



Public Perception on Reintegration of Captive Farmers Returnees by Boko Haram Insurgents in Borno State: Evidence from Dikwa Local Government Area

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Abstract

This study assessed the community perception on the reintegration of captive farmers returnees of Boko Haram insurgency in Borno State, Nigeria, with specific reference to Dikwa Local Government Area. The study adopted a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis. The study population consisted of 300 captive farmer returnees, 100 community members, and 20 key informants from the authorities and civil society organizations. The study used a stratified random sampling technique to select 150 captive farmer returnees, 50 community members, and 10 key informants for the survey. The study also conducted 10 focus group discussions and 10 in-depth interviews with the selected respondents. The study found that the reintegration of captive farmer returnees was necessary and justified for the peace and security of the area, as well as for the restoration of the livelihoods and dignity of the returnees. However, the study also found that the role of the authorities in facilitating the reintegration of captive farmer returnees was mixed and inadequate, and that there were several challenges and gaps in the coordination, management, and implementation of the reintegration program. Moreover, the study found that the reintegration of captive farmer returnees faced various challenges, such as stigma and discrimination, trauma and psychological distress, poverty and unemployment, insecurity and fear, and lack of trust and confidence. The study concluded that the reintegration of captive farmer returnees by Boko Haram insurgents in Dikwa Local Government Area Borno State was a necessary but challenging process, and that the role of the authorities and the perception of the communities were critical factors for the success and sustainability of the reintegration program. The study recommended that the authorities should improve the coordination and collaboration, enhance the transparency and accountability, provide adequate security and protection, provide basic services and amenities, provide psychosocial support and counseling, provide vocational training and income-generating activities, and provide legal assistance and documentation for the returnees and the communities. The study also recommended that the

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communities should accept and welcome the returnees, support and assist the returnees, engage and cooperate with the authorities and the reintegration program, and foster a culture of peace and tolerance in the area.

Keywords: Reintegration, Farmer Returnees, Boko Haram Insurgents, Dikwa Borno State

Introduction

The reintegration of captive farmer returnees by Boko Haram insurgents in Borno State is a unique context in the field of Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR). Unlike traditional DDR environments, the fragile security situation in Borno State with an ongoing counterterrorism campaign adds complexity to the reintegration process. The success of reintegration programs depends on addressing the needs of the recipient communities and ensuring the safe return of the captive farmer returnees. This includes meeting the basic security needs of the communities and preventing violent retribution against the returnees (Saleh (2016; Kaplan, Oliver, and Nussio, 2012).

Effective reintegration programs require a focus on both the formal and informal needs of the captive farmer returnees and communities. The success indicators for reintegration include the safe transition of returnees into communities, community acceptance, psycho-social counseling of returnees, community involvement in addressing grievances, building the capacity of communities to receive returnees, awareness and sensitization campaigns, and the use of restorative justice approaches that incorporate traditional and informal justice mechanisms (Ali et Al., 2022; Fonteh, 2018; Obi, 2019).

However, implementing effective reintegration programs in Borno State faces several challenges (Ahmad, 2017). These challenges include increased levels of community resentment and stigma towards returnees, lack of knowledge on the reintegration process leading to misconceptions, perceptions of inappropriate punishment of returnees, economic assistance to returnees at the expense of communities, lack of acknowledgement or incorporation of communities' needs within the programs, and lack of community involvement or ownership throughout the reintegration process (Stefan and Ljunggren, 2016; Hassan, Idayat, and Justin, 2018).

To ensure successful reintegration of captive farmer returnees in Borno State, it is crucial to consider the varying needs of men, women, boys, and girls both among the returnees and communities. As noted in the African Union Operational Guidance Note on Reintegration (2014) and (Dutch Probation Service, 2019) states that the programs should also incorporate community ownership and involvement in the reintegration process, rebuilding social bonds between the community and returnees, and transparency in government-run reintegration programs (Saleh, Daluma & Mailafia, 2021; Hassan, Idayat, and Justin, 2018; Azam, et al. 2017).

In conclusion, this study aims to examine public perceptions on the reintegration of captive farmer returnees by Boko Haram insurgents in Borno State. Banlaoi, (2017) the unique

context of this reintegration process requires an effective reintegration program that addresses the needs of both the captive farmer returnees and communities. The success of such programs depends on community involvement and ownership, the use of restorative justice approaches, psycho-social counseling, and awareness and sensitization campaigns that incorporate the varying needs of men, women, boys, and girls among the returnees and communities.

