UN Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED) Meeting
29 APRIL 2024
Online

BUILDING RESILIENCE OF COMMUNITIES TO PREVENT RADICALIZATION TO TERRORISM

1. **The African Centre for the Study and Research of Terrorism (ACSRT)**

The Centre was established by the African Union in 2004 to contribute to and strengthen the African Union Member States (AUMS) capacity to prevent and combat terrorism in Africa and ultimately eliminate the threat posed by terrorism to peace, security, stability, and development in the continent. To this end, the Centre is mandated to:

    i.   Collect and centralize information and analyses on terrorism and terrorist groups;

    ii.   Conduct research on issues related to terrorism and violent extremism on the continent;

    iii.   Develop and maintain a database on matters related to terrorism in Africa;

    iv.   Develop and implement capacity-building programmes at national and regional levels, with assistance from International Partners;

    v.   Mobilize resources for CT capacity-building programmes for AUMS, Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and Regional Mechanisms (RMs);

    vi.   Provide fora for interaction and cooperation among AUMS, RECs/RMs and international partners.

2. **Terrorism in Africa**

Africa is home to several terrorist groups operating in all regions of the continent. They are concentrated across the vast Sahel, Lake Chad Basin, Horn of Africa, the Great Lakes and the Southern Africa region. In the Sahel, terrorist activities are rapidly moving southwards, submerging the coastal countries of West Africa, particularly Benin and Togo.

The Islamic State, through its Central Africa Province (ISCAP), mainly based in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, has successfully been able to orchestrate a series of attacks against civilian population in Uganda. The Africa-based major terrorist groups have pledged allegiance with global terrorist groups, to either Islamic States or al-Qaeda. Of recent, the Islamic State, in particular, has clearly adopted an aggressive expansionist approach in Africa following its demise in Syria and Iraq. Mozambique and the DRC fell victim to Islamic State prey.

In all terrorism-affected countries, there is a heavy presence of military by government forces, allied forces, and multinational forces. Despite the military pressure, the terrorist groups have proven resilient by acquiring new techniques and materials that allow them to carry out high-profile attacks and maintain control over territories.

The fight against terrorism and violent extremism is characterized by hard military approaches, as opposed to soft approaches in Africa. The soft approach seeks to address the terrorism menace through preventive measures that include addressing the root causes of terrorism, and most importantly, engaging local communities rallies to win their heart and minds and undermine terrorism radicalization and recruitment and also because they have fallen victim to terrorist activities.

3.   **Building Community Resilience to Prevent Radicalization**
      Several factors can help prevent radicalization and build community resilience to terrorism and violent extremism.

- **Raising Awareness.** This could be through media literacy and educational programs, both formal and informal, which can help address misconceptions, assist individuals in distinguishing between right and wrong, and reject terrorist propaganda and misinformation.

- **Engaging and Empowering Communities**. Families and communities are better placed to identify the early stages of radicalization. Credible voices within communities can promote resilience against terrorism. Community leaders, religious leaders, women and youth organizations, and de-radicalized individuals could be used to counter terrorist narratives and design and disseminate alternative messages. There is a need to support community-led initiatives that promote tolerance, peace, and unity.

- **Empowerment through Economic Opportunities**. Lack of economic opportunities makes individuals susceptible to terrorist radicalization. Creating meaningful and sustainable jobs for youth, marginalized, and other disadvantaged people can promote resilience to terrorism radicalization.

- **Social Inclusion**. Promoting social cohesion and inclusivity in all community sectors could also help build resilience against terrorism and violent extremism.

- **Trust-building between Security Forces/Law Enforcement Agencies and local Communities.** Promoting good practices, respect for human rights, and the rule of law among security forces while preventing and countering terrorism fosters positive relations between security forces and local communities.

4. ACSRT Programmes on Community Resilience and PCVE

There are two ongoing programmes that seek to enhance community resilience against terrorism and violent extremism:

i. **Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) Programme**. The PVE programme, in partnership with the Swiss Human Security Department of Foreign Affairs (HSD/FDFA), focuses on West and Central Africa. It emphasizes community resilience by promoting intra- and inter-community dialogue and supporting community-grown initiatives that foster positive relations. Several workshops and seminars have been held, drawing participation from civil society organizations and community leaders.

ii. **Programme on Alternative Approaches for the Prevention of Violent Extremism.** The Programme is in partnership with the African Union Mediation and Dialogue Division and the African Union Mission in Mali and the Sahel (MISAHEL). The programme considered the biases in promoting hard approaches to preventing and countering terrorism vis-a-vis soft approaches and aims to identify good practices regarding soft approaches to terrorism and violent extremism that will guide and inspire affected communities.

The programme also seeks to enhance positive interactions between security forces/law enforcement agencies and communities. It aims to promote the role of women in communities as mediators as well as identify and use credible voices available in communities. Research is also one of the program's main components, which aims to expand the understanding of community resilience to prevent violent extremism.

A **Plan of Action on Alternative Approaches for Preventing Violent Extremism** was adopted in December 2023. However, implementation is still a challenge, mainly due to financial constraints. In addition, the ACSRT assists AU Member States in developing their Counter-Terrorism Strategies and Implementation Plans in line with the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy.

Conclusion

- Community resilience should come from within and not be imposed.

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