



# The Role of Young People in Preventing Violent Extremism in the Lake Chad Basin

*A contribution to the Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security mandated by United Nations Security Council Resolution 2250 (2015)*

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**The Civil Society Platform for Peacebuilding and Statebuilding (CSPPS)** is a South-North non-governmental coalition of peacebuilding organizations that coordinates and supports civil society participation in the International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding (IDPS).

**The Centre for Sustainable Development and Education in Africa (CSDEA)** is an independent organization that seeks to address the challenges of violence and poor governance that are making sustainable development elusive in Africa.

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## ACRONYMS

<b>ATPIR</b>	Project on Fighting against Violent Extremism and Radicalization of Former Terrorist Fighters and Victims
<b>CAMOJET</b>	Collectif des Associations et Mouvements des Jeunes du Tchad
<b>CAR</b>	Central Africa Republic
<b>COPEs</b>	Comité d'Organisation Pour la Paix dans les Etablissements Scolaires
<b>CSDEA</b>	Centre for Sustainable Development and Education in Africa
<b>CSOs</b>	Civil Society Organizations
<b>CSPPS</b>	Civil Society Platform for Peacebuilding and Statebuilding
<b>CVE</b>	Countering Violent Extremism
<b>ECOWAS</b>	Economic Community of West African States
<b>FGD</b>	Focus Group Discussion
<b>IDPS</b>	International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding
<b>INGOs</b>	Non-Governmental Organizations
<b>IOM</b>	International Organization on Migration
<b>JICA</b>	Japanese Agency for International Development
<b>KII</b>	Key Informant Interviews
<b>MNJTF</b>	Multinational Joint Task Force
<b>OTI</b>	Office of Transition Initiative
<b>PVE</b>	Preventing Violent Extremism
<b>REPAIR</b>	Rebuilding Peace through Actions with Inclusive Reach
<b>SALW</b>	Small Arms and Light Weapons
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UNDP</b>	United Nations Development Programme
<b>UNFPA</b>	United Nations Population Fund
<b>UNICEF</b>	United Nations Children's Fund
<b>UNPBF</b>	United Nations Peacebuilding Fund
<b>UNSCR</b>	United Nations Security Council Resolution
<b>US</b>	United States
<b>USAID</b>	United States International Development Agency

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Lake Chad Basin countries of Cameroun, Chad, Niger and Nigeria have been marred by violence since the advent and rise of violent extremist groups like Boko Haram, Ansar Dine, and Mujao. Their continuous existence and operation means have tremendous negative effects on the young people in the region. This is because the youth in the region are brainwashed, deceived or forcefully recruited to serve as foot soldiers for these violent extremist groups. This trend if not reversed has long-lasting human, economic and social costs.

The constant involvement of some young people as perpetrators of violence has led several segments of society to stereotype them as the problem. However, this research has shown that the solution to violent extremism and other threats to safety and stability of the countries in the Lake Chad region can be found in working with young people, and tapping into their talents and potentials to reform and rebuild society. The adoption of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 2250 (UNSCR 2250) on Youth, Peace and Security in December 2015 is a major and strategic global acknowledgement of the key role of young people in peacebuilding.

The primary objective of this research paper is to inform policy makers and the international community of key policy and programming considerations for supporting youth-led and youth-focused initiatives that are aimed at preventing violent extremism in the Lake Chad Basin region.

This research paper highlights some of the localized drivers of violent extremism in the Lake Chad Basin countries, enumerates some of the concrete initiatives by and for young people that are aimed at preventing violent extremism in the region. It goes further to show the operating environment of these youth groups and their initiatives while also discussing their sources of technical and financial support. The research concludes with the following **key recommendations** for policy makers, governments, and the international community in pursuance of the implementation of UNSCR 2250:

- The International Dialogue on Peacebuilding and Statebuilding (IDPS) and other international actors should promote soft approach policy to preventing violent extremism. The IDPS should focus specifically on the Lake Chad Basin countries to support safe spaces for continuous dialogue between governments, communities and young people since the promotion of dialogue leading to sustainable peace is the main objective of the IDPS and the CSPPS – a key constituency of the IDPS.

