Deradicalisation and Disengagement in Somalia

Evidence from a Rehabilitation Programme for Former Members of Al-Shabaab

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Executive Summary

THE SERENDI REHABILITATION centre in Mogadishu offers support to 'low-risk' former members of Al-Shabaab to prepare them for reintegration into the community, as part of the wider strategy of the Federal Government of Somalia and its international partners to counter the organisation. While certain challenges remain, between 2015 and 2018 Serendi was gradually converted into a functional centre in terms of its conditions and services offered. As such, the implementing team has now additionally been tasked with supporting both outreach (messaging campaigns to encourage additional disengagements from Al-Shabaab, as well as other related activities) and community reintegration of beneficiaries after leaving the centre.

This report presents detailed information about the Serendi programme, as well as wider empirical evidence drawn from interviews with 129 current and former residents on issues such as how and why they enlisted in Al-Shabaab in the first place, how and why they disengaged, and their experiences of reintegration post-exit. While closely related prison-based initiatives have become increasingly common over recent years in countries such as Indonesia, Nigeria, the Philippines, Saudi Arabia, Singapore and Yemen, Serendi-style semi-open residential rehabilitation centres for 'low-risk' former violent extremists remain comparatively rare. The authors of this report advocate for cautiously upscaling such efforts in Somalia, as well as exploring the possibilities to replicate this form of programming in other comparable environments.

Introduction

SOMALIA IS IN the grip of a long-term conflict in which Islamist insurgents Al-Shabaab and other violent non-state actors vie with forces from the Federal Government of Somalia (FGS) and the allied African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) for political and military power. The FGS and AMISOM recaptured considerable territory from Al-Shabaab between 2011 and 2015, including the capital city of Mogadishu, returning it to the jurisdiction of an internationally backed government. Yet, Al-Shabaab remains far from defeated, with the International Crisis Group noting in October 2017 that the organisation still 'controls tracts of rural south central Somalia and supply routes between towns'.[1] Indeed, Christopher Anzalone observes that the group has taken advantage of political turmoil involving the FGS, regional administrations and clan actors, and that today it is 'arguably in the strongest and most stable organizational and territorial state that it has been in since the group's "golden age" between 2009 and early 2011'.[2] Of course, Al-Shabaab also maintains a significant ability to produce violence, with the group being allegedly responsible for a truck bomb in central Mogadishu on 14 October 2017. This attack resulted in 587 fatalities, making it the most lethal terrorist incident in the history of Somalia.[3]

Of course, this represents only the most recent iteration of an ever-evolving conflict, concisely summarised by Vanda Felbab-Brown:

> Since 1991, after the collapse of the Siad Barre dictatorship, Somalia has been caught up in undulating phases of a civil war played out among various clans, larger entities aspiring to statehood, warlords, and Islamist groups amidst a profound meltdown of state institutions, including the national military and police forces. Despite extensive and repeated international efforts over three decades to stabilise the country and rebuild national state institutions capable of delivering order and public services, oftentimes the most effective stabilising actors have been Islamist groups. Mogadishu-based national governments sponsored by various and often competing actors of the international community have for the most part proved unstable, prone to incessant political and clan squabbles, and unable to deliver even a modicum of acceptable governance while facing potent military opponents.[4]

Recent FGS administrations, with the support of the international community, have attempted to undermine Al-Shabaab through initiatives encouraging disengagement. Particularly, the

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1. International Crisis Group, 'Managing the Disruptive Aftermath of Somalia's Worst Terror Attack', Crisis Group Africa Briefing No. 131, October 2017, p. 2.
2. Christopher Anzalone, 'Black Banners in Somalia: The State of Al-Shabaab's Territorial Insurgency and the Specter of the Islamic State', *CTC Sentinel* (Vol. 11, No. 3, March 2018), p. 12.
3. See, for instance, Anzalone, 'Black Banners in Somalia', p. 14; and International Crisis Group, 'Managing the Disruptive Aftermath of Somalia's Worst Terror Attack', pp. 1–2.
4. Vanda Felbab-Brown, *The Limits of Punishment: Transitional Justice and Violent Extremism: Somalia Case Study* (Institute for Integrated Transitions and United Nations University, 2018), p. 7.

National Programme for the Treatment and Handling of Disengaged Combatants (subsequently referred to as the National Programme) provides a mechanism for select individuals to benefit from rehabilitation and reintegration support.[5] This option is available only to those deemed to be 'low risk' by the FGS's National Intelligence and Security Agency (NISA) – that is, individuals who voluntarily disengaged from the organisation, who have denounced Al-Shabaab's ideology, and who are not seen to pose a future risk to public safety.[6] More broadly, the National Programme consists of the following five 'pillars':

1. **Outreach**: A variety of national and international agencies are involved in both online and offline communications campaigns that aim to entice disengagement from groups such as Al-Shabaab, by targeting group members either directly or via their families and community leaders. These encompass radio-based amnesty proclamations by high-profile political figures, internet campaigns, and leaflet drops, among other methods.
2. **Reception**: The second pillar specifies how Al-Shabaab members who disengage to national or international forces should be treated in a way that is consistent with their safety, security and fundamental rights. They should also be transferred as soon as practicable into NISA's custody.
3. **Screening**: The National Programme outlines the screening methodology NISA personnel should employ to categorise individuals by their levels of 'risk', as discussed above. This process determines whether individuals are channelled through military courts or are given the rehabilitation centre option.
4. **Rehabilitation**: The fourth component of the National Programme attempts to set common standards for services provided at rehabilitation centres in Somalia, including in relation to education, vocational training, psychosocial support, facilitating access to families, and so on (see Chapter III). There is a total of four official centres, in Mogadishu, Baidoa, Kismayo and Beledweyne.
5. **Reinsertion and Reintegration Support**: This fifth element is concerned with supporting individuals who have been through rehabilitation programmes to successfully reintegrate into communities. It involves a variety of measures, including facilitating access to livelihood opportunities, job placements and financial services, and relocation support in relevant cases (as discussed in Chapter IV).

This report focuses on the Serendi rehabilitation centre in Mogadishu, which was originally established in 2012, and since 2015 has been co-managed by the Ministry of Internal Security

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5. Official National Programme documents are not publicly available.

6. Of course, categorisations of this nature are highly problematic, with risk assessments ultimately based at least partly on subjective judgements. In practice, FGS has at times conflated 'low-risk' and 'low-level', placing emphasis on the rank of disengaged fighters, rather than only their assessed level of risk. While focusing on individuals who may be considered vulnerable to violent extremism in the first place, rather than those with a prior history of involvement, the issues relating to such assessments are expertly discussed in Kiran M Sarma, 'Risk Assessment and the Prevention of Radicalization from Nonviolence into Terrorism', *American Psychologist* (Vol. 72, No. 3, 2017), pp. 278–88.

and Adam Smith International's Rehabilitation Support Team (RST). While the latter provides considerable direction through technical support, guidance and capacity building, overall ownership of the programme formally resides with the former, as established through a Memorandum of Understanding between the FGS and the international donors. On a day-to-day basis the centre is run by a team of 57 national staff, which includes managers and administrators, social workers, teachers, vocational instructors, medical professionals, imams, and sports coaches.

In accordance with their 'low-risk' status, most Serendi residents were originally motivated to join Al-Shabaab by economic enticements, the pursuit of status, peer pressure, adventure-seeking, and so on (see Joining Al-Shabaab, Chapter II). Most previously held low-level command or rank-and-file positions in Al-Shabaab's military, police or support units. The services provided at the centre are tailored to individual needs and circumstances, and residency is ideally intended to last around six or seven months, up to a maximum of roughly one year. The facility is residential and semi-open, and thus beneficiaries are entitled to (and strongly encouraged to take) weekend leave. They may also elect to opt out of the programme, at which point they are transferred back to NISA.

At the time of writing, a total of 241 beneficiaries had completed their rehabilitation and departed the centre through the formal exit process established in 2015, with a further 62 currently in residence. Best practice dictates that genders should not be mixed at such facilities (as discussed in Conditions at Serendi, Chapter III), and at least since 2015 all beneficiaries have been male, one temporary exception aside. While many originate from Mogadishu and the surrounding Banadir region, the majority hail from further afield, from places such as Lower Shabelle, Middle Juba, Hiiraan and Galguduud. While closely related prison-based initiatives have become increasingly common over recent years in countries such as Indonesia, Nigeria, the Philippines, Saudi Arabia, Singapore and Yemen,[7] Serendi-style centres for low-risk former violent extremists remain relatively rare. Of course, such efforts must also be located within a wider body of related initiatives that additionally target high-value defectors, violent extremists in prison settings, women, vulnerable youth, and other groups.

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7.   See, for instance, Atta Barkindo and Shane Bryans, 'De-Radicalising Prisoners in Nigeria: Developing a Basic Prison Based De-Radicalisation Programme', *Journal of Deradicalization* (No. 7, 2016), pp. 1–25; Tore Bjørgo and John Horgan (eds), *Leaving Terrorism Behind: Individual and Collective Disengagement* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009); Daniel Koehler, *Understanding Deradicalization: Methods, Tools and Programs for Countering Violent Extremism* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017); John Horgan and Kurt Braddock, 'Rehabilitating the Terrorists?: Challenges in Assessing the Effectiveness of Deradicalization Programs', *Terrorism and Political Violence* (Vol. 22, No. 2, 2010), pp. 267–91; Peter R Neumann, 'Prisons and Terrorism: Radicalisation and De-Radicalisation in 15 Countries', International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence, 2010; Andrew Silke (ed.), *Prisons, Terrorism and Extremism: Critical Issues in Management, Radicalisation and Reform* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014).

Determining Programme Success

Beyond the immediate aim of rehabilitating residents, the FGS and its international partners firmly understand the ultimate strategic objective of the Serendi programme to be undermining Al-Shabaab through incentivising additional disengagements. However, in accordance with standard monitoring and evaluation principles, the success of the programme is specifically not determined at this elevated level (for instance, through simply counting new arrivals). This is because the extent to which the Serendi pathway encourages disengagements is also determined by factors far beyond the control of those responsible for the centre, including political developments in Somalia, battlefield momentum, the relationship between key state agencies involved in the reception pillar of the National Programme, and so on.[8] To further place this overarching objective in context, it is worth observing that prior to 2015 the conditions in the centre were widely perceived to be inadequate, to the extent that various residents reported that they actively discouraged their former comrades from leaving Al-Shabaab. For this reason, while the RST's scope widened in 2018 to also support outreach and post-exit reintegration (as discussed in detail in Chapter IV), in 2015 the team was initially mandated only to support the FGS in converting Serendi into a functional centre (see Chapter III).

Shifting the focus to programme successes in relation to changes in the beneficiaries themselves, a total of 241 beneficiaries had completed their rehabilitation and departed the centre through the formal exit process. These exits are contingent on the accomplishment of mutually agreed and personalised rehabilitation objectives relating to family connections, education, vocational training, security issues in the locations of reintegration, and so on (as discussed in greater detail below). The concept of deradicalisation (as discussed in Chapter I) also lends itself to assessment, although arguably more through snapshot studies than longitudinal research.[9] While there is considerable scepticism about the extent to which programmes with violent extremists genuinely drive positive attitudinal change,[10] the evidence presented in this report demonstrates that this can be achieved in at least certain cases (see Rehabilitation Programming, Chapter III). To place this finding in context, it is necessary to observe that the screening process was insufficiently robust prior to 2015, and as a consequence, that Serendi housed certain 'high-risk' individuals with ideological motivations during the initial period of RST co-management. Evidence of positive attitudinal change is also presented in relation to improved

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8.   This 'attribution problem' is discussed, for example, in James Khalil and Martine Zeuthen, 'Countering Violent Extremism and Risk Reduction: A Guide to Programme Design and Evaluation', *Whitehall Report,* 2-16, June 2016, pp. 31–32.

