

# **CIVIL SOCIETY DECLARATION ON PROCESSES TOWARDS PREVENTING AND COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN NIGERIA:**

## **Introduction And Context:**

The World Leadership Alliance [Club de Madrid] in Collaboration with the Office Of The National Security Adviser [ONSA], and in Partnership with Partnership Against Violent Extremism PAVE Network] funded by the European Union, organised a Two Day National Workshop on the Theme of “Preventing Violent Extremism in Nigeria: Effective Narratives and Messaging”, at the Sheraton Hotel Abuja on the 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> of May 2017.

The National workshop was organised as a part of the “Preventing Violent Extremism: Leaders Telling A Different Story” project of the Club de Madrid [CdM] being implemented in a twelve month pilot across three countries [Nigeria, Tunisia and Lebanon], and across two regions [Africa and MENA].

In the course of the Workshop, a closed session of a Civil Society Working Group was held, during which the following Declaration was articulated. The Declaration from the Civil Society Working Group was subsequently presented to the broader multi-stakeholder session.

The Partnership Against Violent Extremism [PAVE Network], a network of Civil Society Organisations working on PCVE and partnering with other stakeholders including State Actors, and in particular ONSA, takes ownership of this declaration, and commits to the vigorous promotion of its content in all her engagements with other stakeholders – State and non-state, national and international.

The deliberations and declaration of the Civil Society Working Group is categorised around three subthemes as follows:

## **A. Preventing violence and recruitment into violent groups;**

### **Community projects (what is working):**

1. Establishment of peace clubs in Partnership with Ministry of Education [MoE].
2. Food for Peace Initiative targeting the informal system of education (almajiri settings).
3. Improving community resilience through strengthening the Early Warning And Early Response [EWER] mechanisms in communities; through multi stakeholders approach of town hall meetings, dialogues to discuss and build strategies of engagements, communication and security (learning and sharing information). Also recognising that there are layers of early response, some of which can be effectively activated within communities and at community level.
4. Literacy engagements with children and youth; Utilising the Non-formal learning education systems which had offered many opportunity to get involved.
5. Positive voices initiative; young people identified and supported at community level, reaching out to more and sharing peace messages through skills and empowerment (peer-peer mentoring)

### **LESSONS LEARNT**

- Improved access to education has promoted engagements especially with and among young people and children.
- Communication and positive relationship enhanced between and within communities and relevant institutions, leading to strengthened flow of information.
- People feel and get involved in identifying threats, this has effectively worked especially from youth perspectives; understanding, recognising and amplifying their roles and responsibilities to their communities.

- Opportunity for mentoring has been created in the cause of several initiatives.

### **Everyone has a little to contribute in his or her own way**

#### **Recruitment into violent groups, shared realities;**

Evidence has shown that extremists have various ways of engagements some of which are;

1. One-one engagements with the disconnected people, rural communities (as in the case of BH in Nigeria, research has shown recruitments were done by preaching directly in vulnerable communities. Example is their recruitment in Kogi central targeting a Muslim majority in Okene; some commanders were identified to be from this LGA, and evidence had shown that BH come in to preach in this community. Ideology, economy, politics etc.)
2. Social media campaigns; Evidence has shown that extremists use social media to promote their cause, influence and recruit people especially young people.
3. Peer-Peer involvement; When young people are not at the centre of decision making particularly on issues directly relating to them, this has engendered rebellion in some places, making rebellious youth more vulnerable to BH messaging.
4. Systemic injustice has contributed a lot to recruitments, in prisons, from among victims, etc.

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Propagating the correct narratives of Islam; especially in disconnected places and places difficult to access (peace actors can only pass peace message the same way extremist recruits)
- A proper stakeholder mapping and research to know how/what motivates people to join extremist groups

- Profiling of religious leaders and worship places (Develop a registration portal or an identification means for preachers)
- Continuous Analysis of messaging contents
- Enhancing youth empowerment through building their capacity on the EWER mechanisms.
- Strengthening relationships with relevant institutions (Ministry of Justice [MoJ] and the justice sector, Police, NSCDC, and other security and law enforcement agencies etc.)
- Building trust and confidence between citizens and security agencies through programs aimed at improving Civil-Security Relations [CSR]
- Strengthening the traditional systems of justice, (Establishing/strengthening ADRC) as most people do not have access to the formal system of justice
- Introducing and integrating PCVE into school activities
- Establishment of safe spaces within communities for youths and women
- Enabling enhanced participation in democratic governance process for citizens in general, and women and youth in particular
- Livelihood support initiatives should be improved to enhance living standards and conditions of living of citizens.

## **B. Producing and Amplifying Alternative Narratives**

**What we know;** distortion of religious messages to attract or recruit

**Existing narratives;** The myth of monolithic Christian South & Muslim North; Failure of Governance; Promotion of the feeling and sense of victimhood; Politics of segregation and exclusion; Appealing to the Sense and spirit of adventure among youths – making Violent Extremism seem to be like a glorious adventure

(how terrorists are celebrated not peace actors); distorted perception of western education, etc.

**What we should do;** Research the current narratives – trends, dynamics; Get a sense of who is listening?; who are Violent Extremists targeting?; what is the reaction/effect of the messaging on targets?; are people joining violent extremist groups because of the messages or there is more? Linking the activities to actors, and to messages!!!

Develop, amplify and disseminate Alternative and Positive narratives to counter the existing narratives:

Existing Initiatives include;

Beyond the bullets (radio program) telling the other side of the side of the story, successes of war against terror.

