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Community Action Strategy

Countering Violent Extremism In Kenya



MOMBASA

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 fifth in a series of six, provides recommendations for working in Mombasa County. Suggestions are based on research carried out in the neighborhoods of Kisauni, Majengo and Likoni.



Potential CVE partners

- Conduct a detailed stakeholder analysis within the community before you begin. Think carefully about which organizations and institutions to partner with. Consider trade-offs between access, trust, credibility, and the potential for antagonism when working with any partner, but government in particular. Perceptions of the same organization may differ between neighborhoods.
 - As per government policy, the National Counter Terrorism Centre (NCTC) and the Mombasa County Commissioner must be aware of your activities and support your approach.
 - Communities generally do not trust chiefs and other government representatives. They are dismissed as too closely associated with the state.
 - Civil society is vibrant and broadly trusted. However, you must be aware of the history, politics, and existing cleavages between organizations before selecting who you work with.
- Information sharing networks are gendered. Ensure you work with women's groups.
- In Mombasa, people also tend to share information with those of the same religion. It is important that both Christian and Muslim partners are identified.



The message

- Do not avoid emotive topics. In particular, discuss appropriate responses to police misconduct and the perceived marginalization of Muslims and coastal Kenya.
- Deepen understandings of concepts such as *jihad*. Criminal groups have been seen to be using scriptural justifications for crime against non-Muslims.
- Discuss the realities of life for Kenyan recruits in al Shabaab, to counter the prevalence of propaganda videos circulating.

- 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' may prove effective amongst young populations 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 Mombasa residents include "*Chanuka Uomoke*", "*Zuia Noma*", "*Elimu Kwanza*" and "*Kata Kutumiwa*".

Language

- Use Kiswahili whenever possible.
- Consider when it is and is not appropriate to use the label 'al Shabaab'. Directly referencing the group may be detrimental when speaking to individuals considered 'at risk' as it could push them away. However, in some settings, Mombasa residents suggest it is important not to shy away from discussing the group, as communities need to understand the risks associated.
- Avoid using technical terms which may have different meanings to different people.
 - When working with religious leaders, involve a messenger that is well versed in the Qur'an and who can authoritatively use Arabic.

The messenger

- Harness Mombasa's vibrant civil society. Many CSOs have extensive access and have established trusting relationships with the most vulnerable communities.
- Identify popular clerics to share CVE messages. Involve them from the outset and support them in how and where to convey messages.
- Identify chiefs and village elders who maintain strong relationships with communities.
 - 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

- Consider gender. Recognize that men and women may not frequent the same spaces. Women in Mombasa will often be more comfortable in private locations.
- Mosques remain important spaces for circulating community messages.
- Young people can be reached at *maskanis*, '*jaba*' bases (*mogakaa dens*), video halls and football grounds.

- Consider working through schools to target those under 18, a group rarely included in CVE programming. By the time these individuals are adults, their world views are well established.
- If *barazas* are reimagined, they could provide opportunities to reach a cross section of society.
- Use sports and the arts to bring youths together in locations where messages can be shared.
 - Festivals bring together people from all sectors of society, providing an opportunity to share messages.

Media

- In-person events are generally seen as likely to receive the greatest impact. Such activities can be used to launch social media campaigns.
- The most popular social media platform varies across the city. Consider using Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, TikTok, Telegram and Twitter.
- Support young actors in the creation of short skits highlighting the recruitment process. Community feedback can be collected to finesse the message. Tanzanian musicians are also highly popular.
 - Radio stations are popular amongst some people. Consider the specific audience you want to reach as different stations are popular with certain demographics. Some consider *Radio Salaam* to be pro-government; women may favor *Radio Rahma*; immigrant populations might listen to *Radio Kaya*; *Baraka FM* is popular amongst youths.

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** has worked historically in Mombasa. To enhance sustainability and employability, consider linking mentees with local business actors who can serve as role models.
- **Economic empowerment.** Build networks to help communities establish businesses through access to training, loans (such as the *Youth Enterprise Funds*, *County Revolving Fund* and *NGAAF*), financial institutions and government opportunities (such as the *Kenya Youth Employment Opportunities Project*). Mentorship programs can be linked with these opportunities.
- **Trauma counselling and psychosocial support** can also be integrated into mentorship interventions. Start with psychosocial support, building values and providing counseling to those affected by violence.
- **Inter and intra-faith dialogue.** Strengthen existing efforts to bring together religious leaders to learn from one another about different beliefs and practices. Encourage these leaders to host joint activities with their congregations.