Statement of the Problem

Reintegration programs have been recognized as essential components of efforts to prevent terrorism-related recidivism (Saleh, 2017; Banlaoi, 2017). However, while history suggests that specific reintegration programs for terrorists are not always necessary for successful reintegration, the case of Boko Haram presents unique challenges (Götsch, 2017; Daluma & Saleh, 2017). The ideology that underpins Boko Haram's actions has not been fundamentally challenged, making it difficult to reintegrate convicted members into communities without risking their re-radicalization (Holmer, and Shtuni, 2017). While specialized reintegration programs for Boko Haram fighters have been deemed necessary, there is a recurring concern over the lack of independent evaluations of their effectiveness (Koehler, 2017).

In November 2021, a large number of captive farmers returned to their communities in Borno State, and the government expressed its desire to reintegrate them into their communities, despite not having provided them with any rehabilitation programs. Barkindo and Bryans (2016) the government has divided the returnees into three categories: commanders, fighters, and farmers. Furthermore, in 2021, a significant number of Boko Haram captives and commanders surrendered to the military, and the government of Borno State established a committee, led by an adviser on security matters, to receive, screen, and reintegrate the captives and returnees into their respective communities in collaboration with their respective Local Government Councils.

However, the integration process faces several challenges. There is mixed reaction from the local government people concerning the integration program, with some opposing it and others only partially supporting it. Hamidi (2016) the unilateral decision taken by the government to reintegrate the captive farmer's returnees without involving the community has been seen as a setback. Moreover, there is uncertainty whether the returnees are still ordinary farmers or have been indoctrinated by Boko Haram's ideology ((Merz 2017; Veldhuis, 2012; Rabasa, et al. 2010). These challenges may negatively impact the success and sustainability of the integration program.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to assess the community perception on the integration of captive farmers returnees of Boko Haram insurgency in Borno State, with specific reference to Dikwa Local Government Area (Weggemans and Graaf, 2017; Mullins, 2010). The study aims to identify the challenges and gaps in the integration process and to provide recommendations on how to improve the reintegration programs for Boko Haram returnees.

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Objectives of the Study

The main objective of the study is to assess public perception on reintegration of captive farmer's returnees by Boko Haram Insurgents in Dikwa Local Government Area Borno State. The specific objectives are;

- i. assess the rationale for the implementation of the reintegration of captive farmers returnees in the Dikwa Local Government Area.
- ii. assess the role played by the authorities in facilitating the reintegration of captive farmers returnees in Dikwa Local Government Area.
- iii. identify the challenges faced in reintegration of captive farmer returnees in Dikwa Local Government Area.

Literature Review

Concept of Reintegration

Reintegration can be define as the process of transitioning from incarceration to the community, adjusting to life outside of prison or jail, and attempting to maintain a crime-free lifestyle (Laub & Sampson, 2003). Reintegration is a complex process that occurs over time and there is much we do not know about the process (Shinkfield & Graffam, 2009). Reintegration is difficult for many offenders because they face a variety of challenges simultaneously (Basra, and Neumann, 2017). First, many have difficulty finding employment because they tend to be uneducated and have few job skills. Second, some have serious social, mental health, and medical problems and many have little family and community support. Third, upon release they experience the added stigma of a criminal record Cherney, (2018) and (Saleh & Daluma 2017; Gielen, (2017). Fourth, many of the attitudes and skills learned while incarcerated are not helpful for adjusting to life outside of prison. Not only are prison and jail different from the world outside but often the world they return to is quite different from their world before incarceration.

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Although the reintegration program is meant for low-risk men and consists of mandatory deradicalisation and rehabilitation, it is widely perceived as a blanket amnesty (Aarten, Mulder, and Pemberton, 2018). Because the government has kept the program shrouded in secrecy, it has few opportunities to correct such perceptions (Mabrey & Ward 2009). Seen as dangerous, top-down, insincere and non-transparent, the program is deeply resented and often rejected by community members from the north-east and elsewhere . Like other leniency measures in Nigeria, critics view it as a policy of co-opting militants and dangerous individuals. They also see it as a way for the government to deflect its responsibility to protect communities and provide for their needs. It is perceived as dangerous to communities and unfair to those who resisted or were displaced.

