EDITORIAL

The challenge of violent extremism in Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Somalia, and the Horn of Africa is growing increasingly more complex. With al-Shabaab terrorist attacks and al-Qaeda-inspired groups operational in the region, much of the international community’s focus has been on engagement with the region’s Muslim community. Muslim communities, especially those in Uganda and Kenya, have been marginalized and co-opted by various regimes seeking to shore up power bases, leaving them in a tenuous relationship with political and security structures. This, coupled with other factors, has an effect on the fight against violent extremism as each party looks at the other with great suspicion.

Against this background, Uganda Muslim Youth Development Forum (UMYDF) – a not-for-profit, non partisan youth-led and faith based development organization – implemented a variety of interventions designed to empower Muslims and other community members in the East and Horn of Africa to rise above common differences to prevent violent extremism and ensure lasting peace and tolerance for all. Such interventions included the Community Change Agents program; Amani Leo campaign; the Nurturing (youth) for Peace program; as well as the East African Credible Voices program. We also participated in numerous activities organized by Extremely Together across the world. Through these interventions, we interacted with different actors.

UMYDF recognizes the community leaders, school authorities, teachers, pupils, students and parents who supported the project by mainstreaming the project activities into their programmes, and providing space, platforms, as well as time for reflection and leaning. Some of these are now agents of change against violent extremism in their respective communities, schools and homes. I am thus confident that we are on the right track to eliminate violent extremism in East Africa.

We acknowledge the different partners including US State Department PREACT Program, US Mission Kampala, Finn Church Aid, United States Institute for Peace (USIP), UN Counter Terrorism Center (UNCTC), IGAD Center for P/CVE, Centre for Youth Dialogue (CYD), Kenya Muslim Youth Alliance (KMYA), The Anti-Tribalism Movement (ATM), Civilization Exchange and Cooperation Foundation (CECF) and UNDP Uganda, with whom we collaborated on the various interventions implemented in 2017. We salute the leadership of the Uganda Muslim Supreme Council (UMSC) for the support accorded to UMYDF throughout 2017. This was indeed a true reflection of partnership.

Lastly, we are very grateful to the UMYDF staff team for all their contributions towards the compilation of this newsletter, and to our donors, for the financial and technical support given to UMYDF during the 2017 year of implementation. Thank you for trusting and allowing us explore new approaches and strategies for the attainment lasting peace and tolerance in East Africa.

AHMED HADJI
Team Leader
UMYDF
A CASE FOR COMMUNITY CHANGE AGENTS

We all know that change is a part of life and that it can either be for better or even worse in some cases. However, there are factors that lead to these changes that occur in our lives. At the Uganda Muslim Youth Development Forum (UMYDF), we call them “change agents.” In order for us to prevent, stop and combat violent extremism, we need change agents. The good news is that these agents are not invisible; they are actually around us. It could be me or you or anyone! All that matters is having the right mindset.

It’s in light of this that UMYDF introduced the “Change Agents Program” which has been very successful in sensitizing citizens about the role that they can play to avert violent extremism amongst themselves. In partnership with the United States Mission in Uganda, we held a five-day seminar to facilitate exchange of ideas. While previous interventions involved only the youth and teachers in the whole activity of prevention and sensitization, this changed on 19th November 2017 where other key players such as counselors, psychologists, university deans and professors who would play a pivotal role in the prevention of violent extremism were targeted.

You have to admit that the success registered under this initiative was a welcome boost in the morale of UMYDF that gave further credence to the cause of the organization. With the help of such a wide-ranging professional pool, the realization of preventing violent extremism becomes a reality and not just a utopian dream. For, we understand that the task of changing the mindset of the people does not fall on the shoulders of government alone but also on other players like individuals who can make informed decisions, teachers and schools who can inculcate peace and conflict resolution studies in their curriculum, civil service organisations and community based organisations through campaign drives and many more.

The most efficient change agent in combating violent extremism is the family. It is from this nucleus that one can be managed and shaped into rejecting any form of aggression. UMYDF has taken it upon themselves to champion and follow the resolve of a peaceful and prosperous tomorrow and they are succeeding in this endeavor.

Quoting the an excerpt from a song I shall say that “I’m tearing down the walls and moving all the mountains, I’m tearing down the hills and believing in a change, I will put out all the fires and we shall say ‘THERE WILL COME A TIME WE SHALL SING VICTORY.’”

