A Report on Preventing/Countering Violent Extremism [CVE]

A Discussion and Engagement Workshop with the National Police Service [NPS] and the Local Administration [Chiefs/Sub Chiefs]

Report Submitted To

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Acronyms

AOP   Agents of Peace
CT   Counter Terrorism
NPS   National Police Service
P/CVE   Preventing/Countering Violent Extremism

Introduction

Over the recent past, the understanding of how and why individuals engage in violent extremism and terrorism has evolved and become more nuanced, as have the tools to prevent these threats. A organization focused on field of policy and practice known as Agents of Peace has emerged on countering the pull of terrorist recruitment and influence by building resilience among populations vulnerable to radicalization.

As the domain of CVE continues to mature and expand, moving further to address root causes of extremist violence, much of the work touches the realm of peace building. Peace builders, through their broader agenda of conflict prevention, also focus on countering extremist violence. Violent extremism is a driver of conflict, and violent extremists are often spoilers in peace building efforts. Peace building and CVE work increasingly intersect, though approaches and practice in the two domains often differ.

About Agents of Peace

Agents of Peace [AOP], was established as an organization in response to the growth of violent extremism and radicalization leading to terrorism acts against innocent lives in Kenya. AOP's core mandate is to Prevent and to Counter Violent Extremism and Radicalization within the community

and to promote peaceful coexistence among our society regardless of Religious, Ethnicity and tribal backgrounds.

> *Its Vision is to promote peaceful co-existence among our societies regardless of religion, ethnicity, race and color, while Its Mission is to provide a platform for peace in which people's differences and misunderstanding can be dealt with non-violently and through dialogue and discussions.*

To deliver on its cultural identity [vision and mission], AOP organizes and convenes various activities and programs centered at empowering key social actors on prevention of CVE, enhancing prospects for peace and security. Its core activities include street campaigns addressing and awareness on violent extremism and terrorism, peace walks against terrorism attacks, peace summit with religious leaders to address radicalization and true meaning of jihad in Islam and university programs on preventing/ countering violent extremism and radicalization leading to terrorism. As AOP, the organization strives to eradicate the myths, negative perceptions and assumptions within Kenyan Communities on religious, ethnicity and tribal grounds, which leads to some young people becoming alienated and disempowered.

Extremists of all persuasions aim to develop destructive relationships between different communities by promoting division, fear and mistrust of others based on ignorance or prejudice and thereby limiting the life chances of young people. Education, dialogue and forum of discussions is a powerful weapon against this; equipping young people with the knowledge, skills and critical thinking, to challenge and debate in an informed way. Any prejudice, discrimination or extremist views, including derogatory language, based on religion, ethnicity or tribal displayed by religious leaders, student or youth within our community will always be challenged and, where appropriate, dealt with according to both Christian and Islamic values.

Overview
Preventing/Countering Violent Extremism (P/CVE) forms an important part of AOP's work on the prevention of violent extremism, terrorism and conflict. AOP's work focuses on the early identification of threats and more importantly analyses the effectiveness of measures available to respond to these threats. Besides carrying out studies, AOP also provide technical assistance through tailor-made workshops focused on different aspects of P/CVE ranging from civil society engagement to education reform to the reintegration and rehabilitation of former violent extremist offenders. AOP aims to assist governments in the development of a comprehensive multistakeholder P/CVE approach including actors from local and national government, such as, youth, women, victims of terrorism and civil society.

Objectives of the Engagement Workshop on CVE
AOP convened a one-day engagement workshop with the Local Security Administration which included the National Police Service and the Local Chiefs/Sub Chiefs.
- ☐ The Objective was to discuss the core factors that trigger radicalism in view of mapping opportunities to develop a Nairobi Action Plan on CVE

In greater depth, the workshop discussed the core pillars of Economic, Political, Education, Ideological and Law Enforcement and how these relate to countering CVE in the community.

A Deeper Understanding: Unpacking the core Pillars

CVE emerges from and does, for the most part, remain anchored - *programmatically and conceptually* - in the international and national security policymaking community as part of a broader effort to counter terrorism. The shift to prevention began as a concept spurred largely by the changing nature of terrorism and the advent of decentralized actors and self-radicalized small groups.

Over time, this affected the ways in which the international community worked to counter the threat but also increased awareness that the pursuit and apprehension of terrorists was—and is—a different functional problem than the prevention of new recruits.