9.   Under ideal circumstances it would be possible to conduct longitudinal research to track changes in the attitudes of each resident over time. While the RST will continue to assess the feasibility of such research, this option has been avoided to date as newly arrived residents may provide unreliable information due to uncertainty about their new environment, and/or long-term residents may adapt their replies as they learn to provide the 'correct answers', either of which would invalidate trend analysis.

10.   See, for instance, Andrew Silke, 'Disengagement or Deradicalization: A Look at Prison Programs for Jailed Terrorists', *CTC Sentinel* (Vol. 4, No. 1, 2011), pp. 18–21.

opinions of Somali political leaders, the notion of democracy, and so on (see Rehabilitation Programming, Chapter III).

In line with the recent broadening of the RST mandate to cover support for reintegration, the team is currently establishing indicators and associated data systems through which to monitor and evaluate this post-exit process in the future. Indeed, while debates about programme objectives in this field most often revolve around the relative importance of deradicalisation versus disengagement, the authors of this report strongly argue that success should also be determined in relation to the concept of reintegration.[11] Specific indicators are likely to include, for instance:

- Percentage of beneficiaries claiming to earn an income sufficient to cover their basic needs and (where applicable) that of their dependents 12 months after exiting Serendi.
- Percentage of beneficiaries claiming to have been accepted by their family and clan 12 months after exiting Serendi.

Box 1: Problems with Recidivism Rates as an Indicator

The RST is unaware of any beneficiaries who have completed the rehabilitation process at Serendi who have subsequently returned to Al-Shabaab. However, while many commentators pinpoint recidivism rates as an important indicator of success for programmes with violent extremists, the authors of this report argue that this metric is highly problematic, at least in the case of Serendi.

More precisely, while high rates of return to violent extremism may demonstrate programme failure, low rates do not necessarily indicate success. First, this is because the rate would be expected to be minimal irrespective of the services offered at Serendi as the centre is designed for 'low-risk' individuals. Second, recidivism data is highly unreliable in locations such as Somalia, with the prospect of false negatives being particularly pronounced. In other words, the relevant security agencies may simply be unaware of former Serendi residents having returned to Al-Shabaab. Finally, recidivism rates would also be misleadingly deflated in cases where former residents return to violence only after the relevant reporting periods.

Sources: Various other commentators also highlight concerns about the use of recidivism rates as an indicator, see, for example, Barkindo and Bryans, 'De-Radicalising Prisoners in Nigeria', pp. 19–20; Marisa Porges, 'Saudi Arabia's "Soft" Approach of Terrorist Prisoners', in Silke (ed.), Prisons, Terrorism and Extremism*, p. 178; Michael Williams and Steven Kleinman, 'A Utilization-Focused Guide for Conducting Terrorism Risk Reduction Program Evaluations',* Behavioral Sciences of Terrorism and Political Aggression *(Vol. 6, No. 2, 2014), p. 3.*

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11. This argument is taken further still by Sarah Marsden, *Reintegrating Extremists: Deradicalisation and Desistance* (Lancaster: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), p. 3.

With this context in mind, the purposes of this report are as follows:

- To develop a conceptual framework for this comparatively novel form of rehabilitation programming, as well as other disengagement/deradicalisation initiatives more broadly.
- To present detailed information about the Serendi programme to a broader audience.
- To provide wider empirical evidence about Al-Shabaab and the processes of disengagement and reintegration, drawing from face-to-face interviews with 129 current and former residents (methodological details are provided in Annex A).

Following on from this Introduction, Chapter I outlines the key concepts of disengagement and deradicalisation. Chapters II, III and IV sequentially focus on the processes of joining and disengaging from Al-Shabaab, rehabilitation at Serendi, and post-exit reintegration. Without overlooking the political and security challenges associated with Serendi-style initiatives, Conclusions and the Way Forward advocates for both the cautious upscaling of such efforts in Somalia, as part of a broader commitment to the National Programme, and the possibility of replicating this form of programming in other comparable environments.

Before proceeding it is necessary to briefly observe that the five co-authors of this report have all held positions in the RST for substantial periods since 2015, with two (James Khalil and Peter Olowo) remaining in post at the time of writing. While the RST's influence over the outreach, reception, screening and reintegration pillars of the National Programme has been limited to date, the findings presented that relate to rehabilitation directly reflect on the efforts of the team. Thus, the authors have included supporting statements as relevant from the independent third-party monitoring agency for Serendi (see Chapter III), as well as an independent study conducted by Vanda Felbab-Brown for the United Nations University and the Institute for Integrated Transitions. The international donors have supported and encouraged the publication of this report as they recognise the successes of the programme and wish to spread knowledge of this initiative to a wider audience.

I. Key Concepts

WHILE CERTAIN COMMENTATORS argue that the Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) framework encompasses Serendi-style programmes,[12] the stance adopted by the authors of this report is that such programmes 'overstretch' the concept. As stated in the UN DDR Resource Centre's 'Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards':

> DDR programmes are unlikely to succeed without the firm commitment of the political elites within and outside State structures, commanders of all the armed elements involved, middle-level commanders, veterans, host communities and civil society organizations in the country in question. At the highest level, this commitment is often demonstrated by the signing of a ceasefire or peace agreement in which the parties undertake to disarm, demobilize and reintegrate their forces.[13]

While subsequent 'generations' of DDR, as well as the concept of 'non-traditional DDR', admittedly broadened the original framework to be applicable across a greater range of contexts,[14] these political and legal preconditions are certainly unmet in the case of present-day Somalia. Perhaps more importantly, the authors argue against the applicability of DDR as the Serendi team is in no way involved in either disarmament or demobilisation, and only began supporting reintegration in 2018. As such, this report instead relies primarily on the alternative concepts of disengagement and deradicalisation, as already applied widely in relation to similar prison-based programmes.

Prior to discussing these terms, however, it is first necessary to briefly consider the substantial disjuncture between attitudes and behaviours in relation to violent extremism, as presented through the Attitudes–Behaviours Corrective (ABC) model in Figure 1.[15] On the one hand, many individuals who support this violence are not directly involved in its production (see Individual E in Figure 1). For instance, the manpower estimates for the Taliban and other such organisations

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12. See, for instance, Robert Muggah and Chris O'Donnell, 'Next Generation Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration', *Stability: International Journal of Security and Development* (Vol. 4, No. 1, 2015), pp. 1–12.

13. UN Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (UNDDR), 'Post-Conflict Stabilization, Peacebuilding and Recovery Frameworks', in UN, 'Integrated Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration Standards', 2006, p. 2, <http://unddr.org/uploads/documents/IDDRS%202.2%20 Post-conflict%20Stabilization%20and%20Peace-building.pdf>, accessed 13 June 2018.

14. United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations, 'Second Generation Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) Practices in Peace Operations: A Contribution to the New Horizon Discussion on Challenges and Opportunities for UN Peacekeeping', 2010.

15. The wider ABC model is outlined in James Khalil, John Horgan and Martine Zeuthen, 'The Attitudes–Behaviours Corrective (ABC) Model of Violent Extremism', forthcoming.

in Afghanistan represent a minute fraction of the population sympathetic to these groups.[16] On the other hand, while individuals supportive of this violence are more likely to be involved in its production *ceteris paribus,* many who do contribute are unsupportive of/indifferent to its ostensible objectives. Instead, they are often primarily motivated by economic incentives, status, or a sense of belonging, adventure, revenge, fear, and so on (Individuals A, B and C in Figure 1). Many commentators have highlighted this key disconnect, including high-profile experts such as Randy Borum, John Horgan, Max Taylor, and Marc Sageman,[17] but progress with a collective understanding of this violence continues to stall, partly because research continues to conflate attitudes and behaviours almost by default.

With this substantial disconnect in mind, the concept of disengagement is widely interpreted in behavioural terms, often specifically in relation to an individual exiting an organisation (as shown by a movement down the y-axis in Figure 2). For instance, regarding the case of Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (ETA, the Basque nationalist and separatist organisation), Fernando Reinares states that 'disengagement is considered to have occurred when an individual ceased belonging to the terrorist organization and no longer felt subject to the discipline imposed on militants'.[18] However, this understanding proves to be problematic in certain contexts as the notion of 'belonging to' a specific organisation can be ambiguous, particularly in cases where the group in question adopts no formal enlistment procedures.

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16.   Taliban manpower estimates are available from Antonio Giustozzi, *Koran, Kalashnikov and Laptop: The Neo-Taliban Insurgency in Afghanistan 2002-7* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2008), pp. 33–37. Survey results revealing sympathies for such groups from approximately the same period are available from Mohammad Osman Tariq, Najla Ayoubi and Fazel Rabi Haqbeen, 'Afghanistan in 2011: A Survey of the Afghan People', Asia Foundation, 2011, pp. 48–52, <http://asiafoundation.org/resources/pdfs/TAF2011AGSurvey.pdf>, accessed 13 June 2017.

17.   See, for instance, Randy Borum, 'Radicalization into Violent Extremism I: A Review of Social Science Theories', *Journal of Strategic Security* (Vol. 4. No. 4, 2011), p. 9; John Horgan and Max Taylor, 'Disengagement, De-Radicalization and the Arc of Terrorism: Future Directions for Research', in Rik Coolsaet (ed.), *Jihadi Terrorism and the Radicalisation Challenge: European and American Experiences* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), p. 174; Marc Sageman, *Misunderstanding Terrorism* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017), p. 90.

18.   Fernando Reinares, 'Exit from Terrorism: A Qualitative Empirical Study on Disengagement and Deradicalization Among Members of ETA', *Terrorism and Political Violence* (Vol. 23, No. 5, 2011), p. 781.

