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Community Action Strategy

Countering Violent Extremism In Kenya

GOVERNMENT ENGAGEMENT

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 first in a series of six, provides recommendations for working with government actors at the national and county levels.

NATIONAL GOVERNMENT

- **Focus on tangible results.** Government actors should deliver viable solutions to communities’ local grievances, focusing on action, rather than narratives or messaging.
- **Continue supporting and resourcing the County Action Plans (CAPs).** CAPs offer useful feedback and lessons that can be incorporated into national policy. Government actors should continue to integrate gender sensitivities throughout the CAPs’ implementation, drawing on lessons learned from progress made along the Coast (particularly Mombasa).
 - CAPs should be living documents, subject to continual revision and adaptation. National and county government responsibilities should not end with the plan’s publication.
 - National stakeholders should work with international donors to develop sustainable funding arrangements for CAPs and ensure programs are not neglected or abandoned due to resource shortages.
- **Invest in, convene, and support private sector engagement in CVE programs.** Connecting CVE interventions with businesses and commercial entities can help practitioners sustain positive outcomes and tackle the socioeconomic grievances that often spur violence. Government backing and facilitation of these arrangements at the national and county levels will accelerate the process.
- **Invest in mechanisms to better manage staff transitions in the police and security services.**
 - Rotations are a ubiquitous feature of Kenyan government and law enforcement agencies, but negatively impact VE-affected communities. Government actors should facilitate continuity and preserve institutional memory in the staff transition process.
 - In some cases, focus on the administrative aspects of staff transitions, e.g., committees established by past County Commissioners. These should be reviewed and/or re-mandated, to avoid replicating existing governance structures. In other cases, focus on relationship-building and communication, potentially by facilitating mediation between new incumbents, their predecessor, and key local stakeholders to protect and sustain hard-earned trust between civil servants and community networks.
- **Harness the potential influence of returnees and defectors.** While there are substantial legal and social challenges associated with incorporating returnees and defectors into

CVE programming, the potential benefits may outweigh the risks. Communities affected by VE and 'at risk' youth often view these individuals as particularly effective and credible interlocutors. As a first step, government actors should clarify amnesty and defection procedures and harmonize formal approaches across administrative departments and security agencies. This would facilitate opportunities for cooperation and boost the quality and quantity of CVE content. Any potential partnerships with formers and returnees must be conducted in collaboration with NCTC.

- **Test assumptions and understand government limitations.**

- Work discretely. State institutions are unsuitable avenues for direct CVE messaging, so minimizing government visibility is key. Government officials should work with CSOs to map and coordinate activities,

mobilize resources, and resolve wider structural and state-based problems.

- Work in partnership with chiefs to ensure barazas (Swahili for public community meetings) are safe spaces for idea and grievance sharing, not intelligence collection exercises. Support chiefs to integrate barazas into community networks if they are siloed.
- Expand linkages between national and county governments, rather than relying on individual relationships between County Commissioners and County Governors. Security and law enforcement problems are often at the core of community grievances, but county officials have no mandate to address these problems at county level. Systematizing and institutionalizing coordination and communication could help resolve these challenges.

Sheik Isaac Abdulahi leads a discussion between clans in Garissa County.
Photo: USAID/Mwangi Kirubi



Police and security services

- **Improve communication and relations between Kenyan society and law enforcement.**

Approve and support CSO-led dialogue activities, meals, and sports-tournaments to build awareness, empathy, and mutual trust. Ideally, participating officers should not be armed or in uniform.

- Facilitate the involvement of lower ranking/ frontline security personnel alongside senior officials (e.g., the County Commissioner or Officer Commanding Station). For example, improve communication between the Anti-Terrorism Police Unit (ATPU) and local police departments so representatives can address questions/concerns regarding security operations.
- Diversify security representatives over time so community linkages with police stations are not contingent on lone individuals who are susceptible to transfer. This is critical for developing institutional memory, enacting structural reform, and internalizing (durable) normative change.
- Sustain buy-in and commitment. Given that CVE is a long-term process, CSOs will be under continual pressure to find 'quick wins' as a means of maintaining public interest. It is critical to solicit ongoing support from and engagement with government actors, and efforts should be made to ensure community outreach becomes a mandatory feature of police service.

- Review the make-up of police departments: 'parachuting in' external officers and commanders from other counties can accentuate tensions with surrounding communities – look

for opportunities to recruit local officers without compromising meritocratic standards.

- Review transfer practices and processes: the itinerancy and turnover of officials disrupts relationship-building and community outreach. Extending placement timeframes allows police to develop trust and credibility in host neighborhoods and cultivate a sense of reliability. This will also preserve the lessons learned from dialogue sessions with local constituents.
- Remember that security sector reform (SSR) is not confined to CVE – officials can streamline these efforts by mapping and connecting initiatives where possible, mitigating duplication, and exploiting synergies between government and non-government activities. Relevant focus areas could include:
 - Strengthening transparency, oversight, and accountability mechanisms to curb corruption and abuse. This crosscuts every strand of Kenya's security apparatus, but there are stand out concerns such as the conduct of General Service Unit (GSU) paramilitaries in Kwale.
 - Improving police training in CVE and administration. Highlight problematic assumptions, the importance of collaborating with civil society, and the negative impact of extrajudicial violence, as well as best practices for handling sensitive data and safeguarding confidentiality. Ensure this training is available to frontline officers and those who routinely interface with Kenyan society, such as Nyumba Kumi, chiefs and local elders, in addition to senior and mid-management personnel.

COUNTY GOVERNMENT

- **Publicize the CAPs.** Communities are broadly unaware of the role of the CAP and the CEF and thus civilians may assume that the authorities are not doing anything to combat the VE problem.
- **Pass legislation to ensure the CAPs are implemented.** In some counties, the CAP has not been through the County Assembly. This limits the utility of the document and local political buy-in.
- **Incorporate CVE into the CIDPs.** Although Kwale was one of the first counties to establish a CAP, the proposals were not included in the CIDP and thus remains unfunded and largely unimplemented.
- **Train county government staff in CVE.** Understanding of VE and CVE amongst county staff must be improved if they are to adequately communicate county plans amongst constituents.
- **Build opportunities for private sector engagement:** Integrate local businesses and commercial stakeholders into CEF networks, and the design and delivery of CVE activities, as they can increase community engagement and the sustainability of project outcomes. Connect private entities with unemployed civilians with appropriate qualifications. Lack of income-generating opportunities, regardless of education, remains a major grievance.
- **Better coordinate local peace-building initiatives.** Clarify the role and scope of peace committees and Nyumba Kumi in CVE and review the purpose and mandate of extraneous or under-funded governance structures to minimize replication and confusion.





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