

Key Concepts and Good Practice(s) in PCVE Strategic Communication

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Outline of the Presentation

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Why do we need to understand concepts in PCVE and Global Practices

- ◊ It helps to identify and understand the root causes and drivers threats to PCVE
- ◊ Precision in identifying Pull, Push & Enabling Factors and their interactions
- ◊ Building resilience
- ◊ Relevant & Context-Specific interventions
- ◊ Promoting Resilience
- ◊ Human Rights protection
- ◊ Global and transnational cooperation
- ◊ Knowledge development and Sharing
- ◊ Monitoring Evaluation & Learning

What is a Concept?

- ◆ A concept is a general notion or idea with a particular although contested meaning
- ◆ A concept helps to explain, classify and organize thoughts
- ◆ Concepts such as peace, security, justice, freedom, and development all continuously attract debates
- ◆ PCVE is apt to be seen as a concept because till date, it continues to generate debates and helps to organize, classify, and explain

The Concept of PCVE

- ◆ Immediately after 9/11, the UN The United States used the Security Council to compel member states to pass counterterrorism legislation and to list groups and individuals identified as terrorist accomplices.
- ◆ Whereas in 2001 only two member states were party to all international terrorism treaties, by 2025 over 180 countries had either ratified or acceded to at least ten of the then 13 instruments, and all had either signed or become a party to at least one.
- ◆ However, overtime, the UN-led war against terror lost steam consequent upon the invasion of Iraq in 2003. Sections of the international community and CSOs frowned at the top-down approach because it was susceptible to abuse because it was becoming unaccountable.
- ◆ Enter Obama, the US/UN shifted from an alienating approach to an inclusive approach as it influenced a shift from counter-terrorism to *Countering Violent Extremism*

Evolution of the Concept from Countering to Preventing

- ◆ A deadly attacks by ISIS and the use of Internet-based recruitment by Al-Qaeda ISIS made it critically important for governments to design a counterstrategy giving vent to CVE.
- ◆ Sequel to the attack in Paris, the US government convened a high-level summit at the White House in February 2015 dedicated to CVE, 'to focus on how we can empower communities to protect their families and friends and neighbors from violent ideologies and recruitment'
- ◆ Ban lauded the American initiative and suggested that the UN take a similar direction and he committed himself to a 'comprehensive multistakeholder plan of action to prevent violent extremism'. PVE was born.
- ◆ Specifically, the UN Plan presented seven priority areas: dialogue and conflict prevention; strengthening good governance, human rights and the rule of law; engaging communities; empowering youth; gender equality and empowering women; education, skill development and employment facilitation; and strategic communications, including through the internet and social media
- ◆ The intellectual foundation was borrowed from Obama's CVE summit.

Evolution of the Concept from Countering to Preventing

- ◆ The diagnosis and prescriptions of the PVE Plan of Action were that there is no one driver for radicalization but several possibilities, including a lack of socioeconomic opportunities; marginalization and discrimination; poor governance, and violations of human rights and the rule of law; prolonged and unresolved conflict; and radicalization in prison.
- ◆ The normative understanding promoted by the PVE agenda suggested that if governments governed in a more inclusive and even-handed manner—the threat of violent extremism would subside.
- ◆ The framing of PVE by Moon encouraged agencies hitherto hesitant to get involved like UNESCO, UNDP, UN Women, Office of the Rule of Law & Security Institutions (OROLSI), & Department of Political Affairs (DPA) because it promoted the notion that counterterrorism is not exclusively a Security Council matter
- ◆ In its framing, the UN deliberately framed PVE akin to its peacebuilding work by making room for active involvement of Complementary non-State actors and rejection of the idea of profiling Muslims or any faith

