



# VOICES OF AL-SHABAAB:

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Understanding former  
combatants from the Baidoa  
Reintegration Center

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2016

UNITED NATIONS ASSISTANCE MISSION IN SOMALIA

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## Preface

A key pillar of a comprehensive approach to counter Al-Shabaab is to deny the group new recruits and to encourage defections. This ultimately damages the group's morale and combat effectiveness, while also damaging the public perception of Al-Shabaab with local and international audiences.

Al-Shabaab is known for its propaganda and recruitment tactics – videos, active social media presence and several radio stations under the group's control – along with more practical offers of money, mobile phones and status.

Despite the continuing ability of Al-Shabaab to attract new members, there has been a parallel flow of members leaving the group as well. Many have sought to take advantage of Federal Government of Somalia's amnesty offers, while others have left on their own accord after promises made by Al-Shabaab recruiters were not kept.

The Federal Government of Somalia, along with international partners, has launched a variety of initiatives to promote and encourage Al-Shabaab members to leave the organization and reintegrate into society.

The United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia (UNSOM) has been at the forefront in rehabilitating ex-combatants and helping in the establishment of rehabilitation centers. In support of the National Programme, UNSOM's Strategic Communications and Public Affairs Group commissioned this study as part of efforts to develop a robust communication campaign that can create both the desire and the opportunity for youths to leave the group and reject the ideology of Al-Shabaab.

Counter-messaging efforts to date are nascent, and more primary research is required to ensure that the counter Al-Shabaab communication campaign is able to reach its full potential. These focus groups were conducted to explore the unique and powerful role disengaged combatants can play in delegitimizing violent extremist activities and propaganda and identifying counter-messaging themes that resonate among current Al-Shabaab (AS) combatants to encourage them to leave the group.

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# Section One: Introduction

## 1.1. Background

In 2012 the Federal Government developed the National Programme for the Treatment and Handling of Disengaged Combatants in Somalia. The purpose of this programme is to provide support to Low Risk Al-Shabaab disengaged combatants attempting to reintegrate back into the community.

One of the core objectives of the National Programme is to create an outreach and strategic communication campaign to inform target groups about how to disengage and renounce violence against the state and to inform target groups about the process and the benefits of the reception, rehabilitation and reintegration programme.

Three transitional facilities have been established according to the terms of the National Programme, providing support to disengaged male Al-Shabaab combatants. Two facilities, one in Mogadishu (Serendi) and one in Belet Weyne (Hiil Walaal), are currently funded by the UK Government and managed by Adam Smith International (ASI). A third facility, the Baidoa Rehabilitation Center, is funded by the German government and managed by the International Organization for Migration (IOM).

The Baidoa Rehabilitation Center consists of facilities for both male and female disengaged combatants. The UNSOM Trust Fund funded IOM to establish a Safe House in Baidoa for disengaged female Al-Shabaab combatants and their dependents. The German government provided funding to IOM to establish another male transitional facility due to open by mid-2016 in Kismaayo. Currently the male Al-Shabaab disengaged combatants in Kismaayo are being kept in temporary facilities managed by the Jubaland State Administration, with no external funding.

From January 2014 (when the Center was established) up to now, 189 Al-Shabaab disengaged combatants entered the Baidoa Rehabilitation Center. A first batch of 40 candidates graduated from the Programme in October 2015 and were reintegrated into the community. A second batch of 39 candidates (20 male and 19 female) graduated in March 2016.

Al-Shabaab disengaged combatants who are currently part of the National Programme in the transitional facilities receive a support package that includes religious counselling, rehabilitation, vocational training, trauma healing and traditional dispute resolution (TDR) to help smooth their reintegration into the community.

## 1.2. Objectives of the qualitative study

The main objectives that guided this qualitative study were:

1. To gather information that will contribute to the development of a comprehensive communication strategy to encourage Al-Shabaab combatants to disengage.
2. To understand what drives individuals to join Al-Shabaab and how to discourage vulnerable individuals from joining the terrorist group.

To achieve these objectives, information areas were tailored around the following themes:

- Assessment of obstacles former Al-Shabaab face in their reintegration to community life.
- Comfortability/Levels of trust former Al-Shabaab combatants have with key intermediaries in the disengagement plan.

- Reaction to key messaging and suggestions for improvement.
- Knowledge and trust of the Federal Government's amnesty plan.

The objectives were qualitatively interrogated within the thematic areas described above. The data for this study was collected through mini-focus group discussions with disengaged combatants in the Baidoa Center. A detailed write-up of the methodology is annexed.

The focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted at the Baidoa Rehabilitation Center in Somalia's Interim South West Administration (ISWA). The center also houses a Safe House for female ex-combatants, which is funded by the UNSOM Trust Fund. Both programs are implemented in partnership with the IOM.

## Section Two

# Detailed Findings

### 2.1. Participants demographic information

**Table 1:** Summary of demographic characteristics of the respondents, as disclosed

Group category	Code No:	Age	Origin	Marital Status	Level of education
31-37 years - Male	AM	31	Hudher town, Bay region, Rahanweyn community	Married	Completed secondary school
	AN	37	Burhakaba town, Rahanweyn community	Married	Has religious education
	AP	-	Baidoa town	Married	No formal education
	AQ	-	Baidoa town, Bay region, Rahanweyn community	Married	No basic education
20-24 years – Male (youth)	AI	21	Dinser town, Rahanweyn community	Married	No formal education
	AJ	22	Halgand region, Rahanweyn community	Married	No formal education
	AK	20	Baidoa town	Married	No formal education
	AL	24	Hudher town, Bay region	Married	No formal education
26-43 years - Male	AA	43	Murubsade clan born in Danyele	Married	No formal education
	AB	41	-	Married	No formal education
	AC	26	Baidoa town, Rahanweyn community	Married	No formal education
	AD	27	Baidoa town, Rahanweyn community	Married	No formal education
16-30 years - Female	AE	23	Baidoa town	Married	No formal education
	AF	30	Burhakaba town	Married	No formal education
	AG	31	-	Married	No formal education
	AH	16	-	Married	No formal education

A majority of the disengaged combatants were from the Rahanweyn clan, which coincidentally is the main clan occupying the larger Bay and Bakool regions. All the respondents were married, and only one of them had formal education up to secondary level. Seeking help within an area inhabited by their clansmen may portray some level of comfort with one's clansmen, and shows the significance of encouraging disengagement through clan leaders. The observation that all respondents (except one) had no formal education is a pointer that many low-risk Al-Shabaab combatants may not be educated, and therefore less equipped to challenge indoctrination.

## 2.2. Attraction to Al-Shabaab

### Motivation for joining Al-Shabaab

All the disengaged combatants interviewed joined Al-Shabaab between 2005 and 2013. A majority mentioned that they joined Al-Shabaab when they were adolescents. The reasons they gave for joining Al-Shabaab included forceful abduction by the militants, unemployment and the need for money to provide for their families living in harsh economic conditions.

Most of them were attracted to the Al-Shabaab ideology to defend Islam. Others felt that they had a role to defend Somalia and the Somali people from invaders. Others were enticed by the Al-Shabaab dress code and public lectures. Adolescent militants were recruited and lured into the group with information that life inside Al-Shabaab was exciting.

*"Al-Shabaab abducted me in 2008 and forced me to become a militant. I then became their driver." –Male FGD (26-43 years)*

*"Due to the power Al-Shabaab had in 2006, I got attracted to the man and believed that he was defending Islam and Muslims."*

*–Female FGD (19-31 years)*

It also emerged that most of the combatants joined Al-Shabaab because of their friends' influence, arrangements and facilitations. Some of the female respondents joined after being convinced by their friends or parents to marry the militants. Others were approached while undertaking household duties (such as fetching water), others were persuaded by religious leaders, while others were persuaded after watching jihadist videos either at home or in video entertainment centers and listening to Washida (Islamic songs), which promised them paradise, on Radio Andalus.

Overall, in joining Al-Shabaab, the militants believed that they were fighting for Islam and the Muslim community.

*"I was attracted to join the group to fight the cause of Allah, I saw it was a religious obligation to fight the invaders, the Ethiopians."*

*–Male FGD (31-37 years)*

*"I was attracted to them by the ideology to defend Islam and its people." –Male FGD (26-43 years)*

### Initial experience after joining Al-Shabaab

A majority of the respondents outlined how their expectations and promises were never met. Most were promised salaries, sometimes specified (US\$400–\$1,000). However, actual pay was far below what they expected (US\$200–\$500, depending on their roles and ranks) and was not adequate to cater to their needs and those of their families. Some respondents were disappointed because they expected Al-Shabaab to take over Somalia and rule, thus ensuring that they would benefit from government support.

Respondents also complained that they were denied access to their families, they fetched water from long distances, they were required to fight in the frontline and they were imprisoned unfairly.

*"I was angered when the group regarded me as an American spy after colleagues were killed by American drones." –Male FGD (19-30 years)*

*"My expectations were never met because I anticipated receiving a good salary as a fighter." –Male FGD (26-43 years)*

*"I was disappointed when the group refused to pay my monthly salary after they lost territories to the Somali government." –Male FGD (31-37 years)*

Not all families supported their children joining Al-Shabaab. One male respondent claimed his family members (especially his parents) were disappointed after they learned that he had joined Al-Shabaab. However, most women received support from their family members, who facilitated their entry into the group through marriage.

*"My family was not happy with me being a member of the militia. We lost many families and relatives after joining Al-Shabaab and our families regarded us as killers who do not spare." –Male FGD (31-37 years)*

*"Our families were happy with us – as their daughters got married." –Female FGD (19-31 years)*

*"My family was not aware of my joining the group but when they realized that indeed I had joined they were disappointed." –Male FGD (20-24 years)*

Some family members made efforts to get their children out of Al-Shabaab, including trying to arrange their relocation to other countries, while others went to look for them at the stations of operation. The respondents were

generally apologetic about the activities that they carried out as Al-Shabaab militants. Further, they were afraid that families and relatives of Al-Shabaab victims would follow them to avenge the killing of their kinsmen.

*"My family was not happy with my mission and they tried to send me to other countries like Djibouti." –Male FGD (26-43 years)*





“

***My expectations were never met because I anticipated receiving a good salary as a fighter***

”

### Key findings

While a majority of respondents joined at will, there were a few that were forcefully recruited to Al-Shabaab – like a government driver who was abducted while on duty, and ended up being an Al-Shabaab driver.

Most of the disengaged combatants left Al-Shabaab disappointed because their expectations were not met. There were months they never received a salary because Al-Shabaab was facing financial challenges.

Their main challenge is fear of rejection by society and reprisals from their former colleagues still in Al-Shabaab.

At joining, some respondents had mixed feelings of being an Al-Shabaab member. While some were not comfortable because they had been forcefully abducted to join Al-Shabaab, others said they were content because Al-Shabaab was a means to protecting their faith.

