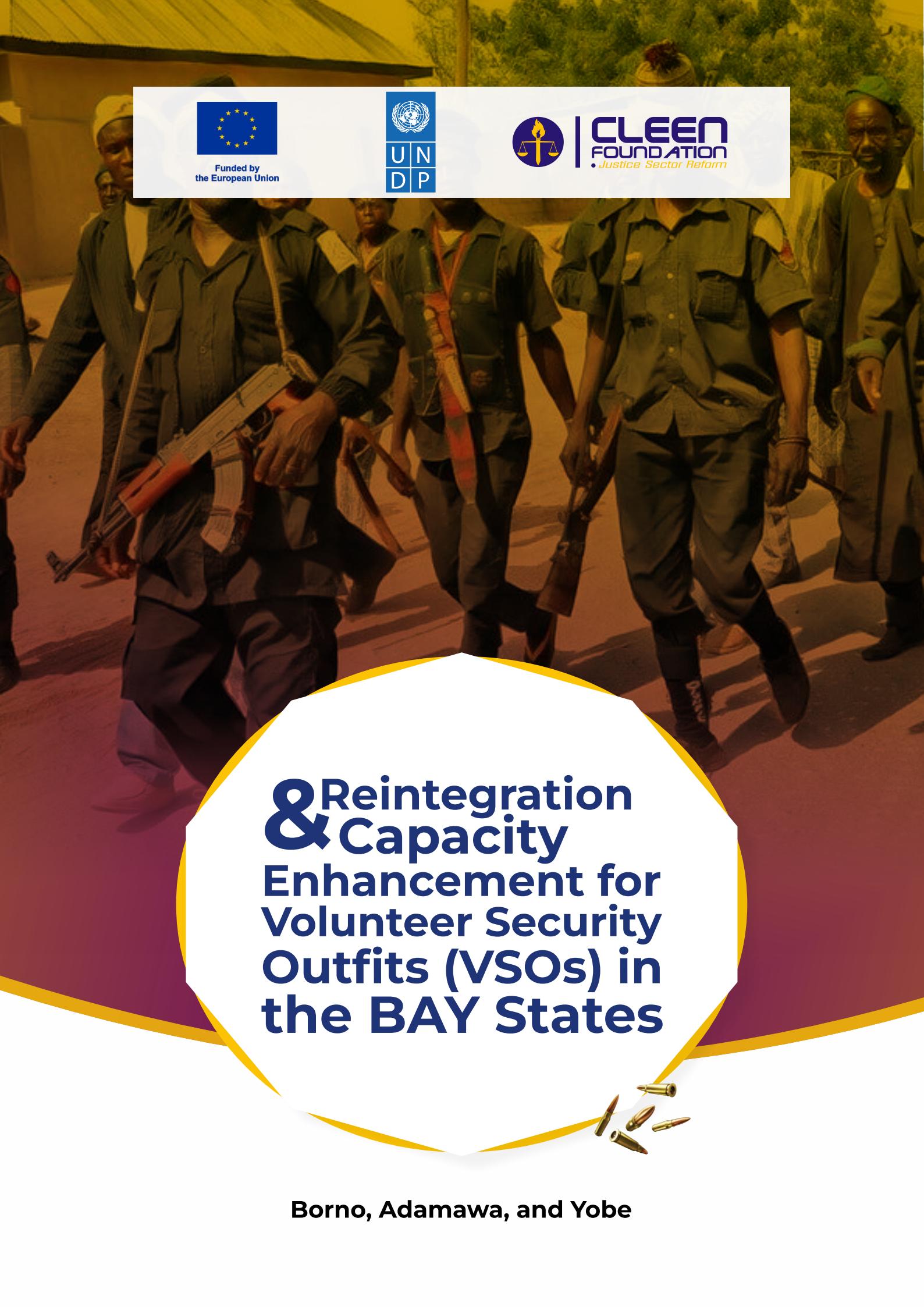




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A large, semi-transparent white circle with a yellow border is positioned in the lower-left quadrant of the image. Inside this circle, the text for the project title is centered. At the bottom right of the circle, there is a small graphic of several bullet casings scattered on the ground.

Reintegration & Capacity Enhancement for Volunteer Security Outfits (VSOs) in the BAY States

Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe



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**Reintegration
& Capacity
Enhancement for
Volunteer Security
Outfits (VSOs) in
the BAY States**



Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe

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Executive Summary

The security landscape in Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe States has been marked by prolonged conflict, leading to displacement, loss of livelihoods, and destabilized communities. Volunteer security outfits, often formed by local residents, have played a critical role in safeguarding communities against insurgent activities. However, these groups face significant challenges, including limited training, inadequate resources, and lack of formal recognition, which can undermine their effectiveness and pose risks to both the members and the communities they protect. This report presents a concise overview of the reintegration and capacity enhancement efforts targeted at Volunteer Security Outfits (VSOs) operating in Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe (BAY) States in Northeast Nigeria. These outfits—including the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF), hunters' associations, and vigilante groups—have played a pivotal role in supporting formal security agencies in the fight against insurgency and maintaining local-level security amidst the prolonged Boko Haram conflict.

The situational review highlights the critical contributions of VSOs, including intelligence gathering, community policing, and frontline support in hard-to-reach areas. However, it also reveals significant gaps and risks, such as limited oversight, lack of formal training, uneven standards of operation, and the absence of structured reintegration frameworks. The continued informal status of these groups poses potential risks to long-term peace and security, especially as the region transitions from active conflict to recovery and stabilization.

Key best practices and interventions have been identified:

- Structured Training and Capacity Building: Select VSOs have benefited from targeted trainings in human rights, rules of engagement, and conflict sensitivity—enhancing their professionalism and reducing incidents of abuse.
- Community-Based Reintegration Models: Initiatives in some communities have successfully engaged VSOs in community development roles, leveraging their local legitimacy to support social cohesion and peacebuilding.
- Formal Recognition and Coordination Mechanisms: In some LGAs, VSOs have been integrated into local security architecture through coordination frameworks led by state authorities and traditional institutions.
- Psychosocial and Economic Support: Pilot programs offering psychosocial counseling and livelihood skills training have shown promise in helping former VSO members transition to civilian life or structured public service roles.