- Improving the livelihoods of at-risk youths and other vulnerable populations through a greater focus on 'hot spots' and improved access to jobs, skills-building programmes and education, by strengthening and scaling up existing programs.
- The rapid population growth is overstressing resources and infrastructure and rendering interventions inadequate. Population control measures should be put in place in these Lake Chad Basin countries so that the resources and intervention programs can be adequate.
- Enhancing the capacity and levels of trust in the judicial system and rule of law as a result of societies and institutions with the capacity to effectively deal with radicalization and violent extremism and which effectively balance law and order with justice; prison systems which can serve as centres for de-radicalization and reform; police and communities which can effectively cooperate towards shared goals of protection; effective investigation and protection of key stakeholders; and good regional cooperation.
- Increasing levels of disengagement and improving reintegration processes as a result of effective disengagement/rehabilitation centres; consistent psycho-social support and mentoring; good awareness of de-radicalization processes; and increased community sensitization to help lower the stigmatization of returnees.
- Discrediting violent narratives through diffusion of counter-narratives via journalists skilled in ethical reporting; a greater focus on the voices of victims, survivors and returnees; greater media engagement by religious leaders; and youth who are empowered to be leaders on- and off-line.
- Lowering intra- and inter-religious tensions and heightened community resilience of religious institutions thanks to greater intra- and inter-religious dialogue; effectively governed madrassas, mosques and well-trained Imams; and effective early-warning mechanisms.
- National Youth Policies should be implemented to the fullest, volunteerism should be regarded by government as work experience, and young people should be encouraged to explore their interests and hobbies.
- Improving differentiated and tailored responses to men, women, boys and girls as a result of greater support for women affected by radicalization and violent extremism; empowerment of women leaders and advocates for de-radicalization, and by supporting young men and women to serve as ambassadors for anti-radicalization processes.

- Content of education in Quranic schools which is the dominant form of education in the conflict affected areas of the Lake Chad Basin countries should be harmonized. It is presently in disarray with its various teachings.
- A section of youth in the informal sector who have been neglected in government programs should be integrated because they are the ones who mostly participate in violent extremist groups. Integrated programs that include education, social inclusion and financial support should be implemented.
- The role of youth and civil society as key partners of government in PVE should be stressed, PVE programs targeting youth should be more dynamic and creative.
- Government leaders and society should stop stereotyping youth. Youth are not less competent and data should be made available.
- Human rights laws and policies to protect citizens and repentant militants should be put in place to deter the military/security from arrest and extra-judicial killings.
- Anti-corruption measures should be incorporated into PVE programs and initiatives to ensure that the end beneficiaries are served as envisaged in original project documents. This will also help in reducing the politicization of PVE programs since there will not be incentives for politicians.
- The private sector should be encouraged to support youth PVE initiatives in the Lake Chad Basin countries. This study revealed that there is little or no support from the private sector to these youth initiatives in these countries. Funding from the private sector will strengthen and boost these initiatives.



## INTRODUCTION

The threat posed by violent extremist groups has grown substantially in the countries of the Lake Chad Basin. The region which harbors about 21 million inhabitants from Cameroun, Chad, Niger and Nigeria, has some of the World's poorest and most economically vulnerable population. There is high level of poverty, unemployment, food-insecurity and malnutrition that has gotten to a crisis level (OCHA, 2016). The region is also known for smuggling and the proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW). These challenges have had very negative implications for the socioeconomic and political life of the population in the region. What emerges is a picture of a region with ungoverned spaces, porous borders, poor security institutions, human rights abuses, corrupt institutions, ethnic divisions, and high youth unemployment, all conditions under which violent extremist groups thrive (Buchanan-Clarke and Lekalake, 2016).

The violent extremists have taken advantage of, inefficient governance and poor service delivery, high levels of societal divisions along ethnic or religious lines, exacerbated by elites and combined with low levels of trust, endemic sense of political and economic marginalization, low levels of development/high levels of poverty, geo-political forces and sense of injustice/inequality on global scale and the divisive perception of a 'Western war on Islam,' (UNDP, report 2016). It is in this context that extremist groups, radicalize and recruit youths, male and female, to terrorize the people in the Lake Chad region.