*“I was content with being in Al-Shabaab because my husband was fighting for Islam.” –Female FGD (19-31 years)*

*“I was happy as a fighter because I believed I was fighting for Islam and I was to die a martyr.” –Male FGD (26-43 years)*

*“After joining Al-Shabaab I believed any person opposing Al-Shabaab was not Muslim.” –Female FGD (19-31 years)*

To some, Al-Shabaab provided a means to earn, which they didn’t have before, and they were able to send money to their families.

As time went on, most respondents felt like prisoners, and they felt cheated and unhappy because they were not allowed to see their families. Conditions became very harsh after Al-Shabaab lost most of their territories to the Somali government and were facing financial difficulties. Other challenges included adolescent fighters being denied salaries because they did not have “family responsibilities” (wife and children to care for). Adolescent fighters were also regularly arrested and denied salaries due to acts of disobedience in the centers. All the respondents were remorseful because they were killing innocent people, and they felt that what they were fighting for was not worth it.

*“I felt captive because I never got a chance to go to my family.” –Male FGD (26-43years)*

*“I felt that we were cheated and deceived, what we were being taught and what leaders were doing were totally different things.”  
–Male FGD (20-24 years)*

*“Today I say they brainwashed me into thinking Islam is them.” –Female FGD (19-31 years)*

*“We were sometimes arrested after a prominent Al-Shabaab leader was killed inside the town and some were forced to be suicide bombers.” –Male FGD (31-37 years).*



## 2.3. Communication

### Access to communication

Respondents in the focus groups identified several access channels through which Al-Shabaab received information. The former combatants stated that the primary channels were mobile phones, Radio Andalus station, Islamic literature and religious leaders who came to preach to them regularly.

Most respondents had a basic mobile phone while in Al-Shabaab, These phones had no such features as radio, internet and cameras.

*"I had access to a mobile phone with no internet and camera because Al-Shabaab feared information being given through an internet spy." –Male FGD (26-43 years)*

*"I had access to phone and a radio station owned by Al-Shabaab, Radio Andalus." –Male FGD (26-43 years)*

*"Only specific Islamic books were allowed to be taught. ...[N]o internet, no phones with internet were allowed and to some extent our phones were confiscated." –Male FGD (20-24 years)*

Respondents however confirmed that feature phones and smartphones were owned by Al-Shabaab fighters higher up in the ranks, and their owners could access internet and listen to international media.

Mobile phones were used to communicate with fellow militants, close family members and close relatives. However, making and receiving calls within the centers was restricted because of fear that the members could give information to government forces or other enemies or be tracked by (American) spies. To make calls, members often disguised themselves as common citizens and could walk out of center. This would also be an opportunity to spy for information.

*"I used to communicate with my family, relatives and fellow militants." –Male FGD (26-43 years)*

*"We used to listen to radio and used to communicate with my ring leader." –Male FGD (31-37 years)*

Though female respondents had access to mobile phones, they hardly used them and often relied on their husbands for information. The women did not communicate to outsiders for fear of being spied on. Female respondents also claimed that they hardly had money to buy airtime, and most times their phones were out of charge.

*"We used to communicate to our families, especially mother, father and brother, not external people from other clans as we feared being spied on. The communication was often dependent on availability of money." –Female FGD (19-31 years)*

## 2.4. Disengagement

### Motivations for leaving Al-Shabaab

Al-Shabaab fighters were typically afraid someone was stalking them or that there was imminent death through an attack by drones or their enemies (AMISOM soldiers or government security forces). This fear, whether real or not, coupled with frustrations and encouragement from family members, informed their decision to quit the group. Specific reasons for leaving could be classified under four main themes:

#### 1. Fear

- Some got information from their friends that Al-Shabaab wanted to arrest them after being suspected of being American spies, and they decided to escape.
- Several left when their colleagues were killed by American drones.
- Female respondents left because of insecurity when they were left behind by their husbands on combat missions.
- Some fighters feared that they would be disowned by their family members who did not approve of Al-Shabaab.

#### 2. Frustration

- Many severed ties after receiving reduced or no salaries due to the group's financial hardships.
- Several people said that being in Al-Shabaab said was less exciting than initially thought/promised, which prompted escape from the center.
- One respondent decided to leave after he lost the group's money put under his custody and he was forced to repay.
- One respondent left after disagreements with the Al-Shabaab leaders.

#### 3. Intervention from family and friends

- Several respondents were informed and convinced by relatives and family members that there was an amnesty plan by the government and they managed to flee after they felt that the group was not genuinely fighting for Islam.
- A female respondent left when she got re-married to a civilian after her Al-Shabaab husband died in combat.
- Two male respondents escaped from the center to see their wives and children and never returned.
- A female respondent left the group to seek medical treatment for her children. "I escaped from my husband and Al-Shabaab through the help of my friend who told me about the Baidoa Center." - Female FGD (19-31 years).

#### 4. Enlightenment

- Three former combatants decided to leave the group when they learned that it had no future and that it would soon end.
- A few of the respondents disengaged from Al-Shabaab because their parents and family members were not happy with them and were afraid for them after AMISOM started gaining control over more areas in Somalia.

*"I was prompted to leave Al-Shabaab after realizing my husband's ideology was wrong." -Female FGD (19-31 years)*

*"I decided to leave the group when it dawned on me that this group had no future and that it would end soon." -Male FGD (31-37 years)*



## 2.5. Escape mechanisms

Most of the escapes were circumstantial; some respondents mentioned that they escaped from Al-Shabaab when they were sent on a mission to fight, and had to trek for up to four hours covering long distances.

Most respondents got assistance from relatives, ex-militants and government forces who informed them of government amnesty or the Baidoa Rehabilitation Center. Most of the assistance given was either logistical or financial support to cover for their transport costs.

*"We were attacked by the government while in prison and that is how I escaped." –Male FGD (20-24 years)*

*"I was assisted by my father who brought a camel so that I could travel to Baidoa to seek amnesty." –Male FGD (20-24 years)*

*"I communicated with my family who helped me get to this center by sending me money." –Male FGD (26-43 years)*

*"I was assisted by an ex-militant in Baidoa." –Male FGD (20-24 years)*

*"I was assisted by my cousin who was a soldier in the Somali army which also helped me to join this center." –Male FGD (31-37 years)*

The disengaged combatants felt happy to leave Al-Shabaab, but were terrified that they could be killed by the insurgents or the government forces.

*"The majority of us feel that Al-Shabaab are still searching for us to kill us and that the government is suspicious about us." –Male FGD (31-37 years)*

*"I fear of Al-Shabaab finding me and I fear being alienated by the community." –Female FGD (19-31 years)*

Moreover, some still believed that the community never forgave them for the loss of their friends and loved one who were previously affected by the insurgent attacks.

*"After I left the group I had many fears that the community and government were suspicious of us and Al-Shabaab was looking to kill us."*

*–Male FGD (31-37 years)*

### Experience in the center

Some respondents mentioned that although they were happy at the Center, they did not have a source of income and were unable to provide for their families.

*"Life outside Al-Shabaab is good, exciting and happier and I am gaining good skills. I am doing good outside."*

*–Male FGD (26-43 years)*

*"In the Center I feel secure due to the security given to me. I also receive food and special treatment for my children."*

*–Female FGD (19-31 years)*

*"I felt happy that finally I was out of Al-Shabaab. I feel happy in the Center and I wasn't aware that there was a center in Baidoa." –Male FGD (20-24 years)*

*"In the Center I see opportunities are open for me as I am gaining skills to read and write, tailoring and carpentry." –Male FGD (26-43 years)*

Respondents were aware of the government's amnesty plan. However, most of them believed that in the event one left the Center the government would trace and kill them. They hinted that their safety would make other combatants trust the government's amnesty plan.

*"I heard of the government amnesty plan and I felt combatants would not trust it because it is a way to catch them (Al-Shabaab) and kill them."*

*–Female FGD (19-31 years)*

*"I knew the ex-militants were in the Center but thought they would be killed." –Male FGD (20-24 years)*

Some respondents were aware of the Baidoa Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Center while others did not know about it. At the Center, most respondents noted they were happy and free. However, they said that they would like a more private area where they could not be tracked by Al-Shabaab members.

*“I am feeling good in the Center but I want a place where I cannot be followed by Al-Shabaab.” –Male FGD (20-24 years)*

*“I need to be taken where I can work and support my family. I had no information about the Baidoa Center.” –Male FGD (26-43 years)*

## Key findings

- Disengaged combatants feel secure at the Baidoa Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Center. There is a need to consider how they can earn an income from the training and skills they have received at the Center.
- Disengaged combatants still fear that the community and government forces do not trust them and they can easily be killed. There is a need to bridge the gap between them and the community and find ways for the government forces to participate in the process of reintegration to reassure them of their safety.
- The Center offers a good opportunity for Al-Shabaab members who would like to disengage. There is, therefore, a need to look into forms of communication that can convince them that the Center is a place where they can get amnesty and security.
- Some respondents did not know about the amnesty plan and most of them learned about it from their family members and relatives. A plan should, therefore, be put in place to make the community more aware of it for more people to be helped to disengage from Al-Shabaab.

## Encouraging disengagement

Most of the respondents said that they could encourage and advise Al-Shabaab fighters to disengage from the group since it had no Islamic values. Besides, there was fatigue in fighting as combatants were always on the run.

The majority of the respondents would help to convince Al-Shabaab fighters that the Baidoa Center was a safe haven. Respondents further said that family members should take advantage of the amnesty and urge their relatives in Al-Shabaab to disengage.



*“The government amnesty plan is a good way to attract Al-Shabaab fighters because there are many who want to disengage but they fear facing the wrath of the security forces.” –Female FGD (19-31 years)*

*“I will convince them by informing them of the Baidoa Center where they can feel safe.” –Male FGD (26-43 years)*

*“I would convince them that the center is a safe haven and they should take advantage of the amnesty plan and disengage.” –Male FGD (31-37 years)*

Respondents would help to convince combatants that life outside Al-Shabaab was exciting and there was freedom. There was a proposition that if most of the Al-Shabaab fighters knew more about how good the Baidoa Center was, they would disengage and seek amnesty.

However, several respondents mentioned that they would not convince Al-Shabaab fighters to disengage for fear of being traced and killed.

*“I would not advise Al-Shabaab fighters to disengage because they can use the communication to trace my location and kill me.” –Male FGD (26-43 years)*

*“I cannot advise the fighters to disengage as I fear for my life. They will tell me I have become a non-Muslim and I will face execution.” –Female FGD (19-31 years)*

## 2.6. Message testing

To test key messaging to encourage Al-Shabaab fighters to disengage, four messages were presented on a concept board. Because of respondent's lack of literacy skills, all messages were read out in the Somali language and each interrogated separately. The messages were:

1. The Somali religion (Islam), culture and values protect human life and do not condone violation of vulnerable groups like women and children.
2. Al-Shabaab are criminals trying to lure you! They are barbaric terrorists bent on causing only chaos and destruction in Somalia.
3. Al-Shabaab does not stand for Islamic values. Islam is a religion of peace and does not condone shedding innocent blood, killing innocent people and looting their property.
4. There is no future in Al-Shabaab.