Figure 1: The Attitudes–Behaviours Corrective (ABC) Model
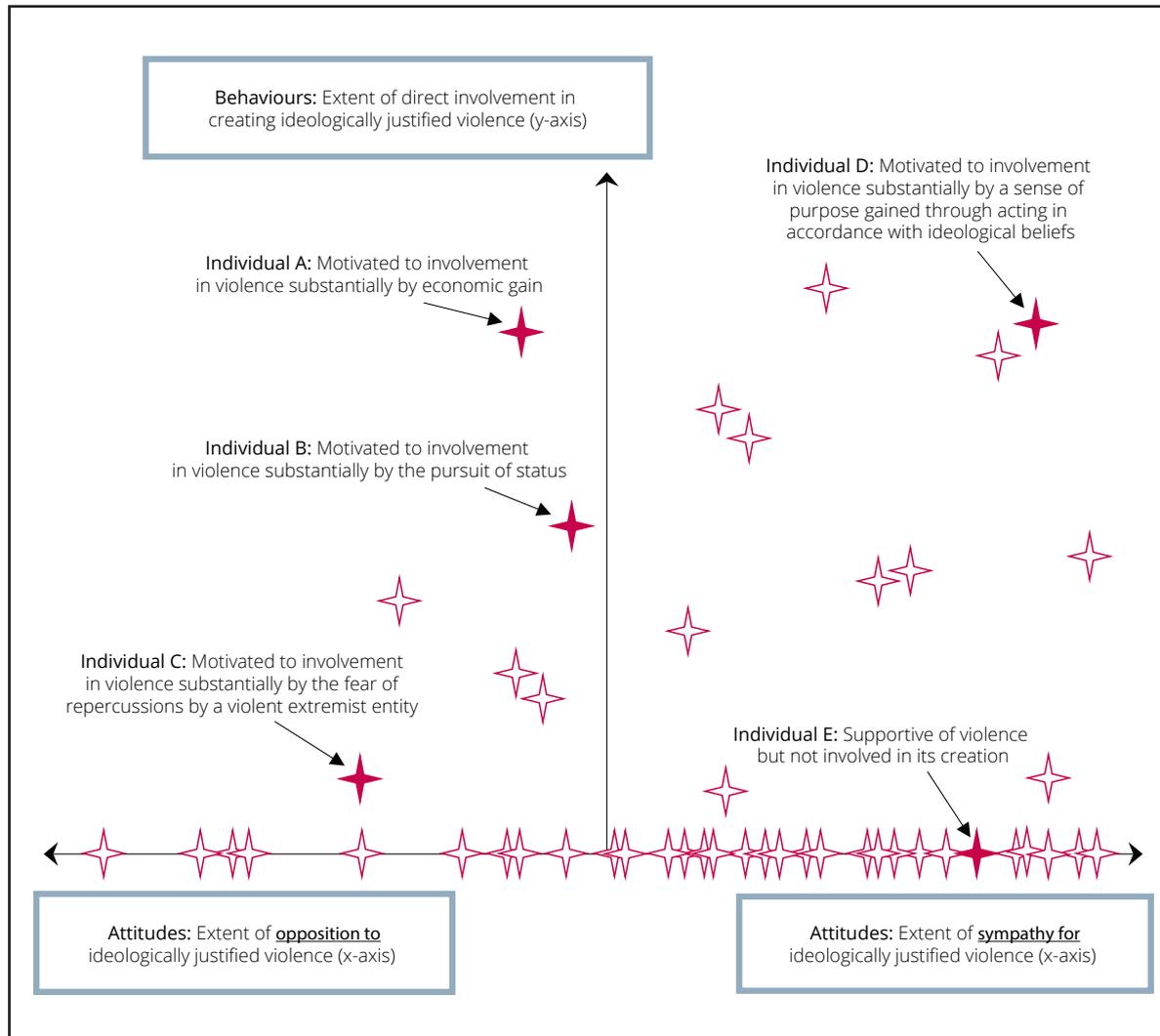
Source: Adapted from James Khalil, 'Radical Beliefs and Violent Actions are not Synonymous: How to Place the Key Disjuncture Between Attitudes and Behaviors at the Heart of Our Research into Political Violence', Studies in Conflict and Terrorism *(Vol. 37, No. 2, 2014), p. 204.*

Perhaps with this in mind, another common approach is to more specifically interpret disengagement in terms of ceasing involvement in the creation of violence. For instance, Mary Beth Altier, Christian Thoroughgood and John Horgan state simply that 'we define disengagement as the process of ceasing terrorist activity'.[19] Disengagement is also often characterised as

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19. Mary Beth Altier, Christian N Thoroughgood and John G Horgan, 'Turning Away from Terrorism: Lessons from Psychology, Sociology, and Criminology', *Journal of Peace Research* (Vol. 51, No. 5, 2014), p. 648.

a process that tends to occur over a substantial period, rather than being a specific event.[20] However, this was generally not the case with many Serendi residents who reported that their disengagement occurred suddenly when they were presented with an opportunity to escape from Al-Shabaab (see Chapter II).

By contrast, most commentators apply the term 'deradicalisation' to mean changes in attitudes only (in other words, a leftward movement in Figure 2).[21] For instance, Bart Schuurman and Edwin Bakker maintain that:

> In contrast to disengagement, deradicalization can be seen as a social and psychological process that results in attitudinal change, effectively reducing an individual's commitment to the belief that personal involvement in violence is necessary and justified. Whereas disengagement is primarily a process of *behavioral* change, deradicalization seeks *cognitive* adaptations.[22]

However, this by no means represents a consensus understanding, with other commentators instead applying the concept of deradicalisation to refer to changes at both the cognitive and behavioural levels.[23] The authors of this report reject this latter interpretation on the basis that greater analytical clarity can be gained through intentionally decoupling attitudinal and behavioural change into separate concepts. More specifically, this is because behavioural change often occurs without attitudinal change (as represented by Individual Z in Figure 2), and vice versa (Individual X). For instance, the former may transpire if individuals are captured, if they 'burn out', or if they elect to dedicate more time to their families.[24] Conversely, deradicalisation occurs without disengagement, for example, in cases where individuals are prevented from exiting by the threat of retaliation by the violent extremist group in question. This phenomenon was regularly reported by Serendi residents interviewed by the RST, who highlighted Al-Shabaab's willingness to apply violence in such cases (see Chapter II).

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20. See, for instance, Bart Schuurman and Edwin Bakker, 'Reintegrating Jihadist Extremists: Evaluating a Dutch Initiative, 2013–2014', *Behavioral Sciences of Terrorism and Political Aggression* (Vol. 8, No. 1, 2015), p. 3.

21. See, for instance, Shane Bryans, 'Handbook on the Management of Violent Extremist Prisoners and the Prevention of Radicalization to Violence in Prisons', United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2016, p. 141; Marsden, *Reintegrating Extremists,* p. 8.

22. Schuurman and Bakker, 'Reintegrating Jihadist Extremists', p. 3. Emphasis in original.

23. See, for instance, Hamed El-Said, *New Approaches to Countering Terrorism: Designing and Evaluating Counter Radicalization and De-Radicalization Programs* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), p. 10; Neil Ferguson, 'Disengagement from Terrorism: A Northern Irish Experience', *Journal for Deradicalization* (Vol. 6, No. 1, 2016), p. 2.

24. See, for instance, Eamon Collins, *Killing Rage* (London: Granta, 1997), p. 179.

Figure 2: Deradicalisation and Disengagement Pathways
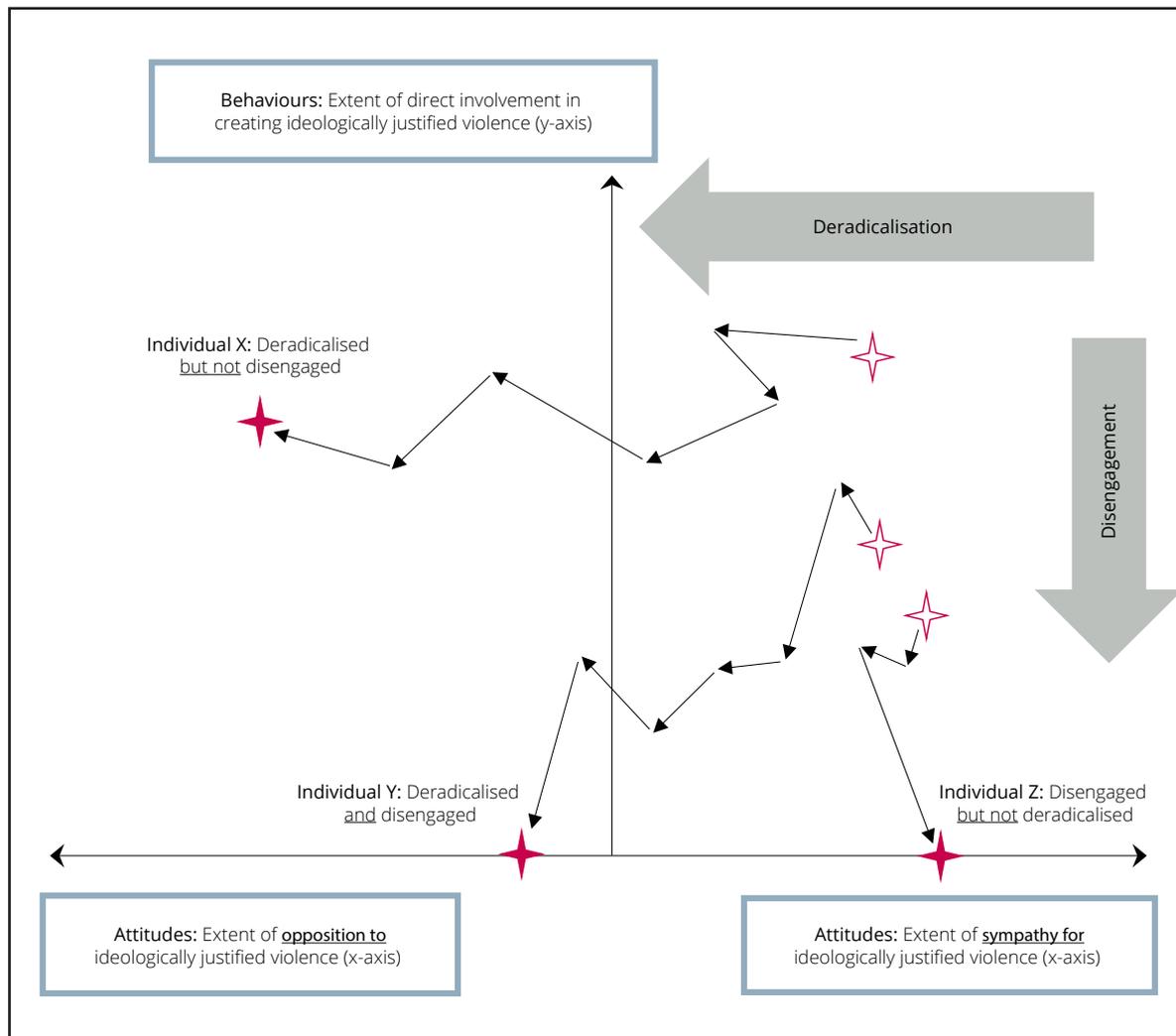
Source: The authors, 2017.

The broader point is that changes in attitudes are neither necessary nor sufficient conditions for changes in behaviours. On this basis, various prominent commentators suggest that programming should prioritise disengagement over deradicalisation, with the former considered to be the ultimate objective. This stance is typified by Andrew Silke's claim that:

In most of the deradicalization programs focused on militant jihadists, a key role is assigned to conversations, dialogue and interaction with moderate Muslims. Yet how realistic is it to expect individuals set in their ways to switch their support based on conversations with moderate imams? … Which course of action is better? Disengagement or deradicalization? Is the priority to change people's

behavior or is it to change their psychology? In the end, acts of violence require behavior, and changing this behavior should be the number one focus.[25]

Similarly, the 'Handbook on the Management of Violent Extremist Prisoners and the Prevention of Radicalization to Violence in Prison', published by the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), argues that:

Perhaps most important is defining from the outset whether the goal of the intervention is to change the views, values and attitudes (deradicalization) or the behaviour of the violent extremist prisoner (disengagement from violence). Interventions that aim for the latter are likely to be more successful in achieving their goals. They do not attempt to change a prisoner's radical or extremist beliefs and views but instead seek to get a prisoner [to] renounce the use of violence to achieve their objectives.[26]

Of course, the case for privileging efforts to influence behaviours is problematic, with a key counter-argument being that sustained disengagement may be more likely if driven by attitudinal change. Furthermore, with such programming still effectively in a phase of trial and error, empirical evidence demonstrating the effects of basic education provisions, vocational training, civic and peace education, psychosocial support, and other specific initiatives remains inadequate. As such, readers should disregard the UNODC claim about which forms of programming 'are likely to be more successful',[27] pending reliable evidence.

