Internal Final Project Evaluation

Empowering and Engaging Youth to Prevent and Counter Violent Extremism and Terrorism under the overall framework of UNOCT's Global Programme on PCVE

Location of intervention: Kenya, Nigeria, Somalia

Timeframe of intervention: 1 January 2023 to 28 February 2025

Funders: The People's Republic of China through the United Nations Peace and Development Trust Fund (UNPDF)

Implementing partners: United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS); National Counter-Terrorism Centre of Kenya; National Counter-Terrorism Centre of Nigeria/Office of the National Security Advisor (ONSA); National Counter-Terrorism Centre of Somalia (Tusban National Center for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (TNC-PCVE)

Date of evaluation: September 2024 to May 2025

Scope of evaluation: All project activities implemented during project duration - 1 January 2023 to 31 February 2025

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URL for evaluation report: https://www.un.org/counterterrorism/publications

Background and Context

The subject of this evaluation is the project "Empowering and Engaging Youth in Somalia, Mozambique and Nigeria to Prevent and Counter Violent Extremism and Terrorism under the overall framework of UNOCT's Global Programme on PCVE" delivered by the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre (UNCCT). The Project sought to empower and enable young people to contribute to PCVE efforts and policies, thereby facilitating effective PCVE initiatives in the three implementation countries (Kenya, Nigeria and Somalia). While the project was originally intended to be implemented in Mozambique, the project team, in close consultation with key stakeholders, decided to implement in Kenya due to operational challenges in Mozambique.

The project was designed in line with UNOCT's innovative model of youth engagement in PCVE, referred to as the Youth Engagement and Empowerment Programme (YEEP). This model responds to the fact that young people are disproportionately affected by terrorism, yet have few opportunities to influence PCVE policymaking and programming. For this project, the model was adapted to the context of the three implementation

countries. It is also worth noting that Sub-Saharan Africa is one of the regions most impacted by terrorism globally.

Key Findings

The evaluation found the project to have been well-designed and implemented, and aligned to relevant priorities. The project achieved all of its intended results, including both learning outcomes and long-term outcomes. Further, the evaluation concluded that there was strong evidence of impact and sustainability in all three implementation countries.

Effectiveness

Finding 1: The project achieved significant reach; however, there are opportunities to increase the participation of women and people with limited proficiency in the English language	The project reached 905 young people (60 young leaders and 845 of their peers), and 97 key decision makers in PCVE. The project met its original reach target for young leaders in Kenya and Nigeria, but not for Somalia where 10 young leaders discontinued their participation in the project. English language limitations may have contributed to the lower engagement among the Somali cohort. The gender balance among young leaders was close to even (32 women, 28 men); however, among peers (382 women, 463 men) and key decision makers (32 women, 65 men) more men were engaged.
Finding 2: Young leaders have influenced PCVE policies and programmes in Kenya, Nigeria and Somalia	In Kenya, the young leaders have informed the new National Strategy on PCVE. In Nigeria, the young leaders have become an informal youth advisory board for the Nigerian NCTC/ONSA. In Somalia, the young leaders have informed the new National Strategy on PCVE, and the government has taken on board several of the young leaders' policy recommendations.
Finding 3: Young leaders feel more confident discussing PCVE as a result of the project	There was a 32% increase in confidence discussing PCVE among young leaders (n=21). Young leaders reflected on their increased comfort presenting in front of high-level stakeholders, as well as a positive change in their self-perception as leaders in PCVE.
Finding 4: Young leaders feel empowered to contribute to PCVE efforts within their region, nation or community as a result of the project	There was a 16% increase in confidence contributing to PCVE efforts among young leaders. Young leaders shared examples of empowerment such as pursuing further studies in PCVE, taking on a career in PCVE and leading new PCVE initiatives.
Finding 5: Young leaders have continued to engage with each other beyond the project	Within three months of completing the national policy dialogues the young leaders had established formal YEEP alumni groups in each implementation country. Almost all young leaders (96%) reported remaining in contact with at least one other young leader (n=48).
Finding 6: Engagement between young leaders and key decision makers has increased as a result of the project	The Somalia YEEP Alumni Group co-delivered an event with government and CSO partners for International Day of Peace in September 2024. The Nigeria YEEP Alumni Group co-launched a strategic communications campaign with the Nigerian NCTC/ONSA in April 2025. The young leaders from Kenya were invited to provide feedback on the new National Strategy for PCVE in June 2024, and, following the project, the Kenyan NCTC obtained internships for most young leaders in relevant CSOs.
Finding 7: The achievement of the project's long-term outcomes was	The foundational modules on violent extremism and PCVE were critical to ensure young leaders had a deep understanding of key