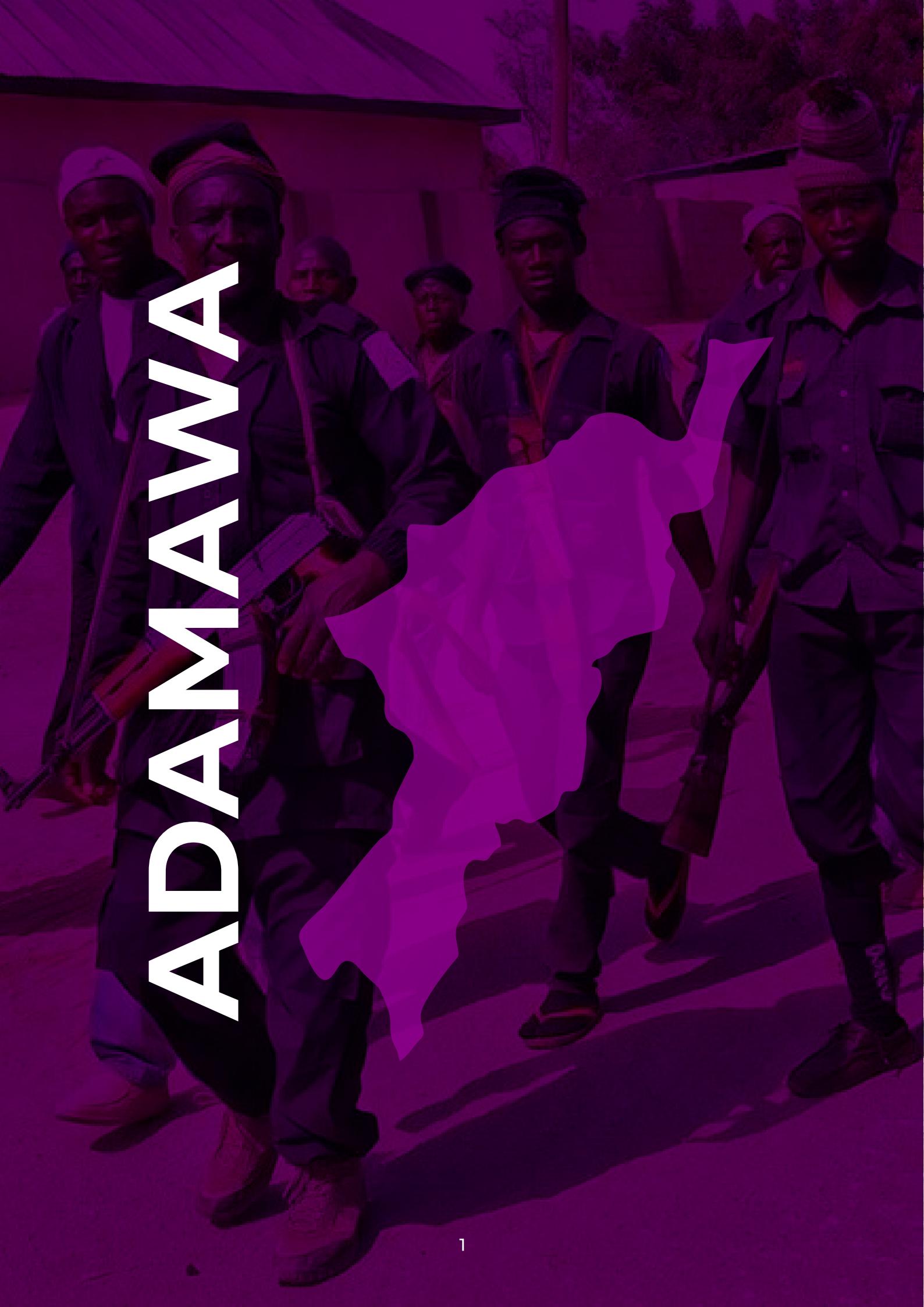
Despite these advances, challenges remain in ensuring consistent policy direction, sustainable funding, and institutional ownership of reintegration processes. The lack of a national framework for VSO engagement and demobilization further complicates long-term planning.

The report recommends a multi-pronged strategy including:

- Development of a standardized policy framework for VSO engagement and exit pathways;
- Expansion of training and certification programs aligned with national security protocols;
- Institutional partnerships to provide psychosocial support and alternative livelihoods;
- Mechanisms for accountability, data management, and coordination among stakeholders.

Ultimately, the successful reintegration and professional development of volunteer security outfits are crucial to consolidating peace and ensuring inclusive security governance in Northeast Nigeria.

ADAMAWA



Reintegration and Capacity Enhancement for Volunteer Security Outfits (VSOs) - ADAMAWA State

Adamawa State has witnessed a notable rise in the presence of volunteer security outfits. A study commissioned by the CLEEN Foundation initially identified three non-state security groups operating in the state¹. Since then, the number of these groups has increased significantly, largely in response to the escalating conflicts across the state. Today, numerous non-state armed groups operate in Adamawa, many of which are aligned along ethnic and tribal lines. Locally, they are known as yan banga, a term that reflects their role in providing security to their communities. Given the persistent insecurity in the state, these groups have become increasingly relevant. Recognizing their growing importance, the Adamawa State government has formally integrated them into its security architecture through their involvement in the state security initiative known as Operation Farauta.

In Northern Adamawa State, the decline in insurgent activity has led to a corresponding reduction in the operations of volunteer security outfits (VSOs). However, in other parts of the state where insecurity and conflict persist, the presence and activities of VSOs continue to grow. This situation raises several critical issues. One key concern is determining the future of VSO members who supported the Armed Forces during the height of the insurgency, now that the threat has largely diminished. Another pressing issue is how to adequately recognize and reward the contributions of those VSO members who continue to assist in combating crime, insecurity, and violence in troubled areas. Additionally, there is the challenge of enhancing their effectiveness so they can better complement the efforts of formal security agencies in Adamawa State.