The above arguments also rest on the flawed premise that it is necessary to choose between disengagement and deradicalisation measures. The authors of this report argue that programmes should incorporate initiatives aiming to achieve both by default, and that this should be the case even for centres such as Serendi, where most residents did not become involved in violent extremism on ideological grounds (see Chapter II). As detailed below, the Serendi team delivers disengagement programming through basic education, vocational training, psychosocial support, family reconnection activities, and so on, and focuses on deradicalisation through civic, political and religious education and 'orientation sessions' provided by the centre imams (see Chapter III).

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25.   Silke, 'Disengagement or Deradicalization', p. 20.

26.   Bryans, 'Handbook on the Management of Violent Extremist Prisoners and the Prevention of Radicalization to Violence in Prisons', p. 71.

27.   *Ibid.*

II. Joining and Disengaging from Al-Shabaab

MOVING ON FROM the key concepts presented earlier, this chapter primarily draws from interviews with 27 Serendi residents through a snapshot study conducted in November 2015, focusing on how and why they joined Al-Shabaab, and how and why they disengaged. This research was conducted to help ensure that the provisions in Serendi address the key drivers of enlistment and reinforce those that contribute to disengagement. This chapter also presents findings from an additional study undertaken with 38 residents in November 2017 that explored access to media while with Al-Shabaab, with the aim of informing outreach initiatives to encourage disengagements (see Annex A for the methodology of both studies).

While the authors have exercised due caution in presenting the findings in this chapter, readers should observe that research on such sensitive themes is problematic for multiple reasons (again, see Annex A). It should also specifically be noted that Serendi residents are not representative of the wider Al-Shabaab membership, at the very least as they disengaged of their own free will.

Joining Al-Shabaab

The research conducted in November 2015 into how and why individuals joined Al-Shabaab drew on the three-way distinction between structural motivators, individual incentives and enabling factors, as outlined in James Khalil and Martine Zeuthen's RUSI report, 'Countering Violent Extremism and Risk Reduction'.[28] Factors within the first category include structural conditions such as state repression, corruption, inequality, relative deprivation, discrimination and longstanding hostilities between identity groups. Somewhat surprisingly, such drivers were rarely mentioned by the Serendi respondents when asked an open question about why they became involved with Al-Shabaab. It was also noteworthy that of the 20 interviewees asked if they joined the organisation in the belief that it could 'provide a better society', only three replied in the affirmative, with 11 firmly stating that they did not enlist with such ideals in mind. While beyond the scope of this report, there is in any case a strong theoretical argument that while grievances associated with such structural conditions may partly explain support for violence (why individuals move towards the right along the x-axis of Figure 1), they provide at best only indirect explanatory power as to why individuals become personally involved in its creation (why they move up along the y-axis of Figure 1).[29] Of course, such patterns are undoubtedly partly explained by the fact that the respondents were deemed to be 'low risk' as

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28. Khalil and Zeuthen, 'Countering Violent Extremism and Risk Reduction', pp. 7–13.

29. See, for instance, Khalil, 'Radical Beliefs and Violent Actions are not Synonymous'; James Khalil, 'A Guide to Interviewing Terrorists and Violent Extremists', *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* (24 October 2017), doi: 10.1080/1057610X.2017.1385182

a condition of their residency at Serendi. The unrepresentative nature of the sample may also help explain why only three interviewees claimed to have been motivated to join Al-Shabaab by a sense of religious obligation.

Box 2: The Inadequacy of Efforts to Categorise Violent Extremists by Their Motivations

Numerous attempts have been made to classify violent extremists according to their motives for involvement in violence. For instance, regarding travellers to Iraq and Syria, Peter Neumann categorises individuals as: (a) those with a desire to 'defend' the Sunni population; (b) 'seekers' of 'identity, community, power and a feeling of masculinity'; and (c) 'hangers-on' with a 'desire to maintain an emotional connection with their leaders and the other members of [their] group'. Similarly, John Venhaus established a four-way distinction among 'foreign fighters' between seekers of revenge, status, identity, and thrill.

In reality, however, many or most individuals are driven to violence by a variety of factors simultaneously, and do not fit conveniently into such neat boxes. While a number of these commentators do specify that their categorisation systems are intended to be no more than 'ideal type' heuristic devices, it is necessary for the community of experts to move beyond such classifications as they cause confusion through oversimplifying reality.

Sources: Peter R Neumann, Radicalized: New Jihadists and the Threat to the West *(London: I B Tauris & Co., 2016), pp. 90–97; John Venhaus, 'Why Youth Join al-Qaeda', United States Institute for Peace, 2010, pp. 8–11.*

In contrast, many respondents reported being substantially motivated by a variety of individual incentives. This second category of drivers is comprised of economic, security-related and psychosocial enticements that are contingent on personal contributions to the production of violence. Approximately half the sample conceded that they were driven to join Al-Shabaab in part by the promise of a salary, with several adding that this decision was taken with limited alternative livelihood prospects in mind (in other words, relating to the structural motivator of unemployment). Roughly one-third of the sample claimed that their recruitment was partly driven by actual or implied Al-Shabaab threats, with various others conceding that they knew of cases where this was applicable. For instance, a former member of the military wing claimed that he was essentially abducted and taken to various holding locations before being transferred to a training camp with 10 others. Similarly, an Al-Shabaab cook maintained that he had been coerced into involvement after the organisation captured his town and alleged that he had been spying on them. Of course, it should not be overlooked that respondents may potentially overstate the extent to which they were coerced into involvement, aiming to reduce their culpability.[30] By contrast, few respondents claimed that they enlisted to seek protection from

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30.   See Khalil, 'A Guide to Interviewing Terrorists and Violent Extremists', p. 7.

Al-Shabaab, and the only individual who elaborated in any detail on this driver claimed that this occurs in areas where clan-based conflict is particularly common.

Psychosocial incentives are also widely acknowledged to be key drivers,[31] as was the case for many in the Serendi sample. For instance, slightly less than half of the interviewees claimed to have been motivated by status and power, including a former member of the military wing who maintained that he joined Al-Shabaab largely because the group promised to teach him to drive, and that this would make him 'a big man'. Several others asserted that they joined to enhance their status with women, adding that Al-Shabaab helped to arrange marriages. Roughly half of the respondents claimed that adventure-seeking also substantially influenced their decision to enlist, for instance, with a former Al-Shabaab foot soldier elaborating that a key motive was the chance to visit new places. Slightly less than half also highlighted the desire to gain revenge through Al-Shabaab, including against members of other clans, local warlords, and the Mogadishu police (with the latter relating closely to the structural motivator of state repression). Perhaps most notably, four of these interviewees claimed that they joined to gain vengeance against other members of Al-Shabaab who had previously caused physical or psychological harm to them or their families. In other words, they felt that their own membership would grant them greater ability to retaliate against others within the group. This included one respondent who claimed to have joined because his mother was beaten by an Al-Shabaab member, and who disengaged only after finding the opportunity to shoot this individual in the leg in battle.

The third category of enabling factors is distinguished from the previous two as it includes drivers that facilitate violence, rather than motivate it – corresponding largely to questions about how individuals enlist in Al-Shabaab, rather than why. While each story is of course unique, certain broad patterns may be identified. For instance, the initial point of contact with Al-Shabaab was generally someone from existing familial or friendship networks. This was reportedly the case with a former member of the Al-Shabaab military who claimed that many young people in his area enlisted, and that after some time one of these individuals persuaded him to join. This pattern was not universal, however, as a former volunteer who performed night patrol duties maintained that he initially approached the local Al-Shabaab chairman and was contacted about the role five days later.

Either way, connections to the organisation were often facilitated by Al-Shabaab being the de facto governing authority in many of the home communities of the respondents. It was also noteworthy that only one individual highlighted that religious institutions had been involved in the recruitment process, claiming that the local mosque was the main mobilisation centre in his region of origin. However, he also added that its messaging was principally comprised of nationalist rhetoric encouraging locals to fight against Ethiopian forces in Somalia, rather than religious-based justifications for violence.

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31.   For instance, regarding the cases of Afghanistan, Northern Ireland and Somalia, see Khalil and Zeuthen, 'Countering Violent Extremism and Risk Reduction', pp. 12–13.

Disengaging from Al-Shabaab

The three-way distinction between structural motivators, individual incentives and enabling factors also provides a useful framework through which to comprehend the process of disengagement. In this case, structural motivators often relate to the non-state entity in question as this represents the context in which members find themselves. For instance, the respondents were asked whether they were motivated to leave Al-Shabaab by disillusionment with its ideology, objectives and strategy.[32] Various individuals found it difficult to disentangle these three concepts, and their answers hinted that they had not regularly considered these somewhat abstract ideas. Yet, the responses also revealed that disengagements were often motivated in part by the repulsion felt towards abuses perpetrated by Al-Shabaab, particularly attacks against civilians. Structural motivators in this context may also relate to changes in the state apparatus or wider conflict environment. Indeed, there was evidence from the November 2017 study that at least a few disengagements were driven partly by optimism still then associated with the administration of President Mohamed Abdullahi 'Farmajo' Mohamed, who assumed office in February 2017.

The category of individual incentives is again interpreted as referring to economic, security-related and psychosocial enticements that are contingent on specific actions – in this case disengagement. Economic motives were again prominent, with slightly over half of the respondents claiming that they were driven to leave Al-Shabaab partly because their income was inadequate. Put simply, their salaries often did not meet the expectations held at the point of enlistment, and these respondents felt that they could earn more outside the group.[33] However, a sense of familial obligation was perhaps the most important driver of disengagement, with a substantial majority of the respondents highlighting its relevance. In specific cases this manifested as families threatening to disown respondents, or alternatively promising to identify wives for them if they disengaged. A substantial number of respondents also highlighted a desire for improved living conditions. Many former members of the military wing claimed that they slept on plastic sheets while in the bush, with some formerly in the police unit asserting that they slept at their checkpoints (although others resided at home). It was also regularly maintained that the food provided by Al-Shabaab was of poor quality, with some respondents adding that they were only offered two meals per day.

A desire to avoid further danger also featured prominently in the narratives of many of the respondents interviewed in November 2015. Such threats related not only to risks on the

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32. See, for example, Altier, Thoroughgood and Horgan, 'Turning Away from Terrorism', p. 648; Reinares, 'Exit from Terrorism', pp. 788–95.

