SARVE II
System and Structure Strengthening Approach
Against Radicalisation to Violent Extremism

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POLICY BRIEF

ON YOUTH DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES AND THE PREVENTION OF VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN NIGERIA: THE NEXUS

Monitoring and Evaluation Officer, Michael Oyinlola engaging the participants at the 2019 Youth Peace Camp in Kogi state facilitated by ActionAid Nigeria in partnership with Participation Initiative for Behavioural Change in development (PIBCID) with Funding from Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund (GCERF)

Participants at the registration boot for the 2019 Youth Peace camp in Kogi state.

BACKGROUND

The United Nations Population Fund, UNFPA, estimates the current population of Nigeria to be over 200 million. According to the statistics, the youth occupies about 65% of the total population. This means that the young people constitute about one third of Nigeria's population. It is therefore imperative to harness the demographic advantages of young people and ensure that policies for social, political and economic development are created as well as implemented to promote the socio-economic and political progress, reduce poverty and optimise economic performances. Furthermore, reports reveal that in Nigeria, the youth (ages 18-30) account for about 65% of the total labour force and this figure is projected to increase to 89 % by 2025 (FGN, 2009).

Hence, the need for Nigeria's development efforts to reflect this demographic fact has become paramount and compelling. The demographic argument or youth bulge is probably one of the most powerful and compelling reasons for recognising the role of youths in political and socio-economic development for sustainable development and peace building. Consequently, there have been gaps in youth development initiatives, especially policies of government aimed at mitigating the security risk posed by youth bulges in Nigeria. This has enormous implications for radicalisation and violent extremism in Nigeria.

CAUSES AND DRIVERS OF VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN NIGERIA

There is a myriad of explanations and narratives to the possible causes of violent extremism in Nigeria. These factors can be grouped into the "Push and Pull Factors" (Albert, 2018).

According to Leuven (2019, p. 29), the "push factors" are conditions or grievances that create a sense of frustration, marginalisation and disempowerment which encourage people to seek out remedies including, but not limited to, joining extremist groups or embracing violent extremist world views. These factors may include structural issues such as "demographic imbalances, poverty, inequality, discrimination or polarised environments and transitional societies." Similarly, Albert (2018) concurred that some push factors include exclusion, deprivation, horizontal inequalities, persecution or the perception thereof; limited access to quality and relevant education, unemployment, underemployment, rights denial, historic grievances, weak family system, weak educational system, among others.

More so, the United Nations Development Programme, UNDP (2017), unequivocally underscores the relevance of economic factors as drivers of recruitment. According to reports, about 86.9 million people in Nigeria are living in extreme poverty with unemployment as one of the major causes of poverty. Statistics also show that the unemployment rate in Nigeria is 23.13 %, while the youth

unemployment is significantly higher at 38%, as revealed by the World Bank.

In a survey by Buchanan-Clarke & Lekale (2016), unemployment is one of the biggest socio-economic problems in Nigeria. In addition, the "pull factors – forces that can be attractive to potential recruits and specifically draw them into radical organisations, such as a sense of kinship, heroism, adventure, economic gain or self-realisation" (Leuven (2019, p. 29) .This according to him explains the drivers of violent extremism in the society .
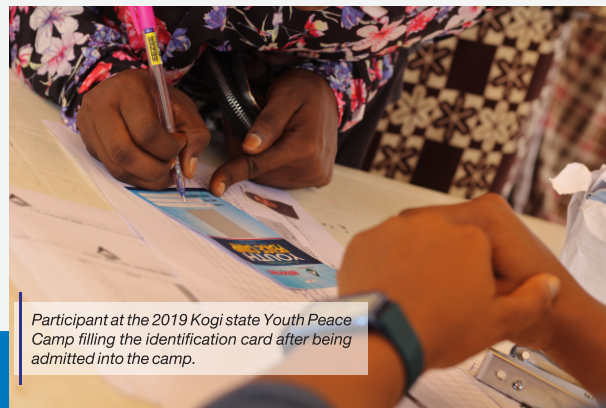
The pull factor also referred to as "individual incentives," which is more effective when violent extremist groups claim that their goals are to resolve the issues, identified as push factors. However, there are varying arguments on the drivers of violent extremism, two of the greatest disagreements revolve around whether religion and economy are drivers of violent extremism. It is important to maintain that religious leaders and economic opportunities can be important allies and entry points in working to counter and prevent violent extremism. In this way, a State's failure to provide basic rights, services and the pull factor also referred to as "individual incentives," which is more effective when violent extremist groups claim that their goals are to resolve the issues, identified as push factors.