supported by its strong learning outcomes	concepts. The modules on engagement provided the young leaders with skills that were transferred to the peer engagement sessions and. The modules on policymaking and policy advocacy supported the success of the policy dialogues.
Finding 8: The project design is unique and supported strong outcomes, with some opportunities for improvement	Each element of the project played a key role in the outcomes achieved. Opportunities for improvement include adopting an extended in-person training modality for all implementation countries, better supporting the young leaders to align their peer engagement sessions with best practice, and re-designing the regional policy dialogue to maximise its return on investment.
Finding 9: The project team's youth-sensitive and highly engaging facilitation approach supported learning outcomes	The facilitation style adopted by the project team was highly effective, enabling free expression among young leaders, and adequately preparing them for the peer engagement sessions and policy dialogues.
Finding 10: Partnerships supported implementation success; and the project team learned that government counterparts should be engaged early in project planning	The project team formed partnerships with relevant UN entities and CSOs, who played an advisory role, including: supporting the tailoring of implementation to local contexts; facilitating access to government counterparts; and supporting the recruitment and selection of young leaders. The project team learned, through implementation in Nigeria, that government counterparts should be engaged as early as possible in project planning to facilitate the policy dialogues, which was adopted in Kenya and Somalia.
Finding 11: The project was flexible to adapt to implementation challenges	Operational concerns led the project team to implement the project in Kenya rather than Mozambique, and to move to a primarily online modality for Somalia. In addition, in-person activities for Somalia were conducted in Kenya in order to safeguard young people.
Finding 12: Future projects would benefit from a more structured exit, sustainability and visibility strategy	The exit, sustainability and visibility strategy should include: ongoing maintenance of UNOCT's YEEP Alumni Network, additional support for young leaders, and the adoption of a bespoke communications approach to facilitate increased project visibility.
Finding 13: The project's integrated M&E supported measurement of success	The development of a comprehensive M&E Plan at the outset of the project, and robust data collection throughout implementation, significantly facilitated this evaluation.

Relevance

Finding 1: The project demonstrated strong alignment to all relevant policy and programme frameworks	The project was strongly aligned with, and contributed, to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Youth Peace and Security (YPS) agenda, as well as the GCTS and the UNOCT Strategic Plan and Results Framework (SPRF).
Finding 2: The project demonstrated strong alignment to Member State and UNPDF priorities	Terrorist and violent extremist groups are a key concern in all three implementation countries, and there was an appetite to draw on the perspectives of young people in response to this issue. The project also aligned with the priorities of UNPDF/Peace and Security Sub-Fund.

Human rights, gender equality, leave no one behind, and disability inclusion

Finding 1: Do no harm principles were incorporated to a significant extent	The project's Youth Engagement Specialist and local partners ensured that do no harm principles were incorporated into project design and implementation.
Finding 2: Gender equality considerations were incorporated to a moderate extent	Achieving a gender balance among young leaders and including gender as a thematic area were the primary focus of the project's gender equality approach. Future projects could further strengthen the focus on gender equality.
Finding 3: Leaving no one behind considerations were incorporated to a more limited extent	Including peer engagement in the project design was the primary focus of the project's leaving no one behind approach. Future projects could further strengthen the focus on leaving no one behind.
Finding 4: Disability inclusion was not factored into project design or implementation	Disability inclusion considerations were not incorporated into the project. Future projects would need to allocate funding for appropriate expertise in order to facilitate incorporation of these.
Finding 5: There is an opportunity to incorporate human rights as a thematic area within future projects	Future projects should strengthen training on the intersections between human rights and PCVE by including a standalone module on this topic within the curriculum for young leaders, encourage young leaders to collect insights from their peers on these intersections, and create a thematic area for human rights within the policy dialogues.

