



EVALUATION SUMMARY

Mid-term evaluation of the Social cohesion programme in Northeast Nigeria

March 2018

EVALUATION THEME

Social cohesion

EVALUATION OBJECTIVES AND CRITERIA

Specific evaluation objectives:

- Determine the extent to which Alert's social cohesion programme in Borno State is having an impact as framed in the Theory of Change.
- Assess the conflict sensitivity of Alert's social cohesion programme in Borno State.
- Determine the extent to which Alert's social cohesion programme is having an impact on gender dynamics, specifically the role of women in society, beyond the reduction of SGBV-related stigma.
- Provide recommendations on what works or not, and what is likely to have sustained results for strategic decision-making for the remainder of the ongoing programme and future programming

International Alert chose to focus the **evaluation criteria** on *Impact, Effectiveness, and Sustainability*, following the OECD DAC guidelines and quality standards for evaluating peacebuilding interventions in settings of fragility.

BACKGROUND TO THE PROJECT

In 2015, International Alert and UNICEF published *Bad Blood*¹, a research study in Borno State, Northeast Nigeria, to understand families', communities', and authorities' perceptions of women, girls and children associated with JAS, as well as the impact of those perceptions on their safety, rehabilitation and reintegration as they returned from captivity. Based on recommendations from the *Bad Blood* research, International Alert launched the 'Social Cohesion Programme in Northeast Nigeria' to promote the reintegration of women, girls and children associated with JAS and to address the stigma and the negative perceptions that they face.

The programme has been implemented by International Alert in coordination with three local partners: Herwa Community Development Initiative (HERWA), the Federation of Muslim Women's Association in Nigeria (FOMWAN) and Health Care Development Focus Initiative (HECADF). In coordination with their partners, Alert has organised a series of activities at various levels to reduce stigma against women and children associated with Boko Haram and open a space for their reintegration into society. At the individual level, they have worked with women and girls, survivors of violence, to develop networks where they feel empowered to express themselves on the challenges they face and access peer social support. They have also piloted a small-scale initiative (SSI) on

¹ Kimairis Toogood - International Alert and UNICEF (2016): *Bad Blood*. Available at: <http://www.international-alert.org/publications/bad-blood>

economic empowerment. At the family level, they have facilitated reconciliation between survivors and family members. At the community level, they have organised dialogues for community members to better understand the experience of the survivors and the necessity of their reintegration to rebuild the social fabric within their own community. They have also implemented radio programming to reach a broader audience with the same messages.

The programme was expected to have the following impact, outcome and outputs:

Impact: Greater social cohesion and resilience to violent conflict and violent extremism in North East Nigeria through increased awareness for conflict survivors and advocacy for community healing.

Outcome: Stronger relationships within and between communities in target areas will lead to stronger social cohesion and increased opportunities for successful reintegration of girls under 18, women over 18 and children born of sexual violence by Boko Haram.

METHODOLOGY

The evaluation, including the desk review and field work, was carried out from January to March 2018. Data collection included 36 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), 20 Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) in IDP camps, host communities, and LGAs. These were carried out by a team of four researchers from the University of Maiduguri, who were accompanied by an external evaluator. The evaluation sought to provide a basis for internal learning and accountability, as well as recommendations for the continuation and expansion of the programme. It focused on understanding the impact and effectiveness of the programme in reducing stigma and increasing social cohesion from December 2015 through January 2018, and the sustainability of that impact beyond the programme's timeframe.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

- 1) The programme had a significant positive impact on reducing stigma and marginalisation of women and girls associated with JAS, including children born of sexual violence by the terror group. Despite continuing isolated incidents of stigmatisation, support groups provide a coping mechanism through the peer-to-peer support, and are helping women and girls to be more resilient to its negative effects.
- 2) Women and girls reported feeling increased sense of self-worth, confidence, autonomy and security, to which the programme contributed through the counselling sessions, support networks and small-scale income generating projects. The bonds of friendship created through the counselling sessions and support networks have been central in making survivors feel less isolated, and in building their resiliency to cope with challenges of displacement.
- 3) Community dialogue sessions have been effective in increasing community members' resilience to violence, and creating greater unity between ethnic and religious groups. Increased empathy and understanding between survivors and community members makes them more resilient to future violence.
- 4) Counselling and dialogue sessions have had a positive impact on participants from all categories in their process of healing from psychological, emotional and spiritual trauma. As their psychological distress lessens, they also reported a reduced desire for revenge, and a willingness to forgive in order to live together again peacefully when they return to their LGAs.
- 5) The community dialogue spaces created by the programme have promoted and advanced inter-faith social cohesion, by addressing the root causes of the conflict, and strengthening social cohesion between religious groups.
- 6) As more people return to their LGAs, there will be increased challenges to the sustainability of the changed attitudes and behaviours, due to the ongoing violence and continuing large numbers of returnees.
- 7) Despite the significant progress being made toward the programme's objectives, participants highlighted that forgiveness and reconciliation are ongoing, long-term processes with many components that should be considered in future programming.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1) Provide additional capacity building and training for facilitators of the counselling sessions and support groups.
- 2) Integrate small-scale initiatives and livelihoods skills training fully into the programme activities or partner with livelihoods organizations so a greater number of women and girls have access to educational and vocational training opportunities to provide for their children.
- 3) Provide consistent, ongoing psychosocial and trauma healing support to community and family members, as well as women and girls to address the negative effects of trauma that undermine social cohesion and perpetuate the cycle of violence.
- 4) Ensure that programming is responsive to emerging phases in the reconciliation process as the socio-political context of the conflict and “post-conflict recovery” process evolves. Future programming should be flexible and adapted to address or partner with other organizations addressing emergent issues in the reconciliation process, such as transitional justice, truth-telling, trauma healing and mental health.
- 5) Reinforce the influence and involvement of community leaders, traditional leaders, religious leaders and women leaders in the process of reintegration through their leadership in social cohesion programme activities.
- 6) Address the conflict sensitive dynamics of the programme that were raised during the evaluation, so they don't compound existing divisions or create new ones and negatively impact the significant progress made by the programme in reducing stigma and promoting the reintegration of survivors.