The respondents' initial and spontaneous reaction was that Al-Shabaab was unjust, had an erroneous ideology and had caused a lot of destruction.

*"I remember the negative teachings I was receiving that made me kill people." –Male FGD (26-43 years)*

*"The justice propagated by Al-Shabaab, killing and looting property, is not allowed in Islam." –Male FGD (20-24 years)*

A majority of the respondents agreed that the messaging was very clear and appealing and would convince Al-Shabaab fighters to disengage.

*"I believe if Al-Shabaab combatants heard that message, some would get convinced, due to Al-Shabaab's lack of knowledge about Islam." –Female FGD (19-31 years)*

*"It would convince Al-Shabaab members because they think they are protecting their religion, culture and human life." –Male FGD (20-24 years)*

A few respondents felt that these messages were not convincing, because Al-Shabaab misunderstood the Koran.

*"This would not convince Al-Shabaab because they misunderstand the Koran." –Male FGD (20-24 years)*

*"For message two – 'Al-Shabaab are criminals trying to lure you' – it can make them go crazy and continue with their ideology because the message cannot convince them against the teaching they received for years." –Female FGD (19-31 years)*

Message number 3 stood out. There was an observable emotional connection among respondents when it was read aloud. Respondents commented that it was sad that Muslims in Al-Shabaab were killing innocent people without justification and in the name of religion.

Most of them felt that designing messages based on their religion and religious writings would make more sense to Al-Shabaab fighters. They proposed that elders and religious leaders would be the most appropriate medium of passing this information to Al-Shabaab because they were most trusted by the group.

*"Use Quranic verses as a message." –Male FGD (31-37 years)*

*"Use quotes by prominent Muslim scholars against terrorism." –Male FGD (20-24 years)*

*"Islamic poems should be used to call them and disengaged combatants should be treated in a humane manner and never be suspected." –Male FGD (20-24 years)*

Respondents also said that Al-Shabaab literature was available on the internet, especially targeting would-



be converts, and that this presented an opportunity to use the internet to develop messages that could counter their radical ideology.

Message simplicity is important, especially where most of the target group has no formal education and, therefore, are unable to comprehend long sentences and concepts. Respondents further proposed short messages that could be used.

- *“The Muslim religion protects human dignity.”*
- *“Al-Shabaab terrorizes innocent people in the name of religion.”*
- *“Violence can’t solve anything.”*
- *“Islam protects vulnerable groups.”*
- *“Al-Shabaab terrorists are meant for destruction.”*

Religious leaders and family members were unanimously voted as the most trusted stakeholders in convincing Al-Shabaab militants to disengage. This was attributed to the fact that religious leaders had a platform of preaching during Friday prayers, and that Al-Shabaab militants had more faith in the religious leaders’ (Kadhi) messages compared to other stakeholders.

*“Religious leaders can take part in propagating the future of Islam.” –Male FGD (20-24 years)*

*“I want the media to be involved in convincing the fighters, but the fighters have trust in religious leaders.” –Female FGD (19-31 years)*

*“Family members can be trusted to convince their sons to disengage from the group.” –Male FGD (31-37 years)*

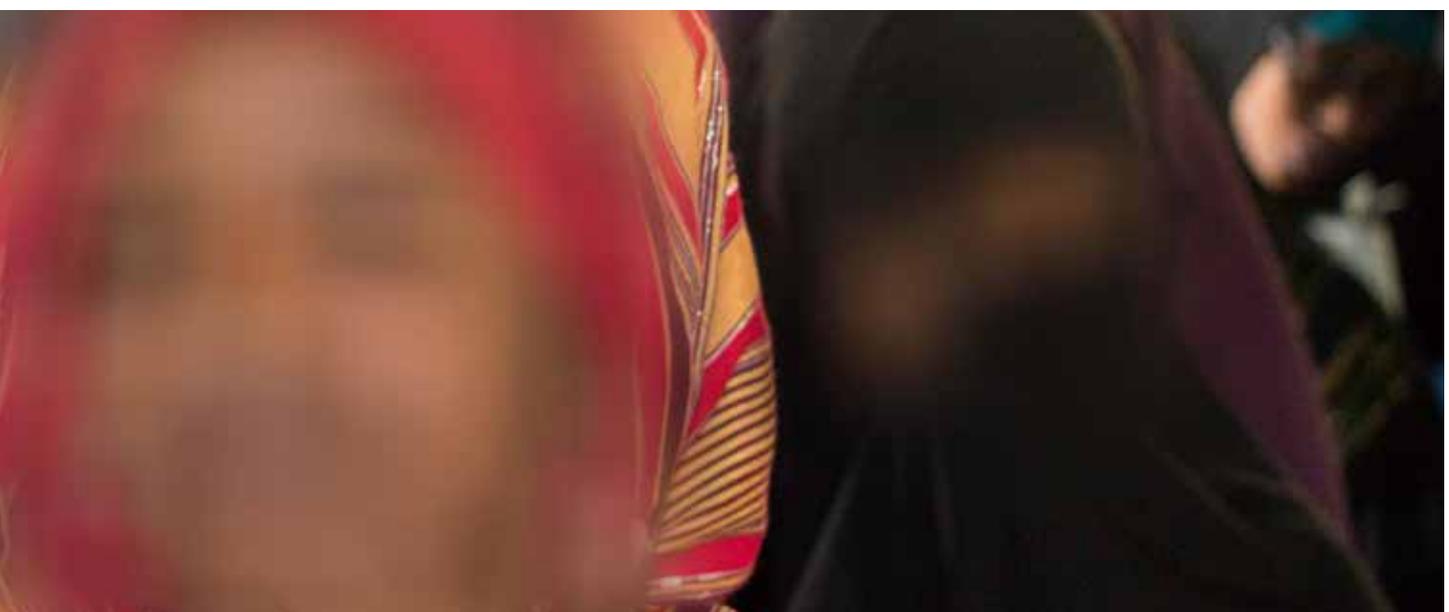
Clan elders were also said to be respected by the community as opposed to other leaders from the federal government and other development stakeholders, who were perceived to be foreigners.

*“I believe religious leaders, clan elders and family members can convince Al-Shabaab fighters to disengage. I see family members as my people who won’t kill me.” –Male FGD (26-43 years)*

AMISOM and government leaders were seen as a threat to Al-Shabaab militants and their ability to convince was considered minimal. The UN was also mentioned as not trusted because they are believed to be working for external interests.

*“AMISOM and government leaders cannot be trusted by Al-Shabaab because they are their enemies.” –Male FGD (26-43 years)*

*“Al-Shabaab fighters will not trust the government leaders and UN plus AMISOM because they are their enemies that came to fight Islam.” –Female FGD (19-31 years)*





Some respondents said that since Al-Shabaab could not trust anyone, or amicably sit and agree with their enemies, the only way to end their influence would be through a military onslaught.

*“Al-Shabaab does not trust anyone and they think everyone is an infidel and can only be approached through military action.” –Male FGD (31-37 years)*

Respondents felt that to convince more Al-Shabaab fighters to disengage, a number of key actions needed to be taken:

- Reintegration and provision of opportunities to disengaged combatants.
- Government reassurance as to the safety of disengaged combatants during/after the amnesty plan.
- Forming networks of disengaged combatants in various rehabilitation programmes to showcase how amnesty was working.
- De-radicalization of uneducated youths.
- Ensuring continuity of the government amnesty plan.
- Involvement of disengaged combatants in providing information or intelligence that could lead to targeted activities to encourage disengagement.
- Transparency and honesty of the Federal Government in equitable distribution of wealth and development in all regions to attract support of communities (clans) that currently support Al-Shabaab.

Respondents also felt that disengaged combatants could be recruited as part of the government forces to fight Al-Shabaab and be treated in a way that could convince others to follow suit.

*“Disengaged combatants should be part of the government forces to fight the group.” –Male FGD (31-37 years)*

They also said that they should be given an opportunity to work, so as to provide for their families. Further, they ought to be treated in a humane manner, not as suspects, and should not be

isolated or victimized. In general, respondents felt uncertain of their newfound freedom.

*“Better education and employment opportunities are important in encouraging more fighters to disengage.” –Male FGD (26-43 years)*

*“Disengaged combatants should not be treated in a manner that makes them regret rather they should be encouraged in their new choice of life.” –Male FGD (20-24 years)*

*“I want the disengaged combatants to be given social, economic and moral support so that they forget their past life; if this is done it will attract more disengagement.” –Female FGD (19-31 years)*

*“The community should be welcoming to ensure the disengaged combatants feel happy.” –Male FGD (31-37 years)*

### Key findings:

- There is need for outreach initiatives to counter Al-Shabaab methods of recruitment.
- Religious preachers are a good channel to pass messages to Al-Shabaab.
- Targeted communication to the youth (who mostly have no education) should be clear, deliberate and strong.
- Reintegration into the community should be rolled out in a step-by-step approach to ensure that there is trust between disengaged combatants and the community.

# Section Three

## Conclusions & Recommendations

### 3.1. Summary of findings

#### Attraction to Al-Shabaab

Al-Shabaab is recruiting people of different ages, but particularly adolescents, forcefully or voluntarily. This occurs with the help of some family members and religious leaders, who lure them with promises of a good life. However, promises given on recruitment are hardly met, and this becomes a source of discontent and an avenue for disengagement.

#### Communication

Al-Shabaab has access to various means of communication which are highly controlled. Both men and women have access to mobile phones to communicate with fellow Al-Shabaab combatants and their family members. However, youthful combatants, especially 15-24 year olds, are restricted from using mobile phones due to the risk of being tracked or leaking information to government or spies. Other common information channels include the media (Radio Andalus) and religious literature.

#### Disengagement

Disengaged combatants left Al-Shabaab due to various circumstances which can be summarized as fear, victimization or frustration. Influence from family members, enlightenment and awareness of the government amnesty plan also contributed to disengagement. Disengaged combatants felt that well-spread knowledge on the government amnesty policy could change the narrative from circumstantial escape to voluntary disengagement. Moreover, providing job opportunities or avenues of earning an income to rehabilitated disengaged combatants would encourage more Al-Shabaab fighters to disengage.



## MESSAGING

Proposed disengagement messages were clear and convincing, though complex, considering that most of the respondents had no formal education.

Messages based on the Quran were noted to be effective when encouraging disengagement, with a preference for simple and straight forward messages due to low literacy levels among the target population.