Questions 39 to 43 explored respondents' opinions on the reintegration and capacity enhancement of Volunteer Security Outfits (VSOs) in Adamawa State. Question 39 specifically asked about the most pressing needs that should be addressed to improve the performance of VSO members. The responses indicated that a majority of respondents (67.6%) identified access to proper training and capacity building as a top priority. A significant proportion (55.9%) also emphasized the importance of providing regular stipends or financial incentives. Additionally, 41.2% of respondents highlighted the need for uniforms, equipment, and communication tools. Meanwhile, 29.4% pointed to the importance of mental health and psychosocial support, as well as access to health insurance and social welfare benefits for members and their families.

Question 40 aimed to identify the key reintegration needs of Volunteer Security Outfits

¹ See Chris A.M. Kwaja (2018) "Non-State Armed Groups in Adamawa State" in Freedom C. Onuoha and Chris M.A. Kwaja (eds) Non-State Armed Group in North East Nigeria: Challenges and Opportunities for Security Sector Governance. CLEEN Foundation.

Reintegration and Capacity Enhancement for Volunteer Security Outfits (VSOs) - ADAMAWA State

(VSOs) in Adamawa State. The majority of respondents (52.9%) indicated that livelihood and vocational skills training are essential for reintegration. Additionally, 38.2% of respondents highlighted the importance of access to formal educational opportunities, psychosocial support, and trauma counselling services. Some respondents (29.4%) also emphasized the need for official recognition, certification, or formal integration into state security agencies, as well as community sensitization and acceptance initiatives. Another 23.5% suggested that providing access to microgrants or start-up capital for small businesses would support successful reintegration. Question 41 focused on the type of mental health and psychosocial support most needed by members of the VSOs and how such support could be delivered. A majority of respondents (52.9%) emphasized the need for trauma counselling and stress management programs. Community-based psychosocial support was also considered important by 44.1% of respondents. Other suggestions included training in psychological first aid and resilience building (41.2%), family counselling and support programs (29.4%), and mental health awareness and stigma reduction campaigns (23.5%).

Question 42 sought to identify the critical capacity-building needs of Volunteer Security Outfits (VSOs) in Adamawa State, along with the types of official approval or support that could enhance their effectiveness. A majority of respondents (52.9%) highlighted the need for advanced training in weapon handling and ammunition management. A substantial proportion (44.1%) emphasized the importance of tactical and strategic security operations training. Additionally, 41.2% suggested training in crisis management and conflict resolution, while 35.3% recommended human rights and ethical conduct training. Community policing and engagement skills were also identified by 23.5% of respondents, and 17.6% pointed to the need for mental health and stress management techniques. Question 43 focused on the key social and economic needs of VSOs in Adamawa State. The responses revealed that a majority (58.8%) believe regular stipends and financial incentives are essential. A significant portion (35.3%) recommended access to livelihood and income-generating opportunities, as well as the provision of health insurance. Additionally, 32.4% emphasized the importance of support for education and skills acquisition, along with recognition and social reintegration mechanisms. Housing and shelter support were also suggested by 23.5% of respondents.

Reintegration and Capacity Enhancement for Volunteer Security Outfits (VSOs) - ADAMAWA State

Figure 1: Respondents' view about consideration of pressing need of members of VSOs in Adamawa State

39. What do you consider as the pressing needs that should be provided to members of volunteer security outfits in the State to enhance their performance? (Please select [✓] all that apply)
34 responses

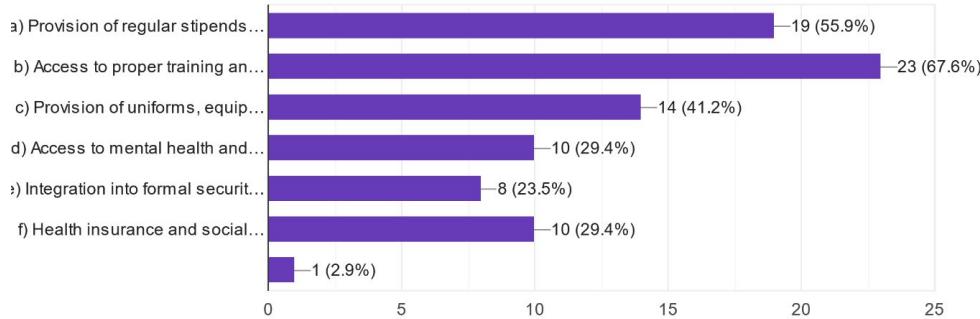


Figure 2: Respondent View about the reintegration needs of VSOs in the state

40. What are the key reintegration needs of volunteer security outfits in the State? (Please select [✓] all that apply)
34 responses

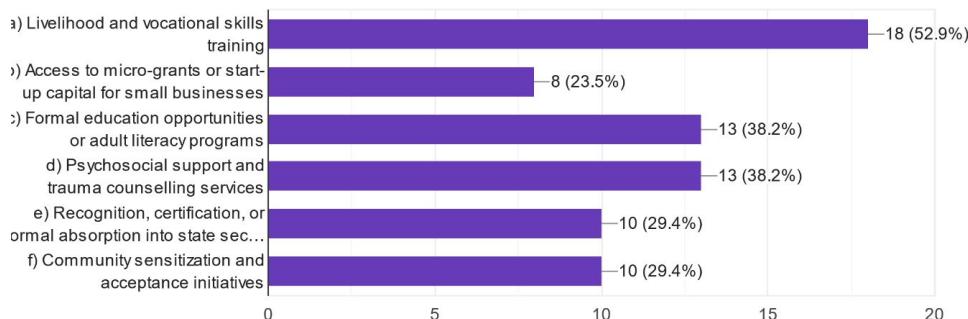
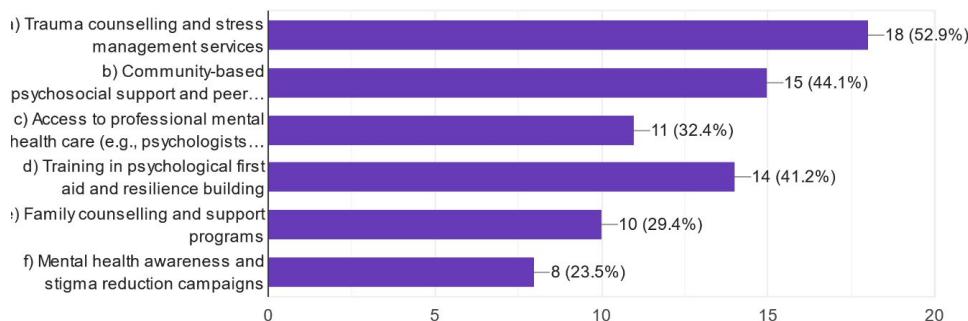


