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Community Action Strategy

Countering Violent Extremism In Kenya

NAIROBI

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 third in a series of six, provides recommendations for working in Nairobi. Suggestions are based on research carried out in the neighborhoods of Eastleigh and Majengo.



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 and capacity of the same institutions vary from neighborhood to neighborhood.
- Consider trade-offs between access, trust, credibility, and the potential for antagonism when working with any partner; but government in particular:
 - ➔ As per government policy, the National Counter Terrorism Centre (NCTC) and the Nairobi County Commissioner must be aware of your activities and support your approach.
 - ➔ Some elements of society are likely to dismiss your activities if seen to be associated too closely with the government (county or national).
- Broadly, communities trust civil society more than chiefs and elders. Potential CSO partners include:
 - ➔ Well-established organizations working on CVE issues in Nairobi's Majengo, and Eastleigh include the *Kamukunji Community Peace Network (KAPCEN)* and the *Usawa Group*.
 - ➔ The *Al Hekma Youth Welfare Group* and *Smile Jasiri* are prominent youth groups in Majengo and Eastleigh respectively.
 - ➔ Information sharing networks are gendered. Ensure you include women's groups. A potential partner in Majengo is the *Crown Ladies Project*, affiliated to *Al Hekma*.
- People in Nairobi tend to share information with those of the same religion. Ensure that both Christian and Muslim partners are identified.
- Religious leaders must be involved if delivering ideological messaging, to enhance credibility and ensure messaging has scriptural authority:
 - ➔ Mosque management committee elections are contentious. Identify when elections are due to be held and avoid working with one side.

The message

- Do not mention 'al Shabaab'. This will cause unease and limit information sharing.
- Allow the target community to formulate the message in their own terms,
- Ensure messages are clear and not open to misinterpretation.
- 'Slogans' may prove effective amongst youths and can be adapted for online use. 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 those in Majengo, and Eastleigh include "*Ujana ni Moshi*", "*Ugaidi si Suluhisho*" and "Allah means peace".
- Speak to the issues that matter in society and do not avoid emotive topics. Debate the options available for a community response to these issues.
 - ➔ As an example, discuss police harassment and allegations of extrajudicial violence.
 - ➔ Discuss the treatment of Muslims in Israel / Palestine.

Language

- Use Kiswahili when communicating with the wider community, and Sheng when targeting youths.
- Avoid using technical terms which may have different meanings to different people. Do not use terms like 'violent extremism' without discussing varied understandings.
- When working with religious leaders, involve a messenger that is well versed in the Qur'an and who can authoritatively use Arabic.

The messenger

- Identify youth leaders to share your messages. Peer-to-peer networks are key to shaping attitudes towards violent extremism.
- Popular local clerics are the best influencers when it comes to religious messaging. Clerics are in most cases willing to share messages on the street, as well as using the pulpit.
- Community Health Volunteers (CHVs) and peace leaders have access to large segments of the population and could be possible partner messengers.
 - ➔ Reformed youths and returnees are considered credible, but any work with these individuals needs to be sanctioned by NCTC.



Spaces

- Mosques provide community spaces, where a cross section of Islamic society can be accessed. However, note that women may not be present. Messages need to be equally applied across all institutions.
- Youths will be most effectively reached in-person at 'base' where issues affecting the community are discussed. However, recognize that men and women are unlikely to frequent the same spaces.
 - Sports pitches and gaming hubs are also useful spaces to engage with youths.



Media

- Use popular radio stations, such as *Ghetto Radio* and *Radio Jambo* (in particular the *Patanisho* show).
- Facebook and WhatsApp are the most popular platforms amongst the youth, but more sensitive issues are discussed on Telegram. Consider using these popular platforms to circulate messages of peace.
- Avoid using social media when sharing religious messages as they can easily be misrepresented.
 - If using slogans, these can be included on billboards, merchandise, radio shows etc.



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 the target audience.

- **Mentorship** programs have historically proven successful in Nairobi. To enhance sustainability and employability, consider linking mentees with local business actors who can serve as role models.
- **Employment schemes.** Link private entities with unemployed civilians with appropriate qualifications. Lack of opportunities, regardless of education, remains a major grievance.
- **Civic engagement.** Promote the benefits of voting in elections, understanding the mechanisms of the justice system, and increasing transparency around the mandates of various government positions. This can also include advice on identifying misinformation / 'fake news'.
- **Law enforcement.** Facilitate engagement between police officers and community members. This could involve the provision of meals or sports matches. Consider activities that will be attended by both men and women. Encourage officers to participate unarmed and in civilian clothes.
- **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.