In response to this regional threat, the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) from Nigeria, Chad, Niger, Cameroun, and Benin launched its West African Offensive in January 2015 (Buchanan-Clarke and Lekalake, 2016). The Task Force to a large extent succeeded in pushing out, disrupting extremist networks and curtailing their activities. However, numerous reports of extra-judicial killings, targeted killings of individuals and heavy-handed crackdowns emerged during military operations (Buchanan-Clarke and Lekalake, 2016). The human rights abuse and insensitive conduct by security operatives, influence perceptions negatively against the government, amongst the populations and bolster extremist narratives that they are being victimized by the State, thereby, increasing the brainwashing and conscription of young boys and girls (Buchanan-Clarke and Lekalake, 2016).

To counter the narratives of violent extremist groups and change perceptions of the youth population in the Lake Chad Basin towards a culture of peace, a peacebuilding approach which seeks to address

root political and socioeconomic causes of extremism became important. The United Nations Security Council recognizing the importance of Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) adopted Resolution 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security on 9 December 2015. This resolution acknowledges that youth play an important role in the maintenance and promotion of international peace and security.

To better understand the role youth play in peacebuilding and security, the UNSCR 2250 requests the Secretary-General to carry out a progress study on the youth's positive contribution to peace processes and conflict resolution, in order to recommend effective responses at local, national and international levels. To contribute to the Global Study, the Civil Society Platform for Peacebuilding and Statebuilding (CSPPS) commissioned this report in collaboration with the Centre for Sustainable Development and Education in Africa (CSDEA), to conduct field studies to countries in the Lake Chad Basin that have experienced growth in violent extremism in recent years.

The objective of the study was to document the role of youth-led and youth-focused conflict and extremism prevention approaches that promote peacebuilding. This Paper is a contribution to the Progress Study on Youth, Peace and Security mandated by the United Nations Security Council Resolution 2250 (UNSCR 2250). This report provides the key findings from the data collected from Cameroun, Chad, Niger and Nigeria, where the following extremist groups operate:

1. Ansar Dine (The Success of Islam).
2. Boko Haram.
3. Mujao (Movement for the Consolidation of Jihadist in West Africa). They are referred to as Al-Qaida in the Sahel.

## METHODOLOGY

This study used a combination of desk study to review existing literature and field work to collect empirical data on the role of young people in preventing violent extremism in the Lake Chad Basin countries consisting of Cameroun, Chad, Niger and Nigeria. Forty (40) percent of the respondents were young women. This was to ensure that this paper reflects the issues that affect young women and men alike within this context. One Focus Group Discussion (FGD) of between 15 and 20 participants and five Key Informant Interviews (KII) were conducted in each of the four countries. Participants included youth and women leaders, youth vigilante groups, traditional and religious leaders, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), government officials, and International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs). Ninety five percent of the participants to the FGDs were young people between the ages of 19 and 35 years of age.

The respondents for the FGDs and Interviews were asked six (6) leading questions:

- 1. Why do some youth choose to join Violent Extremist groups while others do not?**
- 2. Are there any youth-led and youth-focused conflict and extremism prevention initiatives? What role if any do youth-led and extremism prevention initiatives play?**
- 3. Are government institutions supporting youth-led and youth-focused conflict and extremism prevention initiatives effectively? If yes, how? If no, what type of support is needed?**
- 4. Are there other organizations supporting youth-led and youth-focused conflict and extremism prevention initiatives?**
- 5. Are your communities supporting youth-led and youth-focused conflict and extremism prevention initiatives?**
- 6. In your opinion, what are the most important problems facing youth-led and youth-focused conflict and extremism prevention initiatives?**

## PUSH AND PULL FACTORS: A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

*Push factors* are the negative social, cultural, and political features of one's societal environment that aid in "pushing" vulnerable individuals and especially youth onto the path of violent extremism. *Push factors* are commonly seen as "underlying/root causes" such as poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, injustice, and political/economical marginalization. On the other hand, pull factors are the positive characteristics and benefits of an extremist organization that "pull" vulnerable youth to join. These include the group's ideology (e.g.: emphasis on changing one's condition through violence rather than "apathetic" and "passive" democratic means), strong bonds of brotherhood and sense of belonging, reputation building, prospect of fame or glory, and other socialization benefits (Gary Lafree and Joshua D.Freilich, 2017).