Figure 3: Respondent View regarding mental health and psychosocial support needs of VSOs in Adamawa State

41. What types of mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) are most needed by members of volunteer security outfits in the State, and how can these be provided? (Please select [✓] all that apply)
34 responses



Reintegration and Capacity Enhancement for Volunteer Security Outfits (VSOs) - ADAMAWA State

Figure 4: Respondents' view about the critical capacity building needs of VSOs in Adamawa State

42. What are the critical capacity building needs of Volunteer Security Outfits (VSOs) in the State, and what approaches would best strengthen their skills and effectiveness? (Please select [✓] all that apply)
34 responses

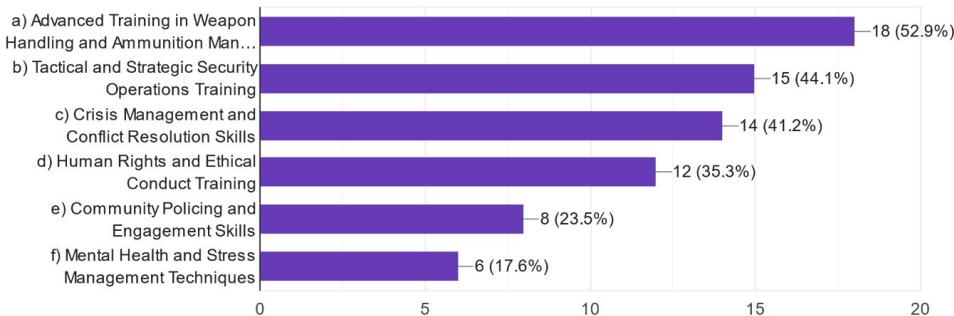
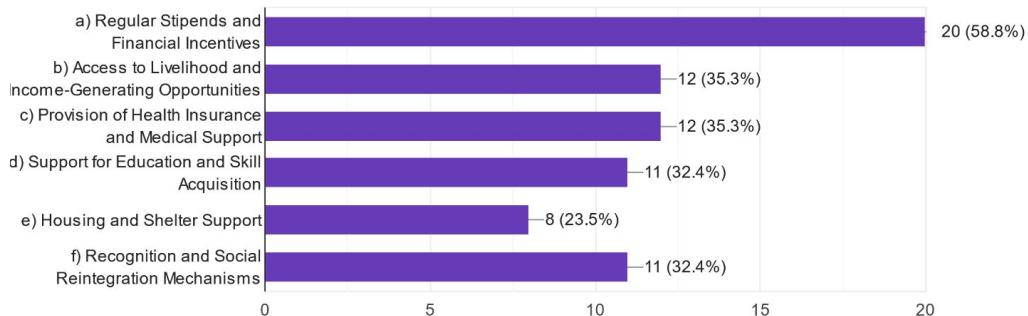


Figure 5: Respondents' view about the key social and economic needs of VSOs

43. What are the key social and economic needs of volunteer security outfits in the State? (Please select [✓] all that apply)
34 responses



Relevant Strategic Recommendations

Given the context of WAM as well as reintegration and social enhancement need of the VSOs explained about.

One key initiative should be capacity building for both security agencies and licensed private firearm holders on effective WAM practices. This training should focus on international best practices for weapon and ammunition management, particularly within the context of insurgency—a pressing issue in Adamawa State. Many security personnel currently lack adequate knowledge and technical skills in this area, highlighting the urgent need for targeted education and capacity development. The training should also cover procedures for the safe decommissioning and disposal of unserviceable weapons.

Reintegration and Capacity Enhancement for Volunteer Security Outfits (VSOs) - ADAMAWA State

Furthermore, it is essential to include private individuals who have legally obtained firearms licenses in these training programmes. Given the rising cases of unauthorized access to firearms by family members, educating licensed holders on secure storage and handling is critical to reducing misuse and ensuring public safety. Additionally, there is a need to engage with government authorities and the leadership of security agencies operating in Adamawa State to invest in safe storage infrastructure and implement effective accountability mechanisms for both individual and community-owned firearms.

Secondly, in light of the increasing presence of community-held weapons and the government's growing encouragement for communities to take responsibility for their own security, it is crucial to implement community engagement and sensitization programmes on the safe storage and handling of weapons and ammunition. These initiatives should also emphasize the role of security agencies in overseeing and supporting community-based security efforts.

This is particularly important given the possibility that the government may eventually provide legal backing for the establishment of community armouries as part of broader strategies to enhance local security in response to rising inter-communal violence in Nigeria. Without proper community engagement and education on the responsible use and management of firearms, such efforts risk contributing to the proliferation of weapons among civilians—and, by extension, to increased access by criminal elements.

Thirdly, there is a critical need for policy reform regarding firearm licensing in Adamawa State. As highlighted by this study, there is a growing trend of community-level firearm ownership, with tacit approval from security agencies who often serve as frontline responders to security threats. Policy reforms should clearly define the framework for licensing community-owned firearms, including mandatory training on accountability, responsible use, and secure storage to prevent unauthorized access or diversion to criminal elements.