We shall sing victory and that day will come with all the strength we have put in. All will come to pass that what we want for our generation is not violence but peace, love and tolerance.

This is not an a cry for acceptance but it is a cry for an acknowledgment; one that goes beyond cultural, tribal and border lines, one that will draw tears that make us realize that we are only divided by what our elders might have told us and that which blindly followed. But we know better now. Oh, but we know better!!! We know that we were destined to peace because it calls upon us. Let’s embrace and tear these walls down.

This is the goal and mission of UGANDA MUSLIM YOUTH DEVELOPMENT FORUM. Let us join hands and make it true.
UMYDF HELPS UMSC TO DEVELOP AND LAUNCH ISLAMIC EDUCATION CURRICULUM FOR NURSERY AND PRIMARY SCHOOLS

On Wednesday 19th July 2017, the Uganda Muslim Supreme Council launched the first ever Islamic Education Curriculum for Nursery and Primary schools in Uganda.

The curriculum was launched today at the UMSC headquarters Old Kampala by the 2nd Deputy Mufti of Uganda, Shk. Ali Muhammad Waiswa on behalf of His Eminence the Mufti of Uganda, Shk. Shaban Ramadhan Mubaje, who is in Nairobi for the African Council of Religious Leaders (ACRL) Executive Committee Meeting.

In his remarks, Shk. Waiswa noted that the curriculum represents years of pain taking research, studying, field-testing and evaluation by a UMSC technical team with support from the Uganda Muslim Youth Development Forum (UMYDF).

“This curriculum we are launching today will be helpful to our students to acquire the necessary holistic knowledge and skills for practicing Islamic etiquettes and serving humanity in all spheres” Shk. Waiswa said.

The Ministry of Education was represented by the Commissioner for Private Schools in Uganda Mr. Ismail Mulindwa who hailed UMSC’s efforts towards improving Muslim education. He expressed the Ministry's support for the Islamic education curriculum and pledged the continued cooperation between UMSC and the education ministry.

“The cooperation between UMSC the Ministry is now stronger than ever and it is growing day by day” Mr. Mulindwa noted.

The UMSC Secretary General Hon. Ramadhan Mugalu and the Secretary for Education Shk. Juma Bakhit Cucu raised concerns regarding the ministry's handling of leadership in Muslim founded School.

They noted that the ministry has on several occasions failed to recognize UMSC as the founding body of Muslim founded schools by posting non Muslim head teachers there.

In response to this concern, Mr. Mulindwa said the ministry is in the process of streamlining the Muslim schools ownership.

The UMYDF Team Leader Ahmed Hadji pledged his organization's continued partnership with UMSC especially in the area of offering local and international fellowships for Imams and Muslim school administrators. He also noted that, with plans for UMSC to develop a National Islamic Education curriculum for secondary schools already underway, UMYDF remains committed to lending a helping hand on the same.

The Amiir Daula Shk. Sulaiman Kakeeto was among the prominent Muslim leaders present. Administrators, head teachers, teachers and pupils from several Muslim primary schools including Old Kampala Primary school and Gyagenda Islamic Primary school were also present.
Violence has become so commonplace that people these days just view it as normal and they have become indifferent to it. They are not aware of it until they become victims.

Violent extremism is not new to us; it’s an age old trend. If we are to look at Uganda since independence, there are so many instances where violence has manifested and we have turned a blind eye or a deaf ear to the plight of the victim. From as far as Calcutta in India, where a woman was burnt to death, to our little and great Uganda where people are being killed, women beaten and raped and robbers get their way. Someone has got to put a stop to this menace!

Fortunately, we are blessed with champions who have chosen to fight this vice. The fight is on, and it’s not a fight of blood for blood but one that is silent and yet present and resounding.

The Uganda Muslim Youth Development Forum (UMYDF) has come out to show that this violence must be exposed in its true form and it must be stopped. Since the 1970s, there has been a great deal of violence going on and this spilled over into the 80s. In the mid-80s the country was made to believe that the killings and other heinous crimes had come to a halt but lo and behold they carried on. Youth like Arinaitwe (who now languishes in jail) and others went on a killing spree for a motive we shall never know or comprehend.

There have been so many instances of violence and they cannot be graded or pitted against another because all are as gruesome as they get. In other wards they all ended up in either death or injuries too painful to describe. The most recent being the Apaa land wrangle that left a few dead and then the constant violent sprees by boda boda cyclists over issues that could have been solved amicably. The country is in turmoil because the agents of this violence are able bodied youth who could have done something with this energy.

