



**STRENGTHENING COMMUNITY
STRUCTURES IN THE PREVENTION
OF VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN NIGERIA:**

A POLICY BRIEF



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INTRODUCTION:

Violent extremism is a local, national, regional, and global phenomenon that affects communities, destabilises countries, and impacts gravely on regional and global security and peace.

Quite often, poverty and inequality, lack of education, unemployment, and lack of economic opportunities among other issues have been identified or suggested as the main factors leading vulnerable members of communities and, most times vulnerable youth to join violent extremist groups in their communities. There is also a strong belief that social exclusion and feelings of marginalisation are driving youth to embrace extremist ideologies.

This is due to the facts that the conditions that predispose to violence in general, and specific forms of violent extremism, emerge and evolve within communities; and because the impact of violence, and violent extremism, is first felt directly by the community where it takes place; it stands to reason that communities should be central and key in the efforts aimed at preventing and countering violent extremism.

It is in recognition of this that Nigeria's Policy Framework, and National Action Plan on PCVE is subtitled, "Partnering for safer and more resilient communities."

What is the current context of violence in the country? What is the current dynamic of Violent Extremism in Nigeria? What roles are communities playing in PCVE efforts? How are they playing this role? In addition, what can be done to strengthen community institutions, in enabling communities to play more effective and impactful roles?

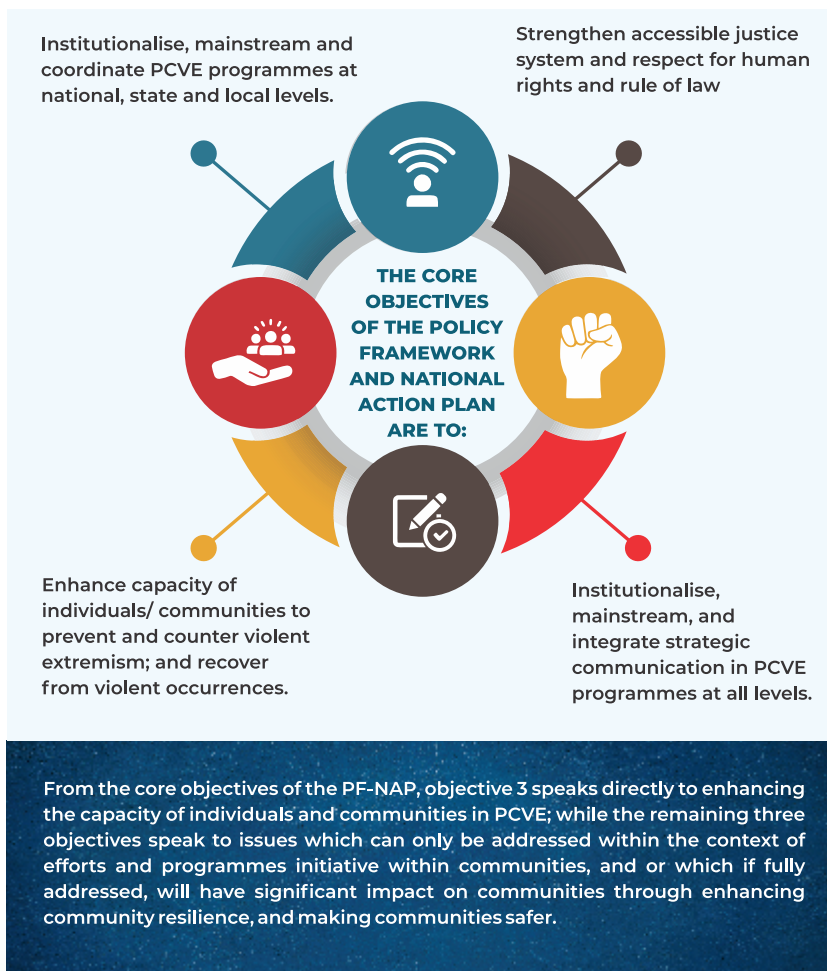
These enquiries, among others, are the questions addressed in this policy brief, with a view to enabling state and non-state actors to collaborate more effectively and efficiently with communities to enhance their resilience, ensure their safety and security, and make them more able to prevent, and counter violent extremism in their communities.