The Imperative and Efficacy of Prevention

- ◆ Given that terrorism relies on constant recruitment of persons, preventing terrorist recruitment is one of the most effective and least lethal methods of countering terrorism.
- ◆ All recruiters must first identify qualified candidates, then establish secure connections, build rapport, indoctrinate them, and slowly pull them into an organization. ISIS proved that this process could be fast-forwarded through online propaganda and social media. Preventing recruitment in the first place can be the most fruitful, and maybe also least expensive, method used to counter terrorism.
- ◆ Therefore, “Prevention” as a concept and practice must be pursued by all well-meaning actors for sustainable peace and security

Prevention in the context of Recruitment & Radicalization

- ◆ This is a set of complex causal processes in which multiple factors work together to produce extremist outcomes,” at the individual, group, and mass-public levels.
- ◆ Radicalization can be behavioural, that is, focusing on the person’s physical and social activation of violence and can also be cognitive referring to an individual’s adoption and internalization of violent and extremist beliefs.
- ◆ Recruitment entails reaching out to potential new candidates, persuading them to join their group, through a series of well planned, systematic, and supervised activities
- ◆ Stages in recruitment & radicalization: 1. Identifying the candidate. 2. Initiate contact. 3. Built friendship. 4. Ideological indoctrination and trust-building. 5. Isolating and linking target to wider community. 6. Reinforcing new identity. 7. Introducing candidate to terrorists activities and media. 8. Assigning candidate to cells within the group
- ◆ So term prevention of recruitment is used to mean planned, systematic, and holistic action taken to stop a prospective recruit from joining a terrorist organization.

Violent Extremism

- ◆ Violent extremism is a violent type of mobilization aimed at elevating the status of one group while exterminating or relegating the “other”.
- ◆ It is also the pursuit of ideological and non-ideological goals through violence
- ◆ Violent extremism defines acts that are intended to destroy, maim, injure or kill in the pursuit of ideological, religious, political and social goals

Terrorism

- ❖ Terrorism cannot be understood only in terms of violence. It has to be understood primarily in terms of propaganda (information operations). Violence and propaganda, however, have much in common. Violence aims at behaviour modification by coercion.
- ❖ Propaganda aims at the same by persuasion. Terrorism can be seen as a combination of the two. (...) Terrorism, by using violence against one victim, seeks to coerce and persuade others. The immediate victim is merely instrumental, the skin on the drum beaten to achieve a calculated impact on a wider audience (Schimid, 1980).

Terror & Terrorism

- ◆ As Schmid wrote in the Handbook of Terrorism Research (2011): ‘Terror’ is, first of all, a state of mind, characterised by intensive fear of a threatening danger on an individual level and by a climate of fear on the collective level.
- ◆ ‘Terrorism’, on the other hand, is an activity, method or tactic which, as a psychological outcome, aims to produce ‘terror’.”
- ◆ Terror is a state of intense fear induced by the systematic threat of imprisonment, mutilation, or death. It is intensified when the victim is helpless in the hands of another human being. We are all afraid of being hurt or killed.

Resilience and Resilience Planning

- ◆ The term resilience refers to an entity's ability to absorb, respond to and recover from shocks such as a terrorist attack, while resilience planning aims to prevent or at least mitigate disaster impacts should such a shock occur.

Social Cohesion

- ◆ Social cohesion can be understood as positive relations among individuals and groups (the horizontal dimension) and between society and the state (the vertical dimension). “A sense of shared purpose, trust, and willingness to cooperate among
- ◆ members of a given group, between members of different groups,
- ◆ and between people and the state,” (World Bank forthcoming).
- ◆ This report focuses on social cohesion between forcibly displaced
- ◆ persons and host communities, and therefore excludes the element
- ◆ of trust between people and the state.
- ◆ While fostering, rebuilding or sustaining cohesion are challenges for any society, they are particularly difficult in conflict/fragile/terrorized settings where divisions fuel violence and violence reinforces divisions.
- ◆ Social cohesion messaging: Provide information aimed at reducing prejudices and stressing the commonalities among diverse groups.