Thanks to the Uganda Muslim Youth Development Forum, there has been a realization on how to rechannel this energy. Through providing employment and extra co-curricular activities, the youth have been able to channel their energy to much more constructive and productive activities.

"By putting young people at the center of the peace process, our “Nurturing for Peace” project has built the capacity of youth and communities where vulnerable youth have gained access to employment and livelihood skills and how to advocate for their own needs, and prevent violence against their peers. We have sustained dialogue circles as platforms to connect the most at-risk youth affected by the
violence with local and national leaders legitimizing them in the eyes of other stakeholders like policymakers, practitioners – as active partners and positive agents of change. We also hope to build on the core of existing knowledge to develop up-to-date recommendations to make programs and policy in each country more relevant and youth-friendly.” — Mr. Ndugwa Hassan (Senior Programs Director, UMYDF).

The violent extremism cycle has been around for a long time but that does mean it should stay. It is a rot that must be expunged from society. It should be fossilized and shelved and thanks to the efforts of UMYDF this dream is now becoming a reality. Piece by piece they are taking the higher ground by reaching out to both individuals and community as a whole. Creating numbers by the day and we all know that “together we stand, divided we fall”
According to the recently concluded National Census (2014), Uganda boosts of an estimated population of about 37 million people 75% being youth under the age of 25 years. However, we have noted that many women and youth in Uganda, as is the case in Kenya and Somalia, are marginalized from political processes, lacking in viable employment options and suffering from an increasing sense of desperation.

This creates an environment where the youth become easy targets for radicalized recruiters who lure or coerce boys and girls and young men and women with a diverse mix of religious narrative, financial incentives, a glimmer of hope and often with violence because the high youth unemployment has left them disgruntled, disoriented, hopeless and vulnerable.

In the April 2017 UMYDF Quarterly Monitoring Report, the youth stated that living with one's own parents and the well-being of the parents, stability in the home and access to basic needs like food and shelter are the key issues that made them (young people) happy and content and very desperate once they lacked them.

On realising that the scourge of violent extremism is on the increase and that the youth are openly engaging in criminal activities because they feel economically marginalised, UMYDF and its partners came up with strategies in the hope of turning the tide.

“We need to empower communities to be a vital part of the solution to the growth of violent extremism; this strategy will ensure communities are provided with the resources and support to serve as a life-line for those at-risk of radicalization and those suffering from the consequences of radicalization by building the resilience of communities by engaging with key formal and informal institutions – such as the family unit and faith-based entities.” —Musa Mwale, Credible Voice leader- Kenya.

Training, mentorship, effective dialogue skills and other forms of support to ensure effective dialogue and advocacy were earmarked as a catalyst for empowering the youth. UMYDF would not lose the need to identify, mobilize and equip key individuals and groups of individuals at the community level, such as community leaders, religious figures, youth representatives, businessmen and women as well as key women leaders, with skills on how to identify and address the key signs of radicalization activities and processes.

All the above strategies have helped improve on the level of confidence among the youth where they feel like they have a platform presented to them to express themselves unlike before when they struggled with their issues in silence.

In the long run, UMYDF and her partners hope this will make it increasingly hard for extremists to recruit youth boys and girls.
East Africa has borne
the brunt of violent
extremism and
radicalism in the last
two decades with bombings
of embassies, churches,
schools, shopping malls,
social gatherings to mention
but a few. Most of these
bombings connected to
radical Islamic groups like Al-
Shabaab and Al-Qaeda.

The world, in retaliation, has
tried to use its military strength
and force to expunge the
menace in vain. Instead, we
are witnessing the emergence
of more radicalized, extremist
groups like ISIS, the Muslim
Brotherhood and a resurgent
Al-Shabaab and Taliban
which is a clear sign that
there is need for a new
school of thought on how to
approach this enigma. East
African countries comprising
of Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania
and Somalia are at the
frontline in the war against
global terrorism with each
country having to deal
with picking up the pieces
and re affirming an already
frightened citizenry in the
aftermath of vicious attacks
from the terror outfit. This
has brought to light the need
for a new approach outside
of the current strategic tactics
being deployed by especially
the west.

