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Community Action Strategy

Countering Violent Extremism In Kenya

KWALE

The Community Action Strategy (CAS) is the product of an extensive USAID-funded study into violent extremist (VE) and counter violent extremism (CVE) social and communications networks in several Kenyan counties (Kwale, Mombasa, Nairobi and Nyeri). It provides suggestions and best practices for communicating with various stakeholders and in various locations. The CAS recommendations are not specific to counter-messaging interventions and do not only address work with 'at risk' youth. Rather, the CAS offers advice on how to communicate with entire communities, including local support networks that shape the broad social and cultural norms that inform how all actors, including youth, perceive and respond to VE. This document, the fourth in a series of six, provides recommendations for working in Kwale County. Suggestions are based on research carried out in Ukunda and Msambweni.



Potential CVE partners

- Think carefully about which organizations and institutions you partner with. Conduct a detailed stakeholder analysis within the community before you begin. Perceptions of legitimacy, access and capacity of the same institutions vary across the county. Trust in different stakeholders also differs.
 - ➔ As per government policy, the National Counter Terrorism Centre (NCTC) and the Kwale County Commissioner must be aware of your activities and support your approach.
 - ➔ However, government actors are mistrusted and any perceived association with the state will likely lead to a loss of credibility.
 - ➔ Communities trust civil society organizations more than most entities. However, it is imperative that Kwale organizations are chosen. Even those from Mombasa are disregarded as outsiders. Potential local partners include: *Jamii Action Centre, Youth to Youth Initiative, Samba Sports Youth Agenda and Kwale Human Rights Watch.*
 - ➔ Work through local CSOs when partnering with Kwale clerics. These organizations have spent time establishing trust.
 - ➔ Information sharing networks are gendered. Seek to involve women's groups.



The message

- Speak to the issues that affect communities every day: police violence, marginalization, and unemployment. Past interventions have been criticized for avoiding emotive topics.
- Deepen understandings of concepts such as *jihad* and an appropriate response to legitimate grievances. Criminal groups have been seen to be using scriptural justifications for crimes against non-Muslims.
- Recognize and debate commonly shared phrases. The Mombasa Republican Council's '*Pwani si Kenya*' rallying cry is not necessarily related to VE at all.

- ‘Slogans’ can be effective. However, note that these should be formulated by the beneficiary community and used alongside tangible activities which establish sustainable relationships and tackle socio-economic grievances. Examples suggested by Kwale residents include “*Dini sio vita*” and “*Yote in ya Mungu*”.

Language

- Use Kiswahili whenever possible. There may be times when Digo is also appropriate.
- Issues of VE are sensitive amongst Ukunda communities:
 - Stressing CVE as the objective of programming can be counterproductive. Frame programs in locally relevant language, around socio-economic empowerment, and a reduction in violence.
 - Al Shabaab should not be mentioned by name. Doing so can cause fear of surveillance and attract unwanted attention.
- Avoid using technical terms which may have different meanings to different people.
 - Some clerics may prefer to discuss *imani potofu* or *msimamo potofu* (false beliefs, misconceptions) rather than *itikadi kali* (violent extremism).
- Focus on building trust. Any suspicion in the project will lead to fear and reduced engagement.
- When working with religious leaders, consider using someone well versed in the Qur’an and who can authoritatively use Arabic.

The messenger

- Some local CSOs have established trusting relationships with the most vulnerable communities.
- Identify popular clerics to share CVE messages. Involve them from the outset.
- Other individuals who are broadly trusted include Community Health Volunteers (CHVs) and teachers.
- Consider using existing boda boda group chairmen as potential influencers, alongside youth leaders. Such individuals need to own and believe in the message. It is imperative that the message is perceived to originate with the messengers, not an exogenous force.
- Reformed youths and ‘returnees’ are treated with suspicion by the broader community, but their voices will likely be important to those active in local gangs. Verify these individuals’ credentials and – with NCTC’s blessing – work with them to create awareness of the risks in joining violent organizations.



Spaces

- Young people can be reached at *maskanis* (especially *mogakaa dens*), gardens / shambas, video halls and football grounds. Older generations often meet at coffee shops.
- Consider gender. Recognize that men and women are unlikely to be present in the same spaces.
- Whatever space is chosen, all participants in any activity must feel comfortable and not afraid of retribution, either from the police or extremists. One-on-one meetings may be necessary when working with the most vulnerable individuals.
- Work with schools to identify those that could benefit from mentorship schemes.
- *Barazas* are not seen as spaces for community dialogue. They are used to pass government messaging. If they can be made more inclusive, they could prove useful spaces for sharing positive messages.



Media

- Most people identify in-person conversation as their main source of information. Conduct in-person activities in the most affected areas: Bongwe, Mbuani, Mlungu Nipa, Kilolapwa, Mabokoni, as well as more rural areas further inland.
- However, Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, Instagram, TikTok and Twitter are all used.
- The use of art and animations to share messages is encouraged.
- Use popular local radio stations to share messages widely, such as *Radio Kaya*.
 - ➔ Many in Kwale support the use of media campaigns using posters and billboards. However, such messaging must be supported by activities and the building of relationships.



Potentially successful interventions

Communication is about more than messaging. Actions are more credible than words. Relationships and networks must be built to amplify meaning. When messages are shared as part of activities, they will have a higher likelihood of resonating with an audience.