**It is important to note that narratives are evolved within and shaped by collectives in the course of taking Collective Social Action**

**LESSONS LEARNT:** Promoting positive messages through media especially radio has been shown to be effective in attracting wide coverage and large audience. Experiences from such initiatives include;

- People were encouraged and made to understand that they have a key role in supporting the fight against violent extremism (in the case of boko-haram)
- Messages are being sent out through multi-dimensional approaches (for example in different and accessible languages) helped a lot people in understanding the messages clearly.
- Positive response is engendered as people were constantly informed, especially celebrating peace actors that are doing something about the violence.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

1. Religious leaders should be supported to produce the right alternative narratives
2. Alternative Narratives must be locally based and preferably tailored to suit target audience. Like shoes, there is no one size that fits all!
3. Alternative Messages should not focus on government failure alone, but also on their positive impacts, and promising trends.
4. Alternative Messages should Emphasize the importance of education to the individual and in society.

## **MEDIUM FOR SHARING NARRATIVES;**

- Media (social media a significant tool); Those engaged with preventing and countering violent extremism must strive to become dominant voices and opinion molders on the social media.
- One-One interactions should be promoted and emphasised with communities without access to internet
- Platforms should be put in place by community leaders for communication, especially on values and discipline.
- Places of worship, market places, places where people earn/make a living, homes, etc are to be utilised as spaces for engagement in PCVE

**Enhanced collaboration between government and CSOs, for information sharing is Key and central to developing and disseminating Alternative messages and positive narratives.**

## **C. FOSTERING EFFECTIVE AND MEANINGFUL PARTNERSHIP**

**Building and nurturing effective and efficient partnerships is key as an approach to Preventing recruitments by violent extremism and developing and disseminating alternative messages and positive narratives**

**CHALLENGES:**

- Lack of synergy and weak coordination within and between CSOs; State Institutions across tiers and arms of government [FG, SGs, LGs]; Communities, etc.
- Lack of synergy and sometimes unhealthy rivalry for tuff among and within development partners who often set the agenda.
- The Absence of formal conflict management institutions at state and local government levels, including within communities.
- Capacity gaps and weaknesses within various stakeholders – State and non-state alike.
- Absence of/weak strategic development planning framework and processes.
- Lackadaisical attitude to investment in peace building and conflict prevention.
- Inflexible one size fits all response framework for conflict management by government institutions, often exclusively based on a ‘law and order’ approach.
- Too narrow a focus of PCVE interventions on the North East inspite of the fact of the recognition that the threat and risk of violent extremism is a nationwide one.
- Scattered, dispersed and disconnected nature and character of ongoing initiatives and interventions.

**What is currently working well;**

- Bilateral, one to one partnerships
- Short to medium term funded/resourced interventions based on the bilateral partnerships

**What we should be doing to overcome challenges;**

- Strengthening existing state conflict management agencies and establishment where there is none.
- Need for a coordinated and integrated increase in PCVE initiatives in Northeast, and across other parts of the country.
- Urgent necessity for a Comprehensive mapping and audit of PCVE initiatives in particular, peace and security initiatives in general. It is important to have a documented sense of what is being done, who is doing what, and where these are being done.
- Establishment of effective coordination mechanism to foster synergy, amplify impact and enhance scope and coverage. Government agencies, community institutions, civil society and international development partners need to be enabled to work together, and coordinate their respective interventions towards achieving the common goal of PCVE.
- Providing sustained and adequate resources and enabling conditions for institutions for conflict management and peace-building across the country.
- Mainstreaming conflict sensitivity and peace building, including PCVE into overarching development strategies and plans at Federal, State, and local government levels, and in community development plans.
- Feedback mechanism should be built into partnership frameworks
- Need to Harmonize strategies of partners and to be guided by a common mandate.

- Putting in plans mechanisms for COORDINATION and COLLABORATION among and within categories of actors - for instance within CSOs, within State Actors, within development partners; and among all of these.
- Urgent need for a participatory and needs based budgetary system based on Integrated national development planning framework, with PCVE mainstreamed.
- Establish a multi-stakeholder Peace Fund for sustainable funding of peace initiatives with contributions from Government [at all levels], private sector and international development partners
- Develop sustainable and enduring partnerships beyond funding cycles.

#### **EXISTING OPPORTUNITY FOR ENHANCED PARTNERSHIP;**

- PAVE Network as an opportunity to build synergy and enhance collaboration [collective planning, joint work, and mutually reinforcing action] between and among various categories of stakeholders, for partnership among CSOs, and between CSOs and state actors and development partners.
- Evolution of PAVE Network into a multilayered alliance, and a robust Community Of Practice on PCVE in Nigeria.

#### **IMMEDIATE NEXT STEPS;**

- Mapping and audit of PCVE interventions and stakeholders.
- Development of a comprehensive and periodically updated accessible data bank on PCVE interventions and initiatives in Nigeria.
- Development of an accessible Central PCVE Resource and Knowledge management Centre/portal.
- PAVE Network leveraged to play key and central role in Monitoring, Evaluation And Learning [MEL] in the course of implementation of the National Policy and Action Plan on PCVE

**CONCLUSION;**

Whereas preventing and countering violent extremism [PCVE] requires a whole society approach, involving an all of government and all of society orientation;

And whereas this approach necessitates synergy and coordination between and among all stakeholders, state and non-state actors, national and international actors etc;

Understanding that Civil Society will play key roles in program design, implementation, monitoring, evaluation as well as in advocacy;

Nevertheless, Civil Society affirms its commitment towards holding government and every other actors and stakeholders accountable, promoting observance of human rights and international humanitarian law, and ensuring the protection of civilians and the rights of every citizen.