Enter the East African
Credible Voices exchange
program! This is a soft-power
approach to countering
violent extremism building
upon established efforts to
identify practical solutions
to the common challenges
facing religious and cultural
leaders as key influencers and
opinion makers in East Africa
and explore new strategies to
enhance their constituent’s
resistance to violent extremist
ideologies. The program provides credible religious and cultural leaders from Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania and Somalia with an opportunity of sharing best practices, expertise, resources, and developing effective strategies and programs of their own to counter violent extremism. Broadly speaking, the exchange aims at developing mutual respect and understanding among people of different faiths and cultures by promoting interfaith dialogue, people-to-people engagement, academic and cultural exchanges thus bringing hope to a hopeless region.

In collaboration with the U.S Mission of these respective countries, Imams, pastors, youth leaders, women leaders, journalists, technocrats, activists, business persons, civil society activists and psychologists have been facilitated to meet periodically in a chosen East African to exchange views on how best to counter violent extremism in their countries. These meetings have hatched some very powerful ideas for empowering young people to avoid violent extremism, including:

- Catch them when they are young through relevant learning, training and education to help them develop the essential knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to prepare for life in the modern world. This will equip the youth to discern and reject any advancement made to recruit them into extremist propaganda, both online and offline.
- Raise their spiritual and religious literacy in a way that allows them to promulgate a culture of tolerance and mutual respect.
- Establish Threat Assessment Teams
- Strengthen Family Outreach and Engagement – as Families are the first line of defense in keeping youth safe from violent extremism.
- Engaging youth through other activities such as sports, arts, culture, media,
- Offer vocational training and technical training
- Utilize experiential learning techniques
- Train teachers on managing biases and on identifying signs of radicalization

While in Kampala the credible voices made a public declaration, through a press conference with local and regional media, of their solidarity against hate and violent extremism in the region and vowed to use their influence as leaders to build resilient communities starting with the youth.

At UMYDF, we are hopeful that ideas like these and more community engagement will along way to sustain the efforts made by credible voices to combat extreme violence in the region.

Hassan and the Credible voices at a community service activity in a school in Kampala
In East Africa alone, thousands, or should I dare say millions, have lost their lives to acts of terrorism and gruesome murders over the last two decades. For instance, we cannot forget the twin bombings of the US Embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998; or the twin bombings at Kyadondo Rugby Grounds and an Ethiopian restaurant in Kabalaga (a Kampala suburb) in Uganda in 2010, all of which were allegedly executed by the Al-Shabaab terrorist group based in Somalia.

The past three years alone have witnessed over a dozen imams, judicial and security officers in Uganda killed by unknown assailants. The attacks have been spread out in several towns along the northern shore of Lake Victoria from Kampala to Mbaale on the border with Kenya, with several of the victims having had connections to the conservative Muslim Tabliq sect, including Sheikh Mustafa Bahiga and Major Kiggundu who were part of its leadership in Kampala. A few of the victims also had connections to the rebel Allied Democratic Forces (ADF).

The recent spate of murders, including former Uganda Police Force spokesperson, AIGP Andrew Felix Kaweesi, who was shot dead on his way to work together with his bodyguard and driver on the morning of Friday 17th March 2017 by unknown assailants believed to be riding motorcycles, have proved a great

STRONG FAMILY UNITS EMERGE AS BEST THE SOLUTION TO COMBATING VIOLENT EXTREMISM
security challenge in the country.

In Somalia, Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed, was sworn in as the country’s new president amidst mortar shells fired near the presidential palace by the Al-Shabaab terror group. This came in hindsight of all the efforts to combat terrorism by the USA and other developed nations for over 15 years with no clear victory as we kept seeing new terror groups like ISIS emerging instead with even more cruel methods of murder.

This forced P/CVE actors to think of a new approach which led culminated in a new school of thought where the most susceptible communities have had to look at the problem from the root through the community outreach programs and initiatives. A case in point is the efforts by Jamia Mosque in Majengo County, one of the recruitment communities for Al-Shabaab in Kenya, to engage the youth and equip them with knowledge to resist the allure of violent extremists.

At Jamia Mosque, the family resource center handles issues of family unity, child upbringing and marriage. It is believed that the breakdown in the Muslim family unit and values has greatly contributed to young people joining terrorist and violent groups in the mistaken belief that they would make up for what they missed from their families.

This theory is supported by a research conducted to establish that another Muslim community has failed the Al-Shabaab group from penetrating their community and recruiting their youth as a result of the strong family values that this community upholds.

