Community Action Strategy
Countering Violent Extremism In Kenya

NYERI

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 sixth in a series of six, provides recommendations for working in Nyeri County. Suggestions are based on research carried out in the neighborhoods of Majengo and Ruring'u (in Nyeri town).

Potential CVE partners

- Conduct a detailed stakeholder analysis within the community before you begin. Think carefully about which organizations and institutions you partner with. Consider trade-offs between access, trust, credibility, and the potential for antagonism.

  → As per government policy, the National Counter Terrorism Centre (NCTC) and the Nyeri County Commissioner must be aware of your activities and support your approach.

  → Some chiefs are trusted, but others are dismissed as too closely associated with the state. Identify respected chiefs and increase their capacity to discuss VE issues.

  → Religious leaders – both Christian and Muslim – are respected as important messengers.

  → Civil society is broadly trusted and CSOs often work through youth leaders. Examples of CSOs in Majengo and Ruring'u include the *Majengo Muslims Association*, the *Ruring'u Muslims Association*, and the *Youth 4 Youth Reform Movement.*

    • Information sharing networks are gendered. Ensure you include women's groups, such as the *Nyeri Muslim Women Empowerment Organization* and the *Nyeri Youth and Women Empowerment Organization.*

The message

- Combine discussions of al Shabaab with efforts to prevent recruitment into Mungiki and other local criminal organizations and gangs. The subject will gain more traction this way.

- Delegitimize promises of money from al Shabaab. Discuss the treatment of Kenyan recruits in the group.

- Do not avoid emotive topics. In particular, discuss appropriate responses to police misconduct and the perceived marginalization of Muslims.

→ 'Slogans' may prove effective with young populations. However, 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 Majengo residents included *"Ugaidi ni kifo"*, *"Vijana tumeamua tuwache kutumiwa na vikundi haramu"* and *"Gaidi hana dini, jinsia au kabila"*.

A Language

- 'Al Shabaab' can be named directly and may be a more useful term than 'violent extremism' in ensuring mutual understanding. However, the messenger should only use language they are comfortable with.

- Avoid using technical terms which may have different meanings to different people.

- Use Kiswahili, rather than English or Kikuyu, when communicating with the wider community.

  → Working with religious leaders, consider using a Qur'anic expert able to authoritatively use Arabic.

The messenger

- Self-styled youth leaders enjoy significant support amongst both the young population and the elite. These individuals act as key gatekeepers.

- Reformed youths and 'returnees' are already active in the community. Verify these individuals' credentials and – with NCTC's blessing – work with them to create awareness of the risks in joining violent organizations.

- Involve local clerics (both Christian and Muslim) in interfaith peace messaging. Popular celebrity clerics such as Sheikh Nurdin Kishki could also be considered.

- The Council of Elders / Kiama Kia Ma should be encouraged to integrate relevant messages into existing rites of passage, such as the existing mentorship component of the circumcision ceremony for boys.

Spaces

- Consider gender. Recognize that men and women may not frequent the same spaces or be as comfortable in those spaces.

- Social halls are popular spaces to hold community dialogue meetings.

- Some sections of the community will be most effectively reached at 'jobless corners' and 'miraa bases' where issues affecting the community are frequently discussed.

- Youths should be encouraged to attend *barazas* where elders and other messengers can speak to them.

- Mosques and churches remain important spaces for circulating community messages.

🔊 Media

- Popular television channels include *Citizen, Inooro, Kameme* and *Horizon.*

- Consider engaging with local art groups to create short skits highlighting the risks of recruitment into violent organizations (crime or VE). These can be performed in person or recorded and circulated on social media.

- Communities support the strategic use of posters and billboards to raise awareness of the threat.

- The notion of 'roadshows' are popular ways of transmitting a message.

- Facebook is the most popular platform in Nyeri, followed by WhatsApp. Consider using these platforms to circulate messages of peace. Few are aware of Telegram.

- Slogans can be shared on posters. These should not directly address al Shabaab.

🤝 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.

- **Employment.** Focus on tackling socio-economic grievances, through support to the *Nyeri Youth Employment Compact.* Harness the 'for-profit' presence in the Nyeri CEF. Link private entities with qualified youths.