- **Community activities.** Encourage meetings to foster community cohesion and communal responsibility for youths. In particular, bring together 'native' Kenyan Somali communities with more recent immigrant communities from Somalia.



Managing expectations

- Balance the need for immediate reward (compensation for involvement in activities) with transparency over the long-term objectives of a program.

What could go wrong?



- **Do not work with politicians.** Elected officials are not trusted by the community and will likely use the platform for their own objectives and could misinterpret the message.
- **Maintain confidentiality.** You will immediately lose the trust of a community if seen to you pass their names to government actors.
- **Do not discriminate.** If seen to be partisan through supporting a certain mosque or certain Islamic groupings, you will quickly lose credibility with the entire community.
- **Do not be judgmental and do not propagate western values.** People are suspicious. A lack of empathy will quickly push people away.
- **Avoid controversial theological debates.** Do not pass comment on controversial theological issues unless you have sufficient knowledge of the Qur'an. This is quick way to lose credibility.

STAKEHOLDERS		
	TRUST / PERCEPTIONS	RECOMMENDATIONS / ACTION
Donors	No significant issues were identified, but CVE is often seen as a foreign concept.	- Maintain limited visibility of 'Western' donors, including branding. - Frame programs in locally relevant language, around socio-economic empowerment where possible.
NCTC	- Maintain a low-profile. - Not widely known in the community.	- Ensure NCTC are aware of your activities, to enable them to deconflict your interventions with other programs. - NCTC personnel should not be present at program activities. There is no need to mention NCTC during public engagements.
County authorities	Most forms of government are mistrusted.	- Don't directly involve county officials in CVE activities. - Ensure that the County Commissioner (a national government figure) is aware of your activities. - Integrate activities with the county action plan if possible.
Police	- Universal rejection and mistrust amongst community members. - Some CSOs defend police officers but this can cause anger amongst those affected by police violence.	- Avoid defending the police. - Avoid police presence at most CVE activities. However, encourage structured police-community engagement, with the aim of making these routine/sustainable (rather than one-off discussions). - Ensure the police are aware of your planned engagement with communities.
Civil society	Specific CSOs and FBOs are trusted by different elements of society.	Work with local youth groups if your target audience is young people; work with FBOs if target audience is religious leaders.
Religious leaders	Ideological differences identified between mosques, but religious leaders are broadly trusted by most community members.	- Focus on unifying narratives, promoting peace. - Consider disseminating messages through clerics at mosques but avoid referencing CVE or 'al Shabaab' directly. - Encourage clerics to assist youths in contextualizing scripture through the provision of one-to-one guidance.
Community policing initiatives	Confusion over the mandates of Nyumba Kumi, peace committees and other community security organizations. Most are associated with the state and thus mistrusted.	- Facilitate public meetings to deconflict these initiatives. - Encourage and promote the independence of community representatives.
Chiefs	- Considered an extension of the state and widely rejected. - Seen as corrupt and exert minimal influence.	- Collect feedback on an individual's reputation prior to including them in a program. - Do not allow chiefs to dictate program beneficiaries. - Work with chiefs to encourage the use of barazas as spaces for discussion, not for issuing directives and collecting information. - Encourage chiefs to invite youths to existing barazas.

Elders	• Intergenerational divisions, sometimes based on ideology or control over mosques.	• Collect feedback on an individual's reputation prior to including them in a program. • Encourage dialogue between youths and elders.
The private sector	• Deep divide in the Somali community between those perceived to be 'native' to Kenya and immigrants from Somalia (perceived to be wealthier and in control of business). • Private organizations historically left out of most CVE work in Nairobi.	• Identify successful local companies run by 'native' Somali communities. • Link community members with local job opportunities. • Bring private companies on board when conducting mentorship programs
Politicians	• Mistrusted by wider society due to use of financial incentives to manipulate youths. • Seen as selfish/hypocritical.	• Avoid working with elected officials where possible. They will likely use the platform for their own objectives.
Teachers	• Some schools have been linked to the circulation of extremist ideas. Teachers were broadly trusted.	• Share simple messages with teachers for circulation in schools. • Educate teachers on topics to avoid.



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

Lisa Poggiali, Ph.D.

Democracy, Data and Technology Specialist
Center for Democracy, Human Rights and Governance
lpoggiali@usaid.gov