The other case in point is the Kibra and South B communities, shanty dwellings which host a very significant Muslim community in Nairobi area, which are relatively homogenous in a sense that the dwellers are mainly of Nubian origin. The important we have lesson learned from Kibra is that, despite the low socio-economic status of the Kibra Muslims, violent extremists have not managed to radicalize and recruit many young people from this community. This is because of strong family values that still exist among the Nubian Muslim community such that, despite the poverty, the community resolves its challenges through dialogue and brotherhood.

We have come to appreciate the fact that where community embraces dialogue and interaction, extremism will not thrive but where the social economic fabric of a community is pretty run down and there is hopelessness which breeds restlessness, violent extremism will thrive because as the saying goes, “The end justifies the means.” Many of our youth indulge in violence as a means of survival.

Going forward, UMYDF will encourage the communities where we work and other stakeholders to rethink our family structures and values as a safe bet towards combating violent extremism in our midst once and for all.
FOSTERING PEACE
THROUGH MUSIC

They say music is a universal language and food to the soul able to cross boundaries, prejudices and barriers like no other weapon known to man. Music, as is the case with love, has the power to break even the hardest of hearts.

That is part of the reason why UMYDF thought it wise to tap into the power of music in its campaign to eradicate hate speech and extremism among the youth. Through our regular interaction with young people and communities where we work, we established that Uganda has so many unemployed and desperate youth who are willing to do anything to survive. With minimal opportunities, many are prone to activities that could endanger them and the public at large.

Crimes committed by gangs targeting people in traffic jam are high; many have fallen victims of iron bar wielding thugs with most of the arrests made including young people as young as 8-18 years. With the influx of refugees, the stakes are higher and this is brewing a dangerous precedent that could escalate into a xenophobic situation comparable to what is happening in South Africa.

Young people need a support system that can guide them, mentor them and help channel their energy towards consolidating their potential. It is thus urgent that every stakeholder working towards integrating refugees focuses on strengthening the support system. Unfortunately, due to inadequate resources, this is not a major priority. We have found that refugees, for instance, are facing challenges that range from segregation, language barrier and unprofessionalism...
by those persons supposed to be guiding them in the camps such as humanitarian workers, health workers, teachers and government workers among others. This pushed them to think outside the box and an idea to use music to promote peace came into play.

“Still standing,” a song collaboration by two youth (one a refugee from Congo and the other an upcoming artist in Uganda), inspires Ugandan and refugee youth to collaborate and realize their dreams. To ensure that the two artists sounded authentic, they were subjected to training on hate speech and extreme violence.

The song has been published on all social media channels like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube and SoundCloud with the aim of fostering peace and reconciliation through monthly jam sessions that attracted a dynamic audience of both refugees and Ugandans, with hopes of reaching at least 300 youth. The idea is to amplify voices of young people working towards rehabilitating those who have faced violence to boost collaboration, avail access of at least four platforms (podcasts or online radio) working to integrate refugees in community. Overall, we achieved our target of reaching more than 200,000 people through online messaging and dialogue platforms with the hope of promoting peaceful coexistence amongst the youth.

With such platforms the once marginalized youth now feel like they have a platform to express themselves and the reassurance that someone cares. It is such efforts, together with others, that are shaping the future of the youth in Uganda.

Surely the youth are now saying, “Amani Leo!”
The Uganda Muslim Youth Development Forum has elected to front education as one of the avenues to curb youth radicalization in the areas where we work. For, we believe education is one of the most important factors to be considered in preventing future radicalization because it is the only way through which better career opportunities and upward social mobility can be achieved thus countering perceptions of relative deprivation. The higher someone’s level of education, the more likely that person will participate in conventional politics. When a person is better informed and has a better understanding of his/her role within the political process, he or she has the ability to express political opinions and has a greater stake in the political process. Not having sufficient education limits employment opportunities beyond low-paying, unskilled jobs.

To this end, UMYDF is working to reduce young people's vulnerability to extremist recruitment by encouraging schools to focus on creating safe learning spaces where youth enjoy learning and are empowered and able to take on societal challenges other than focusing on good grades. We do this through our participatory approaches to preventing violent extremism under education programs.

UMYDF's NDUGWA HASSAN SELECTED AS LEAD TRAINER FOR TANZANIAN GOVERNMENT AND CSOs

During the year, our own Hassan Ndugwa was selected to conduct CVE trainings for Tanzanian Government and CSO officials in the months of March, April, June and December under the Green Light Project. The trainings were conducted under the Community Awareness Program for Preventing Violent Extremism in Tanzania (CAPPTAN) which is aimed at assisting Tanzanian stakeholders in their efforts to prevent violent extremism (PVE) by equipping the Government of Tanzania and CSOs with the requisite knowledge and skills to identify and prevent the drivers of violent extremism (VE) within their communities.