BORNONO



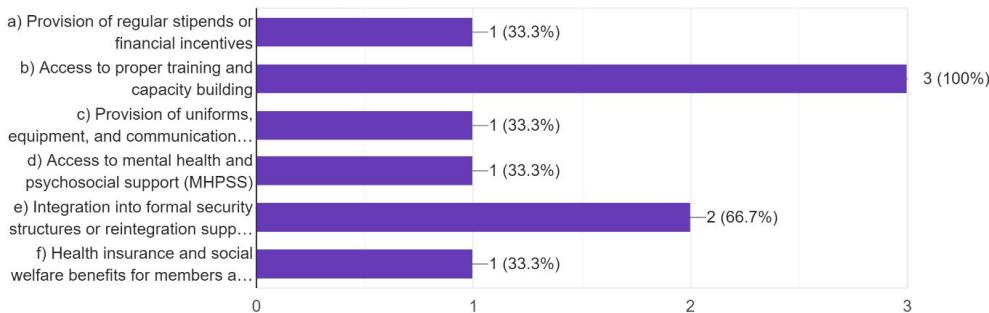
Reintegration and Capacity Enhancement for Volunteer Security Outfits (VSOs) - BORNO State

Borno State has the most robust Voluntary Security Outfit (VSO) in the North East region. While the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) is the most prominent, several other groups also perform similar functions. These groups have played a critical role in the counterterrorism campaign, often working alongside the military. In many instances, they serve as the first responders to security threats, especially in areas where state security agencies are either absent or insufficient.

Given the ongoing insurgency and the limited number of government security personnel, the role of VSOs remains essential in Borno State. However, a key concern raised by respondents is that, despite their usefulness, these groups require proper training to effectively support official security forces. This view was also strongly echoed in the responses to the administered questionnaire.

Figure 1: Respondents' perception of the Pressing needs of the VSOs.

39. What do you consider as the pressing needs that should be provided to members of volunteer security outfits in the State to enhance their performance? (Please select [v] all that apply)
3 responses



There is considerable concern about what may become of Voluntary Security Outfit (VSO) personnel once the insurgency comes to an end. Some scholars have warned that, without proper reintegration, these individuals could emerge as a new security threat—potentially even more destabilizing than Boko Haram. In response to this concern, various studies have called for deliberate and coordinated efforts to ensure the successful reintegration of VSO members into their communities.

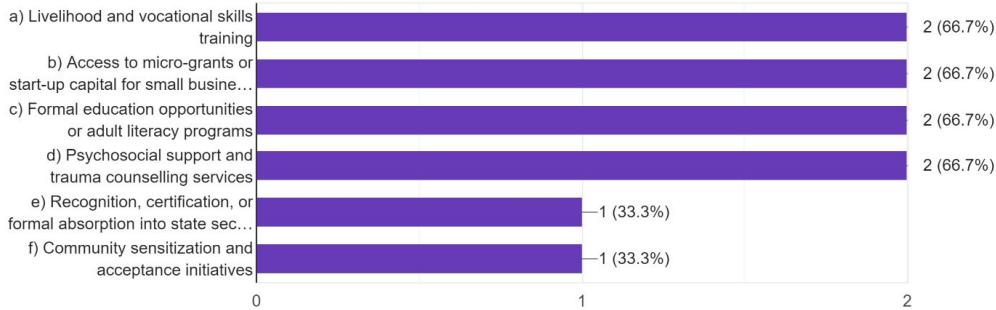
Respondents to the field survey identified key reintegration needs, including vocational and livelihood skills training, access to grants or credit to start small businesses, literacy education programs, and psychosocial support (see Figure 2). Interviewees affirmed that they are open to reintegration initiatives that would enhance their capacity to earn a sustainable livelihood. They specifically emphasized the importance of support mechanisms such as vocational training, access to business credit, and psychological counseling as critical components for successful reintegration.

Reintegration and Capacity Enhancement for Volunteer Security Outfits (VSOs) - BORNO State

Figure 2: Respondents' perception of the reintegration needs of the VSO members

40. What are the key reintegration needs of volunteer security outfits in the State? (Please select [✓] all that apply)

3 responses



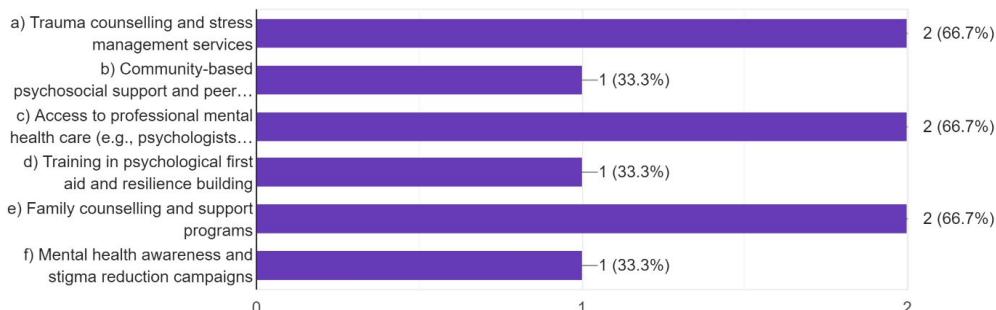
Many members of the Voluntary Security Outfits (VSOs) have suffered mental health challenges due to their prolonged exposure to violence and trauma during the Boko Haram insurgency. One respondent noted that individuals who joined the VSO at the early stages—over 12 years ago—are now experiencing various forms of mental health issues. Another respondent revealed that some members are currently exhibiting signs of mental instability but have yet to receive any mental health care or support from the government or security agencies.

As such, reintegration efforts must include comprehensive mental health and psychosocial support. Interview respondents emphasized the need for trauma counseling, access to mental health care services, and other interventions that could help alleviate the psychological burden faced by VSO members. This view was also strongly supported by questionnaire respondents, the majority of whom recommended mental health support programs for VSO personnel (see Figure 3). This underscores the urgent need to prioritize mental health care as a core component of VSO reintegration initiatives.

