

Panel Discussion

Sadiq Muhammad Mustapha, Alumni, Youth Engagement & Empowerment Programme (YEPP Nigeria),

Open meeting of the Counter-Terrorism Committee

“Building resilience of communities to prevent radicalization to terrorism”,

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Your Excellencies,

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak on this important topic which is a whole society approach to building community resilience against violent extremism.

This topic resonates deeply with me due to my upbringing in northern Nigeria, a region plagued by a history of conflict spanning from the activities of Boko Haram and ISWAP in the northeast to issues like banditry, kidnapping for ransom, cattle rustling, farmers/herders crisis, and ethno-religious conflicts in the northwest and north central. These firsthand experiences have underscored the profound impact of violent extremism on the socio-economic and human capital development of our communities.

Motivated by these experiences, I have been driven to seek avenues to contribute to the building of community resilience, aimed at mitigating the prevalence of extremist activities in my state and region. Through my involvement in the Youth Engagement & Empowerment Programme (YEPP) by UNOCT, we organized peer engagement sessions within our communities, primarily targeting women and youth, to better understand their perspectives on violent extremism and the way forward.

During these engagements, we gleaned that while the conflicts within our communities may vary in motives, intentions, and execution, they share a common root: historical grievances left unaddressed, which serve as fertile ground for radicalization.

We also observed that government interventions often prioritize countering extremism post-incident, with minimal focus on prevention. Additionally, governmental policies typically adopt a top-to-down approach, lacking meaningful

consultation with communities, particularly youth and women, who are often marginalized despite their valuable insights.

To address these shortcomings, the YEEP Nigeria, drawing from the insights gained from our engagements, formulated a comprehensive set of policy recommendations across eight thematic areas. These recommendations aim to foster an inclusive approach to building community resilience, with a specific focus on youth and women's involvement in Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (PCVE) efforts.

Our recommendations urge the government to develop and implement policies in close consultation with communities, especially youth and women, targeting the social, economic, and political grievances underlying extremism.

Furthermore, we emphasize the significance of youth-led dialogues in promoting community cohesion and advocate for enhanced coordination to integrate gender mainstreaming strategies into PCVE initiatives.

Additionally, our recommendations highlight the importance of prioritizing trauma healing initiatives for communities affected by violent extremism, particularly for youth, to facilitate victim support, citizen engagement, and the sustainable reintegration of former extremists.

We also advocate for increased investment in public-private partnerships to create micro-employment opportunities for young people and call for augmented budgetary allocations to ensure equitable access to quality education, including the inclusion of a peace education curriculum, thereby equipping communities with resilience and conflict transformation skills.

These recommendations underscore the imperative of a holistic, community-driven approach to combating violent extremism, wherein the voices of youth and women are not only heard but actively engaged in shaping solutions for a more resilient and peaceful future.

In closing, involving youths and consulting communities in policy development ensures that interventions are culturally sensitive, contextually relevant, and address root causes effectively, thereby fostering a sense of ownership and trust among community members. This inclusive approach promotes social cohesion, empowers marginalized groups, and builds resilience by addressing grievances and promoting sustainable solutions from within the community itself.

And with that, I want to once express my appreciation for the opportunity and for listening.

Thank you.