- **Civic engagement.** Work with chiefs to reconsider how *barazas* are conducted. They should not be intelligence collection exercises but should be considered safe spaces in which all segments of society feel safe to share their ideas and grievances.
- **Law enforcement.** Encourage dialogue (through sport or meals) between youths and the police. Consider activities that will be attended by both men and women. Encourage officers to participate unarmed and in civilian clothes.
- **Media, arts, and sport.** Young people may be attracted to these activities, platforms which can be used to disseminate messages.
- **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.
- Mombasa has experienced CVE programming for at least a decade. Communicate clearly how your approach seeks to make a difference in the longer term.

What could go wrong?



- **Conflicts of interest.** With civil society divided, interventions can quickly become politicized.
- **Blame.** Do not criticize those you are trying to support. Empathy is essential.
- **Women share with women; men share with men.** Ensure you are communicating directly with both genders, as there is minimal information sharing between the two.
- **Deliver on promises.** Manage expectations around financial rewards to avoid disappointment.
- **Misinformation.** Ensure that the message is straightforward and cannot be misinterpreted. Do not speak about theologically contentious issues unless you are confident in doing so.

STAKEHOLDERS		
	TRUST / PERCEPTIONS	RECOMMENDATIONS / ACTION
Donors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No significant issues identified, but local entities generally respected. VE more easily understood through local experiences. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintain limited visibility of 'Western' donors, including branding. Frame programs in locally relevant language, around socio-economic empowerment, and a reduction in violence where possible.
NCTC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintain a low-profile. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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. There is no need to mention NCTC at public engagements.
County authorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not necessarily rejected automatically by all elements of the community, 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensure that the County Commissioner (a national government figure) and the County Governor are aware of your activities. Align your activities with the newly revamped CAP. Consider carefully when to involve county government figures.
Police	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Universal rejection and mistrust amongst Mombasa residents. Non-local officers especially treated with suspicion. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Avoid defending the police. Avoid police presence during most activities but facilitate specific police-community engagement sessions. Ensure senior commanders are aware of your planned engagement with communities.
Civil society	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A vibrant civil society, with plenty of experience, but also rivalry. Some CSO popularity said to be driven by cash hand-outs, rather than genuine trust. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understand local perceptions of specific CSOs. Work with local CSOs that have established trust with particular communities. Seek to understand cleavages within Mombasa's civil society.
Religious leaders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Broadly respected. Theological divisions identified in Likoni. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider disseminating messages through clerics at mosques. Ensure engagement with all ethnic groupings (Swahili, Somali, Arab etc.).
Community policing initiatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nyumba Kumi broadly seen as corrupt or sell-outs to the government. Seen to exclude youths. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nyumba Kumi clusters are not currently key stakeholders in CVE work. Apply lessons learned from successful Nyumba Kumi clusters in rural parts of the country.
Chiefs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Often rejected as elderly, representatives of the state. Seen to use force in their approach and to use barazas to collect information, not share. Popularity of some chiefs is idiosyncratic and based on individual personalities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collect feedback on a chief's reputation prior to including them in the program. 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Village elders are sometimes respected. Others dismissed as incompetent or corrupt. Seen as first point of contact with the state before one reaches the chief. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work with elders to improve understanding of VE issues. Facilitate increased dialogue between elders and youths.
The private sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not included in CVE work, despite widespread emphasis on socioeconomic drivers of VE 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Link community members with job opportunities. Bring private companies on board when conducting mentorship programs.
Returnees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Seen as able to provide evidence that joining al Shabaab does not provide access to quick money. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work with NCTC to identify returnees (or reformed youths) to share their experiences of broken promises.
Politicians	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Broadly mistrusted but listened to due to a willingness to hand out cash. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do not include elected officials in CVE programming.
Teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Broadly trusted. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work with schools to encourage 'at risk' youths to take classes in Business Studies.



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

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