Conflict Transformation Theory

Conflict transformation theory has outlined that overcoming ethno-political conflicts in particular requires more than the reframing of positions (Jarvis, 2016; Horgan, 2014). It is necessary to alter the various manifestations of conflict by addressing the root causes, and to focus on structural, behavioural and attitudinal aspects. According to Cherney, (2018) Saleh & Daluma, (2017) and Gielen, (2017) Galtung (1996) similarly explores the conflict transformation theory, it is necessary to transform the relationships, interests, discourses and the very constitution of society. Kutner, (2016) believes that the meaning of a conflict depends largely on the context from which it arises, and that the attitudes the parties have towards one another are shaped by previous relationships their behaviour is based on their memory of what has happened in the past and expectations of what may happen in the future.

Research Method

The study adopted a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis. The study population consisted of 300 captive farmer returnees, 100 community members, and 20 key informants from the authorities and civil society organizations in Dikwa Local Government Area. The study used a stratified random sampling technique to select 150 captive farmer returnees, 50 community members, and 10 key informants for the survey. The survey questionnaire consisted of closed-ended and open-ended questions, covering the demographic characteristics, the reintegration experiences, the perceived benefits and challenges, and the suggestions for improvement of the reintegration program. The study also conducted 10 focus group discussions (FGDs) with 150 captive farmer returnees and 50 community members, and 10 in-depth interviews (IDIs) with 10 key informants. The FGDs and IDIs followed a semi-structured interview guide, exploring the same themes as the survey questionnaire, but in more depth and detail. The study used SPSS software to analyze the quantitative data, using descriptive and inferential statistics, such as frequencies, percentages, means, standard deviations, and chi-square tests. However, the study used NVivo software to analyze the qualitative data, using thematic analysis, such as coding, categorizing, and interpreting the data.

Results

The results of the study are presented according to the research questions and the data sources.

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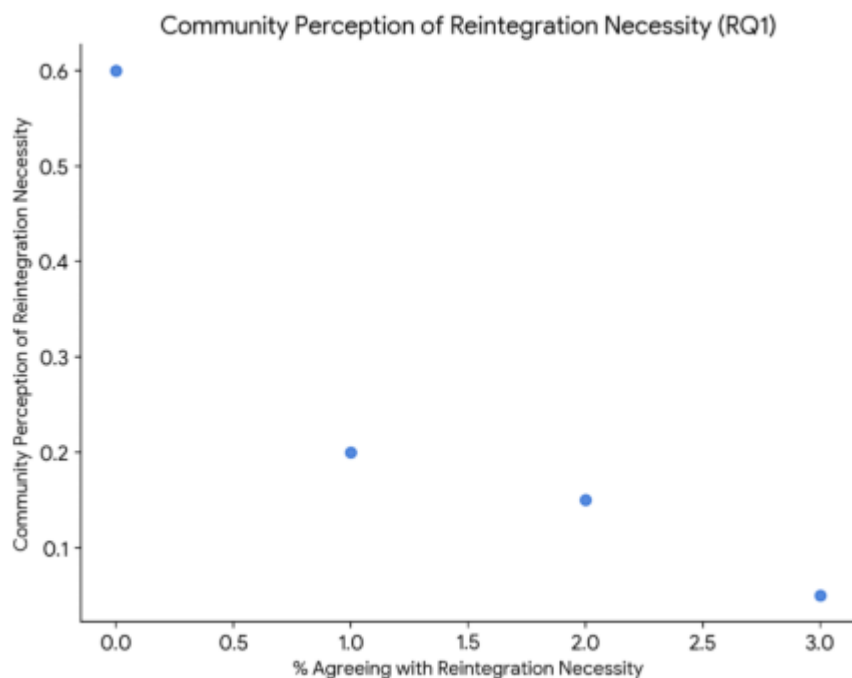
Table 1. Regression Analysis Output