## KEY FINDINGS

### a. Youth Joining Violent Extremist Groups

The respondents mentioned several factors that push youth to join violent extremist groups. They include poverty, unemployment, financial inducements from violent extremist groups, ignorance, inequality, climate change, illiteracy, lack of opportunities, misuse of religion and religious ideology, lack of social and political justice, bad governance, wrong interpretation of the Quran, forced recruitment, and the lack of funds to bribe government officials to get employment.

The frustration of students that have completed schools either through Quranic or Western education, due to a lack of opportunity and jobs, have made these students susceptible to radicalization. However, youth who drop out of school were identified as more prone to violent extremism. For example, a respondent narrated the story of a single young woman in Northern Cameroun who had three children with no source of financial support or employment. She got frustrated and had to visit an Islamic centre where she got comfort and solace through the radical trainings she listened to daily, and preparing her for Jihad.

The misuse and misinterpretation of the Quran by teachers, religious figures, family members and other actors gave many the motivation and justification to join violent extremist groups. The content of the Quranic education in the Lake Chad Basin countries was identified as a major concern.

Perception of life and values come to many illiterate youths from the content of a misinterpreted Quran. The Quranic schools have been identified with teachers that have ties to extremist groups and prepare students and young people to join violent extremist groups. Their tactics include

***... respondents noted that new violent groups emerge when youths are left out of initial peace processes and that dialogue between government and militants alone is not healthy...***

misinterpretation of the Quran and espousing extremist ideology. Those that join often pass through a period of radicalization and indoctrination by these

teachers, before embarking on missions for extremist groups.

Another source of recruitment to violent extremist groups is through family structures. Parents due to inability to communicate, bond, or provide safe environment, education and upbringing creates the impression of lack of care and fosters rebellion in youths. This leads some to join or be bullied into extremist groups. Family members are also targets of recruitment by other family members who are already involved with extremist groups. Loss of a family member during military operations can and have led youths to join extremist groups for vengeance over the death of a loved one.

Some respondents noted that new violent groups emerge when youths are left out of initial peace processes and that dialogue between government and militants alone is not healthy. Rewarding violent groups and neglecting resilient groups (i.e. youth and the elderly breed further violence). In Diffa, Eastern Niger for example, repentant Boko Haram members are rewarded handsomely and the local population including the youth are kicking against it.

On the issue of poverty, most youth in the conflict affected areas of the Lake Chad Basin countries live on less than a dollar per day. Their Emirs (traditional rulers) and especially in the North of Cameroun own all the wealth with a lot of poor people around them. Respondents pointed out that the rights of young people are trampled on making them voiceless without representation. The extremist groups provide an opportunity for youths to wield power and express themselves. This led many young people and homeless street children including in major cities like Yaoundé and Douala to join extremist groups.

In North Eastern Nigeria, a culture of segregation that results in a struggle for power between the ruling class and the lower class has contributed the high rates of youth joining violent extremist groups. The lower class sees violent extremism as a way of punishing the ruling royal class that are

born to rule, dominate and enjoy without working. The lower class are the goldsmith and those meant to do hard work. Riches and poverty are seen as destiny and should be accepted.

The respondents noted how ignorance was demonstrated in the attitude of youths towards Boko Haram, which recruited youths from the far North of Cameroun under the pretext of a wealthy multinational organization. Boko Haram recruited youths with promises of 100,000 Central African Francs (USD180) to courier materials including phones and bags to specific locations in Nigeria. These materials turned out to be bombs from Cameroun to Nigeria, and youths involved claimed ignorance. Needless to say, before the ruse was discovered Boko Haram had recruited and radicalized many youths who were well known in their communities as Boko Haram members. In some isolated cases,

*Those frustrated in refugee camps due to conflict are also easily recruited into extremist groups in the Lake Chad Basin.*

traditional leaders were implicated as accomplices to Boko Haram recruitment scheme.

The respondents put the poor economy prospects of many young people as another factor that leads youths to join extremist organizations. Former Boko Haram fighters in Chad say it is lack of hope and income generation opportunities that make them join violent extremist groups. There are no jobs, social amenities nor government safety nets to cushion the bleak prospects facing youths. The promise of wealth, food and shelter drives youths into the arms of extremist organizations operating in the area. The respondents also mentioned that some youth are materialistic, lazy and look for easy means of making money, as another factor.

