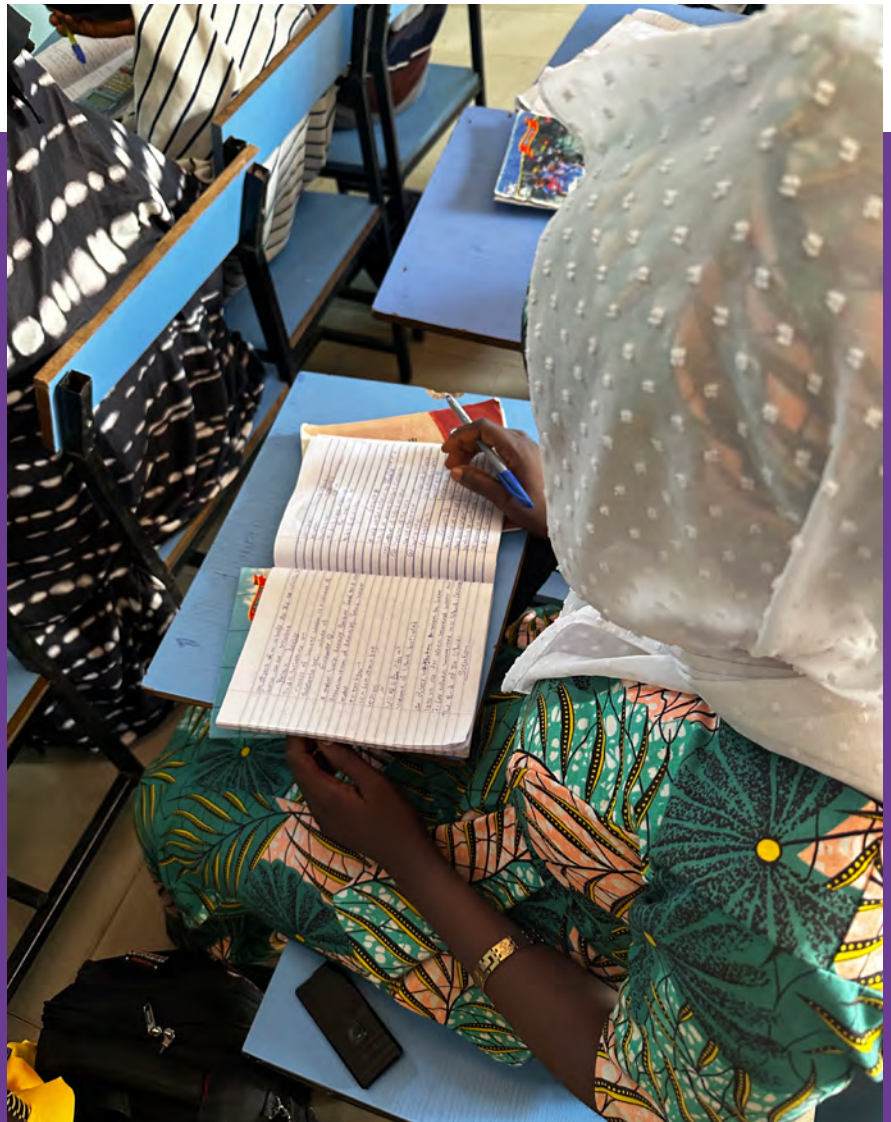
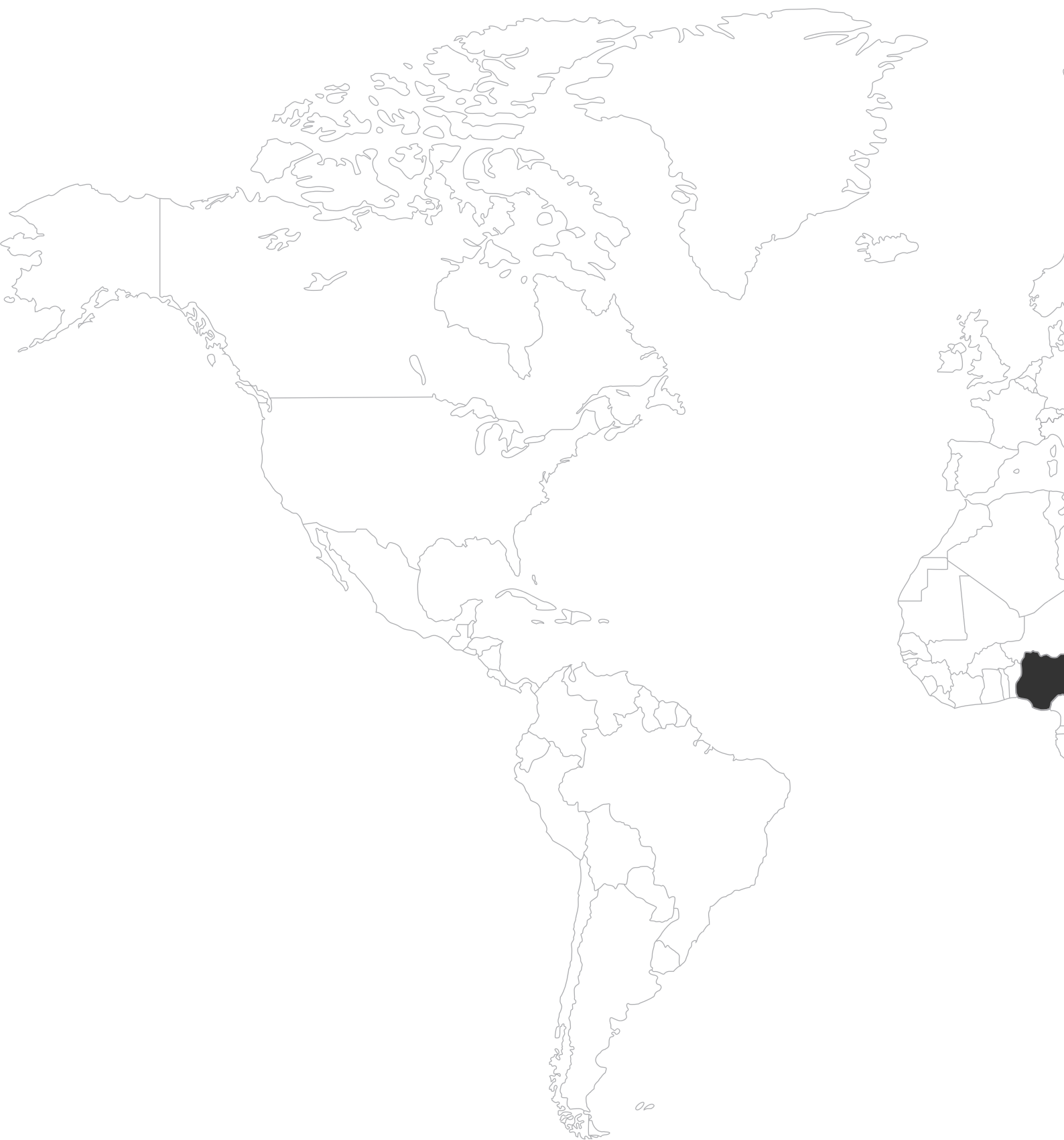


# REPARATION PRIORITIES FOR SURVIVORS OF CONFLICT-RELATED SEXUAL VIOLENCE PERPETRATED BY BOKO HARAM IN NORTH-EAST NIGERIA

NIGERIA





Cover picture: A survivor of conflict-related sexual violence writing in her notebook while preparing for her exams at her tutorial center in Yola, Adamawa, December 2024 © Ussah Yakubu / GSF



November 2025

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## ACRONYMS

<b>CGE</b>	Centre for Girls' Education	<b>IDP</b>	Internally displaced persons
<b>CJTF</b>	Civilian Joint Task Force	<b>IRM</b>	Interim reparative measures
<b>dRPC</b>	Development Research and Projects Centre	<b>ISWAP</b>	Islamic State West Africa Province
<b>EA</b>	Explore Aid	<b>JAS</b>	Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'adati wal-Jihad
<b>GBV</b>	Gender-based violence	<b>NGOs</b>	Non governmental organisations
<b>GRA</b>	Grassroots Researchers Association	<b>WASH</b>	Water, sanitation and hygiene
<b>GRS</b>	Global Reparations Study	<b>YIAT</b>	Youth Initiative Against Terrorism
<b>GSF</b>	Global Survivors Fund		



Fori, Maiduguri, October 2023 © dRPC



# 1. INTRODUCTION

Conflict and armed violence in Northeastern Nigeria have left a devastating impact, not only through the destruction of lives and communities, but also in the bodies and futures of those who were abducted, held in captivity, and subjected to sexual violence. For many women and girls who survived, the trauma did not end with their release or escape: it continues to shape many aspects of their lives, including their health, livelihoods, relationships, and futures.

While sexual violence is most widely reported in relation to Boko Haram, it is neither unique to that group nor confined to the current conflict period. The Nigeria Human Rights Violations Investigation Commission<sup>1</sup> documented that state actors perpetrated sexual violence in Nigeria, including rape, sexual slavery and forced marriage. These violations targeted women and girls, in particular, Igbo women during the Biafran War from 1967 to 1970, and the Ogoni in the Niger Delta, during the 1990s.<sup>2</sup>

Boko Haram has become a prominent perpetrator of sexual violence in the current conflict. The targeting of women and girls by Boko Haram in Nigeria began with isolated abductions from 2009 through early 2013, where individual women were taken from their homes or streets during attacks on communities.<sup>3</sup> Married women were often abducted as punishment for not supporting the group's ideology, while unmarried girls were taken as forced brides. From mid-2013, following the imposition of a state of emergency in Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe states, Boko Haram intensified its attacks and began systematically abducting women and girls, including mass schoolgirl kidnappings, such as the abduction of 276 girls from a secondary school in Chibok, a rural town in

Borno State, in 2014, which drew global attention.<sup>4</sup> While some victims were eventually released, many remained in captivity, subjected to rape and forced "marriages".<sup>5</sup>

In addition to Boko Haram, credible reports document sexual violence and exploitation committed by members of the Nigerian security forces and the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF), particularly against displaced women and girls in Internally displaced people (IDP) camps.<sup>6</sup> These cases, though less widely reported, underscore that survivors often face ongoing risks of abuse even after escaping captivity.

This report focuses on women and girls who survived sexual violence perpetrated by Boko Haram in Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe states, as these were the areas most affected by the group's systematic abductions, and where the scale and patterns of abuse are well-documented. Through their testimonies, they describe both the violence endured in captivity and the ongoing challenges they face after returning home, including stigma, rejection, chronic illness, psychological distress, separation from family and the struggle to meet their basic needs.

Beyond describing these impacts, survivors also speak about the support they need to rebuild their lives. For them, reparation should not be an act of charity or merely a symbolic gesture: it is a right owed in recognition of the grave harm they endured, and an essential part of recovery. They identify urgent priorities such as access to food, medical care, safe housing, and protection, alongside longer-term forms of reparation, including education, livelihoods, psychosocial support, and efforts to end the stigmatisation that continues to isolate them and their children.

1 The Nigerian Human Rights Violations Investigation Commission, later named the Judicial Commission for the Investigation of Human Rights Violations, and commonly known as the Oputa Panel, was inaugurated on 14 June 1999 by then President Olusegun Obasanjo and operated until 2001. It was mandated to investigate the gross human rights violations that occurred from 15 January 1966, the day of the first military coup after the country obtained independence in 1960, until 29 May 1999, the date of the official transition to democracy.

2 Sinqobile Makhathini, 'Truth Seeking and Sexual Violence: Nigeria Human Rights Violations Investigation Commission (1999-2002)' (2023) Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation, <https://atjhub.csvr.org.za/nigeria-human-rights-violations-investigation-commission-1999-2002/>, accessed on 3 November 2025.

3 Human Rights Watch, 'Those terrible weeks in their camps' (2014), [https://features.hrw.org/features/HRW\\_2014\\_report/Those\\_Terrible\\_Weeks\\_in\\_Their\\_Camp/](https://features.hrw.org/features/HRW_2014_report/Those_Terrible_Weeks_in_Their_Camp/), accessed on 3 November 2025.

4 Ibid.

5 Amnesty International '“Help Us Build Our Lives”: Girl Survivors of Boko Haram and Military Abuses in North-East Nigeria' (2024), <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr44/7883/2024/en/>, accessed on 3 November 2025.

6 United Nations Secretary-General, Conflict-Related Sexual Violence: Report of the United Nations Secretary-General, UN Doc S/2019/280, (2019), para. 70, <https://www.un.org/sexualviolenceinconflict/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/report/conflict-related-sexual-violence-report-of-the-united-nations-secretary-general/2019-SG-Report.pdf>, accessed October 2025; Human Rights Watch, 'Nigeria: Officials abusing displaced women, girls' (2016), <https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/10/31/nigeria-officials-abusing-displaced-women-girls>; Amnesty International, '“They Betrayed Us”: Boko Haram survivors have been starved and raped by Nigeria's military' (2018), <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2018/05/boko-haram-survivors-have-been-starved-and-raped-by-nigerias-military/>; Amnesty International '“Help Us Build Our Lives”: Girl Survivors of Boko Haram and Military Abuses in North-East Nigeria' (2024), <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr44/7883/2024/en/>.