Figure 3: Respondents' Perception of the Mental Health and Psychological Support need of VSOs Members in Borno State

41. What types of mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) are most needed by members of volunteer security outfits in the State, and how can these be provided? (Please select [✓] all that apply)

3 responses



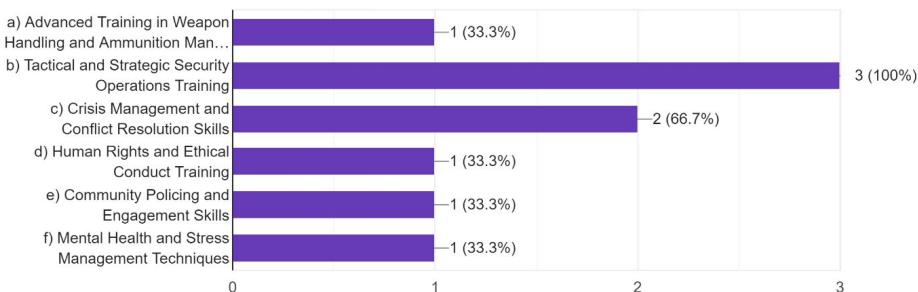
Reintegration and Capacity Enhancement for Volunteer Security Outfits (VSOs) - BORNO State

Given the continued relevance of Voluntary Security Outfits (VSOs) and documented instances of abuse and manipulation by political elites—further underscoring a lack of professionalism in their operations—there is no doubt that VSOs have critical capacity-building needs, especially in the face of renewed Boko Haram insurgency.

Interview respondents recommended targeted training and capacity-building programs focused on the responsible use of force, adherence to human rights standards, crisis management, and stress management. These recommendations were also strongly supported by questionnaire responses, as illustrated in Figure 4 below.

Figure 4: Respondents' perception of critical capacity building needs of VSOs in Borno State

42. What are the critical capacity building needs of Volunteer Security Outfits (VSOs) in the State, and what approaches would best strengthen their skills and effectiveness? (Please select [✓] all that apply)
3 responses



The socio-economic conditions of VSO members are a critical concern. Many believe that the poor economic status of these personnel contributes to their vulnerability to abuse and manipulation, particularly by political elites. Although some VSO members are on the payroll of state and local governments in certain areas, there is a general perception that their stipends are too low to ensure a sustainable livelihood.

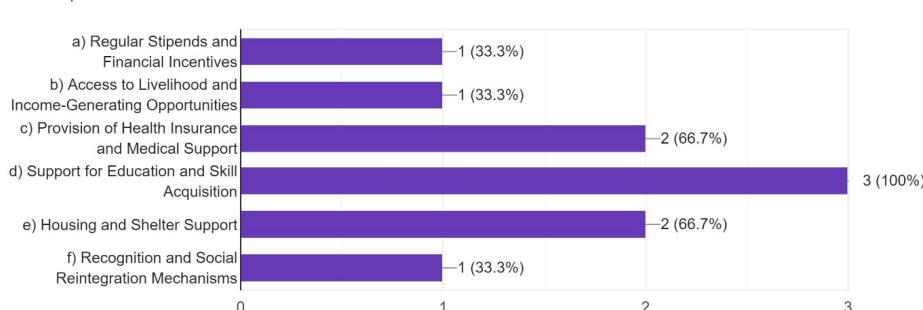
As a result, respondents advocated for an increase in their stipends to improve their living conditions. Some also recommended integrating VSO members into formal government security agencies, such as the police or military. Meanwhile, questionnaire respondents emphasized the importance of supporting their education and skill acquisition as a more sustainable pathway for empowerment and reintegration (see Figure 5).

Reintegration and Capacity Enhancement for Volunteer Security Outfits (VSOs) - BORNO State

Figure 5: Respondents' perception of key social and economic needs of VSOs Members in Borno State

43. What are the key social and economic needs of volunteer security outfits in the State? (Please select [✓] all that apply)

3 responses



Relevant Strategic Recommendation

Given the increasing number of weapons in the possession of Vigilante and Security Organizations (VSOs) in Borno State, it is imperative for the state government to develop and enforce a comprehensive code of conduct governing their operations and use of force. This framework should be complemented by structured and continuous training programs aimed at enhancing their professionalism, accountability, and adherence to human rights standards. In addition, the state government must prioritize the welfare of VSO personnel by ensuring fair remuneration, access to basic amenities, and the provision of psychosocial support services. Addressing their mental health needs through regular assessments and tailored intervention programs is crucial, considering the high-stress environments in which they operate. Such holistic measures will not only improve the operational effectiveness of VSOs but also foster public trust and contribute to long-term peace and stability in the region.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Weapons and Ammunition Management (WAM) in Borno State presents a more serious challenge compared to other insurgency-affected states such as Yobe and Adamawa. Beyond the issue of civilian access to firearms, several critical concerns have been identified. These include the growing number of VSO members, increased firearm acquisition among these groups, the risk of stockpile explosions, and inadequate clearance of unexploded ordnance (UXO), particularly in communities where displaced persons have been resettled after returning from internal displacement or exile.

To address these challenges, several strategic recommendations have been proposed. If effectively implemented, these measures have the potential to significantly strengthen WAM practices in Borno State and contribute to greater security and long-term stability in the region.

A woman in a green dress is holding a child. The woman is looking towards the camera with a neutral expression. The child is facing away from the camera, looking towards the woman. They are standing in front of a car. The background is a dark, out-of-focus scene.

ш
YOBE

Reintegration and Capacity Enhancement for Volunteer Security Outfits (VSOs) - YOBE State

A number of Volunteer Security Outfits such as Operation Haba Maza has been established overtime as an emergency support to conventional security agencies in Yobe State. Prior to and after the award by the Nigerian Police Force, more Volunteer Security Outfits has been set up, even as the conflicts and insurgency in the region surges. Similarly, organisations such as Mercy Corps Nigeria, Plan International and Action Aid Nigeria have implemented various security initiatives and programmes in Yobe state.