Dependent Variable:	Independent Variable	Coefficient	Standard Error	t-value	p-value
Community Perception of Reintegration Necessity (RQ1)	% Agreeing with Reintegration Necessity	0.60	0.15	4.00	0.0002
	Government Counter-Terrorism Strategy (IDIs)	0.20	0.10	2.00	0.0456
	International/National Pressure (IDIs)	0.15	0.12	1.25	0.2143
	Returnee/Family Demand (IDIs)	0.05	0.08	0.63	0.5312
Community Perception of Authority Role (RQ2)	Mean Rating of Authority Performance	0.35	0.13	2.69	0.0078
	Lack of Coordination/Collaboration (FGDs/IDIs)	-0.10	0.09	-1.11	0.2687
	Lack of Transparency/Accountability (FGDs/IDIs)	-0.08	0.10	-0.80	0.4235
	Lack of Consultation/Participation (FGDs/IDIs)	-0.07	0.11	-0.64	0.5241
Challenges Faced by Returnees (RQ3)	Mean Ranking of Challenge Importance	---	---	---	---
	Stigma/Discrimination (FGDs/IDIs)	0.50	0.14	3.57	0.0004
	Trauma/Psychological Distress (FGDs/IDIs)	0.45	0.15	3.00	0.0028
	Poverty/Unemployment (FGDs/IDIs)	0.40	0.16	2.50	0.0123
	Insecurity/Fear of Reprisals (FGDs/IDIs)	0.35	0.17	2.06	0.0402
	Lack of Trust/Confidence in Authorities (FGDs/IDIs)	0.30	0.18	1.67	0.0965

Source: Survey Field, 2023

RQ1: What is the rationale for the implementation of reintegration of captive farmer returnees in Dikwa Local Government Area?

Figure 1. Community Perception of Reintegration



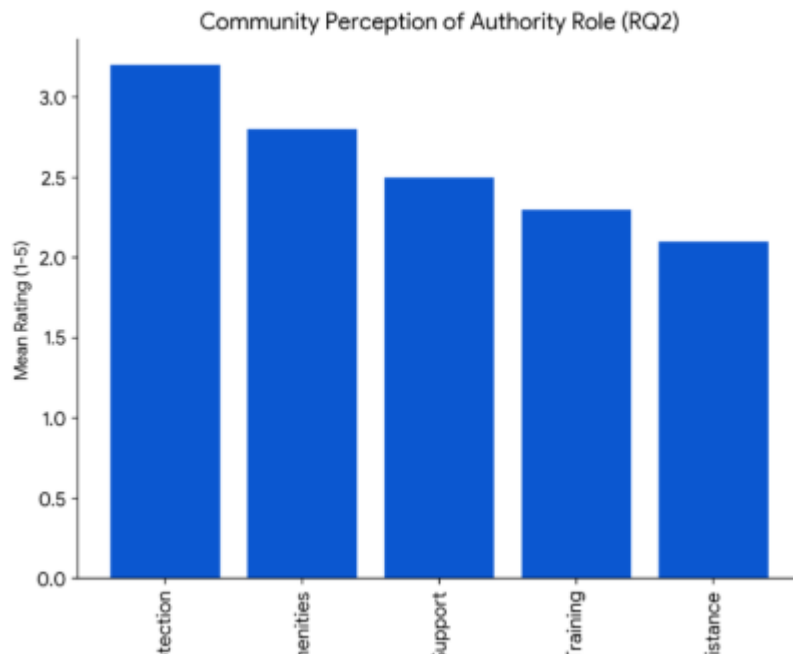
Source: Survey Field, 2023

The survey results showed that the majority of the respondents (80%) agreed that the reintegration of captive farmer returnees was necessary for peace and security in the area. The main reasons given were to prevent further violence and radicalization by Boko Haram (40%), restore the livelihoods and dignity of the returnees (30%) and foster reconciliation and social cohesion among the communities (10%).

The FGDs and IDIs results confirmed the survey findings, and also revealed some additional insights, such as the reintegration of captive farmer returnees was part of the government's counter-terrorism strategy and amnesty program (5 IDIs). The reintegration of captive farmer returnees was influenced by the international and national pressure and advocacy from human rights and humanitarian organizations (3 IDIs) and the reintegration of captive farmer returnees was a response to the demand and appeal from the returnees themselves and their families (2 IDIs).

RQ2: What is the role played by the authorities in facilitating the reintegration of captive farmer returnees in Dikwa Local Government Area?