This study was conducted as part of the Global Reparations Study (GRS), launched by the Global Survivors Fund (GSF) in 2020 to examine the status of, and opportunities for, reparations for survivors of conflict-related sexual violence in more than 20 countries. The GRS is a multi-stakeholder effort led by GSF in collaboration with more than 40 local and international partners, including survivor networks. It aims to provide evidence-based recommendations to enhance access to reparations while identifying available resources and key actors committed to supporting survivors. While situated within this broader framework, this report follows a different structure and focuses exclusively on the experiences, perspectives and priorities of the survivors who participated.

This report presents the findings of research conducted by the Development Research and Projects Centre (dRPC), Explore Aid (EA), and the Grassroots Researchers Association (GRA), in collaboration with GSF. Research took place in Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe States (BAY states), the regions most affected by Boko Haram, as well as in Abuja. Semi-structured interviews were conducted in Maiduguri between 10 to 14 October 2023 with 82 survivors coming from the BAY states. With support from two mental health specialists who facilitated the process. Survivors were offered individual or group counselling sessions to help them process their experiences. The sessions also introduced approaches to trauma healing and resilience building, so that participation itself could provide some immediate benefit alongside the research.

The participants are women between the ages of 18 and 75, with a significant majority (58%) aged 18-24. More than half (54%) experienced sexual violence by Boko

Haram during childhood, before the age of 18. Participants came from a diverse range of ethnic backgrounds, with Hausa (51%) and Kanuri (20.7%) being the largest groups represented. All had been subjected to one or more forms of sexual violence during their abduction, often alongside other abuses. Among them, six survivors reported severe physical abuse, and eight described experiencing periods of starvation. The duration of captivity varied, ranging from two months to ten years. Their testimonies illustrate not only the multiple, interconnected harms caused by the violence and harsh living conditions they endured, but also the risks they face after returning home, including poverty, insecurity, and social exclusion.

This report does not aim to speak *about* survivors, but to amplify their voices, priorities, and demands. While it draws on the voices of 82 survivors, they do not represent a homogenous group. Each participant's experiences are unique, and while patterns and common challenges have been identified for the purpose of analysis, this does not diminish the individuality of their stories. The 82 women interviewed also do not represent all survivors of sexual violence in Nigeria, and even among those affected by Boko Haram, experiences and priorities vary widely. This report does not aim to be representative of all survivors, but rather to amplify the perspectives, priorities, and demands of those who participated, while highlighting the diversity of experiences and recognising that countless others remain unheard. It also includes a section outlining GSF's broader work in Nigeria, beyond the GRS, to exemplify concrete actions GSF and its partners are undertaking to respond to survivors' priorities, demonstrate that reparation is possible in practice, and provide models that can inform and inspire future state-led efforts.



## 2. BACKGROUND

This section provides a brief context for the survivor testimonies that follow. It situates their accounts within Nigeria's longer history of conflict-related sexual violence and explains why the harms inflicted by Boko Haram warrant focused attention. While acknowledging abuses by other actors, it explores the specific patterns of harm these survivors faced, the needs they express, and the forms of reparations they prioritise.

### 2.1. Historical patterns of conflict-related sexual violence in Nigeria (1967–1999)

During the Biafran War (1967-1970) and periods of military rule (1966-1999), sexual violence was used as a tool of domination and repression. The Judicial Commission for the Investigation of Human Rights Violations, commonly known as the Oputa Panel, documented widespread abuses, showing that rape, forced marriage, abduction, and sexual slavery were employed to terrorize entire communities.<sup>7</sup>

From 1967 to 1970, Nigerian federal troops raped, abducted, and forcibly married Igbo women, especially in Asaba and the Niger Delta.<sup>8</sup> Both federal and Biafran forces were implicated, though abuses by federal troops were more extensively documented.<sup>9</sup>

Under subsequent military regimes, the Nigerian military and police continued to commit rape, sexual harassment, and forced prostitution, particularly in the Niger Delta and Ogoniland.<sup>10</sup> Soldiers and policemen, often from outside the region, used sexual violence as an ethnic and political weapon. Ethnic minorities, including the Ogoni, were disproportionately affected, with women from

these communities being “stripped of their autonomy” and moved from “being an individual body to a collective body that belonged to their community.”<sup>11</sup> Sexual violence often happened in public and was used to humiliate communities, undermine male authority, and assert state control. According to the commission’s findings, this was often referred to as the “rape of women in the name of maintaining peace and order.”<sup>12</sup>

Across these periods, sexual violence was both systematic and often state-sponsored, reflecting a culture of impunity and the use of gendered violence as a mechanism of political and social control.<sup>13</sup>

### 2.2. The Boko Haram insurgency and conflict-related sexual violence

The Boko Haram insurgency, which began in 2009 in North-East Nigeria, represents a continuation of these patterns, though driven by a distinct ideology. Boko Haram is a Salafi-jihadist group aiming to replace the secular Nigerian state with an Islamic state governed by strict Sharia law.<sup>14</sup> In 2016, Boko Haram split into two factions: Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-Jihad (JAS) and the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP). Both factions have perpetrated widespread human rights violations, including mass abductions, attacks on villages, schools, and places of worship, suicide bombings, forced displacement, and child recruitment.<sup>15</sup> Since survivors do not differentiate between the factions and refer to the group as Boko Haram, this study uses the term to encompass both.

“Boko Haram” is generally translated from Hausa as “Western education is forbidden.”<sup>16</sup> This ideological stance has translated into deliberate attacks on schools, mass

7 Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation, “Nigeria Human Rights Violations Investigation Commission (1999-2002)” African Transitional Justice Hub (CSV, 2023), <https://atjhub.csvr.org.za/nigeria-human-rights-violations-investigation-commission-1999-2002/>, accessed 5 November 2025.

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid.

12 Human Rights Violations Investigation Commission (HRVIC) 2002c. *Final Report, Volume Four: Petitions*, p. 149, <http://atjhub.csvr.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Oputa-Panel-Report-ume-4.pdf>, accessed 5 November 2025.

13 Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation, “Nigeria Human Rights Violations Investigation Commission (199-2002)” African Transitional Justice Hub (CSV, 2023), <https://atjhub.csvr.org.za/nigeria-human-rights-violations-investigation-commission-1999-2002/>, accessed 5 November 2025.

14 European Union Agency for Asylum (EUAA), ‘1.3.1. Boko Haram, including JAS, ISWAP and Ansaru’ in Country Guidance Nigeria (2021), <https://euaa.europa.eu/country-guidance-nigeria-2021/131-boko-haram-including-jas-iswap-and-ansaru>, accessed 5 November 2025.

15 Ibid.

16 Amnesty International ‘“Help Us Build Our Lives”: Girl Survivors of Boko Haram and Military Abuses in North-East Nigeria’ (2024), p. 19, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr44/7883/2024/en/>, accessed 4 November 2025.

abductions of girls, and sexual violence.<sup>17</sup> Attacks on schools, including abductions of students, have been committed to prevent people, especially children, from receiving what Boko Haram considers a “Western” education.<sup>18</sup>

Since 2009, Boko Haram has subjected women and girls to different forms of violence, including rape, sexual slavery, forced marriages, forced pregnancies and other forms of sexual violence.<sup>19</sup> From mid-2013, following the state of emergency in Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe states, Boko Haram intensified its attacks and began systematically abducting women and girls, including mass schoolgirl kidnappings, such as the Chibok abduction in April 2014, which drew global attention.<sup>20</sup> While some victims were eventually released, many remained in captivity, subjected to rape and forced marriages.<sup>21</sup>

Surveys conducted in Northeastern Nigeria between December 2020 and February 2021 found that 10% of respondents reported personally knowing someone who had suffered conflict-related sexual violence.<sup>22</sup> Boko Haram was most frequently identified as the perpetrator, particularly by women respondents, though some survivors also attributed abuse to the military or the CJTF.<sup>23</sup> The United Nations Secretary General, and leading international human rights organisations have also reported cases of sexual violence and exploitation perpetrated by members of the Nigerian security forces and the CJTF. Most of these cases occurred in internally displaced persons (IDP) camps and targeted women and girls who had escaped or been rescued from Boko Haram captivity.<sup>24</sup>

### 2.3. Impacts of Boko Haram violence: Disrupted education and social exclusion

The study focuses on survivors of Boko Haram’s sexual violence in Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe to understand their specific experiences. These survivors are uniquely affected in two interrelated ways. First, education was profoundly disrupted. The majority of participants were under 18 years old and attending school when the violations occurred. Their studies were interrupted either by captivity, displacement, or the broader disruption of community life caused by Boko Haram’s attacks. Even after escaping or being released, trauma and social stigma have often been preventing survivors from returning to school, creating a long-term educational disadvantage. Second, survivors who were abducted by Boko Haram face a specific form of social stigmatisation. Women and girls are frequently labelled as “Boko Haram wives,” and their children, born to Boko Haram fighters, are treated as outsiders or even enemies, reinforcing social exclusion and severely limiting opportunities for reintegration.

By focusing on the voices and the experiences of survivors targeted by Boko Haram, the study highlights how sexual violence leads to disrupted education, community stigmatisation, and long-term social, psychological, and economic impacts. Understanding these unique dynamics is essential for identifying survivors’ specific needs and priorities for reparations, support, and meaningful reintegration.

17 Amnesty International, ‘Nigeria: Abducted women and girls forced to join Boko Haram attacks’ (2015), <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2015/04/nigeria-abducted-women-and-girls-forced-to-join-boko-haram-attacks/>, accessed 5 November 2025.

18 Amnesty International “‘Help Us Build Our Lives’: Girl Survivors of Boko Haram and Military Abuses in North-East Nigeria’ (2024), p. 19, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr44/7883/2024/en/>, accessed 5 November 2025.

19 United Nations Human Rights Council, ‘Violations and abuses committed by Boko Haram and the impact on human rights in the countries affected’ (Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 9 December 2015, A/HRC/30/67), p. 8; 16, <https://undocs.org/A/HRC/30/67>, accessed 4 November 2025.

20 Human Rights Watch, ‘Those terrible weeks in their camps’ (2014) [https://features.hrw.org/features/HRW\\_2014\\_report/Those\\_Terrible\\_Weeks\\_in\\_Their\\_Camp/](https://features.hrw.org/features/HRW_2014_report/Those_Terrible_Weeks_in_Their_Camp/), accessed 4 November 2025.

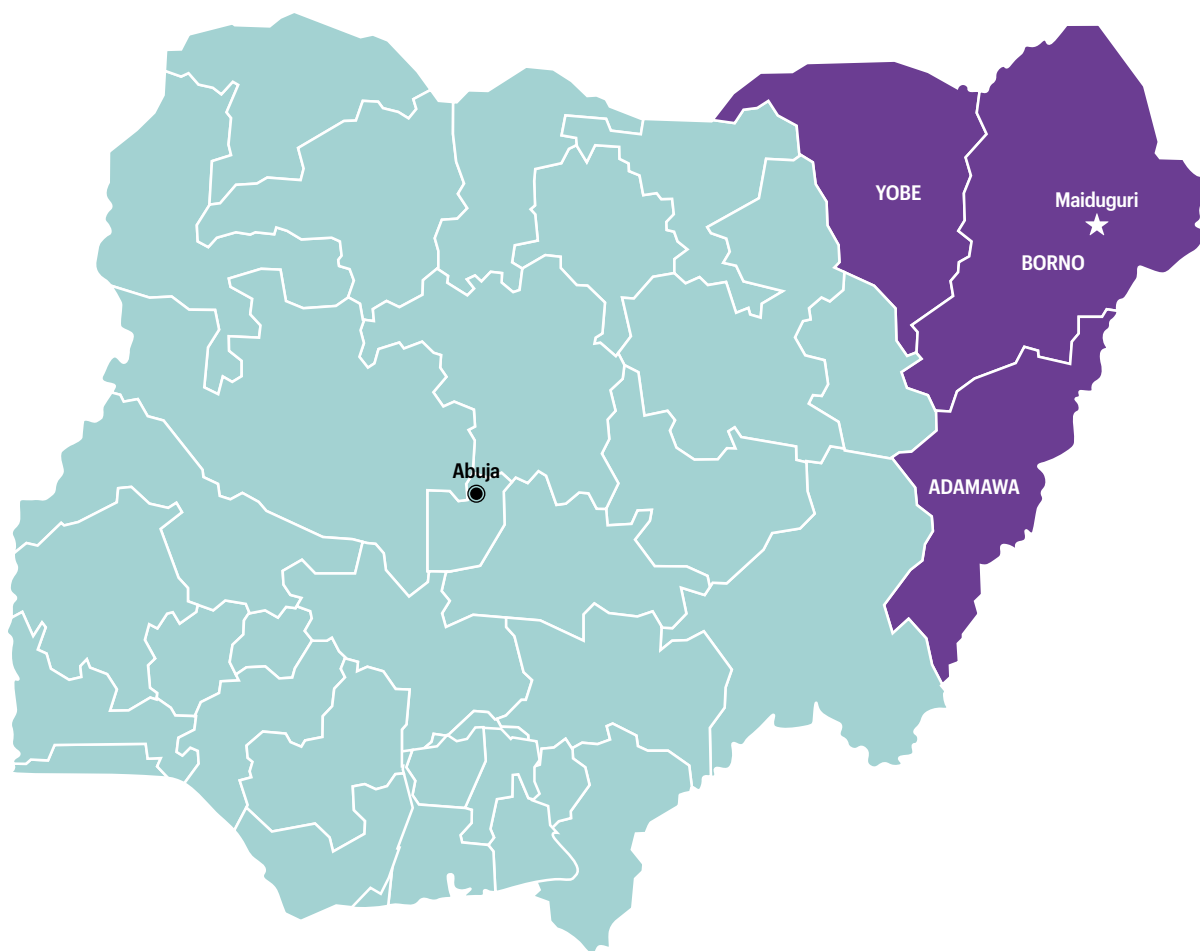
21 Amnesty International “‘Help Us Build Our Lives’: Girl Survivors of Boko Haram and Military Abuses in North-East Nigeria’ (2024), <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr44/7883/2024/en/>, accessed 4 November 2025.