The program is implemented by the Counter Extremism Project (CEP).

As a lead trainer, Hassan focused on Preventing Violent Extremism through Education, Media and Radicalization, Religious Engagement, Interfaith and Ideological Refutation in CVE and Youth Radicalization.
UMYDF CONTRIBUTES TO DEVELOPMENT OF A GOOD PRACTICES HANDBOOK FOR VICTIMS OF TERROR

Associations of terror victims have been established across Africa and the Middle East; with the majority established as a direct result of an attack to cater to the needs and requirements of people who have been directly impacted. Other associations, although primarily established in response to a terrorist attack, have grown beyond their geographic borders and focus areas to encompass areas and issues on victims that are far more wide ranging.

Different associations provide support and assistance in different and unique ways relevant to their national context and on a wide variety of issues. However, their overarching aim is the same i.e. to protect, respect and promote the rights of victims of terrorism, whether it is fighting for compensation, providing a platform for victims’ voices, or collaborating with their national governments to recognize victims’ rights.

Having been formed as a result of a terrorist attack, UMYDF has been working with the United Nations Centre for Counter Terrorism (UNCCT) as well as other Victims’ Associations and organizations all over the world to ensure that victims’ voices are amplified and their rights protected and respected. In this regard, UMYDF is working with the UNCCT to develop a “Handbook of Good Practices to Empower and Strengthen Victims of Terrorism Associations to Assist, Protect and Support Victims of Terrorism” so as to strengthen the efforts and effectiveness of victims’ rights and interests at the fore.

Empowering and providing the necessary tools to victims associations will not only strengthen victims’ rights but also contribute to a stronger civil society ensuring that victims’ issues remain central to any strategy to counter terrorism and violent extremism. By providing successful and impactful experiences, methods and approaches from across Africa and the Middle East, the Handbook will be a good repository of information and good practices on how to effectively and successfully ensure victims concerns remain relevant and timely and where actions can be implemented in the best interests of the victims.

Plans are underway to have the Handbook translated into the six official languages of the United Nations, and be made available online through the UN Victims of Terrorism Support Portal.
Towards the end of the year 2017, Ndugwa Hassan (Senior Programs Manager, UMYDF) flew all the way from Uganda to Germany to meet his colleague, Mimoun Berrissoun, and spent seven days touring European cities. It was an amazing week with a lot of touring and civil society events.

Hassan and Mimoun are both members of Extremely Together, which is a group of 10 Young Leaders brought together by the Kofi Annan Foundation from diverse backgrounds around the world, all active (in their own ways) in preventing and countering violent extremism in their communities and beyond.

While in Germany, Hassan and his colleague visited mosques, the local police and met key figures on different occasions, including speaking at an EU Commission event in Brussels. The main issues discussed were the importance of peace building, social cohesion and violence prevention.

The highlight of Hassan’s visit was the football tournament organized by 180 Grad Wende under the theme “Kick it against Hate.” He used this tournament as an opportunity to inspire more than 70 young people to become peace builders in their communities. To achieve this, Hassan related his personal and touching experience with violence and violence prevention.

As a result, the bridges between Germany and Uganda are much stronger now as Uganda Muslim Youth Development Forum and 180 Grad Wende build and strengthen a long term partnership in Preventing Violent Extremism. Under their umbrella of Extremely Together, there will be more productive meetings and teamwork between the two young leaders and their organizations.

So stay tuned for updates on this!

PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH: OUR NEW MODEL IN UNDERSTANDING WHAT DRIVES INDIVIDUALS INTO VIOLENCE

Over time, UMYDF has come to appreciate that research in P/CVE is challenging due to a number of obstacles. These obstacles include pushback from broad swaths of the community on PVE programs and those community members engaged in PVE initiatives; mutual distrust between communities and law enforcement/government; myths/beliefs/rumors with reference to radicalization and law enforcement; discrimination, social exclusion, and inaccurate or rabble-rousing media stories; lack of evidence based on local conditions for tailoring prevention and intervention programs; among others.

