REINTEGRATION IN SOCIETIES IN FLUX: YOUTH, IDENTITY RECONSTRUCTION, AND THE POLITICS OF SOCIAL RESILIENCE IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Research Problem: *In Nigeria's conflict regions, disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration (DDR) programmes have consistently failed to achieve sustainable results: re-recruitment continues and communities remain hostile to returning ex-combatants, reinforced by structural exclusion from the mainstream of society, which has driven youth into armed mobilisation. These failures are political, sociological, psychosocial, and communicative, stemming from a misrecognition of what reintegration requires in a a society undergoing rapid, simultaneous change.*

Methods/Theory: *This study advances four interrelated arguments and synthesises them into an original Structural-Normative-Psychosocial-Communicative (SNPC) model of reintegration failure.*

Results: *Governance deficits and institutional mistrust sustain the structural grievances, unemployment, and marginalisation that make re-recruitment not irrational but structurally rational for many conflict-affected youth. Community-level reception - normative structures of accountability, forgiveness, and belonging - shapes reintegration outcomes more powerfully than the formal architecture of international DDR programmes. Sustainable reintegration also depends on psychosocial recovery, which conventional DDR approaches routinely exclude, and whose attention can make a difference in lowering re-recruitment vulnerability.*

Conclusion: *These arguments suggest a radical rethinking of DDR architecture that integrates political reform, community sociology, psychosocial rehabilitation, and strategic communication as mutually reinforcing, rather than sequential, components.*

Key Contribution to Knowledge: *This study integrates governance, community normativity, psychosocial recovery, and media ecology into a single analytical model (SNPC). It situates the failure of successful implementation of DDR within the politics of social resilience in fragile states. It contributes to African Studies by analytically focusing on Nigeria's governance pathologies while using them to understand the broader nature of the politics of social resilience in fragile states.*
Recommendation: *DDR architecture should be redesigned to integrate political reform, community sociology, psychosocial rehabilitation, and strategic communication as mutually reinforcing components of sustainable reintegration.*

1. Introduction

Nigeria's disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration (DDR) programmes have failed to curtail the phenomenon of re-recruitment of once reintegrated combatants, while the hostility to returning ex-combatants continues unabated. This realityrequires a scholarly probing which informs the present study. DDR failure in Nigeria is not primarily a problem of programme execution but of a deeper misrecognition of what reintegration politically, sociologically, and psychologically requires.Two narratives of post-conflict recovery run concurrently in Nigeria. Government and donor reports describe thousands of former insurgents processed through DDR facilities, graduated, and returned to their communities. Community surveys, investigative journalism, and academic research describe communities rejecting returnees and returnees relapsing into armed groups because DDR programmes are underfunded, opaque, and lack any mechanism for community healing (Ike et al., 2022; Africa Defense Forum [ADF], 2024; Kurtzer & Anyadike, 2022). It is imperative to understand what makes these two narratives co-exist and why the second is usually stronger.

The scale of problem is alarming as evidenced by the number of internally displaced people (IDP) in Nigeria which is estimated at 3.5 million, of which 2.3 million are in the Northeast, and has been high for more than 10 years (UNHCR, 2025; OCHA, 2024). Since 2021, approximately 90,000 people have defected or surrendered to Boko Haram-affiliated groups, far exceeding the processing capacity that was not built to handle such volume (Zabala, 2024). Since its launch in 2016, Nigeria's deradicalisationprogramme, Operation Safe Corridor (OSC), has successfully processed more than 3,000 persons, although it has yet to have a national framework, clear impact assessments and acceptance by Nigeria's state governments (Olayiwola, 2026; Anyadike, 2026; Ike et al., 2022).The dominant paradigm in DDR has, over the past three decades, shifted from a narrow security-sector focus on weapons collection toward sociologically oriented approaches emphasising economic reintegration, psychosocial support, and community participation (Humphreys & Weinstein, 2007; Palik et al., 2025; UN DDR Resource Centre, 2022). Yet even the most advanced second-generation frameworks still treat reintegration as a technical problem, overlooking how political systems, normative ecologies, and communicative environments upstream of programme design determine success or failure.