22 Survey of 3,471 people conducted by the United Nations University Centre for Policy Research’s Managing Exits from Armed Conflict initiative in and around Maiduguri (Borno State) between December 2020 and February 2021. Respondents were asked whether they personally knew someone in their community who had experienced conflict-related sexual violence.

23 Cristal Downing, Kato Van Broeckhoven and Siobhan O’Neil, ‘New Data Underscores Urgent Need for Holistic Approaches to Conflict Related Sexual Violence’ (United Nations University – Centre for Policy Research blog, 18 June 2021), <https://unu.edu/cpr/blog-post/new-data-underscores-urgent-need-holistic-approaches-conflict-related-sexual-violence>, accessed 4 November 2025.

24 United Nations Secretary-General, Conflict-Related Sexual Violence: Report of the United Nations Secretary-General, UN Doc S/2019/280, (2019), para. 70, <https://www.un.org/sexualviolenceinconflict/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/report-conflict-related-sexual-violence-report-of-the-united-nations-secretary-general/2019-SG-Report.pdf>, accessed October 2025; Human Rights Watch, ‘Nigeria: Officials abusing displaced women, girls’ (2016), <https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/10/31/nigeria-officials-abusing-displaced-women-girls>; Amnesty International, “‘They Betrayed Us’: Boko Haram survivors have been starved and raped by Nigeria’s military’ (2018), <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2018/05/boko-haram-survivors-have-been-starved-and-raped-by-nigerias-military/>; Amnesty International “‘Help Us Build Our Lives’: Girl Survivors of Boko Haram and Military Abuses in North-East Nigeria’ (2024), <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr44/7883/2024/en/>.

## GEOGRAPHICAL SCOPE OF THE STUDY



- Participants' states of origin or residence.
- ☆ Location where participants met to share their experiences during interviews.



Survivors attending a training session on trauma healing and resilience. Maiduguri, October 2023 © dRPC



## 3. IMPACTS OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE ON SURVIVORS' LIVES

### 3.1. Impacts on survivors' physical and mental health

#### 3.1.1. Physical health issues

The physical health issues described by the survivors who participated in this study are deeply intertwined with the sexual violence they endured. Many of the chronic conditions mentioned, such as chest, abdominal, and back pain, are direct results of the brutal force used during acts of rape, as noted by one survivor: *"I feel pain on my right side because of the force they used to rape me."*<sup>25</sup>

Sexual violence in the context of abductions has often been accompanied by physical assault, which has caused various scars and wounds on survivors' bodies, as explained by two survivors:

*"I have been injured, we have been beaten, I have scars all over my back."*<sup>26</sup>

*"There are scars and wounds on my skin because of beating, bullying, as a result of the things that happened to me. Whenever they intended to rape me, and [I] refused, the person kicked [me] on the floor and stamped his foot on [my] chest, so I have chest pain problem that are affecting me time to time."*<sup>27</sup>

Moreover, the experience of repeated rape and physical abuse has resulted in serious gynaecological consequences. At least eight survivors who participated in the study reported experiencing miscarriages and stillbirths.<sup>28</sup>

Such use of violence also leads to long-term impacts such as disabilities:

*"I have a permanent injury on my legs presently, for almost about seven months. I couldn't stand well on my feet. Till today if I walk to a far distance the leg will swell up."*<sup>29</sup>

Starvation, malnutrition, and lack of access to clean drinking water during captivity – some survivors lasted months or even years – also caused several health issues, such as ulcers, as one of the survivors explained: *"I am suffering from ulcer as a result of hunger, while staying with Boko Haram."*<sup>30</sup>

Cardiovascular issues such as high and low blood pressure, and other heart problems, were also reported by survivors:

*"[...] I went to the hospital. They said I have developed high blood pressure, and anytime I remember my encounter with Boko Haram, my blood pressure rises."*<sup>31</sup>

#### 3.1.2. Psychological and emotional impacts

The psychological toll reported by survivors due to the violence and life in captivity is profound, manifesting in various mental health issues. Survivors have mentioned suffering from feelings of loneliness, anxiety and depression as a result of trauma. One survivor said:

*"I was so traumatised and still am. Whenever I sit down alone, it kept on coming to my mind. I can't really forget about it."*<sup>32</sup>

Six survivors reported suffering from sleep disturbances, including insomnia and recurrent nightmares.<sup>33</sup> Survivors also spoke of living in fear due to deep trauma compounded by prolonged exposure to gunshots, bomb blasts and the violence they endured. At least seven survivors explicitly

25 Semi-structured interview 001-05, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

26 Semi-structured interview 003-07, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

27 Semi-structured interview 003-01, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

28 Semi-structured interviews 001-07; 002-08; 003-01; 003-06; 005-03; 005-08; 010-02; 010-03, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

29 Semi-structured interview 002-03, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

30 Semi-structured interview 005-04, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

31 Semi-structured interview 003-02, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

32 Semi-structured interview 005-02, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

33 Semi-structured interviews 003-04; 004-01; 008-06; 010-3; 001-02; 003-03; 008-05, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

stated that the sound of gunshots remains a source of ongoing distress. One survivor recounted: *“The sounds of guns traumatised me, even now whenever I hear loud sounds, I get frightened.”*<sup>34</sup>

Another survivor described the forced marriage practices imposed by Boko Haram, noting the role of firearms in these unions:

*“Their own system of marriage is different from the normal way. In their own system, they just announce that ‘so and so’ have become married, and they shoot a gun, and then they gave us long black hijabs to wear and [told us] follow your husband to where he lives.”*<sup>35</sup>

The fear of guns among survivors is not only linked to general violence by armed groups but is deeply tied to experiences of sexual violence. Gunfire often signaled the start of forced marriages. For many, the sound of a gun remains a traumatic trigger, recalling the violence that followed.

At least three participants in the study shared that they had contemplated suicide and reported hearing of two cases where survivors had died by suicide. One participant shared that she contemplated suicide due to the extreme violence she was subjected to by Boko Haram:

*“I was married off by force, about four to five men were raping me daily. This really disturbs my mind to the extent that I even wanted to commit suicide.”*<sup>36</sup>

### 3.2. Interrupted education and impoverishment

Participants shared that one of the long term impacts of sexual violence is the interruption or derailment of the personal and professional goals they had before their abduction, an effect that often appears immediately and continues to affect their lives over time. At least 28 survivors mentioned that they lost some means of

livelihood because of the violence, causing serious economic hardships for them and their families. Boko Haram militants destroyed the houses and other property of survivors when they abducted them. Survivors whose assets had been destroyed therefore had nothing to rely on when they returned.

One survivor explained: *“It has affected my family badly because our house has been burnt down, our farm produce and properties have been destroyed. We have experienced great damage.”*<sup>37</sup> Another shared: *“They stole all our properties and domestic animals. [...] My home has been burnt since then.”*<sup>38</sup>

Moreover, more than half of the 82 survivors who participated in this research were under 18, and many were attending school when Boko Haram abducted them, forcibly interrupting their education.

This targeting was deliberate: as reported by Human Rights Watch, the group justified the abductions as punishment for the girls’ participation in Western-style education, instead advocating that they be sent to Quranic schools or forcibly married to members of the group and serve as sex slaves.<sup>39</sup>

At least 18 survivors shared that their education was impacted due to the violence, and that they were unable to continue their studies upon return. One survivor declared: *“It affected me personally because I was in secondary school, and I had to drop out from school.”*<sup>40</sup>

### 3.3. Disrupted social relations: stigmatisation and marginalisation from their family and community

Survivors reported experiencing rejection from their partners and family members upon their return from captivity. One survivor recounted:

*“When I returned home, my husband rejected me [...] because I have stayed with Boko Haram people, and till date we are not together.”*<sup>41</sup>

34 Semi-structured interview 004-07, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

35 Semi-structured interview 005-03, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

36 Semi-structured interview 001-01, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

37 Semi-structured interview 001-01, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

38 Semi-structured interview 002-03, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

39 Human Rights Watch, ‘Those Terrible Weeks in Their Camp’ (October 2014), p. 2; 31, <https://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/nigeria1014web.pdf>, accessed on 25 September 2025.

40 Semi-structured interview 001-07, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

41 Semi-structured interview 002-05, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

Another shared a similar account of rejection by her husband:

*"When I came back, I couldn't find my husband. Later on I found him, and he rejected me because according to him since I have stayed with Boko Haram, he can no longer stay with me, all attempts for reconciliation failed."<sup>42</sup>*

Upon their return from captivity, many survivors described facing immense stigmatisation, often resulting in derogatory name-calling and exclusion from employment and community activities:

*"[...] if I go out to search for work, people will be mocking me as 'Boko Haram woman', so I cannot get any employment from anywhere."<sup>43</sup>*

The stigmatisation arises from many factors, including lack of trust towards survivors, as explained by one survivor participant: *"My community is scared of me. They have so far excluded me from being one of them, so they are looking down on me. They are saying that I am not worthy of trust."<sup>44</sup>*

Another survivor recounted the way stigmatisation plays out in every day interactions:

*"If any issue or misunderstanding happened between us they will say 'no wonder that's how abducted people of Boko Haram behave."<sup>45</sup>*

She also highlighted, however, that not all community responses were negative: *"Some of the members of our community really felt bad about what happened and do pity us. While some were stigmatising us, there are some who have been comforting us."<sup>46</sup>*

### 3.4. Impacts on children born of conflict-related sexual violence

Participants to this study have mentioned the issues faced by children born of conflict-related sexual violence.<sup>47</sup> Many of these children were conceived in captivity, with most also being born there.

Survivor participants explained that the children face significant challenges, the most common being social rejection, stigmatisation and discrimination, often manifesting in derogatory name-calling. One survivor shared:

*"People create gossips that [...] my kids are products of Boko Haram, so they will have the same attitudes as their father, and they might even kill the person that I married."<sup>48</sup>*

The rejection faced by these children is not limited to the wider community. Mothers of children born of conflict-related sexual violence mentioned that immediate and extended family members also treat these children with hostility. Survivors described instances of neglect, bullying and even physical abuse. One mother stated:

*"Whenever I leave him at home together with my relations, they bully him. [...] People hate my child and beat him unnecessarily."<sup>49</sup>*

Discrimination in schools presents an additional barrier. Survivors described how their children are ostracised in schools, making it difficult for them to access or remain in formal education. The cumulative effect of stigmatisation and rejection at home, in the community, and in schools severely impacts their development and well-being.

42 Semi-structured interview 003-04, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

43 Semi-structured interview 001-01, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

44 Semi-structured interview 002-02, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

45 Semi-structured interview 003-01, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

46 Ibid.

47 In this briefing, the term "children born of conflict-related sexual violence" is used to refer to children conceived as a result sexual violence perpetrated by Boko Haram, including those born of rape and those born during captivity, which is the terminology used by GSF. While a general term is necessary for clarity, its use is not intended to diminish the individuality of each child or their unique experiences and circumstances. In the interview quotes, we preserve the words used by survivors themselves - most frequently "children born of rape" - to remain faithful to their voices. However, the interviews were conducted in Hausa and Kanuri, and the transcripts were produced in English by our research partners. As a result, the phrasing in the transcripts may not fully capture the survivors' original words, and some nuances may have been interpreted or adapted into concepts familiar to our sector.