However, there are varying arguments on the drivers of violent extremism, two of the greatest disagreements revolve around whether religion and economy are drivers of violent extremism. It is important to maintain that religious leaders and economic opportunities can be important allies and entry points in working to counter and prevent violent extremism. In this way, a State's failure to provide basic rights, services and security will not only contribute to a growing inequality but also   create a vacuum that will allow non-State actors to take control over the state sovereignty and territory. In view of this, it is pertinent   to add that recruitment into violent extremism occurs at various levels depending on many factors and context. These include the individual, group, community, region, state and global levels. The drivers to violent extremism vary across individuals, communities and regions, yet, there is commonality in the ideology and narratives employed by extremist groups (USAID, 2016).

Therefore, one can submit that, violent extremism is the product of historical, political, economic and social circumstances, propelled by religious ideology. More so, growing horizontal inequalities, exclusive politics and governance are some of the consistently cited factors fueling violent extremism.

However, unemployment or poverty cannot be the only push factor inciting violence extremism, but perceptions of injustice, human rights violations, socio-political exclusion, widespread corruption or sustained maltreatment of certain groups, are also considered important push factors. When all these horizontal inequalities come together for a group,

radical movements and violence are more likely to erupt (UNDP, 2017). Also, when socialisation processes that are aimed at fostering social cohesion fails, individuals become more vulnerable and may get attracted to more radical and violent beliefs and attitudes.

Participant at the 2019 Kogi state Youth Peace Camp filling the identification card after being admitted into the camp.

Participants at the 2019 Youth Peace Camp in Nasarawa state, engaging actively during the morning exercise.

THE NEXUS BETWEEN YOUTH DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES AND VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN NIGERIA

Youth Development Initiatives are empowerment programmes designed specifically to avail children and young people the opportunity to take charge of their lives. These initiatives are designed to addressing their situation and help them act in order to improve their access to resources and transform their consciousness through their beliefs, values and attitudes. Thus, the initiatives increase the entrepreneurial skills of the youth, create avenues for the development of potentials , enable them acquire new skills ,develop the already learned skills, equip the youth for the task ahead, as well as equip their minds towards critical thinking and reduce dependence on the government.

Consequently, the absence of youth development initiatives

ActionAid Nigeria's Administrative Consultant, kate Donatus facilitating the registration process at the 2019 Youth Peace Camp in Kogi state.

to engage and include the youth in socio-economic and political policies has been identified as one of the major factors explaining radicalisation and violent extremism in Nigeria. As submitted by Audu (2016), poverty and falling income are the critical drivers of violent extremism in developing countries such as Nigeria. Thus, the membership of violent groups like insurgency, banditry, kidnapping, militancy and other violent crimes become more attractive, especially for the unemployed youth, when legitimate income-earning options are scarce or absent. Developmental practices and inclusive politics have been identified as a critical role in providing the foundation for preventing violent extremism, especially among the youths. Sustainable solutions for the prevention of violent extremism therefore require an inclusive development approach anchored in tolerance, political and economic empowerment and reduction of inequalities.

Violent extremism in Nigeria is setting in motion a dramatic reversal of development gains and threatening to stunt prospects of development for decades to come. The expanding reach and destructive consequences of violent extremism are among the major challenges to peace as being faced in today's world.

Violent extremism has posed a direct and manifest challenge to the gains enjoyed over recent years. It is threatening the developmental outcome of generations to come if left unchecked. The continuous rise in violent extremist activities in Nigeria represents a significant threat to global security and development overall (UNDP, 2017).

As a result of increasing levels of violence and insecurity, many children and students across the African continent are not able to attend schools or universities, undermining their quality of life both now and in the future. Indeed, the phenomenon is disproportionately imparting the youth as they are marginalised from political processes, lacking in viable employment options and suffering from an increasing sense of desperation. They are easy targets for radicalised recruiters who lure or coerce them with a diverse mix of religious narratives, financial incentives, a glimmer of hope to engage in violence.

Participant entering her biodata at the Kogi Youth Peace camp registration boot.