Overall, Volunteer Security Outfits in Yobe State have made significant contributions to maintain peace and security, and their impact is expected to be growing but currently compounded by lack of support, funding and collaboration. Questions 39 to 43 explored respondents' opinions on the reintegration and capacity enhancement of Volunteer Security Outfits (VSOs) in Yobe State. Question 39 specifically asked about the most pressing needs that should be addressed to improve the performance of VSO members. The responses indicated that a majority of respondents (56.3%) identified access to proper training and capacity building as a top priority. A significant proportion (51.6%) also emphasized the importance of providing regular stipends or financial incentives. Additionally, 29.7% of respondents highlighted the need for uniforms, equipment, and communication tools. Meanwhile, 34.4% pointed to the importance of mental health and psychosocial support, as well as access to health insurance and social welfare benefits (25%) for members and their families.

Question 40 aimed to identify the key reintegration needs of Volunteer Security Outfits (VSOs) in Yobe State. The majority of respondents (39.1%) indicated that livelihood and vocational skills training are essential for reintegration. Additionally, 40.6% of respondents highlighted the importance of access to formal educational opportunities, psychosocial support, and trauma counselling services. Some respondents (40.6%) also emphasized the need for official recognition, certification, or formal integration into state security agencies, as well as community sensitization and acceptance initiatives. Another 28.1% suggested that providing access to micro-grants or start-up capital for small businesses would support successful reintegration. Question 41 focused on the type of mental health and psychosocial support most needed by members of the VSOs and how such support could be delivered. A majority of respondents (52.9%) emphasized the need for trauma counselling and stress management programs. Community-based psychosocial support was also considered important by 44.1% of respondents. Other suggestions included training in psychological first aid and resilience building (41.2%), family counselling and support programs (29.4%), and mental health awareness and stigma reduction campaigns

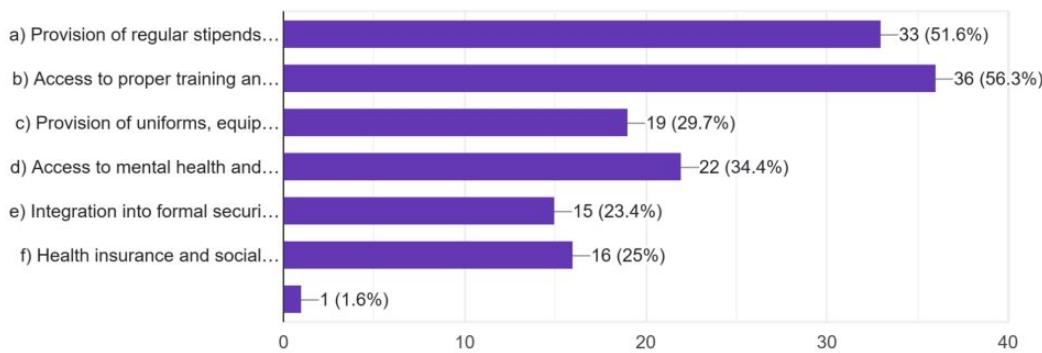
Reintegration and Capacity Enhancement for Volunteer Security Outfits (VSOs) - YOBE State

(23.5%).

Question 42 sought to identify the critical capacity-building needs of Volunteer Security Outfits (VSOs) in Yobe State, along with the types of official approval or support that could enhance their effectiveness. A majority of respondents (48.4%) highlighted the need for advanced training in weapon handling and ammunition management. A substantial proportion (42.2%) emphasized the importance of tactical and strategic security operations training. Additionally, 39.1% suggested training in crisis management and conflict resolution, while 35.9% recommended human rights and ethical conduct training. Community policing and engagement skills were also identified by 21.9% of respondents, and 25% pointed to the need for mental health and stress management techniques. Question 43 focused on the key social and economic needs of VSOs in Yobe State. The responses revealed that a majority (45.3%) believe regular stipends and financial incentives are essential. A significant portion (42.2%) recommended access to livelihood and income-generating opportunities, as well as the provision of health insurance. Additionally, 42.2% emphasized the importance of support for education and skills acquisition, along with recognition and social reintegration mechanisms. Housing and shelter support were also suggested by 29.7% of respondents.

Figure 1: Respondents' view about consideration of pressing need of members of VSOs in Yobe State

39. What do you consider as the pressing needs that should be provided to members of volunteer security outfits in the State to enhance their performance? (Please select [✓] all that apply)
64 responses



Reintegration and Capacity Enhancement for Volunteer Security Outfits (VSOs) - Yobe State

Figure 2: Respondent View about the reintegration needs of VSOs Yobe state

40. What are the key reintegration needs of volunteer security outfits in the State? (Please select [✓] all that apply)

64 responses

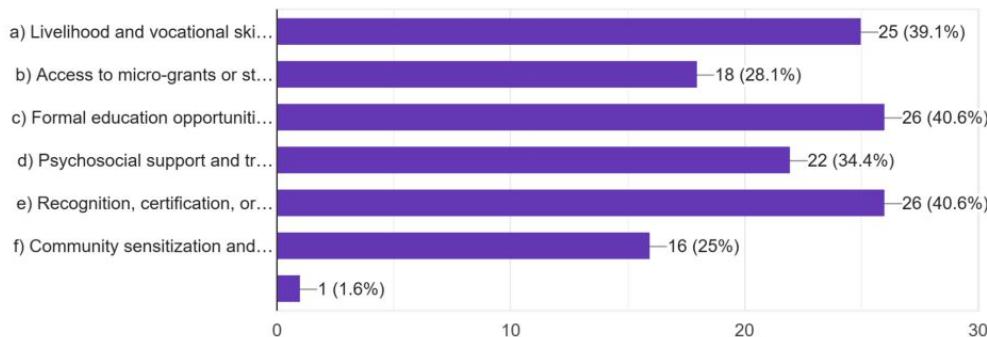


Figure 3: Respondent View regarding mental health and psychosocial support needs of VSOs in Yobe State