48 Semi-structured interview 002-02, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

49 Semi-structured interview 010-01, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

Additionally, children born of conflict-related sexual violence suffer from a range of physical and psychological problems. Participants in the study reported issues such as eye infections, hearing impairments, gastrointestinal disorders, and “emotional instability.”<sup>50</sup>

Many of these health concerns are perceived by the survivors as being linked to the trauma and deprivation their children experienced in captivity.

Survivors described the emotional toll on their children, particularly as they grow older and begin questioning their origins. One woman described her daughter’s confusion:

*“My daughter asks me about her dad everyday, and I don’t know what I should tell her. [...] She is now growing up, so has started becoming aware of many things.”<sup>51</sup>*

Identity struggles are common among children born of conflict-related sexual violence. At least nine survivors mentioned that their children often express distress over not knowing their father. One survivor noted:

*“Children born of rape really feel unhappy and separated and uncomfortable all the time, because of the way my daughter always asked me where her father is.”<sup>52</sup>*

Several children have remained in captivity after their mothers escaped or died. These children face multiple layers of vulnerability and extreme risks, including forced recruitment into armed groups, sexual abuse, and even execution. One survivor recalled: *“The boys are trained on how to shoot while the girls were sexually assaulted. They were harmed in different ways and even killed.”<sup>53</sup>*

Another survivor spoke of the uncertainty and anguish of not knowing her children’s fate:

*“Some people said they used my daughter for suicide bombing, and in another version, it has been said that she is still alive. And the same applies to the male child, some people said he is alive and some said that he is not alive.”<sup>54</sup>*

### 3.5. Impacts on survivors’ families and on the community

The effects of sexual violence extend far beyond the immediate survivors, significantly impacting their families and communities. Many family members of survivors have experienced both physical and mental health issues directly linked to the violence. Reported conditions include cardiovascular problems, various injuries, high and low blood pressure, depression and signs of trauma. As one survivor explained:

*“This has great impact on my family, because my mother has lost weight seriously as a result of this, because they are always thinking about [my] condition.”<sup>55</sup>*

At the community level, the impact has been severe, with consequences such as economic collapse, fractured social ties, and deep psychological trauma. In some cases, entire villages have been devastated by Boko Haram, with homes destroyed, belongings looted, and civilians brutally killed. One survivor recounted:

*“It has affected my community members a lot, because, a lot of people have lost their properties, some have got their houses burnt down and if they come across women they pack all of them, and go away with them, just as they did to me, and some people that have been abducted are not yet back to the community.”<sup>56</sup>*

Survivors also noted the challenges communities face in rebuilding. One reflected: *“Many people were killed in my community by the Boko haram during the attack. Some people left the community. My community is not as full and wealthy as it was before.”<sup>57</sup>*

### 3.6. Risks faced by survivors since returning from captivity

Some survivors interviewed were rescued by the military, while others escaped on their own. Several were first taken to military facilities and later transferred to IDP camps, while others were taken directly to IDP camps, relocated

50 Semi-structured interviews 004-04; 005-04; 005-06; 010-01; 011-01; 011-06, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

51 Semi-structured interview 002-04, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

52 Semi-structured interview 009-03, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

53 Semi-structured interview 001-01, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

54 Semi-structured interview 001-03, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

55 Semi-structured interview 006-01, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

56 Semi-structured interview 002-01, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

57 Semi-structured interview 005-05, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

elsewhere, or returned home. Upon returning home or to other communities, survivors frequently faced destruction of property, stigmatisation, and social rejection.<sup>58</sup>

### 3.6.1. Returning to Boko Haram due to stigmatisation

For some survivors, severe social rejection, stigmatisation and lack of meaningful reintegration made the prospect of returning to Boko Haram appear as a last resort. Seven survivors who participated in the study mentioned that they had considered, or were still considering, returning to Boko Haram, as the ongoing social rejection and the absence of adequate support structures left them feeling it was their only option.<sup>59</sup>

One survivor shared that after facing rejection and stigmatisation from her family and community upon her first return, she took the difficult decision to go back to Boko Haram. Following her second escape, she noted that others she had fled with had also returned because of similar experiences of rejection and exclusion.<sup>60</sup> Another survivor declared: *“Honestly, the way they have been disliking me made me [want] to return to Boko Haram.”*<sup>61</sup>

One survivor described the emotional toll of community stigmatisation on her children:

**“We faced a lot of stigma about our children, a lot of bad words are being said to them that your mind couldn’t bear, sometimes I even think of going back to the (sambisa<sup>62</sup>) because of this discrimination and stigma we are encountering. But in my second thought I will see that, if I return back to Boko Haram, I am still not safe.”**<sup>63</sup>

Those who made the difficult decision to return to Boko Haram did not do so out of loyalty to the armed group, but out of desperation and lack of alternatives. Their testimonies make it clear that returning meant going back to conditions of abuse, captivity and sexual violence.

This shows how deeply they had been rejected and stigmatised to the point that they felt they had nowhere else to go. This highlights the urgent need to address the social and structural barriers that continue to exclude and marginalise survivors, even after they have escaped armed groups and attempted to reintegrate.

### 3.6.2. Insecurity

Many survivors remain in areas still affected by ongoing conflict and insecurity, where attacks continue to pose a serious threat. One survivor explained:

*“Currently my community is not secure from Boko Haram. Men and women are being slaughtered, killed when they go to their farms or other workplace.”*<sup>64</sup>

In addition to the external threat of armed violence, some survivors also face hostility from community members. In extreme cases, this has included physical attacks. One survivor described:

*“They even threw stones at us just because we were trying to enlighten our fellow survivors.”*<sup>65</sup>

These cases demonstrate the dual threats survivors face upon return, as they remain vulnerable to both conflict-related violence and community-based discrimination, undermining efforts toward safe reintegration.

58 Semi-structured interviews 008-04; 008-05; 008-08; 010-01; 010-03; 010-04; 010-05; 010-06; 010-07; 010-08; 011-02, Maiduguri, Borno State, (10–14 October 2023).

59 Semi-structured interviews 001-03; 003-02; 003-05; 004-08; 005-02; 010-03; 010-07, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

60 Semi-structured interview 010-03, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

61 Semi-structured interview 003-05, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

62 Sambisa is a forest in Borno State, widely known as a place where Boko Haram held abductees, particularly women and girls.

63 Semi-structured interview 003-02, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

64 Semi-structured interview 005-02, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

65 Semi-structured interview 006-02, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).



Survivor leaders from Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe States meeting for a training session on trauma healing and resilience. Maiduguri, October 2023 © dRPC



## 4. URGENT NEEDS OF SURVIVORS

Before any reparative measures can be effectively implemented, survivors highlighted the importance of addressing their immediate and urgent needs. The most frequently cited priorities included access to food, clothing and safe shelter, which were described as essential for their basic survival and dignity.

### 4.1. Immediate access to food

Seven survivors explicitly mentioned starving, and many others highlighted the urgent need for food, both for themselves and their children. One survivor explained: *“My kids and I have been suffering a great deal to hunger ever since our return.”*<sup>66</sup> Another one said: *“My child has to go and beg before we can get what to eat.”*<sup>67</sup>

### 4.2. Emergency medical care and health services

Survivors consistently highlighted critical health concerns and identified emergency medical care as one of their most immediate and pressing needs. Many are living with untreated medical conditions that pose serious risks to their lives. due to lack of timely access to healthcare, adapted medication and other treatments. Access to healthcare was described as essential not only for survival, but also for enabling participation in longer-term recovery and reparative processes. One survivor explained the severity of her condition, stating: *“Any hospital that I attend caution me to be careful with my blood pressure, [...] anytime it rises it can lead to my death.”*<sup>68</sup> Another insisted on the central role of health in the broader process of healing and in being able to actively participate in any reparation process:

**“All I want is to focus on health. If we take care of our health, then we can contribute in the process of reparation.”**<sup>69</sup>

While access to healthcare as a form of reparation will be explored in more detail in Section 6, many survivors

identified access to emergency medical care as an urgent and immediate need. Without timely medical support, survivors face a high risk of health deterioration, which in turn severely limits their ability to engage in reparation processes or begin meaningful recovery.

### 4.3. Access to a safe shelter

Testimonies highlight the critical need for immediate intervention to secure safe, stable and dignified housing for survivors. Without access to proper shelter, the psychological and physical well-being of survivors will continue to deteriorate, further hindering their recovery and reintegration into society. One survivor shared the hardship of living in dire conditions:

*“I am a single woman with a daughter. We don’t have good place to sleep. If you see where I stay with my daughter presently, I swear to God you won’t believe that a human being can live in it. When it is raining, we have to go to the neighbour to sleep there.”*<sup>70</sup>

Survivors highlighted the urgent need for access to safe shelter, viewing it as a critical first step in rebuilding their lives. While the issue of access to adequate housing will be addressed later in the section on reparations, many considered immediate shelter a necessary foundation before any reparative measures could be meaningful. Survivors spoke about the risks of homelessness or the extreme inadequacy of their current living conditions, which often expose them to further harm.

A survivor, currently living in a camp, described the overcrowded conditions: *“I am really in need of accommodation, because in the camp we are living in a small tent together with my aunt and about six of her children, so there is congestion in the place we are living.”*<sup>71</sup> The conditions faced by some survivors are particularly severe, with no access to basic necessities: *“We have no shelter with my children and nothing to eat. We stay in makeshift shelter, no toilets; we used the bush nearby to ease our self with my children.”*<sup>72</sup>

66 Semi-structured interview 002-03, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

67 Semi-structured interview 010-06, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

68 Semi-structured interview 003-06, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

69 Semi-structured interview 001-04, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

70 Semi-structured interview 005-04, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

71 Semi-structured interview 002-07, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

72 Semi-structured interview 005-06, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).



A survivor discussing the impacts of conflict-related sexual violence on her life and her perceptions on reparation with a counsellor, Maiduguri, October 2023 © dRPC



## 5. SURVIVORS' PERCEPTIONS ON REPARATION

### 5.1. Reparation as a right

“My rights are more important to me than anything.”<sup>73</sup>

Many survivors emphasised that reparation is not a favour but a right owed to them due to the harm they have suffered. This includes the loss of family members, homes, safety, and the trauma caused by sexual violence. As one survivor stated: *“Survivors have the right to reparation, because they had a better life before the conflict happened, so they have every right of reparation from the government. There is [a right] because they have been greatly harmed, for example, those that encountered sexual assault, and those that lost their parents, surely, they deserve such repairs.”*<sup>74</sup>

Reparation is viewed as a means to support survivors' recovery and restore some stability to their lives. Many survivors see it as an essential step in alleviating the emotional and physical suffering caused by the conflict and enabling them to rebuild what was lost:

*“Of course I have a right to reparation, because before this incident, we have been in peace, when we were in the village before the attack we were living in our own house, in a peaceful atmosphere, and we had no challenges as we are now facing, our parents have been giving us good care and support, but presently after this incident, I am just living like that, I am not enjoying life, so it will be good if we can be aided.”*<sup>75</sup>

### 5.2. A path to healing and well-being

Reparation is not only about material compensation; it is also seen as a way to heal from the trauma of the conflict and regain a sense of stability and peace, both individually and within families. One survivor highlighted the importance of psychological support as part of reparation:

*“We cannot help or support ourselves and reparations are the only way we can be comforted and compensated for the [violence], as for me I need guidance and counselling because I cannot help myself, so I need some assistance.”*<sup>76</sup>

Moreover, some survivors view reparation as a means to regain dignity and reduce the social stigma they face. Survivors of sexual violence often face exclusion and humiliation, and financial support could help restore their social standing and reduce stigma:

*“If you can get reparation that will sustain you, because without money you cannot be social in people, but without it, people will not be afraid to stigmatise and abuse you.”*<sup>77</sup>

### 5.3. Reparation for a better future, especially for their children

For many survivors, reparation is seen as essential not only for their own recovery but also for providing a better future for their children. Rebuilding a sense of security and caring for children has become a key priority for those who have been displaced or are struggling to provide basic needs:

*“Yes, a survivor has got a right to reparation, if they can help, then let them support our children since we cannot take care of them, I have a right as a survivor, First of all, the government should take care of my children and save us out of this situation which is threatening our lives.”*<sup>78</sup>

### 5.4. Perspectives on responsibility to provide reparation

The majority of survivors (56 out of 82) identified the government as the primary duty bearer responsible for reparations. A significant number of survivors (54) also

73 Semi-structured interview 010-05, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

74 Semi-structured interview 001-01, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

75 Semi-structured interview 002-08, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

76 Semi-structured interview 002-06, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

77 Semi-structured interviews 009-04; 001-03, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

78 Semi-structured interview 001-03, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

believed that Non governmental organisations (NGOs) should play a role in providing reparations. Additionally, a smaller number of survivors pointed to community leaders, families, religious institutions, the head of state, and wealthy individuals as having a responsibility to repair the harms they suffered.