33. It was commonly claimed that married members of the Al-Shabaab police and military received $50 per month (in some cases less), while unmarried members received token amounts or only payments-in-kind. This figure increased substantially for those in high-value roles, and it was asserted that the rates for commanders, intelligence operatives, IED makers, logisticians and journalists ranged from $200 to $300 per month. However, it was also maintained that these salaries were inconsistently paid at all levels.

battlefield, but also to punishments imparted for infringing Al-Shabaab rules. Worthy of specific note is a former Al-Shabaab IED-maker who reported that several of his colleagues died in the process of constructing homemade explosives due to inadequate training on rapidly evolving techniques. Also under the category of individual incentives, most respondents asserted that a sense of guilt was a key driver of their disengagement. For instance, a former member of the police unit highlighted his remorse over a case in which Al-Shabaab severed the hand of a child who stole from a baker, after the latter had already agreed a settlement with the family. While most respondents did not observe specific 'tipping points', there were certain exceptions, including a former IED-maker whose device accidentally killed adults, a child, and approximately 20 cattle, rather than the intended Kenyan AMISOM soldiers. More than two-thirds of the respondents claimed that amnesty proclamations by successive Somali presidents substantially motivated their decision to exit (see Box 3).

> **Box 3:** Amnesty Proclamations
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> Current efforts to rehabilitate voluntarily disengaged members of Al-Shabaab within the National Programme framework rest upon the amnesty proclaimed by then newly sworn-in President Mohamed in April 2017, the most recent of a string of such appeals announced by the FGS. Yet, such declarations are unclear in terms of scope, and at the time of writing have only been verbally communicated by the Office of the President, rather than precisely defined within Somali policy and legal frameworks.
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> The informal nature of these amnesty proclamations is problematic, at the very least as a lack of precise details creates difficulties in communicating both the eligibility criteria and the entitlements associated with this process to potential defectors, security-force actors, and other relevant stakeholders. Indeed, expectation management has been a challenge at Serendi for this precise reason, with certain beneficiaries assuming they would be entitled to continued education and employment post-exit. At the time of writing, RST advisors are supporting the FGS in advocating for and drafting an amnesty policy and legal framework.
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> *Source: The authors, 2018.*

Shifting attention to enabling factors, a key determinant of disengagement was the level of influence or control held by Al-Shabaab over specific territories.[34] Perhaps unsurprisingly, many individuals reported that it took them many months or even years to find an opportunity to disengage, in the knowledge that this action was potentially punishable by death (these cases often roughly correspond to Individual X in Figure 2). Indeed, a former member of the Al-Shabaab military interviewed in November 2015 claimed to have reported his desire to leave to a commander, and to have been consequently blindfolded and beaten. On this basis,

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34.   This line of argument is associated closely with Stathis Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 111–45.

Al-Shabaab's loss of territory between 2011 and 2015 provided a major enabling factor for disengagement. For instance, a former Al-Shabaab cook was able to leave the organisation after state forces retook his community, although other members of the group reportedly shot him in the leg after he refused to participate in the battle. Similarly, a former member of the Al-Shabaab police asserted that the primary reason he disengaged was that his home location was recaptured by forces loyal to the state, and he conceded that he may still otherwise be active within Al-Shabaab.

While familial obligations provide a key individual incentive, family members themselves also often act as important enabling factors. For instance, one Serendi resident reported that his parents transported him on a one-way journey away from Al-Shabaab territory to receive treatment for a serious battle injury. The organisation was initially reluctant to authorise his departure, but eventually recognised his need for adequate care, and that he was in any case incapacitated. A former member of the Al-Shabaab police similarly claimed that his mother essentially berated his superiors over the course of several days until they granted his release. However, many others simply fled without familial assistance, including a former member of the military wing who walked for three days with the organisation in immediate pursuit before locating government forces to which he could surrender. An individual consulted in November 2017 also reported disengaging while on a reconnaissance mission with a comrade. He added that he attempted to encourage this comrade to also leave the group, but that this effort was unsuccessful, and that he thus saw no option other than to kill the comrade to give himself adequate time to escape before Al-Shabaab noticed his absence.

A final enabling factor worthy of specific attention is that of media and communications, as specifically investigated in November 2017. The majority of the 38 Serendi residents interviewed about this subject agreed that their main information and communication channels while with Al-Shabaab were radio and mobile phones. It is through these channels that many were driven to exit the organisation, for instance, having been encouraged by their families or having heard the amnesty proclamations. By contrast, there was generally little access to the internet and television (including for most members fortunate enough to be granted holiday periods), and no respondents reported being influenced to disengage by leaflet campaigns. In any case, access to all such sources varied substantially between units and locations. For instance, Al-Shabaab regulations regarding communications tended to be stricter in insecure regions, with many respondents in such locations reporting that they were only permitted to access their phones on Thursdays and Fridays. Pre-battle restrictions were also widely enforced on phone use, and as would be expected the members were not allowed to discuss operational details.

III. Rehabilitation at Serendi

AS DISCUSSED IN the previous chapter, research conducted in 2015 suggests that Serendi residents joined Al-Shabaab for a variety of reasons, with the promise of a salary, status, adventure and revenge being prominent motives. By contrast, they tended to disengage from the organisation because their salaries were often found to be inadequate, due to familial obligations, because the living conditions were poor, and because they no longer wanted to risk their own lives. This chapter focuses sequentially on the conditions in Serendi and the rehabilitation services provided in the centre, with these provisions intentionally tailored to reinforce many of the above drivers. To reiterate an earlier point, the Serendi option is available only to those deemed to be 'low risk' by NISA – that is, individuals who voluntarily disengaged from the organisation, who have denounced Al-Shabaab's ideology, and who are not seen to pose a future risk to public safety (see the Introduction). Depending on individual needs and circumstances, residency is ideally intended to last around six or seven months, up to a maximum of roughly one year.

The information presented below on satisfaction rates with specific elements of the programme comes from exit interviews conducted with all beneficiaries at the point of their departure from Serendi, and the data about attitudinal change is drawn from interviews conducted with 37 residents in March 2017 (see Annex A about both sources). While the authors have exercised due caution in presenting the findings, it is important to remember that research on such sensitive themes is problematic for multiple reasons (see Annex A). As previously observed, the findings presented in this chapter directly reflect on the efforts of the RST, and for this reason the authors have included supporting statements where relevant from the independent third-party monitoring agency for Serendi, as well as an independent study conducted by Felbab-Brown for the United Nations University and the Institute for Integrated Transitions.

Conditions at Serendi

An outcome statement adopted by the RST across 2016 and 2017 states: 'The centre is managed in accordance with the rights of beneficiaries'.[35] The team has consistently considered this principle not only to be a matter of ethical and legal obligation, but also a key enabling factor for rehabilitation. In other words, the RST recognises that a failure to manage Serendi in accordance

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35. Rehabilitation Support Team, 'Monitoring and Evaluation Framework FY2016-17', unpublished, 2016, p. 2. On monitoring and evaluation terminology such as 'outcomes' and 'outputs', see OECD, *Glossary of Key Terms in Evaluation and Results Based Management* (Paris: OECD Publications, 2002).

with residents' rights would undermine the rehabilitation process.[36] Underneath this outcome statement appeared the following four outputs:

- 'Adequate living conditions are provided for beneficiaries offering an environment consistent with their rights'.
- 'Beneficiaries deemed to be unsuitable for the centre (for instance, minors, those not formerly involved with Al-Shabaab, individuals who are disruptive to the safety and functioning of the centres, females, foreign nationals, and those with severe mental or physical health issues) are released or transferred to more suitable facilities as appropriate'.
- 'Beneficiaries understand their rights and are satisfied with the centre complaints mechanisms'.
- 'Beneficiaries are guaranteed the right to weekend leave and an impartial exit process in accordance with centre rules and procedures'.[37]

The first of these outputs includes ensuring adequate security, nutrition, healthcare and sanitation, and physical facilities, with major upgrades beginning in 2016. For instance, having previously been furnished with only basic mattresses, sheets and mosquito nets, the dormitories were equipped with new bunk beds and lockable personal storage boxes. The vocational skills workshops also underwent comprehensive renovations, and a barbershop was constructed to establish an additional livelihood option. The residents additionally benefited from a refurbished medical centre, a new canteen, kitchen block, games and television room, and football and basketball courts. As such, the agency responsible for third-party monitoring of Serendi was able to draw the following conclusions in 2017 and 2018:

> All those interviewed during [the] field visit acknowledged a significant improvement from previous times. Sleeping areas had improved one year ago and these remain much better than on earlier visits, benefiting from more space between beds, due to the far lower number of defectors in the centre. Washing areas, latrines and the kitchen were concerns last time but these have all improved considerably.[38]

> Health care is much better provided for with a separate building and better facilities for the medical centre and seven staff, including two doctors[,] a nurse and a pharmacist. Each defector has a medical file and can attend the health centre freely. We did not receive any complaints as previously of defector not being provided even basic remedies.[39]

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36. While referring to prison programmes, a similar point is made in Bryans, 'Handbook on the Management of Violent Extremist Prisoners and the Prevention of Radicalization to Violence in Prisons', p. 2.
37. All four outputs are separately taken from Rehabilitation Support Team, 'Monitoring and Evaluation Framework FY2016-17', p. 2.
38. Altai Consulting, 'Low-Level Defectors Rehabilitation Project: Third Party Monitoring and Evaluation', unpublished, March 2017, p. 33.
39. *Ibid.* It is worth clarifying that the two doctors mentioned in this quote were in post sequentially – in other words, there was only ever one doctor at any given time.

> The leisure facilities now available at the centre include a new artificial grass football pitch, a basketball court and a library with Somali- and English-language books … All facilities are in regular use, although the basketball court is apparently often used as a second football pitch. A professional coach comes regularly to the centre and oversees the games, which bring [sic] together the defectors, the centre staff and sometimes the guards. All of this contributes to the visibly improved mental and physical well-being of the defectors.[40]

With these upgrades in mind, it is revealing that 91% of exiting residents (64 out of 70) interviewed between October 2016 and September 2017 claimed to be satisfied with the recreational facilities, compared to only 60% (50 out of 83) interviewed between April and September 2016.[41] A lesser increase was also recorded regarding food provisions, with 94% (66 out of 70) and 87% (74 out of 85) of exiting residents reporting their satisfaction respectively within these same two periods.

Since 2015 the RST has supported NISA to develop a standardised screening tool to determine the risk levels and wider eligibility criteria for rehabilitation at Serendi. However, to more broadly place the second of the outputs listed above in context, it is necessary to reiterate that in 2015 the RST and its FGS counterparts inherited a centre with inadequate screening procedures, and that therefore housed many unsuitable residents. For example, this included individuals with no prior involvement with Al-Shabaab, who were prioritised for release once the relevant Somali agencies were satisfied with their claims of non-association. As previously noted, the centre also housed certain ideologically motivated 'high-risk' individuals who would not meet the current eligibility criteria (see the Introduction). The new management team additionally oversaw the transfer of 64 minors to a child protection centre where they were provided with interim care before being reunited with their parents or other caregivers.[42] Best practice also dictates that genders should not be mixed at such facilities given that there are protection issues that relate particularly to females (for example, concerning gender-based violence), and as women have specific care needs. As such, no females have resided at Serendi since the RST assumed joint responsibility, one temporary exception aside.

Placing the third output in context, prior to 2015 Serendi also lacked accountability mechanisms in relation to human rights compliance. As such, improvements in human rights conditions were given priority by the incoming management team in 2015. A comprehensive package of human rights training for all centre staff, and particularly the guard force personnel, ensured that overall levels of compliance were heightened. Since mid-2016 the residents have also been provided with a twice-yearly human rights course through their personal development curriculum (see Rehabilitation Programming, Chapter III).