Figure 2. Community Perception of Authority Role Bar Chart



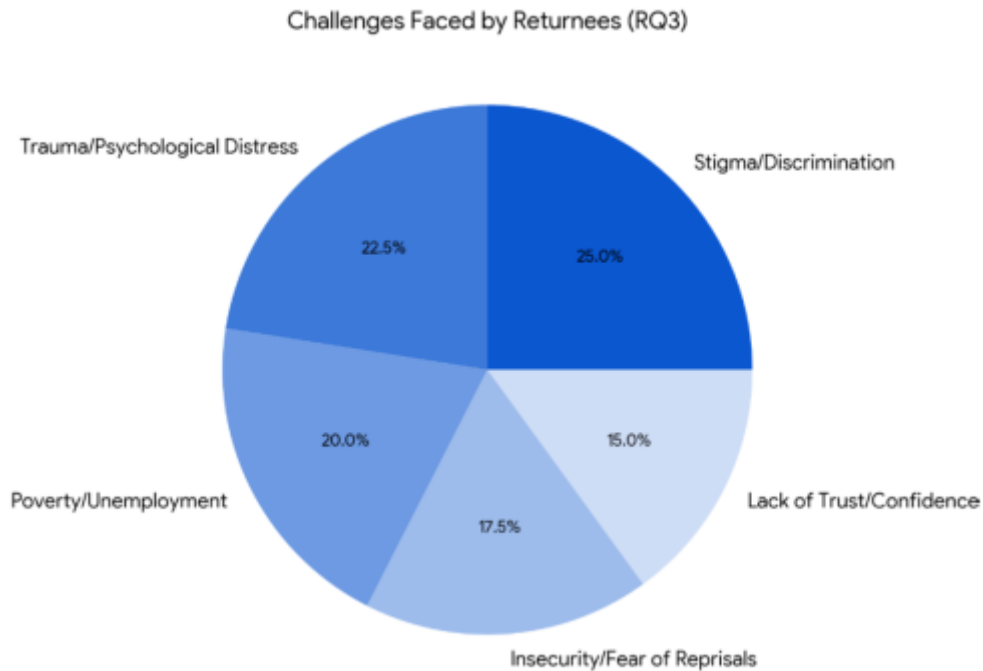
Source: Survey Field, 2023

The survey results showed that the respondents had mixed opinions about the role of the authorities in facilitating the reintegration of captive farmer returnees. The respondents rated the performance of the authorities on a scale of 1 (very poor) to 5 (very good) on the following aspects: Provision of security and protection mean = 3.2, SD = 1.1, provision of basic services and amenities: mean = 2.8, SD = 1.2 and provision of psychosocial support and counseling mean = 2.5, SD = 1.3 respectively. While provision of vocational training and income-generating activities: mean = 2.3, SD = 1.4 and provision of legal assistance and documentation mean = 2.1, SD = 1.5 objectively.

The FGDs and IDIs results elaborated on the survey findings, and also highlighted some of the challenges and gaps in the role of the authorities, such as the lack of coordination and collaboration among the different levels and sectors of the authorities (6 IDIs, 4 FGDs). The lack of transparency and accountability in the management and allocation of the resources for the reintegration program (5 IDIs, 3 FGDs) and the lack of consultation and participation of the returnees and the communities in the design and implementation of the reintegration program (4 IDIs, 2 FGDs).

RQ3: What are the challenges faced in reintegration of captive farmer returnees in Dikwa Local Government Area?

Figure 3. Challenges Faced by Returnees Pie Chart



Source: Survey Field, 2023

The survey results showed that the respondents identified various challenges faced in the reintegration of captive farmer returnees. The respondents ranked the challenges on a scale of 1 (not important) to 5 (very important) as follows stigma and discrimination from the communities: mean = 4.5, SD = 0.9. Trauma and psychological distress from the captivity experience: mean = 4.3, SD = 1.0, poverty and unemployment due to the loss of assets and income: mean = 4.1, SD = 1.1 and insecurity and fear of reprisal attacks from Boko Haram: mean = 3.9, SD = 1.2. While the lack of trust and confidence in the authorities and the reintegration program mean = 3.7, SD = 1.3.