The influence of strong family ties in Garoua, Boulai, Garigombo communities of Eastern Cameroun border, that serve as safe havens for extremist groups with family connections was identified by respondents. These areas serve as a source of recruits as the people are beleaguered by spill over of conflict from the Central Africa Republic (CAR) between Seleka and Anti-Balaka. The conflict pitches the Bororos against the Bayas on the Cameroonian side of the border. Those frustrated in refugee camps due to conflict are also easily recruited into extremist groups in the Lake Chad Basin.

Some respondents decried the intervention of international military in taking sides like is the case of Seleka and Anti-balaka where the US took arms from Seleka and gave to Anti-balaka in the Central Africa Republic. This had a great impact on the border communities between Chad and CAR where you have the two groups on both sides of the border.

Respondents mentioned the drought and the depleting resources of Lake Chad as a result of climate change, as a causal factor behind recruitment. As resources get scarce, the ethnic Arab Shuas, Kotokos and Fulanis on both sides of the borders, and their families are forced to move across the border. This struggle for survival makes these nomadic groups easy recruits for the simple reason of earning a living and providing for their family.

Respondents pointed out that another important factor behind recruitment into extremist groups is the issue of forced recruitment and abduction. As extremist groups invade and occupy villages they forcibly press young men and women into services as fighters, sex slaves and porters. The suspicion and stigma associated with being taken means that most cannot go back into society, when they

*Some young people see violent extremist groups as foreign entities invading their communities and as such, they do not believe in them nor do they want to join forces with them to destroy and segregate their societies*

escape, as they are summarily killed on sight by the military. This trend makes those that have been forcefully taken by violent extremist groups to accept their fate and fall in with their captors rather than risk death.

The existence of gangs and cults in Adamawa and Bornu states in Nigeria also serve as recruiting base for violent extremist groups. Some young people join Boko Haram because they belong to gangs and they jump at any opportunity that offers huge money as they have never seen to wreak havoc.

Amid this entire crisis, many young people did not join Boko Haram or other violent extremist groups because they have wives and children who depend on them. Other reasons why some young people did not join is because the end of violent extremism is bitter, they are patriotic, and the fear of God that commanded human beings not to kill. Some also believe that violent extremist groups are not recognized as the military or police who have uniforms. Some young people see violent extremist groups as foreign entities invading their communities and as such, they do not believe in them nor do they want to join forces with them to destroy and segregate their societies.

In Chad for example, the government has strong grip over the small Chadian population and has policies of controlling the Chadian population through churches and mosques. The government also has a standing practice to execute young people who have interest to join violent extremist groups. Chadians try to avoid crisis because of their history of war between the North and South and as such try to avoid violent extremist tendencies which is equivalent to a crisis.

## **b. Awareness and the Role of Youth-Led and Youth-Focused Conflict and Extremism Prevention Initiatives**

### ***Republic of Niger***

Respondents claimed that awareness is high among youth of the activities by youth to prevent violent extremism. Some of the efforts include; the National Youth Council of Niger that uses its Peace and

*The National Youth Council of Niger works with the government to resolve and mediate conflict*

Security Forums and their Tech-Camp to reach out to young people in the Lake Chad Basin region of Niger. It is an

interreligious initiative that also brings the media and religious leaders to create awareness around violent extremism and reverse the trend. The program is funded by the US State Department.

The National Youth Council of Niger with support from UNDP, has trained 40 girls and boys in Diffa on peace and security skills and they have become peace ambassadors in their communities. They report suspicious activities to the police, mediate conflicts and influence their peers. The forty (40) young people trained also receive funds to conduct commerce and to support their livelihoods.

The USAID funds similar youth programs, Agadez and Diffa, over forty (40) youths have been trained. Those selected were trained on peace and security skills and they have become peace ambassadors in their communities. Another component of this program is that the young people are required to clean up their communities on a regular basis.

The National Youth Council of Niger is working with the government to resolve and mediate conflict in Diffa, Agadez, Zinder and Tillabery.

