser, 2017). The NAP-PCVE emphasizes the need for partnerships between government agencies, civil society organizations, religious leaders, educational institutions, and the media in developing and implementing PCVE programs.

One of the key achievements of the NAP-PCVE has been the establishment of state-level PCVE committees that bring together various stakeholders to coordinate PCVE efforts at the local level. A report by the Nigeria Stability and Reconciliation Programme (2019) found that these committees have facilitated improved information sharing and coordination among different actors involved in PCVE activities. The report noted that in states where these committees were active, there was a 40% increase in the number of joint PCVE initiatives implemented by government agencies and civil society organizations between 2017 and 2019.

The Federal Government has also made efforts to engage the private sector in national security initiatives. The Cybercrime (Prohibition, Prevention, etc.) Act of 2015 mandates collaboration between government agencies and private sector entities, particularly in the telecommunications and financial services sectors, to combat cybercrime (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2015). This legislation has led to the establishment of public-private partnerships aimed at enhancing cybersecurity and protecting critical national infrastructure.

A notable example of such collaboration is the Nigerian Financial Intelligence Unit (NFIU), which works closely with financial institutions to detect and prevent money laundering and terrorist financing. According to the NFIU's 2020 annual report, this collaboration resulted in a 35% increase in the number of suspicious transaction reports filed by financial institutions between 2018 and 2020, leading to several successful investigations and prosecutions of financial crimes

linked to terrorism and organized crime (Nigerian Financial Intelligence Unit, 2020).

The government has also sought to enhance collaboration with international partners in addressing security challenges. Nigeria has actively participated in regional security initiatives such as the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF), which brings together military forces from Nigeria, Chad, Cameroon, Niger, and Benin to combat Boko Haram and other terrorist groups in the Lake Chad region (African Union, 2018). This regional collaboration has led to improved intelligence sharing and coordinated military operations against terrorist groups operating across borders.

Furthermore, Nigeria has engaged in partnerships with international organizations and foreign governments to enhance its security capabilities. For instance, the country has worked closely with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) to strengthen its legal and institutional framework for combating terrorism and organized crime. A UNODC report (2021) noted that this collaboration has resulted in the training of over 500 Nigerian law enforcement and judicial officials in counterterrorism and organized crime investigation techniques between 2016 and 2020.

The government has also recognized the importance of engaging traditional and religious leaders in security efforts, particularly in areas affected by communal conflicts and insurgency. The establishment of the Nigeria Inter-Religious Council (NIREC) in 1999, which brings together Christian and Muslim leaders, exemplifies this approach. NIREC has played a crucial role in promoting inter-faith dialogue and conflict resolution in various parts of the country. A study by Ojewale (2021) found that in areas where NIREC was active, there was a 25% reduction in reported cases of religious-based conflicts between 2015 and 2020.

However, despite these efforts, the implementation of collaborative stakeholder engagement in enhancing national security has faced several challenges. One of the primary obstacles has been the lack of trust between some stakeholders and government agencies. Years of perceived neglect, corruption, and human rights abuses by security forces have eroded public trust in many parts of the country, making it difficult to establish effective partnerships (Amnesty International, 2020).

Moreover, there have been instances where the government's approach to stakeholder engagement has been criticized as being superficial or tokenistic. For example, while the NAP-PCVE emphasizes the importance of civil society involvement, some civil society organizations have reported feeling marginalized in the actual implementation of PCVE programs. A survey conducted by the Centre for Democracy and Development (2020) found that only 40% of civil society organizations involved in PCVE activities felt that their input was adequately considered in government-led initiatives.

Another challenge has been the lack of adequate resources and capacity to support comprehensive stakeholder engagement. Many government agencies lack the personnel, training, and financial resources needed to effectively coordinate and sustain partnerships with diverse stakeholders. This has sometimes resulted in inconsistent and ad hoc engagement efforts that fail to yield long-term results (Omenma et al., 2020).

Furthermore, the government's approach to stakeholder engagement in some areas has been criticized for not being sufficiently inclusive. For instance, efforts to engage youth in security initiatives have been limited, despite the fact that young people constitute a significant demographic in Nigeria and are often both perpetrators and victims of insecurity. A report by the West Africa

Network for Peacebuilding (2019) noted that only 15% of government-led security initiatives specifically targeted youth engagement between 2015 and 2019.

The government's collaboration with the media in addressing security challenges has also been a contentious issue. While there have been efforts to engage media organizations in public awareness campaigns and information dissemination, there have also been instances of media suppression and intimidation, particularly when reporting on sensitive security issues. This has sometimes strained the relationship between the government and media stakeholders, hindering effective collaboration (Reporters Without Borders, 2021).

Despite these challenges, there have been notable successes in the government's efforts to enhance national security through collaborative stakeholder engagement. The establishment of civilian joint task forces (CJTF) in northeastern Nigeria to support military operations against Boko Haram is one such example. These local vigilante groups, composed of community volunteers, have played a crucial role in providing intelligence to security forces and protecting communities from terrorist attacks. A study by Bamidele (2020) found that areas with active CJTF presence experienced a 45% reduction in successful Boko Haram attacks between 2014 and 2019 compared to areas without CJTF presence.

Another success has been the implementation of community policing initiatives in various parts of the country. The Nigeria Police Force's community policing program, launched in 2020, aims to foster closer collaboration between the police and local communities in addressing security challenges. While still in its early stages, initial reports suggest that this approach has led to improved trust between communities and law enforcement in pilot areas. A survey conducted by the CLEEN Foundation (2021) in six states where the program was piloted found that 60% of respondents reported increased willingness to cooperate with the police in crime prevention efforts.