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40. *Ibid.,* p. 16.

41. Unfortunately it was not possible to establish a true baseline through collecting data on these themes from 2015.

42. The team responsible for managing Serendi prior to 2015 were conscious of the need to remove minors, but were unable to identify a suitable solution, as revealed in Michael Taarnby, *Serendi: Inside Somalia's Terrorist Rehabilitation Project* (CreateSpace, 2018).

A complaints mechanism was also established in March 2016 to allow residents and staff to report human rights abuses or concerns over potential abuses. This includes a confidential in-person channel to social workers or centre management, and complaint boxes for cases where anonymity is desired. Consequently, in March 2018 the third-party monitoring agency was able to claim that:

> [The h]uman rights of the defectors are respected in Serendi and the experience of Serendi has improved significantly. The new Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), including [in relation to] the induction and integration of newly arrived defectors and disciplinary procedures are in place, and appear to work adequately. Defectors interviewed at the centre looked healthier and calmer compared to previous visits and were satisfied with the way they were being treated inside the centre.[43]

Felbab-Brown also recently observed that '[m]ultiple UN officials and other interlocutors reported significant improvements of conditions and programming at the [Serendi] facility, including strong compliance with international human rights, humanitarian and refugee laws'.[44]

The final output has been the hardest to consistently achieve, with only a minority of the Serendi population cleared by the FGS to regularly take weekend leave during 2015 and 2016. On various occasions the FGS also entirely cancelled this leave for all residents on apparent security grounds, most recently during the January 2017 presidential elections. Even more seriously, prior to 2015 the exit process was seemingly largely contingent on whether the skillsets of specific beneficiaries matched existing livelihood opportunities in the community, rather than being determined by wider criteria relating to their personal rehabilitation.[45] Since that time the RST and FGS counterparts have established a multi-agency exit board to manage this process in accordance with a newly developed SOP that outlines the importance of beneficiaries meeting their rehabilitation goals and their readiness to return to the community (see Determining Programme Success in the Introduction). However, it also took most of 2016 and 2017 to clear the substantial backlog of long-term residents, several of whom had been in Serendi and a prior facility since 2010.

While a lack of FGS capacity to effectively administer these procedures provides a partial explanation for the above-mentioned issues, more fundamentally they were seemingly driven by key FGS counterparts lacking confidence that the beneficiaries pose only a limited risk of returning to violence. Yet, the attitude of these counterparts has also gradually evolved, with positive consequences. For instance, while current policy dictates that residents remain ineligible for weekend leave during their first two months, an average of 90% of the remainder took this leave each weekend between July and September 2018. Regarding the exit process Felbab-Brown observes that:

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43.   Altai Consulting, 'Low-Level Defectors Rehabilitation Project', p. 12.

44.   Felbab-Brown, *The Limits of Punishment,* p. 21.

45.   As indicated throughout Taarnby, *Serendi.*

> Among the most improved factors since 2015 [when the author conducted a prior assessment] is the predictability of exit from the three rehabilitation facilities for low-risk defectors. Until then, defectors were held at the Serendi facility for many years without any clear prospect for release. … In the cases of Serendi and Kismayo … the DDR-like facilities overlapped with detention. … [The exit process is now] far more predictable and clear in Serendi, although there the length of mandated stay varies and exit is based on the approval of a committee.[46]

Rehabilitation Programming

As previously observed, prison-based rehabilitation programmes are increasingly common in locations as distinct as Indonesia, Nigeria, the Philippines, Saudi Arabia, Singapore and Yemen. While each programme is of course unique, many also converge around a similar range of services, such as basic education, vocational training, psychosocial support and religious education.[47] Such provisions are also offered in Serendi, and with this in mind the second RST outcome was articulated as: 'Beneficiaries at the centre maximise their likelihood of successful reintegration at the point of departure through developing appropriate knowledge, skills and attitudes, and (re)establishing suitable connections to reintegration locations'.[48] The three subordinate outputs were stated as:

- 'Beneficiaries attend and participate in classes in education and vocational training, and participate in life-skills initiatives, appropriate to existing livelihood opportunities and tailored to individual needs and ambitions'.
- 'Beneficiaries participate in reconnection activities that are appropriate to individual needs and ambitions'.
- 'Beneficiaries receive focused, non-specialised psychosocial and mental health support as required, and receive tailored and responsive case management support spanning the rehabilitation process'.[49]

Unpacking the elements within these statements in turn, the education classes cover standard school subjects such as maths, Somali, Arabic, English, science, history and social studies. These classes are aligned with the national curriculum, and 82% of participating residents (9 out of 11) passed their final exams in May 2018. The vocational training currently includes courses in welding, auto-mechanics and tailoring, with 78% of participating residents (29 out of 37) passing their end-of-course exams during this same month. At the time of writing, the RST is exploring possibilities to expand these provisions to also include electrical installation,

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46.   Felbab-Brown, *The Limits of Punishment,* pp. 19–20.
47.   See, for example, Barkindo and Bryans, 'De-Radicalising Prisoners in Nigeria'; Bjørgo and Horgan, *Leaving Terrorism Behind*; Koehler, *Understanding Deradicalization*; Horgan and Braddock, 'Rehabilitating the Terrorists'; Neumann, 'Prisons and Terrorism'; Silke, *Prisons, Terrorism and Extremism.*
48.   Rehabilitation Support Team, 'Monitoring and Evaluation Framework FY2016-17', p. 1.
49.   All three outputs are separately taken from Rehabilitation Support Team, 'Monitoring and Evaluation Framework FY2016-17', p. 1.

driving,[50] carpentry, agriculture and information communications technology (ICT). These additions will be selected in accordance with demand in the centre, as well as livelihood mapping conducted by the RST. The 'life-skills initiatives' refer to civic, political and religious education (as discussed below), personal development courses such as entrepreneurship skills, human rights training, and personal hygiene, as well as structured recreational activities. To date, the core 'reconnection activity' has been the facilitation of access to families and clans, including assistance with locating estranged members (see Social Reintegration, Chapter IV). The 'non-specialised psychosocial support' includes solution-focused counselling and group work provided by trained social workers and general healthcare providers. Psychiatric illnesses are diagnosed and treated, with cases that require institutional care being referred to external mental-health service providers for further management.

In line with the terminology adopted in this paper (see Chapter I), these efforts are collectively intended to achieve both disengagement and deradicalisation objectives. The former concept is applicable in the sense that many of these provisions are designed to influence future behaviours of residents directly, thus aiming to reduce the likelihood of a return to violence. For instance, the vocational training is provided to help beneficiaries establish reliable alternatives to an Al-Shabaab salary (see Joining Al-Shabaab, Chapter II on the relevance of this driver). Several Serendi provisions also aim to contribute to deradicalisation, thereby intending to alter future behaviours indirectly through changing attitudes. For instance, most residents attend a civic, political and religious (CPR) education programme implemented by an external partner and 'orientation sessions' provided by the Serendi imams. The impact of these efforts to deradicalise was revealed through a March 2017 study with randomly selected residents (see Annex A) that identified six individuals who were initially supportive of Al-Shabaab when they entered the centre, but who subsequently reversed this sympathy during residency. Of course, such individuals would be unlikely to presently qualify for entry into Serendi in line with the current understanding of 'low risk' (see the Introduction). This aside, such findings are important as there remains limited empirical evidence to demonstrate that rehabilitation programmes genuinely do drive deradicalisation.

However, the CPR and orientation sessions not only aim to challenge remaining sympathies for Al-Shabaab, but also to drive positive attitudinal change regarding the FGS, the Somali National Army (SNA), the international community, democratic principles, the illegitimacy of violence, and other such topics. Certain residents from the sample of 37 interviewed in March 2017 also reported experiencing positive attitudinal change at Serendi regarding these themes. For instance, four asserted that they now held improved opinions of Somali political leaders, and six claimed they had developed a more positive perception of the SNA. Six residents also claimed to have become more supportive of elections and the broader notion of democracy, with two adding that this change occurred partly as they had previously not understood these concepts. Similarly, three claimed to have become more patriotic while at Serendi, although it should

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50.   Driving had been an option prior to 2015, but this provision was cancelled due to security concerns.

not be overlooked that Al-Shabaab has also promoted patriotic sentiment, particularly to rally opposition to external forces from Ethiopia, Kenya and elsewhere.

Box 4: Capacity Building of Somali Counterparts

A key RST objective since 2015 has been to build the capacity of both the Serendi staff and the wider FGS to respectively manage the centre and the National Programme. For instance, the RST has invested significant resources to develop procedures for the administration of finance and procurement, thereby supporting the Serendi team to engage with the private sector to procure equipment and supplies necessary for suitable accommodation, nutrition and medical facilities. It has also sought to develop specific functional capabilities in the centre, for instance supporting Serendi medical staff to deliver both basic and advanced life-support care for life-threatening events, and case detection and management of both common illnesses and conditions associated with lifestyles in Serendi (including weekend leave) or prior to arrival. The RST also provides the Somali social workers with training in psychosocial support and social care services using established best-practice models developed for working in environments with limited capacity and resources. The RST has also offered extensive guidance and support to build FGS capacity to oversee and manage the wider National Programme, for instance through training the NISA screening team on the newly developed assessment tool (see Conditions at Serendi), although the high turnover of FGS counterparts has hindered this process.

Source: The authors, 2018.

Contrary to the perception that attitudinal change in such facilities may be driven exclusively by tailored programmes such as the CPR and orientation sessions, the March 2017 research revealed that the positive influences of family members, Serendi management and staff, and access to a wider range of media sources outside Al-Shabaab were of comparable importance. Several respondents added that they were surprised about the quality of conditions in Serendi on arrival, and that this itself caused them to re-evaluate their prior negative opinions of the FGS. This reinforces the point that implementers should aim to establish environments that are broadly conducive to such positive attitudinal change, rather than focus only on trainings that specifically aim to provoke this effect. Among the residents who did report positive attitudinal changes, there was a near consensus that this was a gradual process, with most highlighting that their own evolution took months or even years. However, the findings from March 2017 were not universally positive, and several respondents claimed that delays in the exit process and the occasional blocking of weekend leave (see Conditions at Serendi) actually increased their hostility towards the state. It was not possible to determine the extent to which these individuals were reporting genuine trends in their perceptions, or simply using the opportunity to air their then-current grievances.

IV. Community Reintegration

WHILE MANY SERENDI residents hail from regions such as Lower Shabelle, Middle Juba, Hiiraan and Galguduud, since 2015 the overwhelming majority have opted to reintegrate into Mogadishu. Drawing from 27 interviews conducted with former residents in September 2017 (see Annex A), this chapter outlines post-exit security issues faced by these individuals, as well as their experiences of social and economic reintegration. While these three themes are discussed sequentially for the sake of convenience, they are substantially interlinked. For instance, security issues may be a partial determinant of economic reintegration in that certain former residents feel unable to travel to parts of the city with greater employment prospects as they fear being recognised by Al-Shabaab members or sympathisers in these areas.