¹ Youth CAN UN -PVE Survey

SETTING THE CONTEXT: CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS:

To be able to identify and know what we are dealing with, it is first necessary to understand the various interrelated concepts around violence and extremism.

For this, we shall reference the country's PCVE Policy Framework and National Action Plan [PF-NAP] for definitions.



² Nigeria's PCVE Policy Framework and National Action Plan [PF-NAP]. August 2017.

So, what is Violence? What is Violent Extremism? What is Terrorism? How can we differentiate between Violent Extremism and Terrorism? Also, what do we mean by Community



The PCVE PF-NAP defines the relevant terms and concepts as follows²:

Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (PCVE): This is defined as policies and activities that aim to prevent and counter individuals and groups from committing or materially supporting ideologically motivated violence against innocent targets by discrediting the messages and propaganda of the extremists, disrupting their plans and activities, and challenging their actions. It also includes measures to engage and change the behaviour of violent extremist offenders, rehabilitate, and reintegrate them back to the society.

Radicalisation Leading to Violence is the process by which individuals and groups, increasingly accept, justify, and promote the use of violent acts/means to advance a political and/or ideological objective(s).

Terrorism: is defined as criminal acts, including against civilians, committed with the intent to cause death or serious bodily injury, or taking of hostages, with the purpose to provoke a state of terror in the general public or in a group of persons or particular persons, intimidate a population or compel a government or an international organisation to do or to abstain from doing any act (United Nations Security Council Resolution 1566, 2004).

Violent Extremism (VE): according to the United Nations, VE is a diverse phenomenon, without a clear definition. In this Policy Framework, violent extremism is defined as the beliefs and actions of persons who support, promote, or use ideologically motivated violence to achieve social-economic, political, ethnic, and religious objectives.

It follows from the definitions above that while terrorism includes specific forms of criminal actions, aimed at intimidating, spreading fear and terror, and or compelling an entity to do or refrain from doing something; violent extremism refers to the beliefs and actions that utilise, promote or support, that is condone use of ideologically motivated violence to achieve a specific end.

It also follows that a person, a group of persons loosely or spontaneously acting together, or a structured and organised group could use, deploy, methods of terror and terrorism; and or act in a manner as to support or promote or actually deploy the use of violence where the motivation for such use is ideological – that is political, religious, etc.

An act of terrorism can thus be committed by an individual acting alone, just as a Violent Extremist act can be undertaken by an individual acting alone; or by groups of persons acting loosely and spontaneously together; or by organised and structured groups.

The distinguishing factor between Violent Extremism and Terrorism is thus to be found in the ideological motivation, including political and religious ideologies.

Yet, another important point to note is that a culture of terrorism and or of violent extremism cannot exist without people and persons who may not be members of any organised groups, but who support, promote, condone, and find justifications for terrorist acts and violent extremist actions.

Furthermore, while Counter Terrorism is a largely security and military response aimed at combating, subduing, and defeating organised armed terrorist groups who are waging an insurgency; PCVE is a wholly non-military, civil approach that aims at utilising governance policies in provisioning security and wellbeing of citizens, to prevent radicalisation towards violent extremism, and as well to address and counter the effects of Violent Extremism on society, while also countering the narratives of violent extremists and promoting positive narratives.

What is a community



A Community is a social unit [a group of living things], and for our purpose, a group of persons sharing a commonality such as place, norms, religion, values, customs, profession, economic activity, or identity. From this, a community can be defined by geographical space or location, but also by cultural, work, economic, religious, etc identities. So, one can have a religious community, a professional community, a genealogical community, among others. What is key and central is the commonality shared by members of that community.

