



02
Sept 19

POLICY BRIEF

BUILD RELATIONSHIPS TO PREVENT VIOLENT
EXTREMISM

SCOFIELD ASSOCIATES
*Horn of Africa Research
Partner*

*Lessons from law enforcement and
community programing*

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Communities perceive policies as good or bad, depending on the methods of implementation and practice. Discussions around the challenges associated with the impact of violent extremism and terrorism, especially to those directly affected by attacks, is aware of the importance of security from government agencies including law enforcement. However, the process of implementation of policy and strategy serves to do more harm than good in most cases.(1) In Kamukunji Sub-county; Nairobi, the challenges associated with returnees is real and continuously growing. The activities of suspected violent extremists are increasingly significant, necessitating the construction and revision of policy and practice in hotspot areas and around the country.(2) However, the logic of disruption as shown by the operations including Usalama-Watch, usually assumed the role of the community in the prevention process, and police interventions avoided pursuing fully-fledged prosecution, and relationship building that represents a pragmatic way of preventing violent extremism.(3)

The actions from the government as administered by the law enforcement teams over time, serve as a pointer to the never-ending link between violent extremism and the grievance narrative that has fueled the revenge in the communities. From Nairobi to Mombasa and other areas, cases of extrajudicial killing resulting to gross violations of human rights (4) and cases of mistaken identity, (5) have been reported. Though there is mixed reaction from the community (6) on some cases of extrajudicial killing, consensus point to the fact that this policy direction served to destroy the gains made by the state and other non-state actors in preventing violent extremism.

Various community research processes point to a community that over time; remained harassed, silent and non-responsive, leading to reduced resilience capacities and increased need for alternatives. (7) Even with these challenges, programs and projects in the community provide insights on areas that can ensure a prolonged and lasting impact in the prevent journey. Lessons from these programs can be used to advise policy development, and implementation, to ensure minimal blow-back and and erosion of the gains.. The policy brief documents one such program that sought to build the relationship between the community and the police to ensure ease and accuracy in information sharing, accountability in community engagement and involvement in response.

INTRODUCTION

Terrorism has been credited as the use of violence by a group for political gain. Terrorism and violent extremism begin as ideas struggling to permeate the challenges associated with fear, harassment, and limited opportunities to engage. (8) It is from this thinking that the commonalities of terrorism are to politics that to religion. (9)

Actions that are continuously undertaken without moral justification to harass, intimidate and instill fear through shocking of values in the society, compel communities into the path of radicalisation and recruitment. (10) Governments including Kenya, always have to grapple with the challenges associated with the nexus between human rights and terrorism. (11) An analysis of the countering terrorism sphere documents the three major categorisations of response. These include; counter-radicalisation responds to the vulnerabilities in the communities, deradicalisation that provides alternatives by focusing on rehabilitation of those engaged in early phases of violent extremism, and finally, the punitive measures that use the law enforcement agencies to deal with highly radicalised and operational individuals.(12)

In most cases, Governments have opted for the policies that push the avoidance of human rights as a necessary and unfortunate cost of preventing terrorism.(13) This direction has been supported in some cases by correlations that show limited links between terrorism and human rights issues and more of the political issues that affect different communities.(14) Limited community engagement resulting from marginalisation narratives and other at-risk naming categories is also influenced by the interpretation of the external environment and political socialisation.(15) The administration of these policies have been made possible through the use of laws and regulations that minimise the opportunities for engagement in the communities, and in some cases, justify harassment of the suspected communities.(16)

These actions are made possible through the engagement with law enforcement teams who serve as the extension of the government. Usalama Watch is long gone but the actions from the operation, paint the government and by extension the law enforcement teams; as the contributing variables to radicalisation.(17) Therefore, the engagement of the government to the community, on preventing violent extremism is felt through the interactions between the communities and the law enforcement agencies.