Extant studies on Nigerian DDR (Ike et al., 2022; Palik et al., 2025; Akinyetun et al., 2025) are programmatic or descriptive, cataloguing implementation failures without theorising why political, normative, psychosocial, and

communicative deficits interact to reproduce re-recruitment. Studies do not treat governance, community sociology, individual psychology, and media ecology as interdependent, rather than as sequential programme stages. This constitutes a significant contribution of this study.Accordingly, the study asks: (1) how do governance deficits and structural grievances render re-recruitment structurally rational for conflict-affected youth in Nigeria; (2) what role do community normative structures play in reintegration outcomes, independent of formal programme design; and (3) how do psychosocial harms and stigmatising media ecologies interact with governance and community factors to shape those outcomes? To address these, the study synthesises political economy, stigma theory, and social resilience theory into the Structural-Normative-Psychosocial-Communicative (SNPC) model, extending DDR scholarship beyond programmatic critique toward an integrated theory of reintegration failure in fragile states.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

The literature on Nigeria's DDR experience clusters around four themes: programme effectiveness and design; stigma and community reception; psychosocial and identity-based accounts of former combatants; and media framing of insurgency and reintegration. These clusters reveal a shared limitation that guides this studyThe programme-effectiveness cluster is anchored by Humphreys and Weinstein's (2007) finding that formal DDR participation in Sierra Leone was a weak predictor of social reintegration, later extended by Palik et al.'s (2025) cross-national finding that only 26.9 per cent of peace agreements with DDR provisions include a complete DDR package. These studies treat reintegration as a measurable programme output but diverge on political context. While Humphreys and Weinstein isolate individual-level predictors, Palik et al. focuson agreement design - and neither extends its analysis to the community and psychosocial mechanisms through which structural incompleteness becomes re-recruitment.

The stigma cluster draws on Goffman's (1963) sociology of stigma, applied to ex-combatants by Schmitt et al. (2021) in the Democratic Republic of Congo and by Aranda et al. (2023) and Uzomah (2025) in Nigerian and broader African contexts. These studies agree that community-level stigma, not individual pathology, drives continued violence, but disagree on unit of analysis. Schmitt et al. model stigma as an individual psychological state, while Uzomah treats it as a structurally patterned regional phenomenon. This study resolves that tension by extending Goffman's originally interactional model to account for stigma that is institutionalised and politically sustained - produced and reproduced at the communal level even where no direct interaction between a community and a specific returnee has occurred. However, these studies have not systematically theorised this distinction; a gap this study seeks to fill.

The psychosocial cluster establishes, through Annan et al. (2009) in Uganda and Denov (2010) in Sierra Leone, that identity disruption rather than skill deficit is the central barrier to civilian reintegration, while Wong (2021) introduces moral injury as a construct distinct from PTSD among Liberian former child soldiers. These contributions are geographically and temporally distinct from the Nigerian Boko Haram context, and this study justifies rather than assumes their transplantation, applying moral injury specifically to the gendered and communal dimensions of Nigerian reintegration.Furthermore, no causal link has

been established between the media's repetitive construction of the term 'barbaric others' (Aondover et al., 2023; Oluyemi & Badmus, 2025; Habib & Akila, 2021) and DDR outcomes because none of these studies directly used reintegration or re-recruitment data.

Taken together, thefour clusters evolve largely in isolation: programme-effectiveness scholars rarely engage stigma theory, stigma researchers seldom incorporate media analysis, and psychosocial accounts are rarely connected to governance variables. This fragmentation constitutes the central gap this study addresses. By analytically integrating governance, normative, psychosocial, and communicative literatures within a single framework, this study departs from the additive, catalogue-style engagement that has characterised much of the existing scholarship on Nigerian DDR.