### 3.2. Recommendations

Unschoolled youthful fighters form a significant part of Al-Shabaab. This group can be reached through religious leaders and clan elders preaching peace and unity, because they are the most trusted people in the society.

Even though elders and religious leaders may enjoy the highest level of trust among the society at large, youth group leaders and disillusioned ex-combatants themselves have credibility to adolescents, and could be used as a vehicle of influence.



Apart from face-to-face sessions at mosques or community gatherings, religious and clan leaders can pass their message through different media, such as television (e.g. Al Jazeera), radio and the internet. Another form of communication that youth respond to is art, for example, poetry that refutes violence.

To an unschooled majority in Al-Shabaab, radio is a very important source of communication, and it is undoubtedly the best vehicle for delivering a strategic information campaign urging young members of Al-Shabaab to leave its ranks. Radio Andalus (or their associates) is a key channel that Al-Shabaab uses to propagate its radicalization agenda, and should be studied.

For literate combatants, religious literature and bulk short message service (SMS) through mobile phones could be alternative channels to encourage disengagement. Religious leaders, members of the family and clan leaders of those affected should be included in the communication strategy programme (spreading and communicating the reintegration narrative) due to the high level of trust Al-Shabaab combatants and the community at large have in them.

Offering disengaged combatants opportunities to earn a living to help their families and spreading the message about the government amnesty programme is critical in reaching out to Al-Shabaab combatants to disengage and join the reintegration program.

Messages to encourage disengagement should touch on Islamic religion through Koran verses. They should be simple and straightforward due to low literacy levels among the target population. When drafting these messages the elders (religious and clan), youth and disengaged combatants should be involved so as to ensure that the messages counter teachings that Al-Shabaab have taught for over 10 years.

# Annexes

## Annex 1: Methodology

Due to the perceived sensitivity of the respondents and the topics under discussion, a qualitative methodology was considered most ideal so as to get meaningful feedback. For maximum interaction and personalized feedback, mini FGDs with only four respondents in a group was recommended, as opposed to full groups. This also ensured maximum participation and bonding between the groups and our Somali-speaking moderator and note taker. This methodology effectively countered the challenge of dominance and non-participation often seen in large focus groups. Besides creating a trusting environment, the moderator and note taker were able to quickly create rapport with the small group.

Mini FGDs also provided a platform to carry out direct observations of the respondents.

### The research instrument

A discussion guide was designed and reviewed prior to the study capturing all the key information areas in the objectives. The guide was developed to capture knowledge questions, perception questions and behavioral questions. All questions were open-ended and explorative, giving way to in-depth probing. Besides capturing demographic details, there were specific sections for each of the thematic areas under inquiry. A section on testing key intended messaging was also included with requisite questions.

The discussion guide was translated in to the Somali language for ease of questioning.

### Execution

The Baidoa Rehabilitation Center hosts both male and female disengaged combatants of varied ages, but mostly youth. To account for age and gender diversity the study targeted youthful male disengaged combatants, more experienced male disengaged combatants and female disengaged combatants. The respondents were accessed through a special arrangement coordinated by UNSOM officials in Mogadishu and facilitated by IOM staff in the Baidoa Rehabilitation Center. The study was considered sensitive, and meticulous preparations were done in advance.

All the mini groups were conducted on Thursday 3 March 2016 inside the Center. The sessions were held in a secured venue on the outskirts of Baidoa provided by the management of the Center, which promoted a relaxed environment for the respondents, as well as an openness in the discussions.

In total, 24 respondents were randomly chosen to participate in the study. The moderators further screened them and only qualified 16, who finally participated in the FGDs. This screening was based on an individual's ability to talk freely in a group setting.

The four mini groups were spread as follows:

- One male group of youth aged 25 and under
- Two male groups aged 25–45
- One female group aged 16–30







The focus groups were conducted during the following time bands on the 3rd of March 2016:

- Group 1: Males - 8:30 a.m. – 9:50 a.m.
- Group 2: Males - 10:00 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.
- Group 3: Males - 12:00 p.m. – 1:20 p.m.
- Group 4: Females - 3:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.

### Quality control measures

Ipsos employed very high quality control measures to ensure the highest possible integrity of obtained results/data.

- Two highly trained Somali speaking moderators flew to Baidoa to carry out the FGDs. Both staff interchanged in moderating and note taking.
- A debrief of the process was done with the Project Director sitting in Nairobi at the end of each FGD.
- Scanned copies of all handwritten notes were sent on the “WhatsApp” platform to the project director at the end of the FGDs.
- A detailed field report noting all observations was shared by the moderators at the end of the experience in the Center. These observations have been incorporated in the report.

### Limitations of methodology

A qualitative research method has limitations due to its design. Findings could be subjective due to different situations under which they are discussed. They should therefore be interpreted with caution, especially where they may be grossly overstated.

### General observations:

There were several occurrences and observations made during this study which should build a context of interpretation for the findings:

- Al-Shabaab attacked Baidoa town on Sunday 28 February 2016 and reportedly killed more than 50 civilians and maimed more than 100 others. This led to less activity in town, and civilians would hardly accept having conversations with strangers or other people. The logistics of the study were adversely affected by this incident, as the FGDs could only start four days later.
- There was evident fear of eminent attack due to rumors within the locality that there were an unknown number of vehicles in the town which could be used for another attack.
- From a debrief with the Demobilization, Disarmament and Reintegration (DDR) and IOM staff in the center, disengaged combatants felt safe in the center but once they got out of the Center, they feared being shot by Al-Shabaab combatants and the community, which still believed they were Al-Shabaab members with a hidden agenda.
- Most of the disengaged combatants have children and would like to earn an income to support their families, but they felt restricted and unable to get means of livelihood.
- Visits to Baidoa town revealed that it had a heightened number of AMISOM soldiers roaming the streets due to the attack that had occurred. There was some fear among disengaged combatants that the attacks could lead to their victimization by AMISOM soldiers.

## Annex 2: Findings per question

### Introduction 10 mins

What is your background, where were you born? Family of origin? Clan?

- Born in different towns: Danyele, Baidoa, Burhakaba, Dinsoor, Hudhur and Baidon.
- Came from Halgadud and Bay regions, Rahanweyn and Murubsade communities.

Marital status?

- All the respondents were married.

Age?

- 19-31, 20-24, 26-43 and 31-37.

Where did you go to school?

- Respondents had completed secondary education, had basic religious education or did not have any formal education.

Do you have a family?

- All had families with (2-10 children).

What things do you aspire in life?

- They would like to go back to the careers they had before joining Al-Shabaab, like driving and mechanical engineering work.
- Others would like to pursue formal careers like being a soldier, a teacher or a businessperson.
- Some wish to go back to school to enhance their education.

I would like us to talk a little bit about your past life. It may be uncomfortable to talk about it openly, but we assure you this information will be strictly confidential and cannot be used in any way to victimise you. Please feel free to share openly. This information can help someone who could have become an AS victim.

Main Question: How did you become a member of Al-Shabaab? When did you join? Where did you join from?

- Joined Al-Shabaab between 2005 and 2013.
- Joined either voluntarily after being coerced by family, friends or religious leaders or forcefully abducted by Al-Shabaab insurgents.
- Joined from their workplaces, at areas of worship or at home doing their daily chores like fetching water.

What attracted you to AS? What triggered you to make the decision to join AS?

- Attracted due to unemployment or harsh living conditions they had as nomads.
- Given promises of a wage or a better life and opportunity to provide for the family.
- Convinced by the ideologies like fighting to defend Islam, Somalia and the Somali people from invaders like Ethiopia and Uganda.
- Attracted by the lectures received from Al-Shabaab.
- The Al-Shabaab dress code was attractive to them.
- Adolescents were convinced that life inside Al-Shabaab was exciting.

### Attraction to AS (25 min)

## Attraction to AS (25 min)

Were there people involved in arranging for you to join? What role did they play? Who were they?

- Assistance and/or influence of third parties in joining Al-Shabaab.
- Friends and religious leaders persuaded them to join the group and made arrangements or facilitated their joining.
- Family members played a big role in persuading female respondents to get married to Al-Shabaab members.

What benefits did you have as an AS fighter?

- Salaries ranging between \$20 and \$500 depending on their roles and ranks.

Were your expectations met? How or how not?

- Their expectations and promises were never met; they could hardly meet their own needs and those of their families due to delay or lack of pay as promised.
- Expected the Al-Shabaab to take over Somalia and thus provide benefit afterwards, which never happened.
- They were subjected to harsh working conditions such as being denied access to their families, fetching water for long distances and fighting on the frontline. They were also often imprisoned because of suspicion.
- A few felt their expectations were met, because they received pay at the end of the month and could provide for their families.

What was your family's reaction when you joined AS? (probes)

- Families were disappointed, especially parents.
- Some families were happy because their child was fighting for his country or defending them from the enemy (Ethiopians, Kenyans and Burundians), or because their daughters got married.

How did you and your family feel about hurting other Somali families?

- Remorse (observed deep sighs, tears from several respondents).
- Apologetic about the activities that they carried out as Al-Shabaab militants.
- Regrets.
- Felt brainwashed after being enlightened.
- Family members were shocked and unhappy, thus made efforts to get them out of Al-Shabaab, including trying to arrange their relocation to other countries.
- Family members went to look for them at the stations of operation.

Were you worried about shaming your family?

- At first not worried of shaming their families because they saw Al-Shabaab as a means to an end.
- After joining the group they noticed that its ideologies or way of life was not right or appealing.
- Unmet expectations led to loss of pride in joining the group.

### AS communication (15 min)

How did you generally feel as a member of AS?

- At first they were enthusiastic about joining.
- Al-Shabaab was a means of livelihood to provide for their families.
- After engaging in activities with Al-Shabaab they felt captive and brainwashed.

Were you contented / did you feel a captive? Why so?

- Mixed feelings about being a member of Al-Shabaab.
- Some felt contented because they earned a salary which they didn't have before and were able to send money to their families.
- Most respondents felt like prisoners (were not allowed to see their families), cheated and unhappy. They attributed their dissatisfaction purely to the fact that their expectations were not met.

What were you fighting for? In your opinion was it worth it?

- At first they were fighting to defend their country and Islam.
- At the end most felt they were fighting for no reason thus the fight was not worth it.
- Fight was not justified.

What communication did you have access to? (probes)

- The channels of communication were: mobile phones, Radio Andalus station, Islamic literature and religious leaders who came to preach to them.

Were there non-AS people you used to communicate to? Which ones? How often? Were they local or international?

- Those who had mobile phones used to communicate with local family members such as husbands, sisters and uncles.
- Communication happened when considered safe to do so.
- Communication based on availability of phone credit and charge.