The policy directions above may be misguided and lacking as research has shown that flaunting human rights in the belief that it is assured of security, serves only to place states in the same moral grounds as terrorists.(18) Additionally, more research points to the importance of a softer approach that creates relationships and provides opportunities for information sharing, as a means of preventing violent extremism in communities.(19) A system-wide approach that recognises the importance of community resilience and aspects of relationship building provides better chances of dealing a blow to violent extremism and terrorism unlike the use of the hard power approaches. It also ensures that the communities are not profiled but included in the process of preventing violent extremism.

It is these actions that programs in the community provide insights and advice on what works in the community and how governments and other partners can adopt for better programming.

PURPOSE AND INTENDED USE

This policy brief borrows from Community Together Initiative project implemented in Kamukunji, Nairobi Kenya; that sought to engage the law enforcement teams to challenge of violent extremism and terrorism. The underlying thought revolved around partnership, information sharing, capacity building and resilience, within the community. The program activities ensured 30 members of the community are capacity built, on alternative dispute resolution and basic understanding on terrorism and violent extremism. The program also ensured a Trainer of Trainer engagement of 150 community members by creating messaging and community engagement forums targeting 15,000 individuals. The project sought to strengthen existing structures to encourage communication and information sharing to build resilience.

This policy brief does not suggest the complete avoidance of securing processes that ensure the protection of human rights. It encourages the observance of physical integrity rights,(20) to prevent violent extremism and terrorism. It borrows a lot from the theory of change that; building relationships with the policing units at the community level while dealing with trauma and unintended actions of both the police and communities, will reduce the susceptibility to radicalization, and increase the response to address cases of injustice through conflict management and countering violent extremism, while fostering tolerance.

LESSONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Programming has recognised the importance of providing updates and information on the nature and context of the community where law enforcement teams operate. Part of the challenge associated with transfers of officers is made complex due to limited organic training opportunities where the officers are posted. These officers, therefore, depend on stereotypes to navigate the contexts in the new communities. The law enforcement agencies should institutionalise constant orientation training within communities where the officers are posted to deal with the stereotypes and build relationships.
2. Recognition and acknowledgement serve as a contributor to success in communities. Communities view and judge programs and policies and strategies, based on their the impact and results. It is crucial to recognise officers and outstanding community members who offer contributions to preventing violent extremism as it forms a new narrative that strengthens the power of sharing and relationship building.
3. Information sharing on community activities and challenges facing the community serves as a critical component for programming. The process encourages trust-building and expands the reach of programs. Programming should focus on the use of social media to open up spaces for interactions and expand communities of change agents beyond the geographical scope of projects. Platforms that document success, community engagement and accountability, should be encouraged within government, especially with the law enforcement teams. These platforms also provide an opportunity for sustainable programming beyond donor funding.

4. Structural issues form the narratives that push individuals into violent extremism and terrorism. Harassment and profiling in communities borrow a lot from structural challenges to associate access to opportunities as a barrier to peaceful coexistence and equator to radicalisation that leads to terrorism. By its very nature, these assumptions form a stereotype that is detrimental to the youth. The nexus between countering violent extremism programs and development programs are shrinking, and future programs are encouraged to explore growth activities during programming or work with private sector in their activities. Funding opportunities should explore a criterion that requires civil society to mention the role of government and the private sector; during program implementation, and after the program is completed.

5. The complexities associated with violent extremism and terrorism make it challenging to end profiling and harassment instantly. However, contextualization of the problem makes it easier to respond to the needs of the community and form a critical mass of individuals who provide guidance when need arises. Capacity building programs and training are encouraged. However, an equation that determines the saturation points for success in community programs would help in ensuring that program activities get out of the funding cycle that plateaus growth, and into one that encourages a post-growth process that is sustainable. These would help the adoption of new procedures for building community and law enforcement relationships beyond the program areas.

Finally, community programs like Community Together Initiative provide many opportunities to learn and share. The lessons learnt are geared towards the government officials for consideration when drafting and operationalising policy, and the community, to encourage engagement. The road map to future activities is not one of reinvention but that of revision and highlighting, for areas that require attention.

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