PCVE Advocacy

- ◆ Advocacy research is intended to assist in advocacy, that is, efforts to assemble and use information and resources to bring about improvements in people's lives.
- ◆ It is about promoting and implementing strategies to prevent and counter violent extremism focusing on the root causes and promoting resilience and positive alternatives.
- ◆ It takes a multi-faceted and multi-stakeholders approach comprising
- ◆ (1) those being advocated for, (2) those doing the advocating, and (3) those being advocated against.
- ◆ Reflect on campaigns against smoking and HIV

From Peacebuilding to Sustaining Peace

- ◆ In 2017 Ban Ki-moon's focus transitioned from primarily addressing immediate peacebuilding efforts to emphasizing the importance of sustaining peace in the long term.
- ◆ This shift involved a recognition that lasting peace requires not only conflict resolution but also addressing root causes of conflict and promoting sustainable development.
- ◆ He highlighted the role of the UN in supporting these efforts, including the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Rationale and Justification for a PCVE Communication Strategy

- ◆ The absence of a communication strategy constraints PCVE programming and messaging
- ◆ This gets exploited by violent extremists and terrorists to the detriment of the PCVE and Nigeria's counter-terrorism responses.
- ◆ Through strategic disinformation especially online; insurgents, separatists, and conflict entrepreneurs are recruiting, radicalizing, and mobilizing resources for subversive agendas
- ◆ Through subversive narratives and optics on the social media the outlaws try to weaken Nigerians' sense of security and confidence in the capacity of the State to protect
- ◆ Hence the imperative of a PCVE communication strategy informed by an empirical situational analysis cognizant of the fact that terrorism can be likened to a battle of strategic communication with each group attempting to promote their narrative.

A Working Understanding of PCVE Communication Strategy

- ◆ Organized set of actions that incorporate ends, ways, and means to meet policy objectives of PCVE through responses framed by a clear set of strategic effects that prevent, and stop radicalization, recruitment, and mobilization of resources and persons for violent extremism and terrorism from taking place.
- ◆ To complement Nigeria's counter-terrorism efforts through a PCVE communication strategy that thaws terrorists' narratives, reaches a wider audience, restores trust and confidence in the capacity of the State to protect.
- ◆ Specific Objectives
 - ◆ To develop counter-narratives that delink terrorists' narratives from their goals towards detraction
 - ◆ To create alter-narratives towards disengagement from terrorists' narratives
 - ◆ To identify the effective channel for disseminating the PCVE-messages and awareness nationwide
 - ◆ To develop key performance indicators for ease of monitoring and evaluation of the strategy

Key Concepts in PCVE StratComm

- ◆ Channels
- ◆ Audience
- ◆ Positive Messaging
- ◆ Negative Messaging
- ◆ Narratives
- ◆ Counter-Narratives
- ◆ Informal Counter-Messengers
- ◆ Information Operations

Channels

- ◆ In delivering their messages and programs, both state and non-state actors in Nigeria's PCVE efforts utilize hybrid communication approaches, including traditional media such as radio and television, and digital platforms like social media.
- ◆ State actors tend to rely more on traditional media, while non-state actors and individuals often favor social media platforms like X (formerly Twitter). However, most stakeholders employ hybrid channels, integrating face-to-face interactions, roadshows, mobile theaters, billboards, and pamphleteering to reach diverse audiences.

Audience

- ◆ Audience segmentation is critical for effective PCVE communication.
- ◆ The audience is categorized into three main groups: the primary audience, comprising individuals not yet radicalized but vulnerable due to socio-economic or political factors; the secondary audience, those showing early signs of radicalization; and the tertiary audience, individuals already radicalized or involved in violent extremism.
- ◆ These categories also extend to specific geographies, such as proximate at-risk communities, correctional and rehabilitation centers, internally displaced persons (IDPs) camps, and terrorized communities.
- ◆ Understanding these audience segments is essential for tailoring messages and selecting appropriate communication channels.