To mitigate these challenges, a new research model called Participatory Action Research (PAR) was introduced to UMYDF by the United States Institute of Peace (USIP) in a training session at the Hedaya Centre in Abu Dhabi. The model involves the co-production of knowledge with research participants. As a method of research, PAR has
the potential to reduce mistrust at the grassroots level that CVE initiatives are currently trying to overcome, allows for truly co-constructing research in a way that honors the community and is owned by the community, and involves the community as equal partners to academic experts in the research enterprise. In addition, PAR builds on cultural and community strengths (e.g. family values), fosters co-learning among all community and research partners, facilitates shared decision-making and ensures there’s commitment to projects with the goal of taking action.

What further makes PAR more attractive than conventional research methods is that the research question is constructed by stakeholders rather than by the researcher; though the researcher is clearly involved in the process. Therefore, this makes it objective rather than subjective; the values/intentions of the researcher are clearly articulated and there is action within the process of the research itself, in that stakeholders and researchers are actively making change happen during the research.

UMYDF has piloted this model in schools and communities in Kampala (Uganda) and has empowered students and educators to use action research in understanding the realities of students, their grievances, their feelings, dreams and aspirations in order to collectively take action to make education better and empowering to the students. It’s been used to gain deeper understanding of what causes student strikes, school drop-outs, and students’ use of drugs, among things, in Kampala schools. The schools involved in the pilot include Old Kampala SS, Kawempe Muslim SS, Kasanga Seed School, Kingstone High School, and Kololo SS. It has informed school decisions and education policies and actions in schools and communities.

Going forward, UMYDF will scale up the model to cover other areas of her interventions.
HOW THE MEDIA IS SHAPING THE FIGHT AGAINST VIOLENT EXTREMISM

In today’s world, there is hardly a day when you will open any major newspaper or watch television without seeing a report on terrorism. Those news pieces are usually accompanied with visual images depicting the gory pictures of dead persons, maimed victims, collapsed buildings as a result of the impact of bombs and carcasses of vehicles at the scene of the incidents.

The media is the sword arm of democracy; a government watchdog to protect the public interest against malpractices, create public awareness and also the fastest and most effective way to spread the message to a mass audience.

If the above is true then it has an undeniable role to play in helping fight the burden that is violent extremism. It cannot stay silent, not anymore!

Recent trends indicate that radicalization into violent extremism is taking place on media platforms like internet radio, propaganda videos, social media posts and other digital media-enabled platforms which have aided the terrorists in recruiting the tech-savvy young people mostly from the middle class. A case in point is that of the young British citizen of Nigerian descent, Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, who says the extremist video he watched online convinced him to join the movement.

Mr. Hassan Kalundu, a media consultant and an official of the Kenya Editors’ Guild, asserts that “the media is a key player in this fight using its mainstream and social media platforms to amplify the voices that preach peace, tolerance and inter-religious harmony.”

At UMYDF, we realised that for us to win this war, must
must take our message of peace and unity out to the masses, especially the youth using the same mediums as the extremists to foil any attempt at fresh recruitment.

Therefore, through talkshows on local radio stations in Uganda including Bilal FM, Voice of Africa and Pearl FM, we have been to train over 200 Amirs and Amirats on the Islamic Education Curriculum that lays emphasis on confidence building measures as the best way to effect behavioral change in children.

Additionally, we used social media channels such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube to promote a song called “Peace Today” which was sung by two young people to promote oneness and a shunning of extreme violence. The song garnered over 25,000 reviews from especially the youth who felt like the song was paving a way for their voices to be heard.

This piece would be incomplete without acknowledging one instance where television is taking the fight to the enemy lines. Amirat Jamila Wahome, a family psychologist and religious worker who, after attending one of the credible voices exchange programmes in Nairobi, started a family talk show on Horizon TV where she uses the power of roundtable discussions, mini-drama, testimonials and man-on-the-street conversations to engage young people. This show is literally setting the agenda and paving way for frank conversations about violent extremism and why it’s thriving. It is broadcast in the local dialect Swahili language, producing counter-content that seeks to challenge extremist narratives and propaganda through promoting responsible parenting and explore peaceful ways to address grievances, teaching skills needed to constructively interact with families, authorities and participate in government all issues that affect the youth.

It’s undeniable that we live in very radical times however that radicalization has been met with a desire to confront the vice head on if humanity is to be saved from this peril. The media is a key player in achieving some of the set goals by UMDYF and other stakeholders in preaching peace, love and togetherness every opportunity they gate.