In our instance, we refer to geographical communities, which can be a country, a continent, a city, a town, a village, or a neighbourhood. But, even in this sense, a geographical community is essentially composed of several types of identity-based communities. For instance, a village will also consist of young persons, women, men, children, the elderly, hunters, traders, farmers, cattle rearers and breeders, artisans, teachers, students, religious faithful, etc among others.

In this Policy Brief, our concern is focused mainly on communities as human settlements – villages, towns, cities, neighbourhoods; within which all these other multifarious forms of communities exist and live together.

³ Abiodun Baiyewu; Quoted during the presentation of Mass Atrocities in Nigeria for 2021 Report.

⁴ NextTier Violent Conflict Data Base; June 2020 to April 2022.

CURRENT DYNAMICS OF VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN NIGERIA:

Violence has become fatally routine and a daily affair in the country, such that acts of violence in their intensity, scale, and frequency of occurrence, can be said to have become endemic, and rapidly acquiring a pandemic nature in the society. The statistics are very alarming and damning, and they expedite the dire urgency of the current situation.

For instance, Global Rights, a Nigeria Civil Society Organisation [CSO], which has been tracking mass atrocities in Nigeria for more than five years, disclosed that at least 14,641 people have died from mass atrocities perpetrated across all geo-political zones in Nigeria between January 2019 and December 2021.

The disclosure was made during the presentation of a report on 'Mass Atrocities Tracking Across Nigeria for 2021', at the commemoration of the 2022 National Day of Mourning on May 28th, 2022. There were 6,895 fatalities as a result of mass atrocities in 2021; higher than the reported fatalities of 4,556 in 2020; and 3,188 recorded in 2019. This trend is not a decline, instead it shows a significant increase of more than 116% over the 2019 figure in 2021.

The report also found that "Abductions remain a significant indicator of mass atrocities in Nigeria and have increased exponentially. The nation tilted from at least 2,002 abductions in 2020, to at least 5663 in 2021." Further, "Five states in the north of the country accounted for over 57.3% of the abductions."

Confirming the same grave trend, NexTier SPD, a Civil Society Policy and Research Think-Tank, also reported in its Policy Weekly publication, Vol 6, Issue 15, of May 30th to June 6th of 2022 thus:

"The rate of atrocious violence in Nigeria has surged exponentially, as manifested by the rising trends in massacres, arsons, and kidnappings. Data from the Nextier Violent Conflict Database shows that between June 2020 and April 2022, at least 8,455 persons were gruesomely murdered. A yearly breakdown shows that 1,494 were killed in the second half of 2020, 4,379 in 2021, and 2,582 from January to April 2022. Among the 2,582 persons killed between January and April 2022, 2,424 were civilians and 158 security officers. In another report, a significant

indicator of atrocious mass violence is the upsurge in cases of abductions which rose from 2,002 in 2020 to 5,663 in 2021.¹

Similarly, SB Morgen [SBM] Intelligence, a Nigeria Security and Intelligence group, released two reports in the recent times tracking Mob violence in Nigeria since 2019, as well as Mass killings in Nigeria in the first quarter of 2022.

SBM Intelligence reported in its weekly Chart of The Week: Mob Violence in Nigeria released on 30th May 2022 that, “Mob justice is fairly common in Nigeria. From January 2019 until the violence in Dei-Dei, Abuja on 18th May 2022, there were 279 reported incidents of mob violence in Nigeria, which left 391 people dead.”

With respect to number of incidents, the South West had 100 incidents, with 98 deaths, that is a rate of nearly One death per incident; The South - South had 64 incidents, with 82 deaths; the South East had 33 incidents, with 43 deaths; The North Central had 39 incidents, with 42 deaths; the North East had 13 incidents, with 26 deaths; while the North West had 30 incidents, with 100 deaths, that is a rate of more than 3 deaths per incident. Overall, within the reporting period, there were 82 incidents, and 168 deaths recorded in the North, while in the South, there were 197 incidents, with 223 deaths recorded.