While the authors have exercised due caution in presenting the findings in this chapter, it is important to remember that research on such sensitive themes is problematic for multiple reasons (see Annex A). It is also worth specifically highlighting that former residents who currently reside outside Mogadishu could not be consulted due to logistical constraints, and thus the findings relate exclusively to former residents based in the capital. To place the upcoming findings in context, it is worth reiterating that the RST's initial mandate in 2015 narrowly covered support to rehabilitation in Serendi, with this scope only widening to incorporate post-exit reintegration in 2018. That said, the RST also understands reintegration to be a process that begins during residency, particularly through relationship-building between residents and their families and the beneficiaries networking with the wider community during weekend leave.

Security Issues

The Serendi programme relies heavily on NISA to maintain updated assessments of the security situation in potential reintegration locations. The current policy states that exiting residents cannot return to communities if the threat to their security is deemed excessive, and many in any case choose to reintegrate into Mogadishu with extended family members for this reason. The overwhelming majority of former residents interviewed in September 2017 claimed to have experienced no issues with the state security forces after their release. One exception was a resident of Yakshid, an outlying district of Mogadishu, who claimed to have been arbitrarily arrested twice by the police. Another individual based in Howle Wadag asserted that he had been detained by the security agencies on multiple occasions, but that he had been released after showing his Serendi graduation certificate.

By contrast, concerns regarding Al-Shabaab were far more regularly highlighted by the respondents, although only one reported specific threats. This individual received SMS messages from the organisation for roughly one week after his release from Serendi, including content indicating that they knew he had recently graduated. All other threats from Al-Shabaab were latent in the sense that they caused some respondents to fear being recognised by their former

comrades or sympathisers. Of course, even latent threats have real-life consequences, with a third of the sample claiming that they avoid places such as Bakara Market and Dayniile for this precise reason.

Such issues have clear implications for social reintegration, and within the sample there were at least two cases of former residents who relocated with their families on security grounds. One of these individuals explained that he moved to Huriwa district while still resident in Serendi to avoid Al-Shabaab threats after his return, as well as to sidestep awkward questions from the community about his whereabouts during his years of absence. They also have major implications for economic reintegration, particularly as employment prospects are comparatively good in certain insecure parts of Mogadishu, including Bakara Market. Indeed, one former resident claimed that he was briefly employed by a company that produces mattresses, but that he had to quit this work as it was located in an insecure part of the city. With varying degrees of urgency, four individuals from the September 2017 sample also expressed a desire to find work within NISA, the SNA, or the Somali Police Force, claiming that this is the only form of employment that could provide them with adequate protection from Al-Shabaab.

Social Reintegration

Much of the literature on reintegration places a heavy emphasis on the role of familial and community relations.[51] Most of the September 2017 sample asserted that they maintained positive relations with their families after exit. One exception was a respondent based in Hodan who claimed to have been rejected by his siblings since ignoring their advice to not join Al-Shabaab. While most respondents were simply accepted at the homes of their nuclear or extended families post-Serendi, a minority claimed they experienced housing issues. For instance, one former resident observed that he was unable to provide suitable accommodation for either of his two wives on his modest salary, and as such both still resided at their respective parents' homes. He elaborated that he mostly slept at the residence of a distant relative, and only occasionally spent the night in the homes of both in-laws as this provoked shame in the Somali context.

The Serendi programme is already substantially designed to facilitate ties to families, particularly through family visits and weekend leave (see Conditions at Serendi, Chapter III). Indeed, the centre has a facility dedicated to hosting these visits, and at the time of writing work is ongoing to make it more child-friendly for residents' offspring. Nevertheless, as part of the broadening of the RST mandate from 2018, the team is in the process of further enhancing the extent to which it supports the process of social reintegration. While some of the modalities are still being determined, this will include additional efforts to facilitate ties between residents and families, including estranged ones.

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51.   While not focusing on the case of Somalia, see, for example, Kate Barrelle, 'Pro-Integration: Disengagement from and Life After Extremism', *Behavioral Sciences of Terrorism and Political Aggression* (Vol. 7, No. 2, 2015), pp. 129–42; Marsden, *Reintegrating Extremists,* pp. 59–61.

Shifting the focus to wider community perceptions of reintegration, Felbab-Brown observes that these can be highly diverse:

> Perceptions toward individuals associated with al Shabaab vary enormously, ranging from acceptance to extreme ostracization. Views are often based on whether a community, clan or family's experience with al Shabaab has predominantly been marked by brutality or the delivery of justice and protection services. … Many local communities indicate they are afraid of ex-al Shabaab members returning to their areas.[52]

While current levels of awareness of the National Programme remain limited, there is also the possibility that certain community members are hostile to the fact that former Al-Shabaab members are offered provisions such as basic education and vocational training, which give them a competitive advantage over those who remained uninvolved in violence. Of course, the community may also be more-or-less accepting of individuals in relation to their former rank and/or role within Al-Shabaab. For instance, intelligence operatives and IED-makers may be treated less favourably than tax-collectors, cooks and others in supporting roles.

All that said, most former Serendi residents reported that they had not experienced hostility or stigma after exiting the centre, although of course this may be the case partly because they returned to the relative anonymity of Mogadishu. The one main exception claimed that a police officer encouraged other community members to discriminate against him because of his background. However, this individual also observed that an influential uncle was able to resolve the issue through explaining to the officer that he had been rehabilitated at Serendi. To place these positive findings in context it should be noted that a substantial minority of respondents also reported that their communities mostly did not know about their past with Al-Shabaab – in other words, these individuals had been deliberately discrete with this information. Yet, this was certainly not universally the case, and indeed a respondent from Jubaland even claimed that he deliberately informed community members of his background during weekend leave to familiarise them with this information in time for his exit. In any case, as part of the broadening of the RST mandate from 2018, the team aims to further enhance community-based support networks for former residents. It is also considering outreach options with community leaders and civil society organisations to help enhance local 'buy-in' to the processes of rehabilitation and reintegration.

Economic Reintegration

With an elevated proportion of Serendi residents motivated to enlist in Al-Shabaab in part by material incentives (see Joining Al-Shabaab, Chapter II), the programme team views economic reintegration as a key objective. Perhaps the most striking feature of the responses offered by

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52.   Felbab-Brown, *The Limits of Punishment,* p. 8.

former Serendi residents about economic reintegration during the September 2017 research was the diversity of formal and informal livelihoods attained, including the following:

- One respondent based in Huriwa district earns an income through burning trees to make charcoal in his village and transporting the product to market.
- A former resident based in Dayniile works as a casual construction labourer, typically finding approximately 10 days of work each month, earning $10 per day.
- Another respondent in Dayniile district works as a Qur'an teacher in the mornings, earning $120 per month.
- A respondent originally from Lower Shabelle works as a rickshaw driver (renting the vehicle for $10 per day), having spent roughly one month learning how to drive, arranging insurance, and so on.
- A former Serendi resident from Hamar Jajab district transports materials using a donkey and cart, earning on average $10 to $12 per day.
- An individual from Jubaland transports goods such as charcoal, food and drinks on a wheelbarrow, which he hires for $0.50 per day.
- A respondent based in Dayniile works as a full-time apprentice in his uncle's pharmacy, and his intention is to establish his own business once he has learned the trade.

It is also worth observing that four former residents have been provided with employment at Serendi, as a pharmacist, assistant chef, receptionist at the medical unit, and storekeeper. Of course, economic reintegration is not only about obtaining work, but also the adequacy of earnings – including to provide for dependent family members in many cases. Various respondents claimed their compensation was inadequate, including the donkey-and-cart operator who claimed to be unable to afford school for his children. Of course, this must also be placed within a context of chronic unemployment in Somalia generally.[53]

Notably, none of the 27 respondents reported earning an income using skills acquired through the vocational training provided at Serendi. However, this does not appear to relate to the quality of the tuition on offer per se, with seven of the respondents interviewed in September 2017 providing positive reviews of this training, compared to two claiming that it was 'okay', and only one offering a negative assessment (the remainder were not asked due to time constraints, or did not partake in the vocational training).

Neither does this relate to the specific skills being taught, as the modules were selected in accordance with demand in the centre and in line with livelihood mapping conducted by the RST. Rather, the inability to translate new vocational skills into actual employment often reportedly

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53. The third-party monitoring agency attempted to analyse the rate of employment of former Serendi residents in relation to the wider Somali populace, controlling for age, gender, area of residence, and other such factors. However, it was ultimately not possible to draw meaningful conclusions due to the inability to control for the period that the two distinct populations had been seeking work. Put simply, many former residents have only recently exited the centre, and this alone means that on average they are more likely to be without work, other things being equal.

resulted from a lack of capital. For instance, the charcoal-maker highlighted above took a course in welding at Serendi and claimed that he would prefer this work if he could afford the necessary equipment. Similarly, three respondents who took vehicle electrics training claimed that they had been unable to find work in this sector as they would be expected to provide their own tools, which they could not afford. The individual who transports goods on a wheelbarrow also claimed that he would like to buy this equipment outright (which apparently costs around $50), rather than rent it daily. With this in mind, from 2018 the Serendi team will increasingly help facilitate access to financial services, livelihood opportunities, placements, and educational or vocational training schemes, as required.

Familial and social networks provided a second critical factor that often substantially contributed to whether former residents could find suitable income-generating opportunities. For illustrative purposes, it is worth briefly comparing the fortunes of a fishmonger based in Medina district to an unemployed resident of Yakshid originally from Lower Shabelle. The former has an influential uncle who acted as his guarantor while in Serendi, supported his wife and children during that period, arranged his employment to start at the point of his exit, and currently occasionally supplements his income. By contrast, the latter sought employment in numerous sectors after exiting Serendi, but various potential employers reportedly rejected his approaches as he is unknown and lacks a guarantor.

A somewhat less convincing explanation for whether individuals successfully obtained income-generating opportunities in Mogadishu is stigmatisation.[54] Several of the September 2017 respondents maintained that their Al-Shabaab backgrounds hindered their employment prospects, with one elaborating somewhat vaguely that potential employers seemed suspicious. However, those in employment tended to downplay the importance of stigmatisation and claims about its relevance are also seemingly at odds with the findings above about wider community acceptance (see Social Reintegration, Chapter IV). Nevertheless, it is of course prudent to accept that stigmatisation can at least, in certain instances, interfere with efforts to obtain formal or informal work, thus the intention is to initiate community outreach initiatives (including specifically to businesses) to enhance 'buy-in' to the Serendi programme.

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54. Stigmatisation is often highlighted as a barrier to economic reintegration in other locations. See, for example, Ferguson, 'Disengagement from Terrorism', p. 9; John Horgan, *Walking Away from Terrorism: Accounts of Disengagement from Radical and Extremist Movements* (London and New York, NY: Routledge, 2009), pp. 59–60; and Marsden, *Reintegrating Extremists,* pp. 56–57.

Conclusions and the Way Forward

THE THREE CORE chapters of this report focused on the processes of joining and leaving Al-Shabaab, rehabilitation at Serendi, and post-exit reintegration. Regarding the former, research conducted in 2015 suggested that Serendi residents tended to join Al-Shabaab for a variety of reasons, with the promise of a salary, status, adventure and revenge being prominent motives. By contrast, they tended to disengage from the organisation because their salaries were often found to be inadequate, due to familial obligations, as the living conditions were poor, and as they no longer wanted to risk their lives.