> **For and according to AOP***, the shift in emphasis to CVE engagement was and should continually be guided by the realization and in-depth understanding that some CT approaches have indeed exacerbated the threat and added new recruits to the ranks of terrorist groups and movements.*
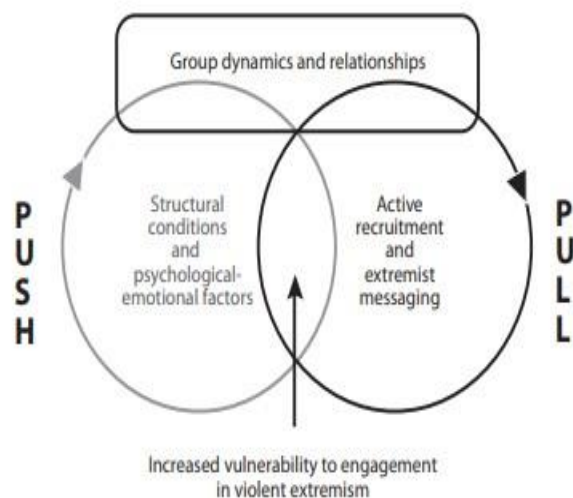>
> *On this informed basis, it is key to note that to a large degree, and somewhat symbiotically, CVE policy should keep pace with an expanded understanding of how and why individuals become involved in extremist violence.*

Key Questions:

- ☐ What leads a **young man or woman** to a movement or a radical group? Or a teenager – still in school - to spend **time with or to join** the ranks of a radical movement – virtually or physically?

- ☐ What is the nature of the relationship between the **police and the general community**? What role does this relationship play in **addressing or countering** CVE in its very nature?

To this effect, AOP classifies this symbiotic relationship as the drivers of CVE being anchored on several levels;

- ☐ Push factors include structural conditions, such as poverty, and grievances, such as lack of access to political processes or justice;
- ☐ Individual psychological and emotional characteristics, such as need for belonging, dignity, meaning, or revenge, or the continuation of cycles of violence brought on by chronic conflict;
- ☐ The influence of socialization and group dynamics by family, peers, and schools; and

Group dynamics and relationships

P U S H

Structural conditions and psychological-emotional factors

Active recruitment and extremist messaging

P U L L

Increased vulnerability to engagement in violent extremism

☐ Pull of active recruitment to include extremist messaging that inspires violence

Key Discussions

Although the radicalization process is highly contextual, many of the push factors that relate to an individual's internal traits and psychological motivations can be globally understood. Common social and psychological motivations for participating in terrorist groups and movements are the need for belonging and/or validation. Others are emotional drivers, such as a desire for revenge and responses to perceived humiliation, especially in the case of suicide attacks. A sense of thrill seeking and adventure are also partly push factors of engagement in violence.

In this way, understanding the dynamics of radicalization requires an appreciation for human psychology. Underscoring this concept of radicalization is an acknowledgment that there is not a direct causal relationship between radical ideas and extremist violence. This is because, not all violent extremists are radical in their belief system, in that some have only a superficial adherence to the ideology believed to —inspire‖ the violent acts. This is an important perspective that suggests that focusing on —countering the narrative‖ of extremists is only part of the solution. This thinking is manifested in the policy shift to a —whole-of-government approach‖ to countering violent extremism and is reflected in the —development and security nexus‖ debate.

As such, CVE practice needs to be expanded to include a spectrum of interventions that range from working to counter the narrative of terrorist recruitment messaging to development projects designed to mitigate the more structural causes that make an individual vulnerable to recruitment. In this regard, it is key to note that CVE policy and practice should be the promotion of cooperative and trust-based relationships between local communities and local police building to the concept of community-led policing. In certain environments, civil society actors are at risk of being instrumentalized by security services in the effort to prevent extremist violence, whereby the relationship can be used more to collect intelligence than to work cooperatively. This reality demands thoughtful implementation of this particular CVE prevention approach.

Key Achievement of the Engagement

The workshop achieved the following;
  ☐ A harmonized understanding and appreciation of the interdependence of the diverse roles of; the National Police and The Chiefs in countering CVE
  ☐ A step towards deliberations aimed at formulating the Nairobi Action Plan on CVE
  ☐ Commitment to continually engage AOP for opportunities of capacity building on the concept of CVE, continually.

Recommendations

There is need to support a no securitized space for all community members. This is because; they have a role in the identification of rogue elements and prevention of extremist violence independent of engagement with the security sector or other state actors. With the help of peace building organizations like AOP, communities can develop effective programs to increase community awareness of the dynamics of radicalization and teach the skills associated with building resilience and resistance to the drivers of violent extremism.

Women have been overlooked as a resource in CVE policy and planning but are poised to play significant and unique roles in their homes, schools, communities, and county government to help prevent violence. Indeed, some already do, although their participation is not recognized or documented as CVE per se. Peace builders, with their inclusive and gender-sensitive ethos, are wellpositioned to help empower women in local communities engage safely and productively in preventing violence

For AOP as a Peace builders' Organization, it can help lay the groundwork for effective police CVE work by working to reform and build the capacity of those security bodies charged with this mandate. Training programs that focus on enhancing the delivery of security services within the framework of democratic governance with full respect for human rights and the rule of law are a significant step toward building trust between civil society and the security sector.

Pictorials