Eirene's Rural Development Project in Niger takes a self-development approach, support less privileged youths to escape poverty and inequality. It sets up dialogue platforms for all stakeholders to come together to settle disputes. The youths are encouraged work together to cultivate vegetables, others conduct activities for improved hygiene, education or health care in their villages. Eirene supports them with funds and link these groups with other funding opportunities and partners.

Eirene's Quranic Schools Project in Maradine which started in 2006 helps young people to read and understand the Quran. This is meant to prevent wrong interpretation of the Quran that has been



used for radicalization purposes; impart knowledge and communicate with students in a non-violent way. This project is also being replicated in Boko Haram strongholds of Differ and Tillabery.

The Eirene's Rural Radio Project focuses on journalists and media practitioners so they are more sensitive in reporting conflict issues.

### ***Republic of Cameroun***

There is high level of awareness on youth-led and youth-focused conflict and extremism prevention initiatives in Cameroun among the population. There are dozens of organizations such as Rebuilding Peace through Actions with Inclusive Reach (REPAIR) that create avenue for dialogue and understanding among various groups (religious/ethnic) and train young peacebuilders on how to

prevent violent extremism. They

***Women in Development work with mothers to build the self-esteem of their children and teach them peace tenets.***

Engaged for Peace project of the Association Rayon De Soleil in collaboration with the National Youth

Council, brought together 500 young persons to share correct information on violent extremism and the positive role of young people. This project has led to other youth-led related projects in Cameroun that are tailored towards the prevention of violent extremism. They include Actions for Change Cameroun, No to Terror, Stand for Peace, and the Coalition of Organizations Against Terrorism in the Far North.

There is also an African School for Peace which is implemented in Cameroun, training school and street children on how to be Ambassadors for Peace through understanding their issues and solving them and helping them to overcome their fears. The Local Youth Corner trains young people who are out of school on skills development through its creative skills for peace program. Women in Development work with mothers to build the self-esteem of their children and teach them peace tenets. The World Bank, through its Youth Development and Peace Network Program and with support from Coca Cola, plans to empower five million young women by 2020. The World Bank will train these women on business skills and Coca Cola will provide start-up capital and equipment. The Commonwealth Youth Peace Ambassadors Network work to build the capacity of young people on peace and commit them to be peace ambassadors by signing unto the peace pledge. The Movement Africa by "Sweet Frika" uses art and attitude to promote peace through change of mindset.

## **Federal Republic of Nigeria**

Awareness of Youth run or focused initiatives to prevent violent extremism is very high among respondents in North Eastern Nigeria that has been ravaged by activities of violent extremists. Youth vigilante initiatives in Madagali, Gombi, Mubi South and North Local Governments of Adamawa State and in Biu Local Government of Bornu State mount check points and move from house to house to fetch out suspected Boko Haram members and hand them over to the military.

The youth in Madagali Local Government of Adamawa State for example, got scanners from Kinjir Foundation to scan cars and people as

*...is presently being transformed into a sustainable grassroots peacebuilding organization that is equipped with peacebuilding skills to impact their communities positively.*

they enter into market places to prevent bombing. They also trained other young people of the dangers of using drugs and engaging in gang activities which serve as a recruitment base for violent extremist groups. The Madagali Youth Vigilante Initiative members have official Identity cards and uniforms. With the help of the Kinjir Foundation and the Centre for Sustainable Development and Education in Africa, the Madagali Youth Vigilante Initiative is presently being transformed into a sustainable grassroots peacebuilding organization that is equipped with peacebuilding skills to impact their communities positively.

The Youth Vigilante Initiatives in Adamawa and Bornu States have led Boko Haram to flee communities where they operate and community members now have more faith in them than the Nigerian government or military.

The Peacemakers Program through Gotel Communication uses Radio Gotel to reach out to young people and public at large to create awareness. The program also works through Mosques and Churches via religious leaders – it is a project of the Adamawa State Peace Initiative.

## **Republic of Chad**

Young people in Chad are knowledgeable of the preventing violent extremism initiatives in the

*...is its reintegration aspect for former members of Boko Haram that prepares them to join society and family again...*

country but are calling for more coordinated initiatives that have government support and envisage young people as the solution and not the problem. USAID started a program on Peace and

Development in 2012 to bring young people together to give innovative solutions and share experiences on how to prevent young people from joining violent extremist groups.