Three theoretical underpinnings are instructive in this regard. The first is the political economy of DDR associated with Humphreys and Weinstein (2007), whose Sierra Leonean finding - that individual programme participation does little to predict community acceptance - is corroborated in later African contexts (Schmitt et al., 2021; Palik et al., 2025). This empirical foundation serves as the starting point for this study. Its micro-level focus, however, leaves unexplained the structural and political dynamics that render some communities more generally hostile to returneesunexplainable.The second is Goffman's (1963) sociology of stigma: stigmatised identity results from discrediting social interaction that 'spoils' social standing and pushes a person out of community life. Subsequent research extends Goffman's work to stigmatisation as a mechanism of social control operating through media, political speech, and institutional policy, not only interpersonal contact (Schmitt et al., 2021; Aranda et al., 2023; Uzomah, 2025). This is compounded in Nigeria, as the stigma of Boko Haram affiliation layers onto ethnoreligious and geographical stigma, making individual destigmatisation without structural, community-level intervention difficult to achieve. This study's extension of Goffman - treating stigma as institutionally and communally produced rather than only interactionally produced - is developed further, where it grounds the study's account of why procedural forgiveness fails to secure normative acceptance. Whereas Goffmantheorised stigma as the product of face-to-face interactional discrediting between individuals, the Nigerian case demonstrates that stigma can be produced and sustained at the institutional and communal level even where no direct interaction between a community and a specific returnee has occurred, a distinction that existing applications of stigma theory to DDR (Schmitt et al., 2021; Aranda et al., 2023) have not systematically theorised. This extension, constitutes a specific theoretical contribution this study makes to stigma scholarship, rather than a mechanical importation of Goffman's original model.

The third is Lederach's (1997) social resilience framework, which treats sustainable peace not as the absence of conflict but as the presence of generative social relationships able to absorb and transform it. African applications elaborate this into the social infrastructure of reintegration - indigenous accountability systems, religious forgiveness, elder-mediated reconciliation (Boehle, 2021; Mullet et al., 2021) - which usefully directs attention to what normative capacity survives conflict and can be strengthened, not only what is lost. Lederach's model, developed around inter-communal reconciliation after civil war, offers no account of how state-level governance failure interacts with community-level normative repair. This study supplies that missing linkage, treating

governance deficits, community normativity, psychosocial harm, and media framing not as parallel factors but as mutually reinforcing dimensions of a single reintegration failure - the contribution formalised as the Structural-Normative-Psychosocial-Communicative (SNPC) model. This integrative synthesisconstitutes another theoretical contribution made by this study.These three traditions form the SNPC model: sustainable reintegration requires simultaneous action on the structural level (governance, economic opportunity, political inclusion), the normative level (forgiveness, accountability, belonging), the psychosocial level (trauma, moral injury, identity reconstruction), and the communicative level (media framing, stigmatising narratives, institutional messaging). Weakness in any one dimension undermines progress on the others.

3. Materials and Methods

This study is qualitative for which sources were identified through Google Scholar, Scopus, Web of Science, and institutional repositories (UNHCR, IOM, ACCORD, CSIS, USIP), using Boolean combinations of terms including 'DDR Nigeria,''reintegration Boko Haram,''stigma ex-combatants,''psychosocial trauma reintegration,' and 'media framing Boko Haram.' Sources published between 1963 and 2026 that engaged substantively with disarmament, reintegration, stigma, psychosocial recovery, or media framing, with a primary or comparative focus on Nigeria, were included; foundational texts predating this window (Goffman, 1963; Lederach, 1997) were retained for their conceptual contribution. Sources addressing Nigerian conflict without reintegration-related themes, or lacking independent verification against a publisher, institutional, or DOI-indexed record, were excluded. Screening yielded a final corpus of 40 sources (See Table 1).

Table 1: Categorisation of the secondary-data corpus (N = 40).

Source category	**N**	**% of corpus**
Peer-reviewed journal articles	21	52.5%
Institutional/policy reports and news media	14	35.0%
Books and edited volumes	5	12.5%
Total	40	100%

Source: Authors

The literature was analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis procedure. Open coding generated descriptive codes (e.g., 'funding instability,''state rejection of graduates,''moral injury'); axial coding grouped these into the four analytical categories structuring (governance/structural grievance, community normativity, psychosocial harm, media framing); and selective coding identified the cross-cutting relationships formalised in the SNPC model. To limit source-selection bias, claims are triangulated across at least two independent source types wherever possible, and confidence in each claim is calibrated to the strength and consistency of the underlying evidence.

The authors' assertions are given an appropriate epistemic calibration: stronger causal language is used when the evidence is strong and consistent, and hedged language is used when the evidence is suggestive or limited to particular circumstances. causal language is used where evidence is strong and consistent, and hedged language where it is suggestive or

context-limited. Because no reliable, independently verifiable outcome data exist for Operation Safe Corridor, evaluative claims about it carry limited confidence. Thousands of people have gone through the rehabilitation process, but there is no independent verification, and no detailed system of recidivism monitoring exists which has been made public - a gap that is itself analytically significant, since it reflects the opacity and accountability deficits this study identifies as central to DDR failure.