### Reintegration (25 min)

What prompted you to leave AS? (probe for all possible reasons)

- Fear of the unknown each day.
- Death.
- Fear of being arrested on suspicion by their leaders. They were frustrated with difficult working conditions:
  - Being forced to be suicide bombers. Having to miss their salaries now and then.
  - Lack of access to their families.
  - Long working hours accompanied by hard labor. Attacks from American drones, government forces.
- Misunderstandings with their leaders that would lead to imprisonment of the combatants.

Was there information that you received that made you to leave AS? Which information was it? Who provided that information?

- Convinced by relatives and family members that there was an Amnesty Plan by the government.
- Noticed that there was no future in fighting as an Al-Shabaab combatant.

## Reintegration (25 min)

Did you get assistance from anyone to leave AS? From whom? What kind of assistance?

- Received assistance from relatives, ex-militants and government forces who informed them of government amnesty in the centers.
- Received cash to pay for transport.

How did you escape AS? What challenges did you face?

- Escaped when deployed to fight in different regions.
- Escaped when fellow combatants were killed by US drones.
- Used financial aid or means of transport they were provided with by their relatives to escape.
- Ran away from center (on foot).
- The main challenge was fear of being captured and killed by Al-Shabaab members or communities who had lost their loved ones.

How did you feel when you left AS? (probe)

- Felt happy to leave Al-Shabaab.
- Felt terrified that they might be killed by the insurgents or the government forces.
- Felt wasted / helpless — did not have a source of income and could not provide for their families.

Do you still have the same feelings at the Center? If not, what has changed?

- At the Center, they are happy and free unlike when they were Al-Shabaab members.
- Some insecurity lingers, with the fear of being tracked and found by the insurgents.
- They fear being confined, not able to mingle freely with their communities.
- They feel safe because somebody is concerned about their welfare.

Were you aware of the Baidoa Rehabilitation Center when you were in AS? What did you know about it? Where did you get this information from?

- A good number of the respondents were aware of the Center.
- Some had never heard about it.
- Those who were aware were informed by their relatives.

What has been your experience so far in the Center?

- Most are happy and free, unlike when they were Al-Shabaab members.
- All would like a more private area where they cannot be tracked by Al-Shabaab members.

Have you heard about the government's amnesty plan? What do you think about it?

- All were aware of government's amnesty plan.
- They acknowledge that it's a good plan.

Would this amnesty plan be trusted by AS combatants? Why?

- Most do not fully trust the government.
- Skeptical that if they escaped the government would track and kill them.
- Assurance of their utmost safety will make other combatants trust the government amnesty plan.

## Encouraging Disengagement (25 min)

Would you advise an AS fighter to disengage? Why/why not?

- Yes (most respondents) because:
  - The group has no Islamic value.
  - There are difficult conditions working in the group.
  - The centre is a safe haven.
- No - Suspicion that those who disengage would be traced and killed

How would you convince them to disengage? What would you tell them?  
(probe for key messages)

- The majority of respondents would convince Al-Shabaab fighters that they are safe.
- They would convince them that life outside Al-Shabaab is exciting and there is freedom.
- If most of the Al-Shabaab fighters knew more about how good the Center was, they would disengage and seek amnesty.
- They would use family members to take advantage of amnesty and persuade their relatives to disengage.
- Some would not convince them because of fear of being traced or killed.

Message testing: Show communication concepts on a concept board: If you saw / heard this, what would come to mind?

Would this convince an AS fighter to disengage?

What should be improved in this message?

- Observation: The surprise on respondent's face, then comments of how unjust Al-Shabaab is, the wrong ideology Al-Shabaab has on the people and the destruction they have caused.
- Most — Messaging is very clear, attractive and would convince Al-Shabaab fighters to disengage.
- Few — Messages would not be as convincing, because Al-Shabaab misunderstood the Koran.
- Message number 3 stood out. There was emotional depth among respondents when it was read out.

If various stakeholders (probe for religious leaders, clan elders, the media, UN, AMISOM, government leaders) wanted to convince AS fighters to disengage, who would they trust most? Why so? Who else would they trust? Why so?

- Clan elders and religious leaders would be the appropriate ones to pass this information to Al-Shabaab fighters because they are trusted in the society.
- Religious leaders are the most trusted stakeholders in convincing Al-Shabaab to disengage. This was attributed to the fact that they have a platform of preaching during Friday prayers and that Al-Shabaab had more faith in the messages of religious leaders compared to other stakeholders.

Would an AS recruit trust members of their clan who convince them to disengage? Why or why not?

- All agreed that clan elders would be appropriate actors to pass on this information at the clan level.
- Clan elders are said to be respected by the community, as opposed to others who are perceived to be foreigners.

Would they trust a family member convincing them to disengage? Why or why not?

- Some felt that due to their attachment to their families they would trust their family member convincing them to disengage

## Encouraging Disengagement (25 min)

- Others mentioned support of the family members would encourage them to disengage because their main aim of joining Al-Shabaab was to fend for their families.
- Some would not trust a family member because of the inability of a family member to offer protection unless they are a highly ranked government official.

### Which stakeholders would they not trust? Why?

- AMISOM and government leaders are seen to be a threat to Al-Shabaab.
- The UN is seen as having external interests and of being a party that came to fight Islam.

### Which other communication channel would they trust? Why so?

- Al-Shabaab use the internet widely to spread their ideology (e.g. [www.somalimemo.net](http://www.somalimemo.net)) and there is a need to develop messages that would counter them on the same platforms that they use for communication.

### What would encourage more AS fighters to disengage? Why?

- Forming networks and programs that encourage more disengagements.
- De-radicalization of uneducated youths.
- Ensured continuation of the government amnesty plan.
- Government transparency in equitable distribution of resources to all regions.

### And how should disengaged combatants be treated?

- They should be part of government forces to fight the group.
- They should be treated in a way that can convince others to follow suit.
- They should also be given an opportunity to work so as to provide for their families.
- They should be treated in a humane manner and not as suspects.
- They should be peacefully re-integrated into the community (not isolated or victimized).

### Is there something else we can do to encourage more AS fighters to disengage?

- Granting amnesty to the disengaged combatants encourages others leave Al-Shabaab.
- Use of disengaged combatants in the fight against insurgency as informers/combatants.
- Provision of job opportunities to the former Al-Shabaab fighters.

### Finally, what message would you like AS fighters to know about your new life?

- They would like the fighters to know:
  - Life is better or good when you are free from insecurity. They are healthy.
  - They can still survive if they choose to leave the group.

## Wrap up

## Annex 3: Focus group discussion transcripts

AS-INTEGRATION FEEDBACK-BAIDOA CENTER

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION TRANSCRIPT

DATE: 3/3/2016

GROUP 1: MALE 31 - 37 43 Yrs

TIME: 8:30 A.M.-9:50 A.M.

### Introduction

Moderator: Before we begin, let us quickly get to know a little bit more about each other. Can you share with me a little bit more about yourself?

Sa: Born in Hudhur town Bay region of Somalia, married with two children. He came from Rahanweyn community, aged 31 years, completed secondary school and has religious education. Aspires to continue with his education and educate his children.

Ma: Born in Burhakaba town, married with five children, from Rahanweyn community, aged 37 years, has religious education and aspires to reunite with his family in Baidoa.

Hu: Born in Baidoa town, married with three children. No formal education and aspires to be back to his former driving job.

Mu: Born in Baidoa town of Bay region. No basic education, married with two wives and comes from Rahanweyn community.

### Attraction to AS

Moderator: How did you become a member of AS, when did you join and what attracted you?

Sa: I joined the AS group in the year 2006 when Islamic courts union were ruling most of southern and central Somalia. I was attracted to the group by the will for fighting for the course of Allah.

Ma: I joined Al-Shabaab from Burhakaba and saw it was a religion obligation to fight the invaders — the Ethiopians.

Hu: I joined the group in the year 2007 during Sheik Sharriff's time after the Islamist group captured Baidoa town. I was approached and persuaded to join the group as a driver.

Mu: I joined the group in the year 2005 when an Islamic court was started in Mogadishu and rose to the rank of a militant commander in Dinsoor town.

Moderator: Were there people involved in arranging for you to join? What role did they play? Who were they?

Sa: There were many encouragements among the religious leaders to join the group.

Ma: I was approached by Shabaab Amirs (leaders) in Burhakaba to join the group.

## Attraction to AS

**Moderator:** What benefits did you have as an AS fighter?

Sa: As an Al-Shabaab fighter I used to earn \$100 per month exclusive of food and shelter. I also used to get a relief contribution for my family.

Ma: I used to earn \$400-\$500 since I was the Shabaab finance manager.

Hu: I used to earn \$100 as an Al-Shabaab driver.

Mu: I used to earn \$300 and other special treatments such as getting access to mobile phones when junior militants were denied access to mobile phones.

**Moderator:** Were your expectations met? What was your family's reaction when you joined AS?

Ma: I was disappointed when the militants arrested me after losing the group's money. My family was not happy about me being a militant.

Hu: I was disappointed when the group refused to pay my monthly salary after they lost territories to the Somali government. My family was not happy about me being a member of Al-Shabaab.

Mu: I felt discouraged and angry when the group regarded me as an American spy after my colleagues were killed by American drones. I lost many of my family and relatives after joining the group and my family regarded me as a killer who does not spare.

**Moderator:** How did you generally feel as a member of AS? Were you contented? Did you feel like a captive? What were you fighting for and in your opinion was it worth it?

Sa: I felt I was fighting for the right cause until the group became more brutal. I was a happy Al-Shabaab member before 2013 but afterwards the group became more extreme and harsh towards the recruits, and there was in-fighting among the group that led to total failure. I was fighting to make sharia law implemented in the country but it dawned on me that the group had diverted from the religion of Islam.

Ma: I felt I was right, and among the militants there was brotherhood and all others who were against were on the wrong side. We were told that if indeed we died while fighting for Al-Shabaab we would get to paradise.

Hu: Since the beginning I never felt comfortable fighting for Al-Shabaab. I used to be the driver and never got time to see my family. I was told to get married within the Al-Shabaab town; we lived in a difficult situation driving day and night like captives for the Al-Shabaab leaders. We were sometimes arrested after a prominent Al-Shabaab leader was killed inside the town and some of us were forced to be suicide bombers.

Mu: Due to my position I had many privileges, such as having phones with internet — before my phone was confiscated after suspicion that I was a spy. We believed we were fighting for justice and we would always be victorious.

## AS-Communication

**Moderator:** What communication did you have access to?

Sa: we used to listen to Radio Andalus and I had no communication with anyone else.

Ma: We were only allowed to listen to the Amir's orders and we were allowed to listen to Al-Shabaab-owned Radio Andalus and sometimes local radio stations. We were denied internet and phones with camera. I used to talk with my family in the country.

Hu: We were listening only to radio; our phones were listened to ascertain whether we were spying for the government.