Although many survivors identified the government as the key entity responsible, a number of survivors expressed they would like the NGOs to be involved, due to their past experiences with these organisations. Many survivors reported finding greater support from NGOs, and some felt that these organisations had a better understanding of their needs. As one survivor said:

*“Some NGOs are even doing better than the government because the government doesn’t know anything about the situation of survivors. I am telling you that if not because of the efforts of the NGOs, many people could have gone back to the bush.”<sup>79</sup>*

Trust in NGOs has been built over time due to the timely and practical assistance they have provided, as reflected in survivor testimonies:

*“In my own opinion, the government is supposed to make that reparation, but if they fail in doing so, then NGOs should do the repairs because they play a significant role in assisting people compared with the government.”<sup>80</sup>*

Another survivor declared:

*“I can say NGOs are the ones that can support well, to be sincere, organisations will serve better in repairing the harm that has been caused more than the government, because it seems that the government is never considerate about our situation.”<sup>81</sup>*

It is crucial, however, to note that only states and perpetrators can provide reparation to victims of gross human rights violations. NGOs, by themselves, cannot provide reparations. Their role lies in supporting the process by working alongside the government and relevant bodies to ensure the survivors’ participation and the effective delivery of reparative measures. Victims’ associations, as well as other local and international organisations, can play an important role in advocating for the rights of survivors and ensuring they are actively involved in the reparations process.

This collaboration can help foster trust and ensure that reparations meet survivors’ needs. Additionally, several survivors highlighted the important role of community leaders in addressing the harm caused by conflict-related sexual violence, particularly in reducing stigma, exclusion and discrimination. Since stigmatisation often originates within communities, survivors view community leaders as essential in raising awareness and challenging harmful narratives. Survivors believe that community leaders can foster positive change by educating the public about the issues survivors face and helping to reduce societal exclusion and discrimination.

Three participants explicitly mentioned this. Their perspectives underscore the potential for local leaders to support survivors’ reintegration. One survivor noted that community leaders, who are aware of local dynamics, are well positioned to help.<sup>82</sup> Two others emphasised that local leaders can raise awareness and encourage community members not to stigmatise survivors and their children.<sup>83</sup> One of these survivors added that reducing the risks of rejection and social exclusion would also prevent some survivors from considering returning to Boko Haram.<sup>84</sup>

79 Semi-structured interview 001-07, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

80 Semi-structured interview 001-03, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

81 Semi-structured interview 003-01, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

82 Semi-structured interviews 001-04, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

83 Semi-structured interviews 009-04, 003-05, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

84 Semi-structured interview 009-04, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).



## 6. FORMS AND MODALITIES OF REPARATION IDENTIFIED BY SURVIVORS

While the concept of reparation was discussed separately from their needs, many survivors expressed them interchangeably: what they most needed was also what they most sought as reparation.

### 6.1. Economic empowerment and financial support

#### 6.1.1. Capital and equipment to start a business

Many survivors identified access to capital as a key component of reparation, emphasising its importance for rebuilding livelihoods and achieving self-sufficiency. At least 23 survivors underscored that an initial lump sum of capital would significantly help them establish income-generating activities and improve their families' well-being:

*"If I have my business, I can pay a house rent. To support my family, business is the only sustainable thing that will make me stand on my feet again. I can pay my daughter school fees."*<sup>85</sup>

In addition to financial capital, some survivors highlighted the importance of receiving the tools and equipment necessary to start their business.

*"I need to do something to support my family. I need a tailoring machine. I know how to sew clothes for long now, and I am making progress. So, I need sewing machine to stand on my own for now."*<sup>86</sup>

#### 6.1.2. Payment of monthly allowances

At least 22 survivors expressed a strong preference for receiving a monthly allowance rather than a one-off payment, stressing that monthly payments would better enable them to manage household expenses and ensure long-term stability. One survivor said:

*"Lump sum is like air. It can be spread anyhow, but monthly pension will be better and preferable, because you can plan it, and do your needs with it. Even if you want to buy something, it will sustain you."*<sup>87</sup>

Another survivor explained:

*"In my own view, it should be given monthly because it will enable you to know how you will spend the money each month. It will be easy to make calculations."*<sup>88</sup>

### 6.2. Access to basic needs and essential services

#### 6.2.1. Free access to services

At least 11 survivors stated that beyond financial compensation, free access to essential services such as healthcare, communication services or transportation would constitute a form of reparation for them.<sup>89</sup> Ensuring cost-free access to existing services was seen as an important component of reparations. One survivor explained:

*"Lumpsum or monthly pension cannot solve the problem of the survivors, because after you finish spending the money, the problem is still there. There should be free to access any kind of service and at anywhere and without fear of harassment."*<sup>90</sup>

Regarding healthcare, survivors focused primarily on removing financial barriers to existing services and guaranteeing free access.<sup>91</sup> For example, they suggested free hospital visits and free access to their medical treatments or prescriptions.

85 Semi-structured interview 005-04, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

86 Semi-structured interview 005-01, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

87 Semi-structured interview 009-06, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023). Semi-structured interview 003-02, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

88 Semi-structured interview 003-02, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

89 Semi-structured interviews 001-01; 001-05; 001-07; 002-01; 002-03; 002-07; 004-07; 005-01; 005-03; 011-02; 011-06, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

90 Semi-structured interview 001-07, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

91 Semi-structured interviews 011-06; 002-01; 004-07, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

### 6.2.2. Adequate housing

The need for adequate housing was mentioned by at least 22 survivors who identified it as an essential form of reparation. As one survivor stated: *“Shelter to me is the most important reparation.”*<sup>92</sup>

Another survivor participant noted:

*“Since we can’t return everything from the past, there are restitution measures that could be adopted, like there are people who have lost their homes, and even after returning they don’t have access to housing and have to squat in camps.”*<sup>93</sup>

One survivor expressed the urgency of housing support: *“If you will do reparation for me, I want a good house to live in with my mother, [...] because my mother stays in a tent in a camp.”*<sup>94</sup> The significance of secure housing in restoring a feeling of dignity was echoed by another:

*“If I have my own house, only little disrespect will be remaining because no one will send me to leave my house, no arguing.”*<sup>95</sup>

## 6.3. Physical and psychological healing

### 6.3.1. Medical care

Most survivors stressed the importance of access to healthcare as a core component of reparation. They cited both immediate and long-term health challenges, many of which remained untreated due to cost or lack of services. One survivor noted:

*“[...] there are those that contracted [HIV] and many other ailments and many of us cannot afford medication due to financial problem.”*<sup>96</sup>

Survivors also advocated for the medical needs of family members, particularly children: *“My children’s healthcare and education, that is what I am concerned about most in this life.”*<sup>97</sup>

### 6.3.2. Psychological support

At least 11 survivors stressed the importance of mental health support as a form of reparation, to help them cope and overcome trauma.<sup>98</sup> Regular counselling and trauma-informed care were among their suggestions. One survivor expressed:

*“I will appreciate if I can get someone or an organisation that will be guiding and counselling me regularly concerning my mental health. Maybe if I get such assistance, it will help to calm my mind down.”*<sup>99</sup>

### 6.3.3. Access to spiritual and culturally sensitive healing

Two survivors emphasised the importance of religion as part of their healing process.<sup>100</sup> One stated that survivors: *“Should be assisted through preachings, by reminding them about the words of their Creator so as to prevent them from negative outlook on life.”*<sup>101</sup>

This request highlights the potential role of spirituality in recovery for survivors who identified it as part of reparations. Facilitating access to diverse forms of culturally sensitive healing, including traditional, community-based and religious services, can also play a valuable role in supporting survivors’ long-term well-being.

## 6.4. Education as a form of reparation

Education was one of the most urgent forms of reparation sought by survivors, for themselves and their children.<sup>102</sup> Survivors emphasised the role of education in rebuilding their lives. Different testimonies show that access to education must be flexible and respond to the diverse needs of survivors and their children.

### 6.4.1. Education for survivors

For many survivors, access to education was not only about academic achievement but a critical step in

92 Semi-structured interview 002-07, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

93 Semi-structured interview 004-04, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

94 Semi-structured interview 009-06, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

95 Semi-structured interview 011-01, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

96 Semi-structured interview 001-07, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

97 Semi-structured interview 005-02, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

98 Semi-structured interviews 003-04; 004-01; 007-03; 007-04; 007-07; 007-08; 008-05; 008-06; 009-07; 009-08; 011-03, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

99 Semi-structured interview 003-04, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

100 Semi-structured interviews 001-01; 011-05, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

101 Semi-structured interview 001-01, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

102 When expressing immediate needs, 25 survivors expressed education for themselves; 25 survivors expressed education for their children.

reclaiming autonomy and restoring their psychological well-being. Access to education was one of the most frequently cited forms of reparation, with 23 survivors highlighting it as a priority.<sup>103</sup> Of these, 14 saw education as a means to rebuild their lives.<sup>104</sup>

Survivors highlighted the need to acquire new skills and knowledge to achieve self-reliance. One survivor reflected how education was essential for restoring her sense of independence:

*"[...] I want to be educated [...] I want to acquire some skills, so that I can be able to do something that will earn me some income, instead of relying on someone."<sup>105</sup>*

Education was also viewed as therapeutic, offering emotional relief: *"If I can be helped to go back to school and get a job it would ease the pain."<sup>106</sup>*

For seven survivors, accessing reparation represented a restoration of what had been violently taken away from them, especially the chance to complete their education or continue disrupted studies.<sup>107</sup> Reparation meant reclaiming their right to learn that had been denied to them due to conflict and sexual violence. One survivor declared: *"All my relatives are attending school excluding myself, and it was all as a result of this misfortune."<sup>108</sup>*

#### 6.4.2. Education for children: breaking the cycle and restoring hope

Access to education for their children emerged as the priority for 56 survivors.<sup>109</sup> They placed a greater emphasis on their children's education than their own, seeing it as central to breaking the cycle of poverty and enabling them to have a brighter future. One survivor emphasised:

*"It is my desire to see my kids go to school and get educated, because as a result of being educated they will be independent, and they will forget about the miseries caused to them by Boko Haram, and they will be able to help us and other people as well. This is how I want my children to be, I really want them to get good education."<sup>110</sup>*

For many, providing education for their children was seen as key to restoring hope for the next generation. Survivors viewed children's education as critical to preventing future harm, offering long-term protection and reducing risks of marginalisation and poverty.<sup>111</sup>

*"My priorities is to see that my children attend school and become fully educated, because education is the foundation of prosperity, if they are educated, they can be able to do many things, [...] So it is very important to see that your child is educated, so that they he fights for his own rights and even for somebody's rights."<sup>112</sup>*

Survivors emphasised the importance of inclusive education for children born of conflict-related sexual violence. One survivor expressed the desire for community support to promote inclusion and reduce stigma:

*"Firstly, they should be enrolled in school and also create awareness to other children to stop disliking them because they are all the same people, this will make such children to feel free and face their studies."<sup>113</sup>*

One survivor preferred the option of separate schooling, suggesting it would provide a safer environment for their children.<sup>114</sup> Another suggested boarding schools as an alternative.<sup>115</sup>

103 Semi-structured interviews 001-03; 001-06; 001-07; 002-01; 002-07; 003-01; 004-02; 004-03; 004-04; 004-05; 005-01.49; 005-03; 009-01; 009-03; 009-04; 009-05; 009-06; 009-08; 010-01; 010-02; 010-04; 010-07; 011-04, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

104 In particular 14 survivors : Semi-structured interviews 001-06 ; 002-01; 002-07 ; 003-01; 004-04; 005-01.49; 005-03; 009-04; 009-05; 009-06; 009-08; 010-01; 010-02; 011-04, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

105 Semi-structured interview 001-06, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

106 Semi-structured interview 004-04, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

107 Semi-structured interviews 002-01; 002-07; 003-01; 004-04; 010-04; 010-01; 011-04, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

108 Semi-structured interview 001-04, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

109 Semi-structured interviews 001-03; 001-04; 001-05; 001-06; 001-07; 001-08; 002-01; 002-02; 002-03; 002-04; 002-05; 002-06; 002-07; 002-08; 003-01; 003-02; 003-03; 003-04; 003-05; 003-06; 003-07; 003-08; 004-01; 004-02; 004-03; 004-04; 004-05; 004-06; 004-08; 005-01.49; 005-02; 005-03; 005-07; 005-08; 006-01; 006-02; 009-01; 009-03; 009-04; 009-05; 009-06; 009-07; 009-08; 010-01; 010-02; 010-03; 010-04; 010-08; 011-01; 011-02; 011-03; 011-04; 011-05; 011-06; 011-07; 011-08, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