For perspective, SBM Intelligence reported that at least 2,287 persons were reportedly killed in Nigeria in the third quarter of 2021 [from July to September 2021], in violent incidents, including attacks by Boko Haram terrorists, militia herders, bandits, abductions and gang clashes. Of these, civilians made up the highest number of people killed at 1153, followed by bandits at 675, Boko Haram at 170, Soldiers at 105, Police at 67, and immigration at 2.

A further 2,085 persons were reported to be killed in the fourth quarter of 2021. This was documented in its Media Reported Killings in Nigeria Report for Q4 [fourth quarter] 2021. The same report put the total of media reported killings in Nigeria at 10,366 in 2021, an increase of 47% from 7,063 reported in 2020.

The Dimension of Violent Extremism

Looking at the figures of reported cases and incidents of various types, the situation is indeed very dire. However, it is also important to be clear about attribution. How many of these instances can be attributed to terrorism and or terrorist acts? How many can be attributed to Violent Extremist acts, and or acts of Violent Extremists?

For acts of terrorism, we can immediately reference armed groups that are using methods of terror. So, we can include Boko Haram, ISWAP, Bandits, Militia Herdsmen, rogues, armed separatist splinter groups, as well as other armed groups engaged in such criminal acts of mass abductions, mass attacks on communities, mass destruction of properties and livelihoods, among others.

With respect to Violent Extremist Acts, the major underlying factor to reference for purposes of attribution, will be motivation – that is the motive behind and or informing the act.

Thus, for instance, while a mass attack on a community that is not specifically targeted by a specific group because of their religious, ethnic, or cultural identity, resulting in mass destructions and injuries and killings, and which may or may not be accompanied by mass abductions; will qualify for a terrorist act, but not a Violent Extremist act. A similar mass attack on a community, where specific place of worship such as Church or Mosque, or a specific religious institution, such as a school, is the focus of the attack, will qualify for a Violent Extremist attack.

Again, with respect to Mob Violence, the motive is the criteria to distinguish between a routine act of violent jungle justice, or a Violent Extremist Action.

Thus, whereas the mob lynching of the sound engineer in Lagos, by Okada riders [and similar acts of mob violence by keke and Okada riders visited on citizens], or the mob violence in Dei-Dei, Abuja, on May 18th, 2022 are neither Violent Extremists Acts nor acts of terrorism; the Mob Lynching of the Sokoto student, Deborah [a Christian], by her schoolmates [who are Muslims] on the accusation of blasphemy, as well

as the mob lynching of a man [a Muslim] in Kubwa [by a crowd consisting largely of Muslims], again on the accusation of blasphemy; both qualify as acts of Violent Extremism, and or Violent Extremist Act.

If a mob, or members of an organisation, who are adherents of particular religious faith or political philosophy were to approach a target shouting slogans and phrases associated with their faith or political philosophy, with the intent to attack, and or intimidate, and or actually proceeding to attack and intimidate the target, that act will be an act of Violent Extremism.

Similarly, while the attack on the Church at Owo, in Ondo state on June 05, 2022, is seen as a terrorist attack because of the method of terror used, it can also be categorised as violent extremism by the nature of the attack, which violently targeted and inflicted harm, damaged and caused the death of worshipers and religious faithful. Therefore, a violent extremist act can use the method of terrorism.

It is important to note that, from the foregoing, violent extremism and violent extremist acts are likely to be enabled, facilitated, and made more likely where a culture of violence is already pervasive.



⁵ See the article; Enabling Safer and More Resilient Communities: By Daye Gaskia. 07/07/2021.