Mu: We used to listen to radio and used to communicate with my group leader. I used to lead a group of 40. I also used to communicate with my close family once in a while but we could not use phones regularly, fearing for my life that I might be targeted by American forces.

## Reintegration

**Moderator:** What prompted you to leave AS? How did you escape AS and what challenges did you face?

Sa: I decided to leave the group when it dawned on me that this group has no future and that it would end soon. I escaped from the group after we were sent on a mission to fight with the Ethiopian soldiers, and in that process I decided to escape.

Ma: I lost a lot of money twice since I was the Al-Shabaab finance manager and the group forced me to pay.

Hu: Life in Al-Shabaab was less exciting than we imagined before, they became more suspicious of us and we had to escape.

Mu: I left Al-Shabaab when my colleagues were killed by American drones and the group became suspicious. I trekked for four hours before I arrived at home and later received amnesty from the government.

**Moderator:** Did you get assistance from anyone to leave AS? From who? What kind of assistance?

Sa: I was assisted by my cousin who was a soldier in the Somali army. He helped me to join this center.

Ma: I contacted my sister who was in the federal speaker's home. Prof Jawari helped me to join the Center. I used \$1500 to reach Baidoa town after I felt unsafe in my home.

Hu: I had information from my relatives that there was amnesty and I managed to flee.

Mu: I was leaked information by my friend that Al-Shabaab wanted to arrest me after being suspicious of me being an American spy. I was assisted by my brother who supported my escape; he gave me money and moral support.

## Reintegration

**Moderator:** How did you feel when you left AS? Do you still have the same feelings in this center and were you aware of the Baidoa Center when you were in AS?

**Hu:** After I left the group I had many challenges that the community and government were suspicious of us and the Al-Shabaab combatants were looking to kill us. I have some good feelings in the Center, I am safe and they gave us education and skills.

**Mu:** I am quite a fearful person, I am feeling that Al-Shabaab is still looking for me and I can't work for my family as I used to do before. I wasn't aware of this center in Baidoa but I was aware of the amnesty plan. I am having a good time in the Center. Al-Shabaab believed that if you escape from the group the government will kill you.

**Moderator:** Would you advise an AS fighter to defect and how would you convince them to defect? What would you tell them?

**Sa:** I would urge Al-Shabaab members to defect from the group because the group has no Islamic values. I would convince them that they are killing Muslims and they need to stop that.

**Ma:** I would advise them to seek guidance and defect from the group since they are killing innocent people. Only family members can convince them due to mistrust and fear.

**Hu:** I would urge the Al-Shabaab members to defect from the group because the group has no Islamic values.

**Mu:** More Al-Shabaab militants should defect from the group and leave their harsh rule behind. I would convince them that the Center is a safe haven and they should take advantage of the amnesty plan and defect.

**Moderator:** If you saw / heard this message-testing communication on a concept board, what would come to mind?

**Sa:** That Al-Shabaab are killing innocent people without justification and they kill in the name of religion. Al-Shabaab does not stand for Islamic culture and human dignity, they kill innocent people because they are opposing them. There is no future in Shabaab.

**Ma:** Islamic values and principles respect and protect human dignity, violence cannot solve anything. There is no future inside Shabaab.

**Hu:** The Somali community should stand for their country. There is no future in Shabaab and they will be defeated. Al-Shabaab members are criminals with no mercy for humanity.

**Mu:** Islam protects vulnerable groups and shedding innocent blood is not allowed. There is no future in Shabaab, who are terrorists bent on destruction.

## Encouraging defection

## Encouraging defection

**Moderator:** Would this convince an AS fighter to defect and what should be improved in this?

**Sa:** It would convince Al-Shabaab members because they think they are protecting their religion, culture and human life.

**Ma:** Al-Shabaab members take instructions from the Amirs or leaders of the groups who have the final say and mean the gospel truth to them. They can defect indeed if they see those who have defected earlier having a bright future. Defectors should be given an opportunity to work.

**Hu:** Al-Shabaab can be convinced, if the community can welcome them. Defectors should be treated in a way that can convince others to follow suit.

**Mu:** Religious leaders must stand for the religion and defectors should be part of the government forces to fight the group.

**Moderator:** If various stakeholders wanted to convince AS fighters to defect, who would they trust most? Why so? Who else would they trust? Why so?

**Sa:** Al-Shabaab does not trust anyone and they think all non-members are infidels and can only be approached through military action.

**Ma:** Religious leaders can take part in propagating the values of Islamic principles. The families can at least convince them to defect from the group. They won't trust the media since they think media are pro-Western.

**Hu:** They do not trust media and clan elders. Family members can be trusted to convince their sons to defect from the group.

**Mu:** Clan elders can be trusted to stand for the Islamic culture and urge them to defect; family members need to take responsibility for their children.

## Wrap-up

**Moderator:** Is there something else we can do to encourage more AS fighters to defect? What message would you like AS fighters to know about your new life?

**Sa:** Many youth who joined the group and are not happy about their situation, therefore they can defect if they are assured of their safety. Life outside Shabaab is good.

**Ma:** They can only be convinced if only the defectors are happy in their new lives.

**Hu:** The community should be welcoming to ensure the ex-militants feel happy and lead by example for those who are still in the group to feel convinced that life outside Shabaab is exciting.

**Mu:** Ex-militants should be given opportunities that give them an income that can help their families.

## AS-INTEGRATION FEEDBACK-BAIDOA CENTER FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION TRANSCRIPT

DATE: 3/3/2016

GROUP 2: YOUTH - MALE (20-24 Yrs)

TIME: 11:30 A.M.

### Introduction

Moderator: Before we begin, let us quickly get to know a little bit more about each other. Can you share with me a little bit more about yourself?

AM: 21 years old, no formal education, born in Dinsoor town, married, came from Ranhanweyn community, regrets being a member of Al-Shabaab.

BI: 22 years old, no formal education, born in Halgadnd region, married, came from Ranhanweyn community. Aspires to start a new life.

Ba: 20 years old, no formal education, married and born in Baidoa town. Aspires to go to a driving school.

Ad: 24 years old, no formal education, married, born in Hudhur town Bay region and aspires to join the government.

### Attraction to AS

Moderator: How did you become a member of AS?

AM: I joined the group in 2013 while at a water point fetching water for the family. I was approached by Al-Shabaab militants and showed desire to join and finally follow them. I was escaping from the harsh and difficult nomadic cultural experience. No one facilitated my joining the group, and I used to receive \$20 per month as an Al-Shabaab fighter. My expectations were never met; in fact it became harsher than nomadic culture.

BI: I joined the group while still a young teenager. I was persuaded by religious leaders from Al-Shabaab to join the jihad against Ugandans. I thought they were fighting for the country and religion. I used to earn \$25 per month. My expectations were never met; it was difficult since we were always being taken to the front lines.

Ba: I was approached by a family man who was fighting for them. I used to watch jihad videos and I later joined the group. I used to earn \$20 per month; sometimes we were told that we would not receive money because we were not married. Things were different; we were not allowed to join family members, unlike the leaders, who were having a lot of freedom.

Ad: I joined the group due to peer pressure. All my friends who were my age were joining the group. I used to listen to Washida Islamic songs and we were told that we would enter paradise. I used to earn \$20 dollars per month. I was disappointed after the group became suspicious of me and I was arrested for 7 days. I later escaped after the center was attacked by government forces.

Moderator: What was your family's reaction when you joined AS?

AM: My family was not happy since I was their first born who was taking care of the family.

## Attraction to AS

BI: My sister in Saudi Arabia sent family members to take me to Saudi Arabia but I refused to go with them, and I am currently regretting that.

Ba: My mother was not happy. She persuaded me not to go to the center. I felt sorry for the killings; people were being slaughtered on a daily basis.

Ad: My family was not aware of me joining the group, but when they realized that indeed I had joined they were disappointed.

**Moderator:** How did you generally feel as a member of AS?

AM: I felt captive, prisoner, I was forced to fetch water from long distances and I was not allowed to see my family. I was forced to fight with the enemies day and night. I was regularly arrested for disobedience.

BI: I felt that we were cheated and deceived. What we were being taught and what the leaders were doing were totally different things. We were forcefully taken to the front line while the leaders stayed in their homes.

Ba: I wasn't totally happy with Al-Shabaab. I was denied my salary because I was young and had no family.

Ad: I felt that I was fighting for nothing and was killing innocent people just because they seemed suspicious.

**Moderator:** What communication did you have access to?

AM: Only specific Islamic books were allowed to be taught and we were told our families were infidels. No internet, no phones with internet were allowed, and to some extent our phones were confiscated. Young soldiers were taken where there was no network and a harsh climate. We were allowed to listen to Radio Andalus, the Al-Shabaab owned radio. I used to communicate with my father.

BI: We listened to the radio, and I used to communicate with my sister in Saudi Arabia, who used to urge me to defect.

BA: I used to listen to Radio Andalus, and we were not allowed to listen to foreign media such as BBC and VOA. I used to communicate with my family members.

Ad: We listened to Radio Andalus and we were not allowed phones with camera and internet. I used to communicate with my uncle and brother in Halgadnd.

**Moderator:** What prompted you to leave AS?

AM: I fought with the leader of Al-Shabaab and was arrested after I refused to return back to the militia. I later escaped from prison.

BI: I was denied the money which had been promised to me, and after I got married they wanted me to continue fighting for them. I refused and ran away to seek amnesty.

BA: I escaped from the militant group after they arrested me. We were attacked by the government while in prison and that is how I escaped.

## AS-Communication

## Reintegration

## Reintegration

Ad: I was denied permission to see my wife. I therefore escaped from the militants, who then followed me to Hudher town so that they could kill me, but I escaped to Baidoa.

**Moderator:** Did you get assistance from anyone to leave AS? From who? What kind of assistance?

AM: I was assisted by my father, who brought a camel so that I could travel to Baidoa to seek amnesty.

Bl: I was assisted by a family member who was working with the government.

BA: I was assisted by an ex-militant in Baidoa.

Ad: I was assisted by my brother, who sent me money to buy food.

**Moderator:** How did you feel when you left AS, and were you aware of the Baidoa Center when you were in AS?

AM: It was challenging for me to stay in town because I feared that Al-Shabaab might kill me. I felt happy that finally I was out of Al-Shabaab. I feel happy in the Center, and I wasn't aware that there was a center in Baidoa.

Bl: I feared for my life. Since I left they sent several people to convince me to come back. I felt happy after deserting them, and I am feeling good in the Center, but I want a place where I cannot be followed by Al-Shabaab.

BA: I felt happy and good after the escape and the Center here is good. I was aware that there was a center in Baidoa, and I knew there were ex-militants in the Center, but I thought they would be killed.

Ad: I felt quite happy, and I feel I am a free man. Treatment in the Center is good and I never knew there was a center in Baidoa.

## Encouraging defection

**Moderator:** Would you advise an AS fighter to defect? How would you convince them to defect? What would you tell them?