110 Semi-structured interview 002-02, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

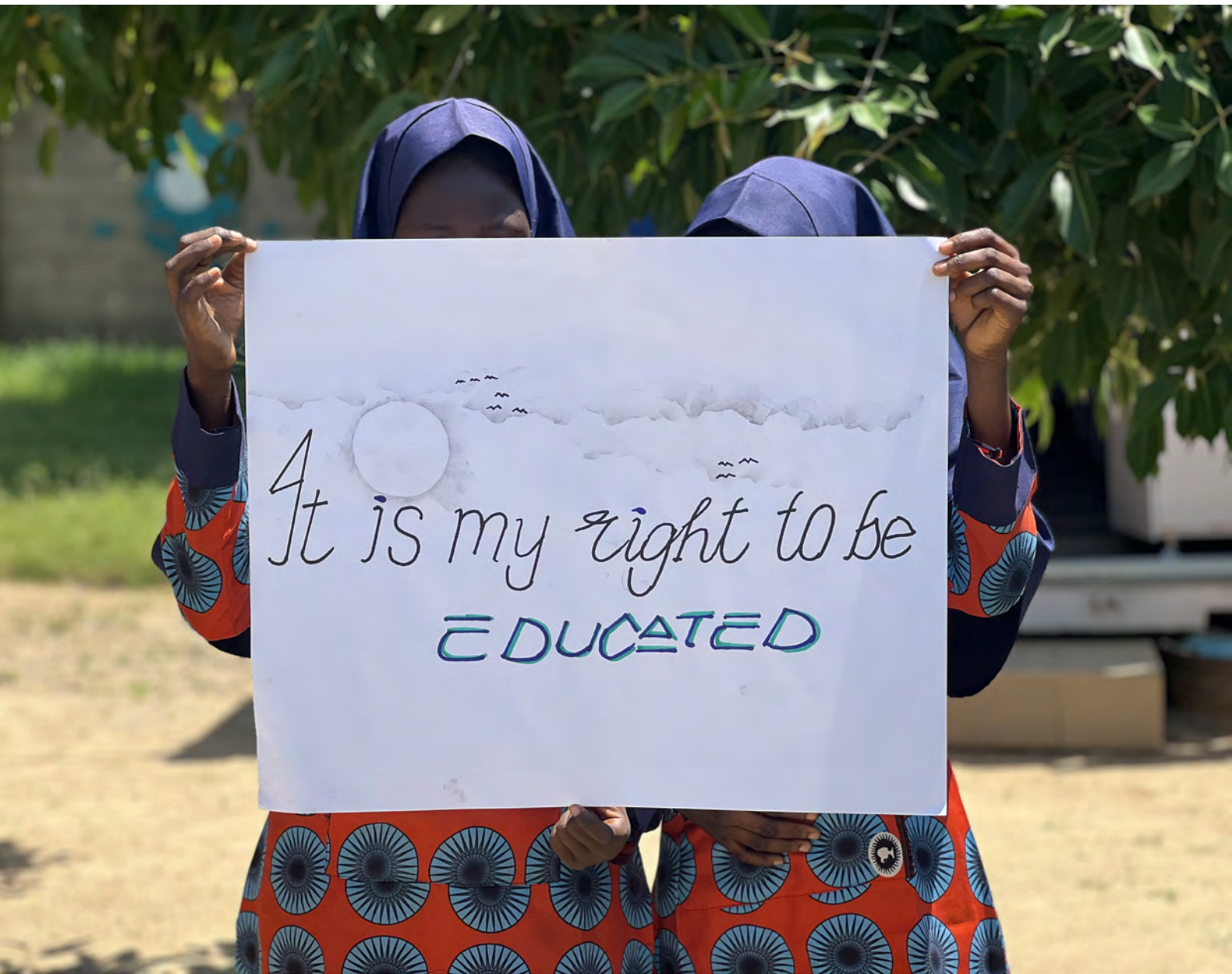
111 Semi-structured interviews 001-04; 002-02; 004-07; 004-04; 003-04; 009-03; 009-07; 006-01; 003-08, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

112 Semi-structured interview 003-02, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

113 Semi-structured interview 002-01, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

114 Semi-structured interview 004-02, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

115 Semi-structured interview 011-03, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).



Students from Lafiya Sarari school holding a sign that reads 'It is my right to be educated'. Maiduguri, June 2025 © Neem Foundation

### 6.4.3. Flexibility and diversity in education opportunities

Testimonies reflected that education as reparation must be flexible and adapted to varied realities. Based on their own needs and those of their children, survivors explained that not all forms of education needed to be formal. Depending on their personal circumstances, this could include formal schooling, vocational training or religious education.<sup>116</sup> Two survivors mentioned the option of Islamic school.<sup>117</sup>

Skill development programmes, such as tailoring or handiwork, were seen as essential complements to formal education. Six survivors also linked acquiring new skills with a sense of protection and future stability.<sup>118</sup>

Gaining knowledge and skills was viewed as a way to build independence, support families, and reduce the risk of future harm or dependence:

*“I need to progress in my life. So I need to learn entrepreneurship and do it. I want to learn and work. So that, I will be able to stand on my own.”<sup>119</sup>*

## 6.5. Social reintegration and family acceptance

### 6.5.1. Sensitisation campaigns for community acceptance

Survivors expressed an urgent need for acceptance within their communities. Rejection, stigmatisation and social exclusion continue to affect their everyday lives. As one survivor put it: *“I want people to stop hating me, to stop running away from me, I want to be accepted in the community.”<sup>120</sup>*

Survivors advocated for public awareness campaigns to reduce stigmatisation. This was an essential condition to the reintegration of survivors and their children in the communities:

*“NGOs can help in creating awareness about the survivor’s ordeal to the community. This will help in sensitising people against stigmatisation.”<sup>121</sup>*

*“People should be sensitised to know how to treat the survivors and the children born of rape.”<sup>122</sup>*

Community leaders were identified as key stakeholders in promoting acceptance and reducing stigma. One survivor proposed:

*“[...] the traditional leaders should be creating awareness for the community members to stop showing discrimination against us.”<sup>123</sup>*

Another survivor shared that traditional rulers should sensitise communities on how they should interact with survivors and stop harassing them.<sup>124</sup>

### 6.5.2. Survivor network for mutual support

The importance for establishing survivor networks for collective healing and support was strongly emphasised during the interviews. One survivor suggested:

*“If there is anyone who wants to harm us, then we can take it forward and form a network so we can help each other.”<sup>125</sup>*

Another added:

*“For example, if we are one hundred people, then we can be divided into three groups. Through this, we can be able to assist each other, because those that understand the matter will enlighten those that didn’t understand. By doing so there will be greater achievements.”<sup>126</sup>*

116 Semi-structured interviews 010-04 ; 001-06 ; 010-04 ; 010-01 ; 010-02 ; 004-07; 010-05, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

117 Semi-structured interviews 002-01; 004-07, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

118 Semi-structured interviews 001-03; 001-06; 005-01; 009-03; 009-06; 010-01, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

119 Semi-structured interview 009-03, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

120 Semi-structured interview 010-03, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

121 Semi-structured interview 002-05, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

122 Semi-structured interview 001-03, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

123 Semi-structured interview 002-01, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

124 Semi-structured interview 002-02, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

125 Semi-structured interview 011-04, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

126 Semi-structured interview 001-07, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

## 6.6. Addressing ongoing threats and supporting survivors' reintegration

### 6.6.1. Security and protection

Survivors insisted on the importance of physical security, particularly in the areas still affected by Boko Haram. Some expressed that the threat of Boko Haram's resurgence remained a major barrier to rebuilding their lives. As one survivor noted:

*"There is need of security. As I am talking to you now, in my town, Boko Haram are still killing people when they go to their farms. So as a result of this insurgency, we cannot go far from our houses to collect firewood for cooking meals."*<sup>127</sup>

### 6.6.2. Safe return, reintegration and family reunification

Significant obstacles still hinder survivors' chances of returning home after escaping Boko Haram camps, such as security risks, the destruction of property and ongoing stigmatisation from the community.

Returning home and reintegrating safely into their communities is essential for survivors to regain a sense of justice, stability, and protection. One survivor expressed: *"Going back home is my hope."*<sup>128</sup>

The restoration of their homes and the ability to return to their communities was regarded as a vital part of the recovery process for many survivors: *"If it is possible, we should go back to our village, because we have our farmland there and business."*<sup>129</sup>

Family separation during captivity was a recurring issue mentioned by survivors, who described reunification as a key form of justice and healing:

*"My current need for now is to have access to my children and my parents. [...] to reunite with my family and children."*<sup>130</sup>

## 6.7. Recognition and access to justice

Survivors often interpreted the notion of "justice" in broad and personal terms, associating it with fairness rather than limiting it to formal legal proceedings. However, for a few participants, justice and reparation were closely linked, with a clear emphasis on the right to access justice and have violations formally acknowledged and addressed. One of these survivors emphasised: *"I want to be able to report any case of violation and get justice for my right that has been violated."*<sup>131</sup>

Another shared: *"If something happened, it should be investigated and justice should be done."*<sup>132</sup> A third said: *"According to the law, anyone who has been sexually violated has the right to seek justice."*<sup>133</sup>

One survivor mentioned that receiving a public apology was a critical part of the healing process. She shared: *"Public apology as a result of what happened is very important."*<sup>134</sup>

While not all survivors emphasised this, for her the symbolic act of acknowledging their suffering and apologising for the violence they endured was a necessary step for psychological healing and reconciliation.

127 Semi-structured interview 003-03, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

128 Semi-structured interview 011-06, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

129 Semi-structured interview 011-02, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

130 Semi-structured interview 001-08, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

131 Semi-structured interview 004-06, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

132 Semi-structured interview 009-01, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

133 Semi-structured interview 004-02, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

134 Semi-structured interview 003-04, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).



## 7. CHALLENGES AND RISKS IN ACCESSING REPARATIONS AND MITIGATION MEASURES IDENTIFIED BY SURVIVORS

### 7.1. Barriers to accessing reparation

#### 7.1.1. Administrative risks and corruption

Seven survivors expressed concerns that they would be excluded from reparations due to administrative issues, misidentification or corruption.<sup>135</sup> A lack of clear eligibility criteria and transparent selection processes can contribute to mistrust in how reparations are handled. For example, two survivors reported cases of corruption where assistance was provided to individuals who had never experienced conflict-related sexual violence, while actual survivors were overlooked, undermining the trust in any potential reparation process.<sup>136</sup> Ensuring a transparent and fair process was highlighted as key to preventing errors, exclusion or favouritism in the identification and selection of survivors. Survivors recommended the use of biometric verification and direct engagement to ensure that those eligible were accurately included and no one was unfairly left out.<sup>137</sup>

#### 7.1.2. Physical inaccessibility

Survivors may be unable to travel due to financial limitations, lack of access to transport, security concerns or health conditions. For some, participation in reparations programmes would therefore be inaccessible.

*“Reparation never reaches me, because I live in a farway place [...]. It never gets to me, my location is too far. [That is why] I never have access to getting it.”<sup>138</sup>*

### 7.2. Risks associated with accessing reparations

This section outlines the risks survivors associated with accessing reparations, due to concerns about how it might be delivered. Survivors emphasised that without

careful implementation, reparations could reinforce stigmatisation, provoke hostility, or expose them to security risks. The following analysis explores these concerns as described by survivors themselves.

#### 7.2.1. Reinforced stigmatisation

Eight survivors expressed that seeking reparations could reinforce stigmatisation.<sup>139</sup> One survivor shared that the stigma faced is so extreme that they feel unable to express themselves: *“Even if we want to speak our mind, some people mock us. We are not free to say what we want.”<sup>140</sup>*

For one survivor, such stigmatisation caused feelings of depression,<sup>141</sup> discouraging her from the idea of participating in potential reparation programmes, fearing that doing so would permanently mark her as a victim rather than allow her to rebuild her life.