- **Mentorship** has worked historically in Kwale. Carefully selected mentors can be used to sensitize communities regarding the risks of VE. Link mentorship schemes with employment opportunities.
- **Economic empowerment.** Provide entrepreneurship and business management training. Link participants with microfinance institutions and support them through SACCOs to enhance sustainability of programming. Consider working alongside the *Youth Enterprise Development Fund* or the *Women Enterprise Fund*.
- **Private sector engagement.** Work alongside large private entities to link qualified local youths with job opportunities. Consider working with beach hotels and *Base Titanium*.

- **Law enforcement.**

- Build the capacity of police officers by demonstrating the potential implications of their actions on the threat of VE. Involve low-level officers, not just the commanders.
- Facilitate civilian-police dialogue through sport or meals. Identify activities that both men and women will attend. Encourage the police to participate unarmed and in civilian clothing.
- Trauma healing must be an option as a follow-up or integrated part of any activities. Consider long-term frequent counselling for those worst affected. Recognize that short term interventions can cause further trauma.
- Civic engagement (not education). Most work promoting the potential benefits of democracy and elections has been led by government institutions such as the Peace Committees, coordinated by the Ministry of Interior. Broadening such efforts through civil society could be productive.
 - Improve understanding of the benefits of elections
 - Increase transparency over the mandates of various state actors
 - Improve local understandings of the criminal justice system
 - Provide guidance on identifying misinformation and 'fake news'
- Community activities. Focus on cohesion and a communal responsibility for youths.
- Arabic. Encourage religious leaders and madrassas to focus on improving knowledge of Arabic language, allowing individuals to interpret the Qur'an for themselves, rather than relying on gatekeepers.

Managing expectations

- Balance the need for immediate reward (compensation for involvement in activities) with transparency over the long-term objectives of a program.
- Discuss the long-term implications of violence on the community. Promote long-term economic benefits of an improved investment environment.

What could go wrong?



- Any relationship with the government will lead to a loss of credibility.
- Loss of trust. Do not betray participants' confidence.
- Directly discussing al Shabaab will immediately raise suspicions.
- Blame. Do not be seen to 'name and shame'.
- Deliver on promises. Manage expectations around financial rewards to avoid disappointment.

STAKEHOLDERS		
	TRUST / PERCEPTIONS	RECOMMENDATIONS / ACTION
Donors	The involvement of foreign donors causes fear amongst local communities.	Do not mention 'Western' donors during program activities.
NCTC	- Maintain a low-profile. - Feared due to association with CT activities.	- Ensure NCTC are aware of your activities, to enable them to deconflict your interventions with other programs. - Always ensure transparency with government entities. - NCTC personnel should not be present at program activities. - Do not mention NCTC at public engagements.
County authorities	- Rejected as incompetent by many. - Mistrusted.	- Encourage county authorities to prioritize CVE in the next County Integrated Development Plan (CIDP) and to pass associated legislation through the County Assembly. - Ensure that the County Commissioner (a national government figure) and the County Governor are aware of your activities, but they do not need to be present.
Police	- Universal rejection and mistrust. - Feared and avoided by communities if possible. - Seen as the main VE actor.	- Avoid defending the police. - Avoid police presence during most activities but facilitate specific police-community engagement sessions. Ensure these sessions do not only include senior officers. - Ensure senior commanders are aware of your planned engagement with communities.
Civil society	- Local CSOs are broadly trusted, but suspicions are raised regarding external actors, even from other parts of Coast. - CSOs seen as more likely to provide financial compensation for time. - Competition between CSOs for funds.	- Understand local perceptions of specific CSOs. Work with local CSOs that have established trust with particular communities. - Encourage work beyond mere VE awareness raising.
Religious leaders	- Broadly respected, but some suspicions regarding certain clerics. - Some clerics fear both the police and extremist actors	- Explore options for improved security for clerics. - Explore neutral messaging that clerics can use to counter violence in all forms.
Community policing initiatives	- Nyumba Kumi personnel sometimes concerned over their own safety. - Nyumba Kumi is sometimes linked to the state and rejected. Trust in Nyumba Kumi officials is dependent on individual personalities.	- Clarify Nyumba Kumi officials' obligations regarding information sharing with the police. - Build the capacity of Nyumba Kumi as representatives of the community, not state actors.
Chiefs	- Rejected as state representatives. - Mistrusted by many in the community.	- Work with chiefs to encourage use of barazas as spaces for discussion, not for issuing directives / collecting information. - Encourage chiefs to invite youths to existing barazas.

Elders	• Relevance depends on charisma and connections. • Youths often associate elders with the state.	• Work with elders to improve understanding of VE issues. • Facilitate increased dialogue between elders and youths.
The private sector	• Not included in CVE work, despite widespread emphasis on socioeconomic drivers of VE	• Work with the larger employers (e.g., beach hotels and Base Titanium) to provide jobs for qualified local civilians.
Returnees	• Common in Kwale. Normally operate discretely. • Feared less than the police.	• Work with NCTC to identify returnees (or reformed youths) to share their experiences of broken promises.
Politicians	• Broadly mistrusted. Seen to encourage violence and sometimes perceived as VE actors.	• Do not include elected officials in CVE programming.
Teachers	• Broadly trusted.	• Raise awareness amongst teachers on the threat of VE. • Share simple messages for circulation in schools.



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For a detailed copy of the findings of the USAID-funded
study, please contact:

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