AM: I would advise them to leave the militant group, since they are on the run. I would convince them that life outside Al-Shabaab is exciting, with a lot of freedom.

BA: I would advise them to defect and never waste their time in endless fights. I would convince them to join the Center where they will be welcomed graciously.

Ad: It is difficult to advise and convince a member who is still in the battlefield, because many have no access to mobile phones.

**Moderator:** If you saw / heard this message-testing communication on a concept board, what would come to mind?

AM: Our religion protects life and the dignity of human life. Al-Shabaab terrorizes innocent people and does not follow Islamic principles. Islam is a religion of peace and love and does not allow injustice.

## Encouraging defection

BA: The Somali religion stands for justice, but not the justice propagated by Al-Shabaab. Killing and looting property is not allowed in Islam. There is no future in Al-Shabaab.

Ad: In Islam, human life is sacred, and it's forbidden to shed blood in the name of the religion. Al-Shabaab members are criminals and many are held hostage by the group. There is no hope in that group.

**Moderator:** *Would this convince an AS fighter to defect? What should be improved?*

AM: There is no good in Al-Shabaab and there should be an outreach initiative to educate members who are willing to leave the group. Islamic poems should be used to call them, and defectors should be treated in a humane manner and never be suspected.

BA: This would not convince Al-Shabaab, because they misunderstand the Koran. There should be Koranic verses and other poems that refute violence. The defectors should be encouraged so that many others can follow.

Ad: Religious leaders can take part in propagating the future of Islam. Defectors should not be isolated and victimized.

**Moderator:** *If various stakeholders wanted to convince AS fighters to defect, who would they trust most? Why so? Who else would they trust? Why so?*

AM: Al-Shabaab members can trust their close family members to convince them. AMISOM and UN are not good at convincing them.

BA: Clan elders can convince the family of the Al-Shabaab member to persuade their son to defect from the group. It all depends on the member and how he feels. Sometimes it is difficult to convince them, since you can be attacked for being against the jihad.

Ad: Al-Shabaab regards clan elders and religious leaders who are against them as apostates. Media can be used to propagate the true Islam.

## Wrap - up

AM: Ex-militants should be promoted so that they become an example to the rest in the group. Life outside Al-Shabaab is happier.

BI: The defectors should be given opportunity, freedom and encouragement. I am doing good, having good skills in life.

BA: Defectors should not be treated in a manner that makes them regret; rather they should be encouraged in their new choice of life. We are practicing religion in an easy way.

Ad: Defectors should be used to encourage their former friends to leave the group and should take advantage of the amnesty program.

## Annex 3: Focus group discussion transcripts

### AS-INTEGRATION FEEDBACK-BAIDOA CENTER

#### FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION TRANSCRIPT

DATE: 3/3/2016

GROUP 3: MALE (26 – 43 Yrs)

TIME: 12:30 P.M.-1:20 P.M.

#### Introduction

Moderator: Before we begin, let us quickly get to know a little bit more about each other. Can you share with me a little bit about yourself?

Ha: Aged 43 years from Murusade clan. No formal education, a family man with seven children. He likes driving vehicles and was born in Danyele.

Ad: Aged 41 years. No formal education but finished Koranic teachings. He has a family and 10 children. He is a driver and a mechanical engineer, all learned from the garages.

Mu: Aged 26 years. No formal education. He has a family with two children, from Rahaweyn tribe born in Baidoa town.

Yu: Aged 27 years with a family of two children. He was born in Baidoa and from Rahaweyn tribe. No formal education and would like to be a soldier.

#### Attraction to AS

Moderator: How did you become a member of AS? When did you join and what attracted you?

Ha: I was a federal government driver previously. Al-Shabaab abducted me in 2008 and forced me to become a militant. I then became their driver and besides the forceful abduction I was not interested, but had no option but to give in.

Ad: I joined in 2010 and left in 2015. I was attracted to them due to my unemployment and I wanted to support my family. I was given hope that I would earn a good salary.

Mu: I joined Al-Shabaab in 2007 as a soldier from Baidoa. I loved their dress code and I used to listen to their lectures, and then I decided to join them.

Yu: I joined Al-Shabaab in 2007 and worked with them in different regions. I was attracted by their ideology to defend Islam and its people.

Moderator: Were there people involved in arranging for you to join? What role did they play? Who were they?

Ha: I was abducted by Al-Shabaab militants.

Ad: My close friends made me join Al-Shabaab.

Mu: My friends arranged for me to join Al-Shabaab.

Yu: No person was involved in arranging for me to join Al-Shabaab.

## Attraction to AS

**Moderator:** What benefits did you have as an AS fighter?

**Ad:** I received a salary of \$400 and lead a team of soldiers.

**Mu:** I used to receive a salary of \$80, but sometimes less.

**Yu:** As a soldier I used to receive a salary of \$80, but sometimes less.

**Moderator:** Were your expectations met? What was your family's reaction when you joined AS?

**Ad:** My expectations were not met at times due to the group's financial constraints. My family was happy in me joining the group as they believed I was defending them from their enemies, like the Ethiopians, and I never worried about shaming them.

**Mu:** My expectations were never met because I anticipated receiving a good salary as a fighter. My family was not happy with my mission and they tried to send me to other countries, like Djibouti, so that I would never meet Al-Shabaab, but it never happened. I was not worried about shaming them.

**Moderator:** How did you generally feel as a member of AS? Were you contented? Did you feel like a captive? What were you fighting for, and in your opinion was it worth it?

**Ha:** I felt bad as an Al-Shabaab member as I was forced to join the group. I felt captive because I never got a chance to go to visit my family. Al-Shabaab informed me that I was fighting for my land and religion. It was not worth it.

**Ad:** I was happy as a fighter because I believed I was fighting for Islam and I was to die a martyr. I never felt a captive because I was receiving a good salary and support, but now I believe it was not worth it. I was brainwashed.

**Mu:** I enjoyed the earlier days, but when I heard my parents were not happy I started to feel bad. I never felt like a captive because I joined knowing the mission. I believe I was brainwashed to believe that I was fighting for Islam.

**Yu:** I was happy being a fighter, because I had teammates who used to encourage me. I received a salary that I sent to my family. I was fighting to protect the land and Islam from invaders, but it was not worth it.

**Moderator:** What communication did you have access to?

**Ha:** I had access to a mobile phone with no internet and camera, because Al-Shabaab feared information would be given out by spies. I also got access to leaders that gave me information about the missions done by comrades. I used to communicate with my family, relatives and fellow militants.

**Ad:** I had access to a phone and a radio station owned by Al-Shabaab, Radio Andalus. I used to listen to preaching from the phone and communicate with my family and friends in the militia.

**Mu:** I used to access religious leaders who used to come to preach. I also had a mobile phone and I communicated with my parents.

## AS-Communication

## AS-Communication

Yu: I had access to a mobile phone only, which I sometimes switched on when in the bushes. I used to communicate with fellow militants.

**Moderator: What prompted you to leave AS? How did you escape AS and what challenges did you face?**

Ha: I escaped when we were invaded and I ran away because of insecurity and fear for my life. As I escaped I travelled through bushy areas for days, then reached Baidoa, fearing to be seen by Al-Shabaab fighters.

Ad: I was prompted to leave Al-Shabaab after my salary was reduced; the place became insecure, targets by American drones increased and because of financial constraints I could not support my family.

Mu: I was forced to escape because the salary I was getting was minimal, my family encouraged me to leave, Al-Shabaab became more brutal in targeting civilians, I felt insecure and I had no permission to see my parents.

Yu: I left Al-Shabaab because my parents were not happy and did not support me, I was living in fear of an AMISOM invasion and the group had started experiencing financial constraints. Al-Shabaab wanted to kill me and I feared being seen by them.

**Moderator: Did you get assistance from anyone to leave AS? From who? What kind of assistance?**

Ha: I communicated with my family who supported me get to this center by sending me money.

Ad: I heard of the government's amnesty plan from family and I decided to leave. They sent me money for transport, and then I escaped.

Mu: I heard of government amnesty and was helped by a relative who was in the army to escape to Baidoa.

Yu: I heard of the government's amnesty and contacted a close friend in the military who supported me to get to this center.

**Moderator: How did you feel when you left AS? Do you still have the same feelings in this center, and were you aware of the Baidoa Center when you were in AS?**

Ha: When I left Al-Shabaab I felt peace of mind. I was not aware of the Baidoa Center, and in the Center I see opportunities are open for me as I am gaining skills to read and write, tailoring and carpentry.

Ad: My biggest challenge is fear of Al-Shabaab and the government. In the Center I feel relieved from the fear, although I have no income to support my family and I cannot get out because of fear. I need to be taken where I can support family. I had no prior information about the Baidoa Center.

Mu: I feel peace of mind in this center. I feel safer in the Center than outside because of security. I was not aware of the Center and I believe Al-Shabaab militants can trust it only if they are contacted by family members who have a link with the government.

## Reintegration

## Encouraging defection

Moderator: Would you advise an AS fighter to defect? How would you convince them to defect? What would you tell them?

Ha: I would advise Al-Shabaab fighters to defect because they have no future. I will convince them by informing them of the Baidoa Center where they can feel safe.

Ad: I would advise Al-Shabaab fighters to defect by telling them that I feel safer now than earlier. I can get access to my family and enjoy being with them.

Mu: I would not advise Al-Shabaab fighters to defect because they can use the communication to trace my location and kill me.

Yu: I would advise Al-Shabaab fighters to defect due to the wrong ideology they have. I will promise them a good life and a feeling of safety in the Center.

Moderator: If you saw/heard this message-testing communication on a concept board, what would come to mind?

Ha: I remember my wrongdoings.

Ad: I remember the brutal killing of innocent people.

Yu: I remember the negative teachings I was receiving that made me kill people.

Moderator: Would this convince an AS fighter to defect? What should be improved?

Ha: The messages are clear although they can be improved through making or creating songs carrying messages.

Ad: The messages are good but can be improved by using Koranic verses.

Mu: The messages can be improved by using Islamic quotes and sayings of religious scholars.

Yu: The messages are good in convincing combatants, and can be improved by including images of blood of innocent civilians.

Moderator: If various stakeholders wanted to convince AS fighters to defect, who would they trust most? Why so? Who else would they trust? Why so?

Ha: I believe only religious leaders, clan elders and family members can convince Al-Shabaab fighters to defect because I see them as people that won't kill me. Al-Shabaab fighters believe information from religious leaders, and this can help them to defect. Al-Shabaab fighters don't trust AMISOM and government leaders because they are seen as enemies. They cannot access any communication channel.

Yu: AS fighters can listen and be convinced by religious leaders and clan elders because they are sometimes neutral and not influenced by the government. Most of them believe in their family due to their family not betraying them. AMISOM and government leaders can't be trusted because they are on the opposite side and they see them as enemies.