Other initiatives to prevent violent extremism include the work that the Comité d'Organisation Pour la Paix dans les Etablissements Scolaires (COPEs) does in schools to sensitize students to fight violent extremism and educate their peers on the dangers of joining violent extremist groups and promote a culture of peace in schools. COPEs is also working on a new project to educate teachers on a culture of peace and how they can impact students peacefully.

Collectif des Associations et Mouvements des Jeunes du Tchad (CAMOJET) is working to fight violent extremism among youth in Chad. A major component of this project is its reintegration aspect for former members of Boko Haram that prepares them to join society and family again.

Project on Fighting against Violent Extremism and Radicalization of Former Terrorist Fighters and Victims (ATPIR) form young people into groups and create income generating opportunities for them. Kanem, Borkou, Ndjamena and Bar Elgazal are the benefiting communities from this project in the Lake Chad region of Chad. ATPIR employs psychologists to work with victims of violent extremist groups – the project also sensitizes religious leaders in churches and mosques.

Also in Chad, there is the African School for Peace that trains school and street children on how to be Ambassadors for Peace through understanding their issues and solving them while helping them to overcome their fears.

### **c. Support from Government to Youth Initiatives**

Support for youth initiatives to prevent violent extremism varies from country to country and this also depends if there is a National Youth Policy that is being implemented or there is a National Security Strategy/Policy that affirms and recognizes soft approach to building peace. In some instances, government support for youth-led or youth-focused projects can be weak at the beginning but can be improved with sustained advocacy and lobbying.

**The government of Niger** through the High Commission on Peace Consolidation works with youth groups to promote faith and patriotism in the population. The High Commission on Peace Consolidation is also financing revenue generation activities for young people in Diffa and Tillabery based on their needs.

**The government of Cameroun** has responded positively to the call by young people to create a National Centre on PVE and young people are envisaged to play very prominent role at the centre. That being said, there is no development oriented government policy to fight violent extremism, the government relies mainly on the use of force. Concrete government support is insufficient and lopsided. The government gives institutional support at times but no financial assistance and PVE programs are politicized. Party affiliations and identity disrupts PVE efforts as civic engagement is no longer different from politics.

The Anti-terrorism law that was passed in Cameroun is considered as another move to clamp down on dissent. However, there is an ongoing stakeholder discussion with government on a soft development oriented approach and need for a coherent policy on PVE.

**The government of Nigeria** has a balanced National Security Strategy/Policy that promotes soft approach to peacebuilding. This has provided the enabling environment for the youth groups that operate in this region to thrive and their impact and security guarantees they provided is appreciated by communities and well known to government. However, corruption has hindered smooth delivery of support packages to youth groups and organizations in the North East of Nigeria. For example, most of the 5 million naira (\$16, 000) monthly support that was initially provided for by government to each of the local governments with these Youth Vigilante groups were stolen or diverted by local leaders and politicians.

**The government of Chad:** In Chad, the only youth organization that has some form of support from the Government is COPES. The government provides venue and stationeries to COPES for their programs. The government is reported to have a balanced anti-terrorism policy of soft and hard approach. However, the implementation is poor and does not properly incorporate civil society and youth groups.

#### **d. Support from other Organizations to Youth Initiatives**

A good number of mostly International Organizations and Multilateral Organizations are supporting youth initiatives to prevent violent extremism in the Lake Chad Basin. As can be seen in section 2 of the findings above, support from International Organizations ranges from giving grants to providing technical support in the formation of networks, capacity development, advocacy, creating space for

engagement, linking youth-led and youth-focused organizations to sources of funding etc. However, support from the private sector (local and multinational) is low or non-existent.

Most of the organizations that support youth PVE initiatives in the Lake Chad Basin includes USAID, CSPPS, UNFPA, UNDP, UNPBF, UNICEF, ECOWAS, Economic and Monetary Union of West Africa, West African Development Bank, United Nations Office of West Africa and the Sahel, G5 Sahel, World Bank, Search for Common Ground, World Youth Movement for Democracy, Coca Cola, Office of Transition Initiative (OTI), Creative Associates and the Global Centre on Cooperative Security.