CONCLUSION

The youth constitute not only a formidable demographic force, but also make up the next generation of parents, workers and leaders. The well-being of this dominant demographic group in Nigeria, therefore, has implications not only for their own lives, but also for the societies they will build and maintain. Their ability to play these roles effectively depends on the support of their families, communities as well as the commitment of their governments for the development of Nigeria. Thus, meeting their needs is a major continuing public policy challenge which calls for a re-think of policies, re-assessment of priorities, commitment of adequate financial resources and effective implementation of programmes. Furthermore, efficient and equitable resource allocation and improved policy formulation as well as implementation can only be achieved with a better understanding of their needs. In the same vein, the establishment of an inclusive governance process that creates trust between government institutions and citizens should be a key piece in combating violent extremism. It is important to note that in addressing violent extremism and the security challenges, there is need to apply a comprehensive approach that would tackle the underlying structural drivers of extremism. In addition, the government policies should remove obstacles to youth participation and investment in the entire social, economic and political sectors of the economy. Government policies must ensure value chain, by promoting youth inclusion in governance.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the forgone discussion, we strongly recommend:

i. Unhindered access to quality and affordable education, better healthcare; better job opportunities through integration of life skills, information technologies and vocational training; protection from all forms of violence, harmful practices and trafficking; removal of cultural, social and legal barriers that hinder political and economic inclusion and participation as well as an open and transparent structure of governance.

ii. The creation and commitment to youth development commissions, backed by law. This will become statutory forthe governments to compulsorily include the youth in their governments and involve them at all stages of policy formulation and implementation. The Kogi Youth Development Commission is a good starting point that should be emulated by the Federal, other States and Local Governments. It is a Law to provide for the Establishment of Youth Development Commission, Implementation of Sustainable Youth Policy and other matters connected therewith. It is the first privately sponsored bill ever assented to by an Executive Governor in Kogi State. The Youth Development Commission Law is therefore pre-meditated to address the drivers of youth restiveness and violent extremism as a result of idleness, unproductivity and underutilisation of human resources which bedevil the young population within the State. The Law is anticipated to open shrinking political, economy and social spaces for the youth of Kogi State.

iii. Creation and employment of Desk Officers on youth development and inclusiveness in all ministries, departments and agencies of government at all levels. This policy should also be implemented by the private sector.

iv. The institutionalisation of vocational and entrepreneurship development in education curricular at all levels of learning in Nigeria. This will go a long way to impart skills on the youth and keep them busy.

v. Favourable financial and institutional environment for youth entrepreneurs. This would enable the youth to access financial services, especially for small start-ups and young smallholders. In addition, appropriate funds should be developed for youths in business and other economic ventures such as agriculture to enable them to surmount the challenges of the sector and also taxes should be reduced for agro-inputs as aid for starting up in agriculture.

vi. The development of proper stakeholder mapping and research to better understand people's decision to join extremist groups. Mapping motivations is crucial to crafting an effective counter strategy because it allows grievances and deprivations that push people towards extremism to be identified.

Vii. The creation of accurate profiles of religious leaders and places of worship as a means of identifying those promoting radicalised messages as well as knowing where, why and the motives behind this promotions. The establishment of a registration portal for preachers would be extremely useful in fishing out the drivers of violence in the society.

viii. The creation of Early Warning and Early Response (EWER) mechanisms. An effective EWER system must have solid connections with civil society groups and key actors. Therefore, the roles of trusted local leaders, including young people should be strengthened to serve as reliable providers of information and support.

ix. The promotion of enhanced inclusion and participation of excluded groups, such as the youth, minority groups and women in democratic governance and decision-making processes. Inclusive societies are most likely to be peaceful and stable. Finding innovative ways to engage with these groups is urgent.

x. Encouragement of leisure activities and the establishment of cultural centres and safe spaces to keep young people positively engaged with the society and prevent them from developing or exhibiting anti-social behaviours.

xi. Promotion of sporting activities and other hobbies. This will engage the youth and provide common grounds for conflict resolution and prevent them from idleness and extremism. Similarly, access to models and mentors can help enhance social cohesion.

Xii. A development response to violent extremism. This is because the security response alone is proving insufficient. The response of the government to security challenges of the country has been a 'reactive' approach to countering violent extremism. Military operations alone, can only hope to curb some of the outward manifestations of violent extremism but will not address the endemic levels of poverty, unemployment, marginalisation, corruption, instability, among other challenges confronting the country.

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Halima Sadiq, acting Executive Director, Participation Initiative for Behavioural change in Development (PIBCID) supporting staff at the Kogi Youth Peace Camp, during the registration.

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