While challenges certainly remain, between 2015 and 2018 Serendi was gradually converted into a functional centre, through which 241 former members of Al-Shabaab had completed their rehabilitation at the time of writing. However, Serendi and the other rehabilitation centres in Somalia provide only one link in the National Programme chain, and their broader ability to undermine Al-Shabaab is also dependent on simultaneous improvements across the outreach, reception, screening and reintegration pillars of this framework (see the Introduction). While the RST's mandate has expanded to cover support to outreach and community reintegration (see Chapter IV), the authors of this report advocate for still greater focus to be placed on these two key pillars, as well as the reception and screening elements.

The authors also cautiously advocate for exploring the possibilities to replicate this form of programming in other comparable environments. While closely related prison-based initiatives have become increasingly common over recent years in countries such as Indonesia, Nigeria, the Philippines, Saudi Arabia, Singapore and Yemen, Serendi-style rehabilitation centres for low-risk former violent extremists remain comparatively rare. While there is no simple formula to determine which environments may be suitable, at the very least the following should be considered by donors:

- **The disengagement rate**: The extent to which members of violent extremist organisations are likely to disengage is dependent on a broad range of factors (see Disengaging from Al-Shabaab, Chapter II). For instance, these may include *esprit de corps,* treatment by commanders, community support for the group in question, living conditions, the prevalence of non-ideological motives, and so on. Government and donor agencies may influence disengagement rates through various means, including messaging campaigns that provide emotive appeals to incentivise exit, as well as practical guidance on how and where to surrender. However, there are also factors that are effectively beyond the control of governments and donors, at least in the short and medium term, that may limit the disengagement rate to an extent that Serendi-style initiatives would be unfeasible. For instance, this may apply to cases where the violent extremist groups in questions

maintain battlefield momentum and elevated territorial control (see Disengaging from Al-Shabaab, Chapter II).

- **State support for such programmes**: Donors should consider the extent to which government stakeholders are willing to support disengagement programmes. As the authors witnessed in the case of Somalia, certain representatives from key agencies initially struggled to fully commit to the idea of rehabilitating violent extremists, either because they opposed 'rewarding' the perpetrators of violence, or they believed that many would in any case later return to Al-Shabaab. More broadly, certain governments simply may not be able to support such efforts, for instance, due to the need to satisfy public opposition to rehabilitation and reintegration policies, to maintain fragile political coalitions, or to retain the loyalty of armed forces. Of course, even where the necessary domestic political support does exist, limited local capacity may constrain the ability of state actors to deliver such programmes, and in such cases donors must rely on greater levels of international expertise. Donors should also ensure that different funding streams are aligned to maintain a common international strategy in support of such efforts.

- **Security considerations**: Rehabilitation centres and their residents and staff are vulnerable to attack by violent extremist groups – indeed, the more successful the programme, the more likely it is that such groups will be incentivised to target what could amount to an existential threat. Attacks may take various forms, including direct strikes on the centres, the targeting of family members and staff, and assaults on beneficiaries on weekend leave. With this in mind, national and international policymakers must consider whether it is possible to identify locations that are sufficiently secure for rehabilitation centres. Donors must also ensure that adequate finance is provided within the programme budget to cover security considerations.

- **Community acceptance of such programmes**: RST research indicated that discrimination was not a major issue for most former Serendi residents (see Social Reintegration, Chapter IV). However, this finding came with the dual caveats that many of these individuals were not open about their past with Al-Shabaab and that the sample was drawn exclusively from a population of former residents who reintegrated in Mogadishu. As such, it is prudent to accept that a lack of community 'buy-in' may undermine the reintegration process in other parts of Somalia, as also occurs in other conflict environments. Of course, many such communities are the immediate victims of violence, and thus it should come as no surprise that some members outright reject the idea of living alongside those who previously committed atrocities. There is also the possibility that certain community members resent the fact that violent extremists are provided with basic education, vocational training, and so on, which may give them a competitive advantage over those who remained uninvolved in such violence. While policymakers have some influence over the level of support for the rehabilitation and reintegration process – for instance through community consultations, reconciliation mechanisms, messaging campaigns about the benefits of this programming, and so on – donors should consider that public opposition may be sufficiently strong to make such initiatives unfeasible at least in certain locations.

Of course, efforts such as the National Programme in Somalia must be located within a wider body of initiatives that also target other groups, including high-value defectors, violent extremists in prison settings, women and vulnerable youth. Put simply, while the primary aim of the National Programme is to incentivise disengagements, this must be placed alongside parallel efforts to prevent individuals from joining violent extremist organisations in the first place, to prevent them from returning to these groups, and so on.

Annex A: Research Methods

THE RESEARCH FINDINGS presented in this report were generated through face-to-face interviews with current or former Serendi residents. Except for the entrance and exit interviews, the various studies (as individually detailed below) were led by international RST staff, with Somali interpreters assisting with translations and through providing key contextual information. The interviews were semi-structured, allowing the research team to delve into topics of specific interest, while also ensuring that all key themes were discussed with each of the respondents. More broadly, the methods applied reflected those outlined in a recent paper by a co-author of this report: 'A Guide to Interviewing Terrorists and Violent Extremists'.[55] Each study was supported and facilitated both by the relevant FGS agencies and the Serendi management team.

Caution should be taken in interpreting the findings presented in this report. First, some of the information was collected from individuals who disengaged from Al-Shabaab several years earlier, and thus may relate to a former manifestation of this ever-evolving organisation. Second, the respondents should not be considered representative of the wider population of former Al-Shabaab fighters, at the very least in terms of their locations of origin and their 'low-risk' status. Third, interviewees involved in research of this nature may provide false or misleading information, for instance:[56]

- As they themselves are misinformed.
- To discredit others.
- To be viewed favourably by the interviewer.
- Out of fear of perceived repercussions of divulging information.
- To aggrandise their own role in events.
- As a process of unwitting self-deception.

While it would certainly be naïve to entirely dismiss such concerns, it should also be observed that the respondents often freely conceded past actions or beliefs that reflected badly on their former selves, and this is inconsistent with efforts to conceal or distort information. In any case, throughout all phases of the research the interview questions were deliberately sequenced to help identify inconsistencies in the narratives presented, and in general these were not apparent.

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55. Khalil, 'A Guide to Interviewing Terrorists and Violent Extremists'.
56. This discussion draws particularly from Khalil, 'A Guide to Interviewing Terrorists and Violent Extremists', pp. 7–8; Khalil and Zeuthen, 'Countering Violent Extremism and Risk Reduction', pp. 16–18; and Elisabeth Jean Wood, *Insurgent Collective Action and Civic War in El Salvador* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 33–40.

Further aiming to enhance the reliability of responses (as well as to conform to research ethics best practices), at the outset the respondents were:

- Introduced to the research team.
- Informed about the study purposes.
- Informed about interviewee confidentiality.
- Informed that the process was voluntary and that they could stop the interview at any point.

A minority of interviewees were somewhat hostile during the investigation despite such reassurances, although this was invariably directed at conditions in Serendi, rather than at the research itself. More specifically, this occurred particularly in 2015 and early 2017, with these respondents often using the opportunity to air then-current grievances about restrictions over weekend leave and delays in the exit process (see Conditions at Serendi, Chapter III). While this led to a small number of early terminations of interviews, there is no reason to believe that it systematically distorted the findings. Most respondents were more than willing to offer information, and many were even enthusiastic about the opportunity to discuss their experiences.

While the 'triangulation' of information collected through interviews with that gained from other sources is often correctly presented as best practice for social science research, such efforts were generally inapplicable during these investigations. This is because most of the events discussed were effectively unverifiable as they occurred in remote parts of Somalia under Al-Shabaab control, and as the enquiries often focused on personal perceptions rather than 'factual' information.

Research into Joining and Disengaging from Al-Shabaab: November 2015

In November 2015 the RST interviewed 27 individuals who were resident in Serendi at that time on the following themes:

- How and why they joined Al-Shabaab.
- How and why they disengaged from Al-Shabaab.
- How they arrived at Serendi.

Ten of these respondents reported to have previously operated within the Al-Shabaab police force, nine were in the Al-Shabaab military, four performed high-value roles such as journalist, IED manufacture and intelligence operative, and the remaining four played supporting roles, such as cook and patroller. The respondents were selected at random from a list of those who had been resident for less than two years, with 'non-associates' having first been removed from the sample (see Conditions at Serendi, Chapter III). The time-based criterion was introduced with the dual aims of drawing from individuals with more recent memories and ensuring that the data related to more current manifestations of the ever-evolving Al-Shabaab.

Research into Attitudinal Change in Serendi: March 2017

This investigation initially involved a focus group discussion with the imams and teachers involved with the civic, political and religious and orientation programmes. It also involved interviews with 37 individuals who were resident in Serendi at that time, who were specifically asked about:

- Current attitudes to Al-Shabaab, the government, democracy, and related themes.
- The extent to which attitudes regarding these themes evolved while at Serendi.
- The key drivers of attitudinal changes where this occurred.

The respondents were selected at random once those who had been resident at Serendi for less than four months had been excluded. In practice, the sampling was also determined to a substantial extent by availability, with many residents taking extended weekend leave during this period.

Research into Reintegration: September 2017

In summer 2017 the Serendi management team conducted telephone-based post-exit interviews (PEI) about reintegration issues, and this provided a sample frame for the September 2017 study. For the in-depth qualitative study, 27 former Serendi residents were interviewed face to face, with the key overarching areas of focus being:

- Post-exit security issues.
- Social reintegration.
- Economic reintegration.

The sampling process was designed so that information was drawn from a wide range of individuals in terms of their age, date of departure from Serendi, marital status, employment, and income levels. Several cases of specific interest were also purposely selected, including an individual in full-time education, and two of the three PEI respondents who claimed to have faced social discrimination. Individuals who resided outside Mogadishu were not selected on logistical grounds, and thus the findings related exclusively to former residents currently based in this limited geography – according to the PEI, this represented 79% of former residents. Individuals were incentivised to partake in the study through a financial allowance for transport, and this may have resulted in a sample bias towards those more in need of this financial incentive. It is also plausible that individuals with negative perceptions of Serendi may also have been less likely to return for interview.

Research into Media Access in Al-Shabaab and Message Testing: November 2017

During November 2017 the RST consulted 38 Serendi residents on the following themes:

- The main sources of news and information for Al-Shabaab members.
- The most trusted sources of information.
- Messages/images most likely to entice additional disengagements.

Respondents were selected at random once individuals who had been resident for less than one month had been excluded from the population. The initial intention had been to conduct focus-group discussions on the basis that the interactive nature of such research would facilitate a process through which the participants would arrive at insights beyond those achieved through interviews. However, the study team reverted to interviews on the second day of research as certain respondents were uncomfortable in a group setting, reflecting wider issues with suspicion between former members of Al-Shabaab.

Entrance and Exit Interviews: Ongoing

Unlike the 'snapshot' elements of research discussed above, the entrance and exit interviews provide a continuous source of data collected on entry into Serendi and immediately prior to final exit, and they form elements of a much broader monitoring and evaluation system. They are also distinct in that they are conducted by members of the Serendi management team, rather than the RST. The data collected covers various themes, including the satisfaction figures provided in Conditions at Serendi, Chapter III.

About the Authors

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Nick Wood has managed several security sector programmes in Somalia and the Occupied Palestinian Territories, and was the deputy programme manager of the Serendi Rehabilitation Support Team from August 2015 to March 2018. Prior to this he worked in the security and risk management sector. He holds an MA in Applied Security Strategy.