Some survivors explained that stigma was worsened when assistance was provided publicly, as this made them visible targets for discrimination.<sup>142</sup> Three survivors also mentioned that they would fear jealousy and resentment from their communities if they were to receive material reparations, which could lead to further complications. In some cases, this jealousy was so extreme that one survivor expressed that it felt as though the community would rather they received no support: *“When someone sees you getting [support] while he is not, he gets jealous. Even if you will lose it, he doesn't care, and they will keep talking.”<sup>143</sup>*

Until the security situation improves, survivors shared that any reparation received in the form of compensation should remain a private matter to avoid any stigmatisation or retaliation from the community. One survivor declared: *“My advice is that the survivors that will benefit from the reparation should remain silent about anything that*

135 Semi-structured interviews 010-04 ; 005-01; 002-06; 010-05 010-06 ; 011-04 ; 011-07, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

136 Semi-structured interviews 005-01; 010-04, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

137 Semi-structured interview 010-06, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

138 Semi-structured interview 009-07, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

139 Semi-structured interviews 002-06; 005-01; 006-02 ; 009-07; 010-05 011-02 ; 011-04 ; 011-05, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

140 Semi-structured interview 005-01, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

141 Semi-structured interview 009-07, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

142 Semi-structured interviews 011-05; 010-05; 002-05; 011-04, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

143 Semi-structured interview 011-04, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

they got, they should keep their secrets.”<sup>144</sup> Another survivor shared: “It should be given not in public. There is stigmatisation that you may start feeling you don’t want to collect again because there will be gossiping anywhere you go.”<sup>145</sup>

Survivors most frequently suggested community awareness and sensitisation as the most effective way to reduce risks linked to stigmatisation, suggesting that without efforts to educate communities and involving local leaders, stigma, security concerns and exclusion would persist.<sup>146</sup> It was highlighted that awareness-raising should come both from the community and from NGOs.<sup>147</sup> One survivor declared:

*“[...] the senior traditional rulers should be alerted about the significance of reparation programmes in the lives of the survivors, that there is need for helping them with anything that will reduce the risk that they may face at the time of accessing such reparation programs. Then he will call the rest of the village leaders and create awareness for them, I think by doing so there will be less problems.”<sup>148</sup>*

### 7.2.2. Personal safety

Eleven survivors stated that they would fear for their safety when accessing reparations in the form of financial compensation, as public knowledge increased their risk of theft and violence, and carrying cash made them visible targets for criminals.<sup>149</sup> A survivor shared:

*“There are risks associated to providing or receiving financial compensation, for example if a person doesn’t have a bank account, there is risk in moving alone with cash or even keeping ready money at home, because you can be easily robbed or even murdered all in attempt to take the money away from you.”<sup>150</sup>*

Another survivor described how receiving money could pose a risk to them as well as family members:

*“An aid of lump sum can attract too many eyes and thieves; you won’t be comfortable and even your children won’t be safe.”<sup>151</sup>*

### 7.2.3. Financial management and economic pressures

Some survivors noted that financial support, while valuable, could potentially introduce new risks, including challenges around managing money or external pressures from relatives. Two survivors explained that receiving financial support without guidance on to how to manage the funds might not always lead to long-term stability. Some shared that they lacked the financial skills necessary to handle such sums of money, which could lead to unwise spending or rapid depletion of funds.<sup>152</sup> One survivor shared past experiences where funds were quickly spent due to a lack of financial planning.<sup>153</sup>

Another highlighted the pressure they could expect from family members to share their financial reparations, reducing their ability to use it.<sup>154</sup>

Survivors stressed that providing business training and vocational skills programmes was not only essential but also a recommended way to mitigate risks associated with receiving financial compensation. Finance management training would allow them to use the money efficiently: “My advice is that when you get help, especially if it’s money you should know how to invest the money.”<sup>155</sup> Another survivor said:

*“I will recommend that [...] they should train us in business. Like teaching us how to sew, and giving us a sewing machine. Or any other type of business that will make us able to take care of ourselves.”<sup>156</sup>*

144 Semi-structured interview 002-04, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

145 Semi-structured interview 011-05, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

146 Semi-structured interviews 001-03; 002-01; 002-02; 005-02; 006-02; 009-07; 011-02; 011-04, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

147 Semi-structured interviews 006-02; 002-05, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

148 Semi-structured interview 002-01, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

149 Semi-structured interviews 001-05; 002-03; 002-04; 004-01; 005-02; 005-05; 006-02; 010-08; 002-01; 002-02; 002-05, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

150 Semi-structured interview 002-01, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

151 Semi-structured interview 002-03, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

152 Semi-structured interview 009-07, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

153 Semi-structured interview 005-03, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

154 Semi-structured interview 011-06, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

155 Semi-structured interview 002-04, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

156 Semi-structured interview 005-03, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).



## 8. SURVIVORS' PARTICIPATION AND SENSE OF AGENCY

Survivors emphasised the importance of being included in decisions that directly impact their lives. As one participant stated, capturing a sentiment echoed by others: “We should be given the chance to speak our minds.”<sup>157</sup>

### 8.1. Participation in reparation processes

Eight survivors expressed the importance of being able to participate meaningfully in the design and implementation of reparation processes. They stressed that their lived experiences should inform decisions that directly impact their lives.<sup>158</sup> For example, one survivor explained:

*“In my opinion, we, the survivors, should be reached out to seek and ask for our opinion, to hear from us, because it’s obvious that every one of us has different wishes and needs. But by having meetings and one-on-one conversations so as to hear our views, that will be really useful.”<sup>159</sup>*

Another survivor said she wanted to be directly involved in shaping reparation measures, since survivors best understand what is needed: “Giving advice and suggestions on the needs that the reparation process would address, since I know, having been in that position.”<sup>160</sup> She further explained how opportunities to participate in discussions, such as those that took place during this study, helped her begin to articulate her needs: “Having sessions like this and asking questions that helps us share our experience and talk about our needs would help.”<sup>161</sup>

### 8.2. Transformative power of participation

The engagement of survivors in this study also had a profound personal impact on many survivor participants.

One survivor described how it transformed her sense of self and her understanding of her rights:

*“This interview has great impact on me, because in the past, I have been regarding myself as nothing, but now I have gained a lot of knowledge. Now I can feel more able to explain my rights. I have rights to justice and rights to freedom from slavery. Now I can act and think differently, I have understood many things. [...] I am now myself. My priorities include education and also to be empowered to become self-reliant.”<sup>162</sup>*

Another survivor echoed this sentiment, explaining how the conversation gave her hope and inspired a new vision for her future:

*“And now as a result of this interview, my way of thinking has changed, I am through with many things from my mind unlike in the past. I wish to become a very important person in the society, someone that will be useful to people, this is among my priorities.”<sup>163</sup>*

### 8.3. Collective support and advocacy

In addition to individual empowerment, six survivors emphasised the importance of supporting one another to understand, access, and participate in reparation programmes.<sup>164</sup> One survivor suggested a collective approach:

*“We can contribute by grouping ourselves and holding meetings and advising each other about how to follow the reparation processes.”<sup>165</sup>*

Ninety percent of participants reported being part of a survivors’ network. Survivors expressed a desire to build on this by sharing knowledge, advocating for others, and expanding outreach:

157 Semi-structured interview 010-07, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

158 Semi-structured interviews 003-05; 010-02; 010-03; 010-04; 010-05; 010-06; 010-07; 010-08, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

159 Semi-structured interview 003-05, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

160 Semi-structured interview 004-08, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

161 Semi-structured interview 004-08, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

162 Semi-structured interview 006-01, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

163 Semi-structured interview 003-03, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

164 Semi-structured interview 004-06; 004-07; 010-01; 010-04; 006-01; 001-07, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

165 Semi-structured interview 006-01, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

*"We should be given training on how to advocate to other people."<sup>166</sup>*

*"For instance, in my community, I can reach out to those around me who have similar challenges and link them up so that they too can get help. We can talk about how we are benefiting from these programmes to reach out to other survivors so that they too can benefit."<sup>167</sup>*

#### 8.4. Financial independence as a path to agency

Survivors described financial independence as a key to gaining agency, enabling them to support their families, pursue education, and ensure their own security:

*"Start a business in order to be independent and also to improve our security situation, so that such will not happen again."<sup>168</sup>*

*"If I have something to do, I can support my family, especially my younger ones, even to go to school. In the next four years, I will start a business; that business will support me even after I get married. I can support myself and my family, because they don't have someone to support them apart from me and my mother."<sup>169</sup>*

*"I want to be financially independent, graduate from school to become an engineer or doctor."<sup>170</sup>*

*"I hope [...] my tailoring service to be strong, so that I also teach people how to sew clothes."<sup>171</sup>*

166 Semi-structured interview 011-05, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

167 Semi-structured interview 004-06, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

168 Semi-structured interview 010-01, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

169 Semi-structured interviews 001-02; 010-02; 005-01, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

170 Semi-structured interview 010-02, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).

171 Semi-structured interview 005-01, Maiduguri, Borno State (10–14 October 2023).



## 9. REPARATIVE INITIATIVES FOR SURVIVORS OF CONFLICT-RELATED SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN NIGERIA: THE EXAMPLE OF INTERIM REPARATIVE MEASURES

The testimonies in this study highlight a clear message: reparations are both urgently needed and deeply desired by survivors. They have articulated concrete, practical ideas about what they would need to feel repaired and the kind of measures that would be most meaningful to them. Although the Government of Nigeria and other responsible actors bear the obligation to deliver reparations, the urgency expressed by survivors has driven non-governmental organisations to take action and undertake a range of initiatives to respond to their urgent needs, including emergency and humanitarian assistance and livelihood support while reparations are implemented.<sup>172</sup> While these efforts provide immediate relief, they do not address and acknowledge the harms suffered by survivors due to sexual violence or contribute to reparation.

GSF was established in October 2019 by Nobel Peace Prize Laureates Dr Denis Mukwege and Nadia Murad in response to a call from survivors to fill the reparation's implementation gap. GSF's mission is to enhance access to reparation for survivors of conflict-related sexual violence globally. Working with partners around the world, GSF advances this mission through advocacy and technical support and by implementing interim reparative measures (IRM).

IRM are measures provided to survivors by non-duty bearers – such as GSF and civil society organisations – to support survivors' healing and rebuild their lives when States or other duty-bearers have yet to comply with their obligation to provide reparations and the need is urgent. They aim to have a transformative and sustainable impact on survivors' lives, but are limited in nature and space, and can only include a limited number of survivors. They cannot and do not constitute comprehensive reparation in and of themselves. Access to such measures does not relieve States or other duty-bearers of their responsibility to provide full reparation. GSF's interim reparative measures projects are co-created with survivors, meaning that survivors design these projects. This in itself has a reparative value.

In Nigeria, GSF, in collaboration with its national partners, the Centre for Girls' Education (CGE), the Youth Initiative Against Terrorism (YIAT), and the FRAD Foundation are IRM in Adamawa, Yobe, and Borno States. These included urgent and longer-term support such as healthcare, psychosocial assistance, livelihood opportunities, and education support for survivors' children. In Borno State, GSF also collaborates with the Neem Foundation to implement a reparative education programme for children affected by conflict-related sexual violence, providing trauma-informed schooling and psychosocial care in a safe and inclusive environment.

By ensuring survivors are at the centre and working in close partnership with local organisations, these projects offer practical models that can inform and inspire broader, state-led efforts in the future. Although interim reparative measures projects began before this study was completed, the experiences and reflections shared by survivors in interviews strongly reinforce the relevance and value of these projects. Survivors' testimonies echo many of the same priorities that informed the design of the IRM, further validating their potential as a model for future reparative efforts. In this sense, the need for IRM is powerfully affirmed by the findings of this study, and the feedback received from survivors in the IRM projects through the different monitoring, and evaluation carried throughout the project.

Survivors described IRM as one of the first tangible ways their voices were acted upon. The IRM projects are co-created with survivors, and this ensures that the projects are a reflection of survivors' vision. For many, IRM projects represent a recognition of their rights, voices and dignity. Survivors consistently emphasized that having the opportunity to decide what form of support best suited their situation was in itself empowering. Having a choice, whether to pursue education, start a business, or invest in farming, for instance, gave them a sense of agency that had long been denied.

172 Several initiatives targeting survivors of conflict-related sexual violence have been implemented by organisations such as Alamin, Explore Aid, and Grassroot Researchers Association. Bibliothèques Sans Frontières also concluded a project on combating conflict-related sexual violence through innovative technologies. While some broader humanitarian programmes focused on Water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) or food have indirectly reached survivors, these were not specifically designed for survivors of conflict-related sexual violence, leading to possible exclusion due to registration or information gaps.

Survivors reported that the benefits of IRM went well beyond material support. One woman shared: *“I have seen changes in my life since I started implementing the IRM, I was able to re-enrol my daughter back to school.”* Another expressed pride in beginning large-scale farming, excited about the harvest and the prospect of being able to feed her family and to sell produce.

For others, financial IRM meant regaining safety and dignity: *“I have experienced a great deal of stigma, with people pointing fingers at me and my children. I lost my mother and my home, but with the start of my financial IRM, I have been able to rent a bigger and more secure house for my family. In just a few weeks of starting this financial IRM, I have also enrolled my children in a private school.”*

Survivors underlined that the value of IRM lays not only in what was given but in how it was delivered. Privacy and confidentiality were repeatedly stressed. Funds were deposited directly to survivors’ accounts, and those without accounts were supported to open them. Equipment deliveries were made discreetly at survivors’ request. These safeguards helped build trust and reduce stigma.