NO TO VIO LENCE

COMMUNITY AGENCY IN PCVE; The Community Action and Response Team [CART] Experience:

In the context of this Policy Brief and the PCVE PF NAP, community is viewed within the context of space and geographical location, thus reference is to a group of people living together in a shared space within the same geographical location. And who by virtue of the diversity of that community, belong to different subsets of the community based on certain shared identities.

Besides, by safety, reference is to protection from harm or danger, or the threat of harm or danger; while by Resilience, reference is made to the ability of a people, in this case, a community of people, to recover from shock and or unpleasant event or occurrence that has happened to them. Resilience is thus a measure of the ability of a people and their community to recover from a shock event or occurrence. Thus, how quickly or slowly they achieve this recovery is indicative of their level of resilience.

Resilience viewed in this way is thus, dependent on, and is a function of the collective capacities of the individuals, collective institutions, and social infrastructures of the community.

It therefore follows from this perspective and approach that the community is the central theatre of manifestation of security or insecurity, including Violent Extremism; and as such, the community, where people live and organise the full range of their existence, is, and ought to be central to any processes aimed at PCVE, tackling insecurity, and enabling effective security.

Putting in place the required processes, measures and mechanisms [institutional, regulatory, and legislative; including appropriate financial investment and fiscal regimes], to enable and facilitate the all-round human development of communities – human capital development; provision of functional, adequate, universally accessible; qualitative and affordable basic social services in education, health, housing, energy, transportation, among others—is a prerequisite for preventing harm, and protection from harm. Just as it is equally also the prerequisite for achieving the capacity that is enabling of the ability to recover in the event of shock and harm occurring.

Viewed this way, infrastructure is thus a means to an end; infrastructure becomes the platform to enable service delivery, including services in securing the people and the community, services in Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism [PCVE], and services in enabling and enhancing their economic activities and livelihoods systems—that is services in securing the economy of the community.

Since communities are where people live, it follows that the mechanisms for supporting the safety and security of the people and the nation must of essence be embedded and rooted in communities. In this sense, every infrastructure is primarily a community

infrastructure, and every service is purposefully a service to be delivered to and within a community.

But, in order for the community to be able to function effectively as a unit of organising human society and civilisation, then every community must have the requisite agency and appropriate autonomy to organise its own self administration, and local governance for the purpose of meeting the needs and aspirations of its own residents, and provisioning their basic needs through the delivery of accessible and affordable basic social services—that is services that are required for individuals to function effectively within a collective.

Such agency and autonomy enabling community mechanisms must be inclusive, equitable and representative of all sectors and sections of such a community; and it must also be such that it enables residents the ability to hold their elected representatives and administrators accountable.

For communities to be able to play a decisive role in PCVE, community institutions must be such that they are geared towards identifying and responding to grievances, building tolerance, promoting peaceful resolution of disputes and conflicts, and engendering peaceful coexistence among residents of the community.

The Community Action and Response Team [CART] Experience

CART is a community institution, which arose as result of the project of ActionAid Nigeria, supported by GCERF, aimed at enhancing community role in PCVE.

The SARVE II project implemented by ActionAid Nigeria was implemented in two states – Nasarawa and Kogi States. The project was implemented in twelve communities across six different Local Government Areas of each state, with two communities being selected from each of the six selected Local Government Areas. The project was thus implemented, with CARTs being established in 24 communities spread across the 12 Local Government Areas of Nasarawa and Kogi States.

Each CART is made up of nine persons selected from the community members, by the community, and representing different segments of the community including women, youth, persons with disability etc.

Most of the CARTs also include representatives of the community vigilante group; while some are open to all residents including non-indigenes, while a few are open only to indigenes of the community.

Each CART elects a chairperson with a secretary, and each CART also keeps records of its meetings, activities, and cases it has intervened in.

The CARTs are responsible to the communities, and report back to the Community Chief, the village or ward heads, and ultimately to the paramount ruler of the community.