4. Governance Deficits, Structural Grievances, and the Rationality of Re-Recruitment

A persistent error in understanding DDR failure in Nigeria is to focus on the DDR programme design and not the political environment that creates insecurity and reintegration difficulties. It is crucial to lookbeyond the programme design to the political environment that creates insecurity in the first place. No programme design, however well executed, compensates for a political environment in which the structural conditions that drove youth into armed mobilisationremain unchanged after they leave it. Northeast Nigeria illustrates a structural grievance trap in which youth are aggrieved to view armed mobilisation as an alternative to livelihood, identity, and security, and formal DDR exit pathways as a route back to the conditions they fled (Akinyetun et al., 2025). Youth unemployment in the Northeast exceeds the national rate approximated at 38 per cent (Kurtzer & Anyadike, 2022); regional poverty reaches an estimated 90 per cent living on less than two dollars a day (Akinyetun et al., 2021; Akinyetun, 2023a, 2023b). Weak state presence - low education access, poor health infrastructure, impunity for security-force abuses - has been systematically exploited by armed groups for recruitment (Akinyetun, 2022a, 2022b; Herbert & Husaini, 2018; Onuoha, 2014). Meanwhile, this evidence base draws on donor-funded assessment and journalism rather than independent state audit, meaning that governance failures the literature emphasizes are also the reason government-verified data on them do not exist. This is regarded in this study as analytically significant and not a mere limitation.

Direct implications for DDR have not been sufficiently discussed. Humphreys and Weinstein (2007) found no improvement in the likelihood that DDR participants would sever faction ties, improve democratic attitudes, or gain community acceptance. The Nigerian evidence corroborates this, as OSC graduates return to communities offering no material change, still marked as former Boko Haram members, and unemployed (ADF, 2024; Ike et al., 2022). The individual's mistake is not the result of reasoning but rather the natural consequence of structural incentives that have not been addressed (Akinyetun et al., 2025). Communities are not expressing institutional distrust of the government in general but also of DDR organisations in particular due to decades of corruption, electoral manipulation, and security force abuse; would-be defectors doubt the government's capability to deliver on social programmes promised; the OSC has no clear statute, overlapping command structures, and is a victim of chronic funding instability (Ike et al., 2022; Ogunnubi&Aja, 2024).

This structural failure is recorded globally, with only 26.9 percent of peace agreements that include DDR provisions including a full package of DDR. In Nigeria, the reintegration phase is the most expensive, longest, and sociologically complex; however, it is also the least institutionalised and least funded aspect of peacebuilding. (ACCORD, 2024; Hamidu & Bulila, 2024) If DDR is to be a security

intervention, the political architecture that creates insecurity must be in place, which has been under-emphasised where DDR is conceived and implemented as a technical approach, without regard for the prerequisites of institutional trust-building, economic inclusion and governance reform (Anyadike, 2026; Kurtzer & Anyadike, 2022).This suggests that a claim not expressly stated elsewhere in the literature is that Nigeria's DDR institutions do not just operate in a situation of governance deficit; they also perpetuate it. DDR is thus less a corrective to problems in governance than a reflection of them, as the command, funding, and legal structure of DDR is just as opaque and cloaked in elite discretion as the security sector as a whole, and therefore is a source of mistrust within it (Herbert and Husaini, 2018). It goes without saying that any increase in the strength of DDR programming without addressing the governance pathologies it reproduces will relocate the mistrust but not solve it.

5. Community Normativity and the Sociology of Acceptance

While governance failure can help explain the structural failure of DDR programmes, community normativity can explain why reintegration fails at the point of social re-entry, even when progress is made in addressing structural issues. Stigma and distrust are the most common reintegration challenges, even among communities targeted by sensitisation programs in Nigeria's northeast (Ulebor, 2026). Programmatic explanations are insufficient to explain the nature of community normativity in relation to acts of transgression, loss, and accountability. The analytical generative approach here is by extending Goffman's (1963) 'spoiled identity' to the reintegration of Boko Haram members, where the stigma is not interpersonal but communal, institutional, and politically entrenched. Communities in Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe have endured collective losses – lives, livelihoods, repeated psychological trauma – and there are no serious mechanisms to recognise these losses, hold them to account, or provide a space for normatively dealing with the loss (Ike et al., 2022; Kurtzer & Anyadike, 2022).