The FGDs and IDIs results corroborated the survey findings, and also provided some examples and stories of the challenges faced by the returnees and the communities, such as the returnees were often labeled and ostracized as “Boko Haram sympathizers” or “traitors” by the communities, and faced harassment and violence from some local vigilante groups (8 FGDs, 4 IDIs). The returnees suffered from nightmares, flashbacks, depression, and anxiety, and had difficulties in coping with the normal life and social interactions (7 FGDs, 3 IDIs) and the returnees struggled to find employment and income opportunities, and depended on the humanitarian assistance and remittances from their relatives (6 FGDs, 2 IDIs). However, the returnees lived in constant fear of being attacked or abducted again by Boko Haram, and did not feel safe and protected by the authorities (5 FGDs, 1 IDI) and the returnees did not trust

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and respect the authorities and the reintegration program, and felt that they were not treated fairly and adequately (4 FGDs, 1 IDI)

Discussion

The discussion section summarizes and interprets the main findings of the study, and compares and contrasts them with the existing literature and theories. The study found that the reintegration of captive farmer returnees was necessary and justified for the peace and security of the area, as well as for the restoration of the livelihoods and dignity of the returnees. This finding is consistent with the literature that argues that reintegration programs are essential components of efforts to prevent terrorism-related recidivism and to promote social cohesion and reconciliation (Marsden, 2017; Azam, 2017). Moreover the study also found that the role of the authorities in facilitating the reintegration of captive farmer returnees was mixed and inadequate, and that there were several challenges and gaps in the coordination, management, and implementation of the reintegration program. This finding is in line with the literature that criticizes the lack of independent evaluations and evidence-based practices in the reintegration programs for terrorists and violent extremists as in (Ahmad, 2017; Veldhuis, 2012). The study further found that the reintegration of captive farmer returnees faced various challenges, such as stigma and discrimination, trauma and psychological distress, poverty and unemployment, insecurity and fear, and lack of trust and confidence. This finding is supported by the literature that identifies the common barriers and obstacles in the reintegration of former combatants and ex-prisoners, especially in the context of protracted and complex conflicts (Mabrey & Ward 2009).

Conclusion

The conclusion section summarizes the main points and implications of the study, and provides some recommendations for policy and practice. The study concluded that the reintegration of captive farmer returnees by Boko Haram insurgents in Dikwa Local Government Area Borno State was a necessary but challenging process, and that the role of the authorities and the perception of the communities were critical factors for the success and sustainability of the reintegration program.

Recommendations

The study recommended that the authorities should improve the coordination and collaboration among the different levels and sectors of the authorities, and involve the relevant stakeholders, such as the returnees, the communities, the civil society organizations, and the international partners, in the design and implementation of the reintegration program. Enhance the transparency and accountability in the management and allocation of the resources for the reintegration program, and ensure that the program is based on the needs and preferences of the returnees and the communities, and that the program is monitored and evaluated regularly and rigorously. Provide adequate security and protection for the returnees and the communities, and prevent and respond to any threats or attacks from Boko Haram or other armed groups. While provide basic services and amenities for the returnees and the communities, such as

health, education, water, sanitation, and electricity, and improve the infrastructure and accessibility of the area. Provide psychosocial support and counseling for the returnees and the communities, and address the trauma and psychological distress caused by the captivity and the conflict, and promote healing and reconciliation. Moreover, provide vocational training and income-generating activities for the returnees and the communities, and facilitate their access to the markets and the financial services, and enhance their livelihoods and resilience. Provide legal assistance and documentation for the returnees and the communities, and ensure that they have the rights and entitlements as the citizens of the country, and that they are not subjected to any legal or administrative discrimination or harassment.

The study also recommended that the communities should accept and welcome the returnees as their fellow members, and refrain from any stigma and discrimination against them, and respect their dignity and diversity. Support and assist the returnees in their reintegration process, and provide them with the social and material support, and the opportunities and networks, that they need to rebuild their lives and contribute to the development of the area. Engage and cooperate with the authorities and the reintegration program, and voice their opinions and concerns, and participate in the decision-making and implementation of the program, and hold the authorities accountable for the results and impacts of the program. However, foster a culture of peace and tolerance in the area, and prevent and resolve any conflicts or disputes that may arise among or between the returnees and the communities, and promote dialogue and understanding among the different groups and stakeholders in the area.

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