Survivor engagement was a defining feature of the IRM projects. Survivors were not merely participants but shaped the process, from designing and implementing activities to guiding weekly psychosocial support sessions and influencing the content of positive masculinity trainings. Their active contribution ensured that interventions were grounded in lived experience and responsive to real community needs. As one survivor explained, *“Previously, my husband and I argued over finances. Now, with my business stable, I can support our children without tension.”*

Despite positive outcomes, survivors faced challenges such as community stigma and pressure from family members expecting financial support once they receive their IRM. To help address these issues, the IRM project facilitates positive masculinity sessions within the communities and supports survivors’ continued participation in literacy classes.

While interim in nature, such measures demonstrate what is possible when reparations are built directly on survivors’ expressed needs and delivered with respect and dignity, and shaped with survivors as active participants. These projects provide valuable models to inform future, more comprehensive reparations efforts.



## 10. CONCLUSION

There is no single story that defines what it means to be a survivor of Boko Haram captivity. Each person who spoke with us brought a different experience of violence, of return, and of navigating life after sexual violence. Some found partial acceptance in their communities, while others were forced to leave their community again. Some spoke about the impact on their health and trauma, others about education, livelihoods, or the future of their children, while also sharing their priorities for reparations in these and other areas. These diverse experiences underscore a critical point: reparations must not rely on a fixed idea of who survivors are or what they need.

The testimonies shared by survivors throughout this study reveal the deep and lasting impacts of conflict-related sexual violence, not only during captivity but in the years that follow. Survivors described living with chronic health conditions, trauma, interrupted education, destroyed livelihoods and social rejection. Some are raising children born of conflict-related sexual violence who themselves face rejection and discrimination, illustrating the profound and intergenerational nature of this violence. Survivors also underline that their challenges are ongoing: insecurity, poverty, and marginalisation continue to threaten their dignity and well-being long after captivity or assault.

Survivors articulated their vision for their recovery. Their contributions point to clear priorities: urgent access to safe shelter, food, and healthcare; longer-term support for education, livelihoods, and psychosocial care; and community-level efforts to reduce stigma and rebuild trust.

Survivors also spoke about the importance of active participation, not just being heard, but being involved in shaping the responses that will impact them. Reparations must be inclusive, and grounded in the reality of survivors' lives. Having survivors at the centre of reparation processes is crucial for adequately repairing the harm and achieving transformative and sustainable change. As showcased by survivors' testimonies in the IRM projects, being actively involved in the design and implementation of reparative measures can be a reparative experience in itself and help restore their sense of agency. By listening to and acting upon their perspectives, governments and institutions can ensure that reparation truly contributes to healing, justice, and a more secure future for survivors and their children. Their voices carry the knowledge, urgency, and vision needed to ensure that reparations are not just symbolic, but transformative.



## 11. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the survivors' perspectives, these recommendations aim to facilitate ongoing dialogue among key actors. We acknowledge that the survivors' voices in this study represent only a portion of survivors in Nigeria. Therefore, these recommendations may not fully address the needs of all survivors across the country. However, if implemented, they can serve as a starting point for the journey towards reparation for survivors.

### | To the Federal Government

#### Recognition and public apology

- Recognising the failure to effectively prevent, and respond to conflict-related sexual violence and issue an apology to the survivors acknowledging the harms they have suffered.

#### Survivor participation in transitional justice mechanisms

- Ensure that survivors can meaningfully participate in any truth telling, and transitional justice mechanisms in the country, by establishing survivors' representation within these processes.

#### Survivor-centred reparations

- Collaborate closely with survivors, civil society organisations and relevant government agencies to develop, and adopt a policy framework or regulation for reparations, that formally recognises survivors of conflict-related sexual violence as rights-holders and therefore eligible beneficiaries of reparations programmes.

#### Education as a form of reparation

- Recognise and implement education as a form of reparation that goes beyond existing state obligations, through adequately financed, trauma-informed, value-based, gender and age-sensitive measures. These must include acknowledgment of harms suffered, as well as safe, stigma-free spaces.

- Develop flexible and accelerated learning programmes for children affected by conflict, including children born of conflict-related sexual violence. These programmes must include psychosocial support and address physical, emotional, and social barriers to learning.

#### Emergency and long-term support services

- Address survivors' urgent needs by providing cash or in-kind support linked to health screenings and access to short-term shelter.
- Expand trauma-informed medical and psychosocial care by increasing resources for hospital units -created or existing- dedicated to CRSV, strengthening referrals for specialized services and by extending outreach efforts as well as mobile services to ensure survivors in remote areas can access support.

#### Rebuilding survivors' trust in the State

- The State should take concrete actions to regain survivors' trust in its ability and willingness to deliver reparations, acknowledging that many survivors currently rely on NGOs due to their positive experience of timely support. Such actions can include:
  - Publicly acknowledging past failures to prevent and respond to conflict-related sexual violence and formally committing to uphold survivors' rights to reparations;
  - Collaborating with NGOs that survivors trust to help survivors safely access state-led reparation programmes and policies. NGOs can act as intermediaries by informing survivors about their entitlements, facilitating access to services, and supporting engagement, while the State remains the accountable provider of reparations;
  - Ensure security from threats such as attacks from Boko Haram, while preventing abuses by security forces, by establishing clear and accountable civilian oversight of security policies and operations.

#### Combining individual and collective reparations

- Individual reparations for survivors of conflict-related sexual violence should be accompanied by measures that address broader harms in affected communities, responding to survivors' concerns about safety, social tensions, and challenges to reintegration.

- This can include measures such as the reconstruction of schools, health centres, and public infrastructure, improvements in education and healthcare services, as well as collective livelihood support for both survivors and their neighbours. Integrating community-level measures can help mitigate social tension, fosters acceptance and understanding of individual reparations, and addresses the shared consequences of conflict, displacement, and destruction of public services.

### **To the State level (Borno, Adamawa and Yobe)**

#### **Accessible, inclusive and flexible education as a form of reparation**

- Prioritise accessible and flexible education for survivors and their children. This should include funding for school fees, supplies, and inclusive programmes that reduce stigma and support children born of conflict-related sexual violence.
- Education should accommodate diverse needs and preferences, offering formal schooling, vocational training, religious education, and safe alternatives such as boarding schools or separate classes where necessary.
- Complementary skill development programmes should be integrated to promote economic empowerment, recognising education as both a path to independence and for healing.
- Work with local education actors to provide catch-up, literacy, and vocational education programmes targeting children who missed out on schooling due to conflict and displacement, particularly girls, children with disabilities, and those born of conflict-related sexual violence.

#### **Mapping and documentation of survivors and their children**

- Lead and support a comprehensive survivor-centred mapping of survivors including children born of conflict-related sexual violence, and support the confidential documentation of the different violations suffered by survivors.

#### **Free and accessible services**

- Integrate survivors of conflict-related sexual violence into national social protection systems by establishing a dedicated survivor register, modelled on or connected to the National Social Register, to ensure sustained access to support programs, including health insurance and cash transfer schemes.
- Provide free, accessible, and comprehensive medical care to all survivors of conflict-related sexual violence, including treatment for chronic health conditions linked to the violations. This should also include free and confidential HIV testing and treatment for survivors of CRSV and children born of CRSV and life-long access to antiretroviral treatment.
- Provide specialised psychological support for survivors and children affected by CRSV. Professionals should be trained in trauma-informed care. This includes investing in mobile or community-based psychosocial services in order to reach isolated survivors.
- Strengthen the availability and accessibility of survivor-centred one-stop centres to provide comprehensive care for chronic health issues resulting from conflict-related sexual violence.

#### **Reintegration of survivors and their children**

- Together with survivors, set up campaigns aimed at addressing stigma, and re-integration of survivors and their children in their communities.

#### **Coordination of holistic and integrated reparation measures**

- Serve as a hub for communication and coordination between and among survivor organisations, different state and federal agencies and civil society organisations to ensure that information is shared and different services are aligned and gaps addressed.
- Provide information to survivors regarding available services from both state and other service providers.

## | To Civil Society Organisations

### Survivor engagement and advocacy

- Support and build the capacity of survivors and survivor networks to engage with governmental actors at state and federal levels, particularly in advocacy for survivor-centric reparations and transitional justice processes.
- Engage with key stakeholders such as the African Union, United Nations on regional and international advocacy on the plight of survivors of conflict-related sexual violence in the country and their right to meaningful, comprehensive and transformative reparation.
- Integrate survivors and survivor network in existing sub-clusters, such as the gender-based violence (GBV) sub-cluster to ensure meaningful participation within these networks and support the establishment of sub-clusters focused that prioritise conflict-related sexual violence prevention and response.

### Community awareness and education

- Work with schools, communities, and local governments to support return to education for survivors and affected children, through school fee support, materials provision, and advocacy for inclusive enrolment practices.
- Conduct community awareness sessions with survivors on the impact of conflict-related sexual violence. These sessions should involve key actors and stakeholders in the different communities including traditional, and religious leaders.
- Engage with the media to ensure that the messaging around conflict-related sexual violence is trauma-informed, and survivor-centric. The messaging should counter misinformation on this topic.

### Survivor-centred reparation

- Support the various government entities in the co-creation with survivors of programmes aimed at addressing conflict-related sexual violence, stigma, and reparations.
- Raise awareness among survivors of their right to reparation and how to access related services, whether interim or administrative.

- Advocate for the development and implementation of reparation programmes that reflect survivors' needs and preferences, including access to healthcare, psychosocial support, education, and livelihood support.

### Psychosocial and peer support

- Provide mental health support that combines regular trauma-informed counselling with culturally and spiritually sensitive healing methods. This should reflect survivors' preferences, including faith-based and traditional approaches.
- Establish safe, confidential spaces where survivors can meet regularly to support one another and heal collectively.

## | To Survivor Networks

### Inclusive peer support and solidarity

- Provide peer emotional and practical support, helping survivors navigate emotional pain, social rejection and economic challenges.
- Facilitate safe spaces where survivors can connect, share experiences, and support each other's healing journeys.
- Ensure inclusive membership to represent all survivors, including children born of conflict-related sexual violence, making sure diverse voices and experiences are reflected.

### Mapping and documentation efforts

- Lead safe and confidential mapping and identification efforts to connect survivors to essential services.
- Prioritise outreach to rural and socially excluded communities to ensure no survivor is left behind due to geographic or social isolation.
- Uphold strict standards of confidentiality and survivor consent in all documentation processes.

### Survivor-led advocacy and engagement

- Take part in the advocacy through co-creation of advocacy messages.
- Participate in consultations with education authorities to influence school policies, curricula, and support services that reflect the realities and needs of children affected by conflict-related sexual violence.

## | To Donor/International Community

### Fund and expand survivor-centred programmes

- Engage with civil society organisations working with survivors of conflict-related sexual violence to get an understanding of the key priority needs for the survivors.
- Fund and support the scaling up of survivor-centred programmes, such as IRM, that include financial support, livelihood assistance, medical and psychosocial care, housing, and education access, in ways that promote Government ownership in the continuation of those programmes as government funded policies.

### Sustainable and inclusive education for children affected by conflict-related sexual violence

- Secure long-term, predictable financing for education in conflict-affected areas by promoting multi-year humanitarian funding, and supporting flexible learning, reconstruction, and safe school reopening, with the aim of these tasks be assumed by the respective authorities.
- This includes mobilising international aid to close education financing gaps and ensure continuity of learning for survivors, and promoting Government ownership and financing of them as permanent policies.
- Support innovation and scaling of programmes that combine learning with psychosocial care, health support, and flexible schedules to support reintegration and recovery.
- Align funding and programming with international education in emergencies standards, such as the Safe Schools Declaration and Education Cannot Wait, to ensure protection and continuity of education for children in conflict zones.

## | To Community Leaders

### Awareness campaigns to reduce discrimination

- Support the re-integration of survivors by actively raising awareness to reduce stigma and discrimination within the communities, using leadership roles to foster acceptance and create a welcoming and safe environment for survivors returning home.
- Design and lead public awareness and sensitisation campaigns with survivors and in partnership with traditional and religious institutions. These campaigns should promote empathy, challenge harmful beliefs, and address discrimination against survivors and children born of conflict-related sexual violence, while maintaining survivors' privacy and confidentiality.
- Community leaders should actively include survivors' voices in designing awareness campaigns and community initiatives, making sure interventions reflect their real needs

### Reintegration of survivors and their children

- Welcome survivors and their children back into schools, workplaces, religious spaces, and community activities.
- Encourage the community to create supportive environments that reduce isolation and promote healing.
- Facilitate access to education for children and economic opportunities for survivors.

### Advocacy

- Engage with state and national authorities to support advocacy efforts on CRSV and reparations.



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