## Encouraging defection

I believe the following can encourage more Al-Shabaab fighters to defect: promising a safe and secure life; better treatment of earlier defectors; creation of employment for youth; ensuring Al-Shabaab financial support is restricted. I want defectors to be accepted and reintegrated as they have come out of their past life. They should not be alienated and seen as Al-Shabaab forever.

Mu: Clan elders and religious leaders are trusted by Al-Shabaab.

Ad: I believe religious leaders can be trusted. AMISOM and government leaders cannot be trusted by Al-Shabaab because they are their enemies.

**Moderator:** What would encourage more AS fighters to defect?

Mu: Better education and employment opportunities are important in encouraging more defectors.

Ad: The government's willingness to equalize and work in transparency for Somalis. Continuation of the amnesty plan is a way of encouraging defectors.

Mu: I want defectors to be welcomed and helped in terms of financial and moral support.

Ad: I want defectors to be accepted by society and not to be victimized for their past.

## Wrap - up

**Moderator:** Is there something else we can do to encourage more AS fighters to defect? What message would you like AS fighters to know about your new life?

Ha: I would like Al-Shabaab to know that I am living a good life, free from insecurity.

Ad: I would like Al-Shabaab to know I am healthy and they can also defect from Al-Shabaab's ideology.

Mu: I would like Al-Shabaab to know that I am not an infidel.

Yu: I would like Al-Shabaab to know I am living and breathing but very vigilant about their work. I know they are willing to kill me but I am in a safe haven.

## AS-INTEGRATION FEEDBACK-BAIDOA CENTER FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION TRANSCRIPT

DATE: 3/3/2016

GROUP 4: FEMALES (16-30 Yrs)

TIME: 3:00 P.M. – 4:00 P.M.

### Introduction

Moderator: Before we begin, let us quickly get to know a little bit more about each other. Can you share with me a little bit more about yourself?

Fa: Born in Baidoa town, aged 23 years and married to an Al-Shabaab member and have three children. No formal education. Ran to Dinsoor town with her husband after government retook Baidoa. Defected from Al-Shabaab after her life became harsh and realized the ideology is wrong.

Fh: Aged 30 years, born in Burhakaba. Has no formal education. Married to an Al-Shabaab member and has three children. Aspires to be a business lady and is from Rahanweyn clan.

Ms: Aged 31 years with five children. Married to an Al-Shabaab member. Was later on married to another Al-Shabaab member and gave birth to two children then divorced and remarried again to another Al-Shabaab member. No formal education.

Musd: Aged 16 years, married to an Al-Shabaab member. She decided to stay away from her husband after living with him for a year. No formal education and hopes to be a teacher.

### Attraction to AS

Moderator: How did you become a member of AS? When did you join and what attracted you?

Fa: I joined Al-Shabaab in 2009 in Baidoa town after getting married to an Al-Shabaab Amir.

Ms: I joined Al-Shabaab in 2006 after marrying my first husband who was in Al-Shabaab. Due to the power Al-Shabaab had in 2006, I got attracted to the man and believed that he was defending Islam and Muslims.

Musd: I am 16 years got attracted to Al-Shabaab in Dinsoor after they came to my parents asking for me. I was attracted to them after they convinced me they were fighting for Islam.

Fh: I joined Al-Shabaab after marrying an Al-Shabaab militant in Burhakaba. Fighting for Islam and ensuring the religion gets stronger is what attracted me to them.

Moderator: Were there people involved in arranging for you to join? What role did they play? Who were they?

Fa: My friends convinced me to marry the man as he was fighting for Islam. I fell in love with him and hoped that he would be a leader. My friends played the role of convincing me.

Ms: No person was involved in arranging for me to join the militants.

Musd: My parents played the role in facilitating to hand me over to them.

## Attraction to AS

Fh: Friends and family played that role as they believed in the mission of supporting Al-Shabaab.

**Moderator:** What benefits did you have as an AS fighter?

Fa: I received \$30 dollars, which made me happy and enjoy life.

Ms: As an Al-Shabaab wife, I enjoyed a small income of \$40 dollars, which I did not receive some months. I lived with the children.

Fh: I received an income of \$25 dollars and ran a small business [selling clothes in the Burhakaba.

**Moderator:** Were your expectations met? What was your family's reaction when you joined AS?

All: Our family facilitated our joining Al-Shabaab, so we didn't feel like we were shaming the family. Instead our families were happy with us as their daughters got married.

**Moderator:** How did you generally feel as a member of AS? Were you contented/did you feel like a captive? What were you fighting for, and in your opinion was it worth it?

Fa: I was contented living with an Al-Shabaab member as he was the leader of the group, and I had the position to bake biscuits. I never felt captive and believed my husband was fighting for Islam and his country. But I defected after life became hard, because the man ran away from me and the children. I now feel that the ideology is wrong and not worth it.

Fh: I was contented with the life because my husband was my family member who was fighting for Islam. Now, after integration with other people and defection, I believe the idea is not worth fighting for.

Musd: After joining Al-Shabaab, I believed any person opposing Al-Shabaab was not a Muslim. This today is an idea I am against.

Ms: I believed Islam was Al-Shabaab. I was married to Al-Shabaab and felt happy to live with them. Today I say they brainwashed me into thinking Islam is them.

**Moderator:** What communication did you have access to?

Fa: I got access to mobile phones, the small ones with no internet and radio.

Ms: I had a small phone with no internet and I listened to the radio.

Musd: I had no access to phones, TV, internet and radio for the one year I was married. My husband was my informant.

Fh: I had access to a mobile phone and a radio. We used to communicate to our families, especially my mother, father and brother, not external people from other clans as they feared them to be spies against us. The communication was often dependent on the availability of money.

## AS Communication

## Reintegration

**Moderator:** What prompted you to leave AS? How did you escape AS and what challenges did you face?

**Fa:** I left Al-Shabaab because I felt insecure with the Amir. Also my children needed medical attention, and later I hated the ideology of killing innocent people. There was no information I received that made me leave Al-Shabaab.

**Ms:** I was prompted to leave Al-Shabaab after realizing my husband's ideology was wrong. He could not feed his family and many times he said he had nothing. I sought assistance from my relatives to send me some money for transport.

**Musd:** I escaped from my husband and Al-Shabaab through the help of my friend who told me about the Baidoa Center.

**Moderator:** Was there information that you received that made you to leave AS? Which information was it? Who provided that information?

**Fa:** I escaped Al-Shabaab with my children after I could not receive income from my husband. I saw the need to save my children from hunger. The challenges I faced included insecurity, fear of Al-Shabaab finding me and the fear of being alienated from the community.

**Ms:** I heard of the government's amnesty plan as a good way to attract Al-Shabaab fighters because there are many who want to defect but they fear facing the wrath of the security forces. Some Al-Shabaab members trust the plan because they have heard of leaders joining the government, but some don't because they don't trust the government.

**Moderator:** How did you feel when you left AS? do you still have the same feelings in this center and were you aware of the Baidoa Center when you were in AS?

**Fa:** In the Center I feel secure. I also receive food and special treatment for my children. I came to know the Center when I learned of it from a female friend.

**Musd:** I learned of the Center through a former family member who is here. He called me and informed me about it. I feared for my life before I joined the Center. Some will believe if they see ex-combatants enjoying a peaceful life. They will not be targeted by the AMISOM.

**Fh:** I heard of the government's amnesty plan and I thought the combatants would not trust it because they think it is a way to catch them and kill them.

**Moderator:** Would you advise an AS fighter to defect? How would you convince them to defect? What would you tell them?

**Fa:** I would encourage them to defect because the fighters are living in hardship and don't have the opportunity to get an income for their family.

**Fh:** I cannot advise the fighters to defect as I fear for my life. They will tell me I have become non-Muslim and I will face execution.

**Musd:** I would tell them to defect because I look at them as non-Muslims who have wrong beliefs about Islam.

## Encouraging defection

## Encouraging defection

**Moderator:** If you saw/heard this message-testing communication on a concept board, what would come to mind? Would this convince an AS fighter to defect? What should be improved?

**Fa:** I believe if Al-Shabaab heard the message, some members would get convinced due to Al-Shabaab's lack of knowledge about Islam. For message two, "Al-Shabaab are criminals trying to lure you," it can make them go crazy and continue with their ideology because the message cannot convince them against the teaching they received for years. What needs to be improved is the use of religious teachers to teach anti-radicalization.

**Musd:** I believe the messages are good in convincing Al-Shabaab, but can be improved by using Koranic teaching and verses.

**Fh:** We cannot use, "There is no future in Al-Shabaab," because they will say Al-Shabaab existed for over 10 years. Are you Allah in telling the future? To improve let us involve elders, youth and defectors in coming up with messages.

**Ms:** The message is clear and can convince combatants but I also want Koranic verses to be used.

**Moderator:** If various stakeholders wanted to convince AS fighters to defect, who would they trust most? Why so? Who else would they trust? Why so?

**Fa:** I believe religious leaders and clan elders can convince Al-Shabaab to defect.

**Musd:** I believe Al-Shabaab fighters can believe and trust elders and religious leaders.

**Fh:** I want the media to be involved in convincing the fighters, but they trust in religious leaders. In terms of communication channels, Al-Shabaab members have trust in Muslim scholars.

**Ms:** The fighters would trust religious leaders.

**All:** Al-Shabaab fighters will not trust the government leaders and the UN and AMISOM because they are their enemies that came to fight Islam.

**Moderator:** What would encourage more Al-Shabaab to defect? **Fa:** I believe using Muslim scholars and Koranic verses.

**Fh:** The government amnesty plan and job creation.

**Ms:** The government must be honest and transparent in sharing resources and using Islamic sharia, which can attract the members of Al-Shabaab.

**Musd:** Treating former defectors very well and giving support to their families can attract more defections.

**Moderator:** How should defectors be treated?

**Musd:** I want former defectors to be welcomed and accepted as Somalis and not terrorists.

## Encouraging defection

Fa: I want defectors to be scrutinized very well to ensure they are true to their defection and then welcomed and integrated into society.

Ms: I also want them to be welcomed.

Fh: I want the defectors to be given social, economic and moral support so that they forget their past life. If this is done it will attract more defectors.

**Moderator:** *Is there something else we can do to encourage more AS fighters to defect? What message would you like AS fighters to know about your new life?*

Fa: I want my husband and friends to know that I have not become a Non-Muslim and that I have rejoined my family. They should not see us as non-believers due to my change of ideology.

Musd: I want my husband to know that I am living more peacefully than when I was with him.

Ms: I want all Al-Shabaab members to know that I and the Baidoa people are Muslims and will not become non-Muslims due to their opposition.

Fh: I want Al-Shabaab to know that I am a mother who wants a good life for my children.

## Wrap - up