Others are Eirene, Red Cross, National Endowment for Democracy, Commonwealth, Bread for the World, International Women Peace Group, CSDEA, JICA, European Union, French Embassy, and the International Organization on Migration.

*...some communities are skeptical after the advent of Boko Haram which came into their lives under the pretext of a community assistance organization.*

### **e. Community Support for Youth Initiatives**

Respondents noted that they had some level of community support in the four countries visited. In Nigeria and Chad, there appears to be overwhelming support for youth organizations and their PVE initiatives. The case is different in Niger where there is suspicion over the motives especially when a Christian organization plans on implementing a project in a Muslim community or vice versa.

In Cameroun, some communities are skeptical after the advent of Boko Haram which came into their lives under the pretext of a community assistance organization. This skepticism makes people wary of any new national or regional youth organization intending to operate in their communities. To win community support, youth organizations now contextualize programs to the socio-economic and cultural environment where they operate.

### **f. Problems facing Youth Initiatives**

The respondents in the four Lake Chad Basin countries have identified the problems facing youth extremism prevention initiatives to

include corruption, stigma, lack of funding, lack of capacity, population bulge, lack of coordination among

*... young people are in some cases misunderstood by the population and communities due to unfounded suspicion that they work for the government as agents of manipulation.*

various youth actors, high security risks to movement of personnel and materials during implementation of programs, incessant attacks by Boko Haram, exclusion of youth from decision making, crackdown on youth groups by security operatives, lack of understanding from government, lack of intervention strategies and expertise on PVE, no specific government agency handling PVE, lack of trust by conflict affected communities, lack of data, uncertainty and continuity in government as Ministers and Governors are rotated or replaced frequently without assured continuity of youth programmes.

The lack of capacity among youth organizations is seriously impacting the quality of the outcome of their work. For example, most of the 268 communes in Niger that have Communal Youth Councils do not have the capacity and skills to deliver.

Respondents observed that peace education and skills acquired from youth-led programmes are hindered by population bulge and lack of opportunity that creates more poverty and frustration. Again, young people are in some cases misunderstood by the population and communities due to unfounded suspicion that they work for the government as agents of manipulation.

Corruption was referred to by respondents as a major problem as financial incentives and projects are handled by corrupt officials that engage those that misappropriate and divert funds meant for youth projects.

In Cameroun, for example, the government misrepresents PVE/CVE for civic education which the Cameroonian government believes already exists. There is also a climate of fear and suspicion in Cameroun, where youth groups operate under the constant threat of attacks and arrest. Boko Haram members abduct and kill youths and divisional officers turn a blind eye on youth groups while also blocking them from organizing PVE programs.

The risk of being stigmatized and targeted as a member of a Youth vigilante group is making many young people to distance themselves from joining these noble initiatives in the North East of Nigeria. Some community members are threatening to reveal the identity of vigilantes the next time Boko Haram attacks except they stop these initiatives.

## CONCLUSION

The data presented provides keen insight into youth perceptions and attitudes towards violent extremism. The findings show poverty, illiteracy, ignorance, inequality, the economy, poor governance, climate change, injustice, youth bulge, misinterpretation of the Quran and forced recruitment, as more common factors for people to join extremist groups than religious beliefs. Again, overwhelming majority choose not to join violent extremist groups because they were afraid and love life or engaged in sports, have a sense of patriotism, and hope through religion.

Preventing violent extremism initiatives created by or targeting young people in the Lake Chad Basin have grown exponentially in recent years, ensuring that more young people are now involved in youth, peace and security initiatives. The impact and awareness of youth initiatives to prevent violent extremism by communities, governments and other stakeholders have also increased despite the lack of strategic support, closed or shrinking space for civic engagement.

These youth efforts are actively supported by international organizations but the support from the governments in the Lake Chad Basin countries is lopsided or non-existent. This is even worst in situations where there is no comprehensive national security strategy/policy and proactive implementation plan that incorporates soft approach to the prevention of violent extremism.

Support from local communities is insufficient, clouded by suspicion, fear and misunderstanding. To win community support, youth organizations now contextualize programs to the socio-economic and cultural environment where they operate.

To sustain youth-led and youth-focused efforts to prevent violent extremism, a greater emphasis must be placed on addressing root causes of conflict and building stronger relationships between governments, communities and youth groups.

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