This builds on Schmitt et al.'s (2021) DRC finding that community mistrust and returnees' felt stigma predict continued violence. Stronger community scepticism and more acute stigmatisation both raise the likelihood of re-recruitment. Nigeria replicates this pattern whereby state governments have resisted admitting OSC graduates, some populations have threatened returnees with violence, and community-based reconciliation processes remain largely absent, thus leaving returning combatants without the relational anchors, acknowledgement, and forgiveness that social reintegration requires (Kurtzer &Anyadike, 2022; Ulebor, 2026).Two phenomena the mainstream DDR literature has not adequately theorised deserve attention here. The first is processing transgression through indigenous norms. Nigeria's Northeast is ethnically and religiously plural, with norms of accountability, dispute resolution, and forgiveness - the Islamic practice of *tawba*, Christian theology of redemption, elder-led reconciliation - that predate and operate alongside formal state institutions (Herbert & Husaini, 2018). DDR frameworks 'sensitise' communities to reintegration rather than formally invoking this indigenous normative capacity, a resource they have systematically neglected.

The second is a communal trauma involving the cumulative psychological damage caused by continuous assaults upon the physical, social and symbolic structures of a community, this study calls communal trauma. Ike et al. (2022) conducted an interpretative phenomenological

analysis of 30 community members in Borno, Adamawa, and Kaduna to identify the factors driving scepticism towards returnee reintegration and discovered that unresolved trauma persists as a driver of scepticism towards reintegration. Formal DDR almost ignores the community as a whole, as a party that needs rehabilitation, not just the returnees. Awareness campaigns in communities where lives were lost and children were abducted are insufficient to produce forgiveness. There is also the issue of absence of visible justice. This constitutes a normativedilemma for communities to deal with when having to accept the return of fighters who directly killed and injured them without being held accountable (Kurtzer & Anyadike, 2022; Ike et al. 2022). Boehle's (2021) peacebuilding approach hold that sustainable reconciliation requires justice and reintegration to function as interwovenprocesses. DDR without transitional justice - truth, victim recognition, reparations - produces individually rehabilitated returnees without addressing the communal ruptures through which re-recruitment occurs (Ike et al., 2022).

Together, these dynamics identify a distinction Nigerian DDR practice has not yet attained: procedural forgiveness, which programmes manufacture through sensitisation, differs from normative forgiveness, which communities extend only once indigenous mechanisms of accountability, acknowledgement, and grief have run their course. Where DDR substitutes the former for the latter, as OSC largely does, community acceptance remains procedurally compliant but normatively withheld - returnees are formally reintegrated yet socially suspended. This distinction, not previously drawn in the literature, constitutes a specific contribution of this section.

6. Psychosocial Rehabilitation and the Politics of Identity Reconstruction

The third dimension of DDR failure concerns what does not happen within the individuals being processed. Conventional programmes treat psychosocial support as an add-on to vocational training - a few weeks of counselling - a sequencing that underestimates both the depth of conflict-related psychological harm and its links to other DDR outcomes.Youth who spent extended periods with Boko Haram or affiliated groups do not only acquire skills vocational training can redirect; many, recruited as children through abduction or drawn by grievance, ideology, or material need (Onuoha, 2014), undergo identity change that programme participation cannot reverse. Environments where violence was extreme, belonging was rigid and hierarchical, and civilian norms were suspended produce what the literature calls identity interruption - a developmental rupture displacing people from stable civilian identities and leaving no identity to return to (Annan et al., 2009; Denov, 2010).

An under-researched dimension in the Nigerian context is moral injury - the affective aftermath of acts that violate one's own moral values. Wong (2021) shows, among Liberian former child soldiers, that moral injury produces traumatic stress distinct from and less amenable to standard psychotherapy than PTSD; those involved in atrocities experience self-condemnation and fragmented moral agency that complicates civilian identity reconstruction. In the absence of clinical tools designed for moral injury, affected combatants often cope by denial or by returning to the agency and identity language the armed group offered (Schmitt et al., 2021; Wong, 2021). Meanwhile, this is compounded by gender. Reintegration for women and girls associated with Boko Haram - as wives, supporters, or combatants - occurs

within a system structurally built around male ex-combatants. However, like the OSC, the Nigerian campaign Yellow Ribbon Initiative claims to have reintegrated thousands, yet lacks accountability and does not tackle issues of sexual violence, forced marriage, and reproductive coercion – issues that are beyond the scope of gender-blind programming. (Ike et al., 2022; Amani Africa, 2025)