Negative & Positive Messaging

- ❖ Negative messaging aims to dismantle the narratives of violent extremist groups by exposing their fallacies, destructive outcomes, and lack of legitimacy. For example, Boko Haram's messaging promotes divine rule as the solution to poverty and bad governance, which negative messaging seeks to counter by highlighting the group's failures and harm.
- ❖ Positive messaging, on the other hand, promotes alternative narratives that emphasize peace, tolerance, and non-violent solutions to grievances. Together, these approaches aim to disrupt extremist ideologies and provide viable alternatives.

Informal Counter-Messaging Activists

- ◆ Informal counter-messaging activists play a significant role in PCVE efforts. These individuals, often professionals, academics, or civil society actors, use social media platforms to fact-check, debunk misinformation, and provide alternative narratives to extremist propaganda.
- ◆ Unlike state or formal non-state actors, informal counter-messengers operate independently, leveraging their credibility and social capital to reach diverse audiences. Their work is particularly important in countering the growing influence of extremist groups online.

Stakeholders

- ◆ Stakeholders in PCVE strategic communication include state and non-state actors who are directly or indirectly affected by violent extremism and terrorism.
- ◆ State actors encompass government agencies, security forces, and state-led initiatives, while non-state actors include civil society organizations, community leaders, and international NGOs.
- ◆ These stakeholders operate at primary, secondary, and tertiary levels, each contributing to PCVE programming and communication in unique ways. Their activities, whether positive or negative, have a significant impact on the effectiveness of PCVE efforts

Complementary Non-State Actors

- ❖ Civil and complementary non-state actors are essential to PCVE programming, often operating outside the formal government structure.
- ❖ These include non-governmental organizations (NGOs), community leaders, and international partners who work to address the root causes of violent extremism, such as poverty, inequality, and governance issues.
- ❖ Organizations like the Partners against Violent Extremism (PAVE) network provide leadership and coordination, while other local and international NGOs implement programs focused on peacebuilding, conflict resolution, and community development.

Information Operations

- ◆ In PCVE (Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism), Information Operations (IO) involve using information to influence, manipulate, or defend against violent extremist groups. This can include activities like countering propaganda, building resilience against extremist narratives, and protecting against online radicalization.
- ◆ Information operations and warfare, also known as influence operations, includes the collection of tactical information about an adversary as well as the dissemination of propaganda in pursuit of a competitive advantage over an opponent.
- ◆ Countering Propaganda: IO aims to debunk and discredit extremist narratives, promoting alternative, more accurate information.
- ◆ Building Resilience: This involves equipping individuals with the critical thinking skills needed to resist extremist messaging and identify misinformation.
- ◆ Protecting Against Online Radicalization:
- ◆ IO plays a crucial role in identifying and mitigating the spread of extremist content online, including identifying and removing harmful content and promoting positive alternatives.

Examples of Information Operations

- ◆ Strategic Communication: Developing and disseminating messages to counter extremist narratives and promote a positive counter-narrative.
- ◆ Counter-Narratives: Creating and promoting messages that emphasize the values of peace, tolerance, and inclusion, offering alternatives to extremist ideologies.
- ◆ Social Media Monitoring and Intervention: Tracking extremist online activity, identifying and reporting harmful content, and engaging with individuals at risk of radicalization.
- ◆ Capacity Building: Training and equipping individuals, organizations, and communities with the skills and knowledge to counter extremism.
- ◆ Community Engagement: Working with local communities to build resilience and foster a sense of belonging, reducing the appeal of extremist groups. and engaging with local communities to foster a sense of belonging, build trust, and address the root causes of extremism.
- ◆ Educational programs: Training programs that teach critical thinking, media literacy, and conflict resolution skills.

Good Practice in PCVE StratComm

Situational Analysis

Developing effective narratives and counter-narratives

Audience segmentation

Collaboration & partnership

Utilizing Appropriate Communication Channel

Research

Monitoring Evaluation & Learning

Engaging with vulnerable population

Responding to mis and disinformation promptly with data

Daalu

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