41. What types of mental health and psychosocial support (MHPSS) are most needed by members of volunteer security outfits in the State, and how can these be provided? (Please select [✓] all that apply)

34 responses

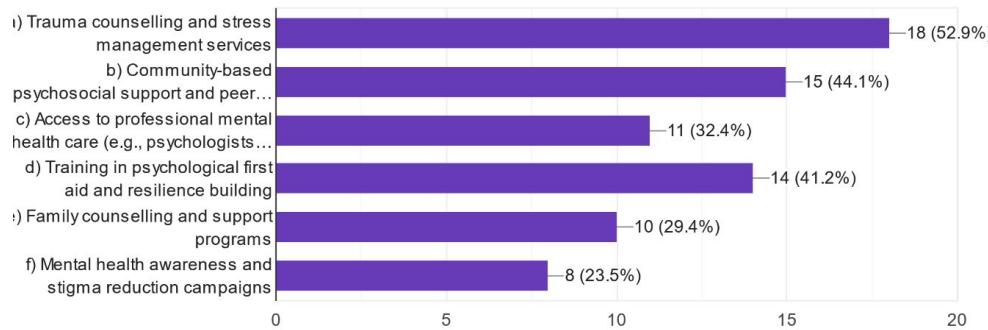
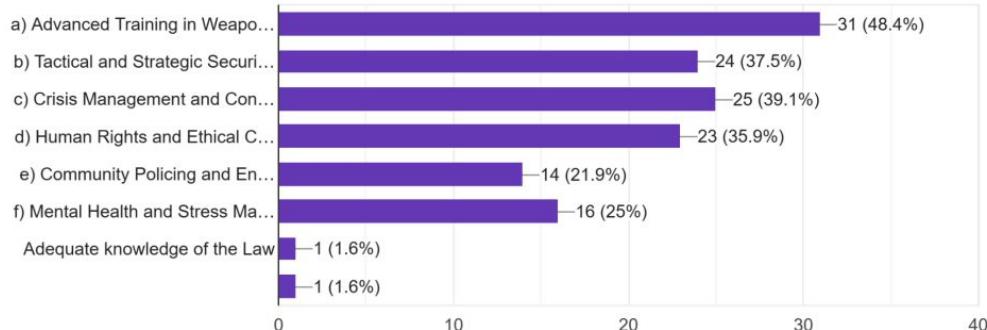


Figure 4: Respondents' view about the critical capacity building needs of VSOs in Yobe State

42. What are the critical capacity building needs of Volunteer Security Outfits (VSOs) in the State, and what approaches would best strengthen their skills and effectiveness? (Please select [✓] all that apply)

64 responses

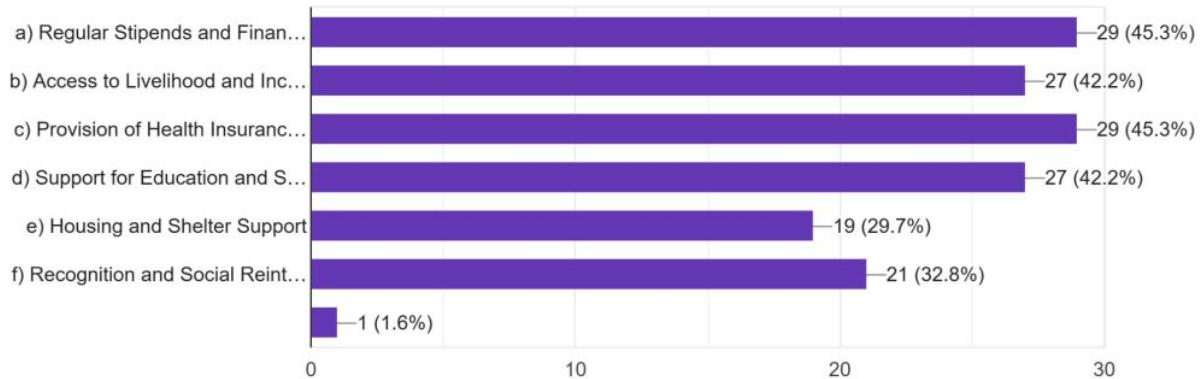


Reintegration and Capacity Enhancement for Volunteer Security Outfits (VSOs) - Yobe State

Figure 5: Respondents' view about the key social and economic needs of VSOs in Yobe State

43. What are the key social and economic needs of volunteer security outfits in the State? (Please select [✓] all that apply)

64 responses



Relevant Strategic Recommendation

To ensure safety of arms and ammunitions, VSOs must be trained and re-trained on how to handle the arms and ammunition by trained security personnel. If a civilian is given the opportunity to handle any arm, his psychological behavior must be tested to ensure that his mental ability is in order.



ABOUT CLEEN FOUNDATION

CLEEN Foundation is an indigenous NGO with offices across 6 geo-political zones in Nigeria, the organization has gained recognition for its efforts in promoting public safety and security for over 25 years. CLEEN Foundation promotes security, justice, and good governance in Nigeria. Through our research, advocacy, capacity building, and partnership initiatives we strive to create positive change and drive sustainable development. At CLEEN Foundation there are two key focus areas promoting security, justice, and good governance, and strengthening democratic institutions. In the pursuit of a safe and just society, we work towards enhancing public safety, protecting citizens' rights and promoting accountability and transparency in governance. Additionally, it is focused on strengthening democratic institutions to ensure active citizen participation and foster a vibrant democracy.

CLEEN Foundation utilizes a multi-faceted approach that encompasses research, advocacy, capacity building and partnership/collaboration. Through rigorous research, the Foundation gain insights into the challenges faced in the areas of security, justice, and governance. CLEEN utilize these findings for evidence-based advocacy, engaging with stakeholders to drive policy reforms and institutional changes. Additionally, CLEEN Foundation prioritizes capacity building to empower individuals and organizations and foster partnerships and collaborations to leverage collective resources and expertise.



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