- **Mentorship and role models.** It was argued that children exhibiting bad behavior should be paired with those achieving good grades or obtaining jobs. Work through traditional Kikuyu mentorship structures. Pair 'reverts' with experienced imams for scriptural guidance.

- **Civil engagement.** Incorporate CVE messaging into existing civic engagement. Encourage youths to attend *barazas* and to vote in elections. Provide guidance on identifying misinformation and 'fake news'.

- **Law enforcement.** Facilitate engagement between police officers and community members in Majengo. 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.

- **Interfaith dialogue.** The Muslim population of Majengo and Ruring'u is in the minority in Nyeri. Encourage dialogue between Muslim and Christian communities to improve mutual understanding.

- **Sports.** Work to provide reassurances regarding the identity of sports coaches. Recognize that, historically, recruitment in Nyeri took place at the football pitch.

- **Community activities.** Hold cooking and eating competitions, where youth will gather. Messages can be shared with them at these events. Focus on cohesion and a communal responsibility for youths.

Managing expectations

- Communities in Nyeri do not yet suffer from research fatigue, but they do expect results and financial returns. Whilst the value of workshops in raising awareness was appreciated by some, others want to see immediate tangible improvements in their lives.

- 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.** Nyeri is a politically contentious county, with a history of political violence. Politicians' involvement in programming will be divisive.

- **Timing.** During elections, messages will be lost in politics.

- **Deliver on promises.** Empty promises will lead to a loss of trust. Manage expectations to avoid disappointment.

- **Consistency.** Elders are divided and it was stressed that different branches of the Kikuyu Council of Elders must ensure consistency of message.

- **Misinformation.** Ensure that the message is straightforward and cannot be misinterpreted.

STAKEHOLDERS

	TRUST / PERCEPTIONS	RECOMMENDATIONS / ACTION
Donors	• No significant issues were identified, but local entities are generally respected.	• 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	• Maintain a low-profile. • Not known in Majengo and Ruring'u, outside those who are members of the Nyeri CEF.	• 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	• Majengo communities do not trust government, either county or national. County politics is particularly fraught and divided.	• Ensure that the County Commissioner (a national government figure) is aware of your activities. • Integrate your activities with the CAP if possible. • Encourage the county government to broaden employment schemes to include residents of Majengo.
Police	• Universal rejection and mistrust amongst Majengo residents.	• Avoid defending the police. • Avoid police presence during most intervention activities but facilitate specific police-community engagement sessions. • Ensure senior commanders are aware of your planned engagement with communities.
Civil society	• Trusted. Communities take their personal issues to CSOs. • Friction identified between CSOs within the CEF. • Youth groups are particularly popular in Majengo and Ruring'u.	• Understand local perceptions of specific CSOs. • Identify particularly influential youth leaders.
Religious leaders	• Broadly respected. • Relative harmony between Christian and Muslim institutions.	• Draw on existing positive relationships between Christian and Muslim religious leaders. • Consider disseminating messages through clerics at mosques.
Community policing initiatives	• Some Nyumba Kumi officials respected. The scheme works better in more rural areas. • Some Nyumba Kumi officials distrust the state.	• Apply lessons learned from successful Nyumba Kumi clusters to those in Majengo and Ruring'u. • Work with active Nyumba Kumi members in Majengo to improve relationships with the state.
Chiefs	• Some chiefs are respected as the go-to authority in the event of a community issue.	• 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	• Kikuyu elders' councils are divided, but broadly elders are trusted by most sections of the community.	• Build mentorship schemes around existing Kikuyu structures. • Bring rival elders together to ensure consistency of message.
The private sector	• Existing (if minimal) presence on the CEF. • Perceived not to recruit from Majengo.	• Link qualified community members with appropriate job opportunities. • Bring private companies on board when conducting mentorship programs.
Returnees	• Seen as able to provide evidence that joining al Shabaab does not provide access to quick money.	• Work with NCTC to identify returnees who can share their experiences of broken promises.
Politicians	• Said to pay youths to partake in violence against the opposition. • Broadly mistrusted.	• 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.

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

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