Cases that cannot be resolved by the CARTs are taken to the village heads with recommendations; where the village heads are unable to resolve the cases, such are taken to the paramount ruler; and where the cases cannot be resolved at the level of the paramount ruler, the cases are formally reported and handed over to the Police, Civil Defence or any other Law Enforcement Agency in the area.

The CARTs hold regular weekly meetings, in most cases, and monthly meetings in a few instances. They also convene periodic Town Hall Meetings or general meetings of the community to brief the community on their activities.

The CARTs work hand-in-hand with their community vigilantes and the local law enforcement agencies in their community.

Cases are reported to the CARTS by community members or during community meetings. These cases are then followed up by the CART members.

The CARTs though established purposely as Conflict Resolution and Peace Building mechanisms have also during their activities taken on the role and function of crime prevention, investigation, and detection.

With respect to conflict resolution, violence prevention and peace building, the CARTs address contending issues by mediating, carrying out independent investigation, and bringing parties together to resolve the issue, through enabling reconciliatory actions, meting-out sanctions and punishments endorsed by community, and directed by the community head or paramount ruler etc.

When parties to disputes and conflicts refuse to abide by the decisions of the community, the case is reported to Law Enforcement for appropriate action through the Justice system.

With respect to crime prevention, investigation and detection, the CARTs collaborate with the community vigilantes to patrol the community, to conduct surveillance, and to investigate reported crimes. Ultimately, culprits and the results of the investigations are handed over to law enforcement agency for appropriate action.

The cases mostly managed by the CARTs are Herders – Farmers Disputes, which have seen drastic reductions to near zero over the last two years, and particularly since the establishment of the CARTs. However, it is not that disputes do not arise between Herders and Farmers, it is that the disputes are instantly identified, reported, and managed by the CARTs, leading to their amicable resolution before they become violent conflicts.

Similarly, the CARTs are also handling increasing numbers and incidences of Domestic Disputes and inter-personal and inter-group disputes particularly among youths in the communities. The CARTs report that the success rate of their interventions in these domestic disputes and inter-personal and inter-group disputes among youths have been very high, leading to a drastic reduction in incidences of domestic violence and inter-personal and inter-group violence among youths.

The overarching result is that the establishment and operations of the CART as instruments of community agency have led to drastic reductions in cases of violence and crime in these communities and resulted in peaceful coexistence within and between communities.

The CARTs from the different communities are linked with and are members of the Local Conflict Management Alliance [LOCMA] established in each of the local governments where the ActionAid Project was implemented. These LOCMA include representatives of Law Enforcement Agencies in the Local Government Area, the Chairman of the Local Government Area Council, and the CARTs from the communities. The LOCMA meet regularly, quarterly, and also keep records of their activities.

The LOCMA take up and review cases from the communities in the local government, in particular from the CARTs, and where additional support and assistance towards the resolution of a dispute is required, the LOCMA enables and leverages access to that support and assistance.

Challenges of the CARTs

The CARTs encounter a number of challenges in conducting their activities. These include, but are not limited to the following:

The main challenge is that of logistics for their activities. As it is most of the CARTs are self-resourced, financed by members, with occasional contributions from some community leaders.

The third challenge is that of the operational isolation of the CARTs with respect to neighbouring communities where they have not established CARTs or similar institutions, largely because they have not been the beneficiary of any similar intervention by either NGOs or governments.

There is also the challenge of formal identification. The need for CART members to carry Identification Cards or means of formal identification. This is particularly important in their work when they need to liaise with and visit state institutions at local government level, or businesses, operating in the vicinity of their communities, or engage and liaise with neighbouring communities.

The Role of CARTs and LOCMA in PCVE

From the experience of the CARTs and the LOCMA where they exist, and given their evolution, it is evident that CARTs and LOCMA as community institutions have played, and can be made to play an increasingly effective and impactful role in conflict risk reduction and violence reduction in general, and by extension, given their role in mitigating disputes, identifying sources of disputes ahead of time, and reconciling parties; it stands to reason, that they have inadvertently mitigated against and prevented violent extremism, in their communities.