Recommendations

The evaluation produced six key recommendations.

Recommendations

1. **Recommendation No. # 1: Deliver extended in-person training for all young leaders**

   The implementation model adopted for Nigeria, where the young leaders completed additional training in person, facilitated learning outcomes and enabled the formation of strong interpersonal connections between the young leaders early on in the project. This model should be adopted for all implementation countries in the future.

2. **Recommendation No. # 2: Provide additional support to young leaders to implement their peer engagement sessions in line with best practice**

   The additional support pertains to assisting young leaders to communicate clearly with prospective peers about the purpose of the peer engagement, providing funding to cover the logistical costs of conducting peer engagement, and 'closing the loop' with peers by providing a summary of how their inputs have been used.

3. **Recommendation No. # 3: Allocate more time, and optimise the enabling environment for young leaders to formulate policy recommendations**

   Adding additional time for the young leaders to work on their policy recommendations in their small groups may reduce stress and enable stronger presentations at the policy dialogues. In

addition, the enabling environment for this important in-person group work should be optimised, including through ensuring young leaders are staying at the same accommodation.

4. **Recommendation No. # 4: Re-design the regional policy dialogue to maximise its return on investment**

There are three options for re-designing the regional policy dialogue: 1) A whole-of-region approach in partnership with the African Union, with an in-person policy dialogue focused on influencing regional policymaking (requires a large budget to accommodate 20 or more Member States); 2) A sub-regional approach in partnership with a sub-regional organisation, with an in-person policy dialogue focused on sub-regional policymaking (requires a medium budget to accommodate 5-20 Member States); 3) Multilateral knowledge exchange through online dialogues (can be achieved with a smaller budget and less than five Member States).

5. **Recommendation No. # 5: Incorporate a more structured exit, sustainability and visibility strategy**

To maximise sustainability, the strategy should include: ongoing maintenance of UNOCT's YEEP Alumni Network; additional skill development for young leaders; funding of pilot PCVE initiatives; and the development of a bespoke communications plan, in collaboration with UNOCT's Communications Unit, to bring greater visibility to youth-led initiatives stemming from future projects.

6. **Recommendation No. # 6: Strengthen the incorporation of human rights, gender, disability inclusion and leaving no one behind considerations**

Opportunities to strengthen human rights considerations include: strengthening the do no harm approach for the peer engagement; and incorporating human rights as a thematic area within each element of the project. Opportunities to strengthen gender considerations include: hiring both women and men facilitators; considering the need for specific measures depending on the cultural norms of the implementation country; encouraging the young leaders to achieve a gender balance within their peer engagement; and requesting governments to nominate a minimum number of women representatives for the policy dialogues. Opportunities to strengthen leaving no one behind considerations include: involving organisations representing minority groups in the project; providing translation and interpretation services; and providing young leaders with funding to cover the logistical costs of the peer engagement sessions. These opportunities should be elaborated, and further opportunities identified, with the support of UNOCT's HRGS.

Methodology

The internal evaluation was conducted by the Global Programme on PCVE's M&E Specialist between September 2024 and May 2025, supported by the Evaluation Reference Group (ERG) consisting of the PCVE Programme Team, the Human Rights and Gender Section (HRGS), and the Evaluation and Compliance Unit (ECU) for technical review and quality assurance. The evaluation adopted a mixed-method approach to data collection, drawing on both qualitative and quantitative sources, including project data, surveys, interviews, and a focus group discussion. The strong integration of M&E within ongoing project management and implementation strongly supported the measurement of success.