In addition to trauma, the process of reconstruction involves a shift from 'rebel' to 'returnee'; from one social designation to another, from one identity to another – one that is not just a cognitive transition but a relational one, in need of supportive relationships and institutions affirming civilian identity. In the absence of these relational anchors, as in the case of underserved communities in the Northeast, the structural risk of returning to a group identity of armed actors also grows, even if such a group identity is destructive in nature. Psychosocial programming therefore needs to be reimagined as a longer-term, more sophisticated process addressing moral injury, gendered trauma, and identity reconstruction alongside PTSD, since livelihood provision without psychosocial support produces economically functional but psychologically vulnerable returnees, and the reverse produces returnees with no economic basis for civilian life.

These findings support an argument that moves beyond the individual-clinical framing dominant in DDR psychosocial literature, that identity reconstruction is relationally contingent. A returnee may complete trauma-focused therapy and still fail to reconstruct a viable civilian identity if the community withholds the recognition that identity depends on. This recognition deficit, rather than residual psychopathology, better explains persistent re-recruitment vulnerability among OSC graduates than clinical accounts alone –another specific contribution of this study.

7. Media Ecosystems, Stigmatising Communication, and the Preconditions of Reintegration

DDR programmes that ignore the communicative context in which they operate make a category error: reintegration is not a two-way relationship between programme and participant but a three-way relationship in which community reception - shaped by media representation - is decisive. Nigerian media consistently frame former insurgents as 'barbaric others,'irredeemably useful to civil society (Aondover et al., 2023; Oluyemi & Badmus, 2025; Habib & Akila, 2021). This framing treats returnees as existential threats and fosters the scepticism toward reform that Schmitt et al. (2021) identify as a precondition for continued violence.Programme representation compounds the problem. Kurtzer& Anyadike (2022) find that OSC lacks any community communication strategy as receiving communities are given little or no structured information about who is arriving, what happened to them, or how accountability will be ensured. Without an institutionalised narrative, informal frames - permanent-threat characterisations and rumour networks –takes precedence, and state-government resistance to receiving graduates reflects and reinforces that vacuum, since acceptance carries political cost.

This is the mediatization of security, where security narratives created in the media become autonomous of events and influence institutional and community responses to security more than events (Oluyemi & Badmus, 2025). This hostile framing has been set up and normalised before the arrival of any returnee and is therefore hard to change with post-hoc sensitisation campaigns over a decade. The answer is not to prevent

critical reporting but to encourage constructive conflict reporting (International Alert, 2025) – to give returnees more than one identity, share the outcomes of reconciliation at the community level, highlight community-level reconciliation successes, and communicate the structural causes of radicalisation without placing blame on individuals. Communicative trust requires building trust through the transparency of institutions regarding what they measure and how they can be held accountable by communities, as well as the engagement of their legitimate but not misinformed concerns about safety, justice, and unverifiable rehabilitation claims. OSC's documented lack of transparency actively contributes to the mistrust it needs to overcome to gain community access.

Collectively, these dynamics suggest that Nigeria's media ecosystem functions as an informal, parallel gatekeeping mechanism for reintegration, operating independently of, and often overriding OSC's formal certification criteria. Communities defer to mediatisedjudgements of trustworthiness over official certification, meaning no amount of programmatic reform secures durable reintegration unless strategic communication is treated as structural to DDR rather than peripheral to it. This reframing of media as a structural precondition, rather than a communications add-on, is this section's contribution.