Building their capacity on Violent Extremism prevention and response, will serve to enhance this inherent potential and capability of the CARTs and the LOCMA.

The evidence from the experience indicates that it would be possible and easy for CARTs and similar community institutions to identify, have reported to it, and intervene to mitigate and prevent violence that may arise from inter-personal, inter-group, or domestic disputes motivated by religious difference, and differences in religious ideology or political philosophies.

These community institutions, not only demonstrate, but also prove the importance of community agency, through their own collective community institutions, in PCVE, and enabling safer and more resilient communities.





CONCLUSION

To conclude, a community centric approach is required to ensure the safety and security of communities and enhance their role in PCVE; while a robust investment in delivering basic social services, and provisioning the prerequisite infrastructure to deliver these social services, not only builds up the social capacity of the community, but it is also a pre-condition for enabling the ability of the community to recover from shock – that is enabling community resilience.

Nevertheless, in the final analysis, for this community centric approach to PCVE, safety, security, and resilience to be effective, it requires that communities have the appropriate mechanisms to ensure their own agency and enable their autonomy – that is the institution of formal community governance through the establishment of elected, representative, inclusive community governments.

RECOMMENDATION

A. TO CIVIL SOCIETY

1. There is a need for Civil Society Organisations working in PCVE and implementing PCVE projects in communities to prioritise enabling Community Agency, through strengthened Community Institutions, towards enhancing community-centric approach to PCVE.
2. Civil Society Organisations working around issues that are related to PCVE and implementing PCVE projects need to improve coordination, experience sharing, and shared learning towards ensuring that they implement good practice in enhancing community agency in PCVE.
3. Civil Society Organisations in their PCVE programming should direct more support to communities to enable them to play an effective role in PCVE.

B. TO GOVERNMENT AND STATE ACTORS

1. State governments across Nigeria should consider enacting legislation that will empower communities to establish representative, and inclusive community institution such as the Community Action Response Team [CART] in all communities, with similar functions and roles as the CARTs, with responsibility to the community leadership, and that are accountable to the communities establishing them. Such legislation and or policy should account for the establishment, running, and management of the CARTs or similar community Violence Risk and Conflict Risk Reduction institutions.
2. State governments should equally also consider enacting legislation, and policies establishing Local Conflict Management Alliances [LOCMA] or similar institutions in each local government, including representation from law enforcement and security agencies present in the Local Government Area, representation from the community institutions [CARTs], and representation from the Local Government Authority. Such Local Government Agency

would be responsible for linking and coordinating the community agencies [CARTs].

3. The Federal Government of Nigeria should work with state governments to consider establishment of a Community Development Fund, with contributions from levels of the state, and with responsibility for providing counterpart funding to communities in aid of their community development activities. Such a fund should specifically support the programmes of Community Development Associations [CDAs], which should be recognised by legislation; and the activities and operations of CARTs and LOCMA as specific Community institutions. While the CDAs will be responsible for human and societal development initiatives in the communities, the CARTs will be responsible for Conflict Risk Reduction, Violence Risk Reduction, and Security [in conjunction with the community vigilantes] in the communities.
4. Federal Government to direct state security, and law enforcement agencies to work and partner with communities and liaise with and provide support for community institutions for the prevention of crime and mitigation of violence and violent conflicts.

C. TO THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

1. Synergise efforts and interventions on PCVE across the country, to enable the amplification of impact, reduce duplication, and prevent poor quality work in operationalising PCVE.
2. Prioritise and provide more support for community-based interventions and community-centric approaches in PCVE, and with the particular aim of enhancing community agency in PCVE.
3. Review ongoing support to PCVE Interventions in the country, identify gaps, and develop strategies for achieving scale and wider impact from limited interventions.

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System and Structure Strengthening Approach
against Radicalisation to Violent Extremism Project,
SARVE I, II and III

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