The government's efforts to engage the private sector in cybersecurity initiatives have also shown promise. The establishment of the Office of the National Security Adviser's National Cybersecurity Coordination Center has facilitated improved information sharing between government agencies and private sector entities on cyber threats. According to the center's 2020 report, this collaboration led to a 30% increase in the early detection and mitigation of cyber attacks against critical national infrastructure between 2018 and 2020 (Office of the National Security Adviser, 2020).

Looking ahead, there are several areas where the Nigerian government could further enhance its approach to collaborative stakeholder engagement in national security. First, there is a need for more structured and institutionalized mechanisms for stakeholder engagement. While ad hoc collaborations have yielded some positive results, establishing formal platforms for regular dialogue and joint decision-making between government agencies and other stakeholders could lead to more sustainable and effective partnerships.

Second, the government should prioritize building trust with stakeholders, particularly in communities affected by insecurity. This could involve increased transparency in security operations, addressing allegations of human rights abuses by security forces, and demonstrating a genuine commitment to incorporating stakeholder input into security policies and strategies.

Third, there is a need for increased investment in capacity building for both government agencies and non-governmental stakeholders involved in security initiatives. This could include training programs on collaborative approaches to security, conflict resolution, and community engagement.

Fourth, the government should strive for more inclusive stakeholder engagement, particularly in terms of youth and women's participation in security initiatives. Developing targeted programs that empower these groups to contribute to security efforts could tap into valuable resources and perspectives that are currently underutilized. Finally, there is a need for improved monitoring and evaluation of collaborative security initiatives. Developing robust metrics to assess the impact of stakeholder engagement efforts could provide valuable insights for refining and improving these approaches over time.

Summarily, the Federal Government of Nigeria has made significant efforts to enhance national security through collaborative stakeholder engagement. Initiatives such as the National Security Strategy, the National Action Plan for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism, and various public-private partnerships demonstrate a recognition of the importance of a whole-of-society approach to security. While these efforts have yielded some positive results, challenges such as trust deficits, resource constraints, and inconsistent implementation have hindered their full potential. Moving forward, addressing these challenges and building on successful models of collaboration will be crucial for enhancing the effectiveness of Nigeria's national security efforts. By fostering genuine partnerships with a diverse range of stakeholders, the government can tap into a wealth of resources, knowledge, and capabilities that are essential for addressing the complex security challenges facing the country. Ultimately, a collaborative approach that engages all sectors of society in security efforts holds the greatest promise for building a more secure and resilient Nigeria.

CONCLUSION

The Armed Forces of Nigeria (AFN) have demonstrated a significant shift in their approach to combating violent extremism, embracing collaborative strategies that reflect the complex nature of 21st-century security challenges. This evolution from traditional, state-centric methods to more inclusive, multi-stakeholder engagement aligns with global trends in counter-extremism efforts and represents a crucial adaptation to the changing landscape of national security.

Central to this new approach are key initiatives such as the National Security Strategy (NSS) and the National Action Plan for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (NAP-PCVE), both of which emphasize a whole-of-society approach. These frameworks have facilitated meaningful engagement with civil society organizations, religious leaders, and traditional rulers in counter-extremism programs. The establishment of state-level PCVE committees has further enhanced coordination among various stakeholders, while collaboration with international partners through initiatives like the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) has strengthened regional responses to cross-border threats. Additionally, the AFN has fostered public-private partnerships, particularly in the realms of cybersecurity and financial intelligence, recognizing the critical role of non-state actors in addressing modern security challenges.

These collaborative efforts have yielded tangible successes. There has been a marked improvement in intelligence gathering and community reporting of suspicious activities, indicating growing trust between the military and local populations. The enhanced coordination among different stakeholders in PCVE activities has led to more comprehensive and effective interventions. Joint military operations against cross-border terrorist groups have demonstrated the value of international cooperation, while increased detection and prevention of cyber-attacks and financial crimes linked to terrorism highlight the

benefits of public-private collaboration.

However, despite these achievements, significant challenges persist in the implementation of collaborative strategies. Trust deficits between communities and security agencies continue to hinder full cooperation in some areas. The AFN often faces constraints in resources and capacity, limiting its ability to sustain comprehensive stakeholder engagement. There have been instances of inconsistent implementation and superficial engagement with stakeholders, potentially undermining the effectiveness of collaborative initiatives. Furthermore, the limited inclusion of youth and women in security initiatives represents a missed opportunity to leverage diverse perspectives and experiences in counter-extremism efforts.

To enhance the effectiveness of these collaborative strategies, the AFN should focus on several key areas for improvement. Establishing more structured and institutionalized mechanisms for stakeholder engagement could ensure more consistent and meaningful collaboration. Prioritizing trust-building measures with local communities is crucial for overcoming historical tensions and fostering genuine partnerships. Investing in capacity building, both for military personnel and non- governmental stakeholders, would enhance the quality and sustainability of collaborative efforts. Ensuring more inclusive participation, particularly of youth and women, could bring fresh insights and approaches to counter-extremism strategies. Finally, developing robust monitoring and evaluation systems for collaborative initiatives would allow for evidence-based refinement of strategies over time.

Finally, while the AFN has made commendable progress in adopting collaborative strategies to tackle violent extremism, there remains significant room for improvement. By addressing the identified challenges and building on successful models of collaboration, the AFN can further enhance its effectiveness in countering extremism and fostering a more secure Nigeria. The continued evolution of these collaborative approaches will be crucial in adapting to the dynamic nature of security threats and leveraging the collective strengths of all stakeholders in the pursuit of national security. As Nigeria faces ongoing and emerging security challenges, the AFN's commitment to inclusive, collaborative strategies will be a key determinant of its success in safeguarding the nation's peace and stability.

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