8. Toward an Integrative Framework for DDR in Societies in Flux

Nigeria's failure of DDR is as complex as its many other failures; hence, it is impossible to correct it with any single intervention. The three elements of governance/structural grievance, community normativity and psychosocial rehabilitation, and communicative environment create a complex interplay in which a weakness in one dimension outweighs progress in the other: a weakness in community normativity and psychosocial rehabilitation has a detrimental effect on progress in the other dimensions of communicative environment and vocational programming, and conversely, a lack of governance/structural grievance has a harmful effect on progress in community normativity and psychosocial rehabilitation.As a result of this interdependence, the SNPC model does not propose implementing DDR in a linear sequence of phases but rather in four parallel tracks. Despite the theoretical literature recommending the inclusion of structural tracks in governance reform, which invariably involves political inclusion, economic opportunity, and institutional trust building, these areas consistently elude Nigeria's coverage. (Humphreys & Weinstein, 2007; Palik et al., 2025). The normative track actively involves communities as agents, using formalised processes of Indigenous reconciliation mechanisms, victim recognition, and transitional justice (Boehle, 2021; Lederach, 1997). The psychosocial track is an approach to rehabilitation that goes beyond PTSD symptoms to include moral injury, gendered trauma, and identity reconstruction. Communicative track resources for strategic communication are used throughout the program, involving media, community, and religious leaders to influence the norms that returnees face.

This framework is qualified by three types of tensions. The issue is not that all combatants must be prosecuted or that prosecution should be given up, but that Nigeria's failure to have any form of accountability mechanism overlooks and ignores instead of engaging with community resistance, which can be tackled by context-sensitive tools such as truth-telling, reparations, and acknowledgement ceremonies without universal criminal prosecution (Sriram et al.,

2013). Second, integrative DDR is costly and slow to scale relative to current programming, but the human, social, and economic costs of continued instability exceed those of effective reintegration; inadequate DDR is, in this sense, a failure to protect the original investment in bringing ex-combatants home. Third, while this study analyses the Northeast, Nigeria's conflict landscape, the Niger Delta, Northwest banditry, Middle Belt ethno-religious conflicts, have distinct structural, normative, and psychosocial profiles. Thus, the SNPC framework generalises structurally but requires context-specific application rather than uniform transfer.

Conclusion

Reintegration in Nigeria cannot work unless treated as a political response to political conditions. Conventional DDR models define the 'returning combatant' as the unit of change while leaving the structural, normative, psychosocial, and communicative context around them unchanged. The study argued that the concept of reintegration needs to be reconceptualised in the context of sustainable reintegration in societies in flux. DDR architecture must treat political structure, community sociology, individual psychology, and public communication as interwoven parts of one intervention logic, not separate programme elements.Nigeria's 'Maiduguri model' of mass surrender processing is a logistical achievement but not a substitute for governance reform, transitional justice, and communicative trust-building that sustainable reintegration requires. Three theoretical implications were generated. First, this study confirms and extends Humphreys and Weinstein's finding that formal DDR participation weakly predicts durable reintegration, specifying the mechanism as the interaction of governance opacity, withheld normative forgiveness, unmet relational recognition, and adverse media framing - not any single deficit. Second, where Goffman's stigma theory and Lederach's relational peacebuilding have largely been applied separately, the SNPC model shows they are more explanatorily powerful integrated, since community-level stigma and relational normative repair operate on the same causal pathway. Third, against studies treating Nigeria's DDR failures as *sui generis*, evidence from Sierra Leone and the DRC suggests that institutional inversion, recognition deficit, and mediatised gatekeeping are plausibly generalisable features of DDR in weak-governance settings, though their configuration will vary by context.This study also identifies genuine institutional strengths on which reform can be based, such as indigenised accountability and forgiveness mechanisms, which remain very much normative in Northeast communities.

Base on the findings, this study recommends that the DDR architecture in Nigeria should be redesigned to integrate political reform, community sociology, psychosocial rehabilitation, and strategic communication as mutually reinforcing components of sustainable reintegration. In addition, there should be an independently audited, regularly published recidivism-monitoring mechanism for OSC graduates, closing the accountability gap identified above. Also, there should be a formal, funded incorporation of indigenous transitional-justice mechanisms - elder-mediated reconciliation, victim acknowledgement - as a sequenced DDR component rather than an informal parallel activity. Furthermore, it advocates for a psychosocial programming extended into long-term, community-embedded support targeting relational recognition rather than individual symptom reduction; and finally, it recommends a coordinated strategic communication strategy, developed jointly by

DDR authorities and community and religious leaders, to counter stigmatising media narratives. However, this study is not without its limitations. Methodologically, it relies on secondary and documentary sources in the absence of independently verifiable outcome data on Operation Safe Corridor graduates. Nonetheless, the study's use of triangulation of divergent public narratives on DDR in Nigeria from different sources attempts to limit the impact of this limitation.

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