

Policy Brief

Using education to promote peace and counter radicalisation and violent extremism in Africa



Association for the
Development of
Education in
Africa

Radicalization and violent extremism have increasingly become major threats to humanity in the 21st century and continue to negatively affect international peace, compromise peaceful coexistence, national security and economic prosperity. From about the year 2000, many states began to recognise that they could not limit themselves to traditional military strategies to mitigate the threats of terrorism and extremism. This propelled a need to address social, economic, politic and other conditions which fostered separatism and extremism; hence the introduction of the concept of Countering Violent Extremism by the United States Homeland Security Department. The main objective of Countering Violent Extremism is to support and coordinate efforts to better understand and address the phenomenon of violent extremism, including assessing the threat it poses to states and within specific communities.

The African continent continues to experience the rise of radicalised and violent extremist groups. Such groups have increasingly adopted extreme political, social, cultural or religious ideals and aspirations and use undemocratic and violent means to reach their objectives. This has affected socio-economic development on the continent particularly that of education, by creating unstable communities where learners focus more on staying alive than going to school (GMR 2011). The escalation of extreme violence in recent years in a number of African countries is highlighted by the abduction of 200 school girls by Boko Haram in Nigeria and the massacre of 147 students at Garissa University in Kenya. These examples indicate the centrality of education both as a conduit and structure under assault by extremist movements.

The challenge of radicalisation and violent extremism has mainly been addressed through soft diplomacy (negotiation and non direct measures) and hard approaches (use of force). For many African governments the latter method has been used to weed out the power bases of extremist groups. However, judging by the continued proliferation and activity of these groups, the approach has been less than successful. This has led to the view that Countering Violent Extremism becomes counterproductive when only one technique is used. It is therefore necessary that militant measures be complemented with soft initiatives such as education which can address the conditions conducive to the spread of violent extremism. Education can help to promote the global values of tolerance of diversity, inclusion and redress for vulnerable groups.

Violent extremism results from radicalization and entails advocating, engaging in preparing or supporting ideologically motivated or justified violence to further social economic and political objectives.

Radicalization is a process through which a person to an increasing extent accepts the use of undemocratic or violent means, including terrorism, in attempt to reach a specific political objective

(Danish Government, 2009).



This policy brief will explore the challenge of radicalisation and violent extremism in society and propose interventions in education to promote peace and that mitigate the growth of radicalisation and violent extremism.

Contextual Framework

Education is recognized as a key strategy in a peace building agenda as it provides an avenue for conflict prevention and the development of more resilient societies. The UN Counter Terrorism Strategy (2006) incorporates education as a means to counter radicalisation and violent extremism. While education has gained prominence among policy makers and practitioners as a means for conflict prevention it is also used as vehicle for extremists to disseminate their ideologies and recruit supporters (Resolution 1624 of the UN Security Council). The role of education therefore needs to be harnessed in favour of promoting values that counter radicalism and extreme violence.

Education is an important tool for social transformation as it facilitates the development of knowledge, skills, values and attitudes required to promote peaceful and tolerant communities. The interventions for Countering Violent Extremism through education involve the provision of safe learning environments for learners to hold interfaith and intercultural dialogue in order to facilitate appreciation and respect for diversity. It also entails the empowerment of individuals. Through the appreciation and use of critical thinking, they reject their previously held view on the legitimacy of violence as a means to achieve their political or ideological objective. Counter narrative responses are also used to diffuse the radicalizer's indoctrinating messages



In addition to promoting citizenship values, education is also a means to empower youth with appropriate skills, increasing the probability of their engagement in gainful employment. This consequently encourages their integration into mainstream society and likelihood to shun violent extremism. However, a contradictory tendency has been noted by some. A study by Mercy Corp (2013) in Somalia found that youth who felt that they had more economic opportunities were at greater risk of engaging in and supporting political violence. Similarly, a 2015 CNN report notes that people who engage in extremist activities generally have middle class backgrounds and moderate incomes. It is therefore imperative to integrate skills for life (including decision-making, critical thinking, problem solving) and value based education in empowerment programmes to enhance the capacity of young people to resist radicalisation to violent extremism.

There is therefore a need to ensure that interventions aimed at countering violent extremism primarily involve challenging the structural conditions that predispose people to engage in violent activities and encourage active civic participation in non-violent ways. Education should therefore commit to promoting peace, tolerance and acceptance as a way of preventing constant cycles of violence.

Continental Trends

The African Ministers of Education recognise that conflict, insecurity and instability continue to pose major challenges to economic, social and cultural development in several African countries (Mombasa Communique 2009). Despite the major strides made towards achieving both local and international development targets, increased violence perpetrated by armed groups and made easier by porous borders, illegal arms trafficking and difficult socio-economic situations are still prevalent. There is a growing concern that these circumstances, if left unchecked, could turn the continent into a breeding ground for extremists (UN Security Council 2013). This is further compounded by the emergence of international terrorism within the continent, supported by globalization and the existence of radicalised and violent extremist groups that have links with other international terror movements such as Boko Haram and Al-Shabaab.

Different regions of the African continent have experienced the effects of radicalization and violent extremism. Several North African states have witnessed a wave of extremism that is increasingly mainstreamed, exploiting the new-found freedoms won through political change and capitalizing on widespread frustration as citizens fail to have their expectations met by new governments (Malka 2014). The challenge of Boko Haram in Northern Nigeria is well documented, with one of their major attacks being the kidnapping of over 200 school girls in 2014. The most recent xenophobic attacks on migrants from other African countries in South Africa, in 2015, are an indication of a culture of intolerance closely associated with violent extremism. These attacks have created fear and despondence among communities and are a threat to peace and security.

Strategic Actions

Education has the potential to promote peace. Unless, however, such education is appropriately delivered to promote equity and development of skills for employability, psychosocial competencies and value; it can also exacerbate conflict. In 2012, ADEA carried out a study in The Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kenya, Liberia and Zimbabwe on the challenges and promising practices in education reconstruction in a post crisis environment. Of note in this study was the value of education in normalising post crisis situations and its variable impact in consolidating peace gains while reducing grounds for further conflict. Education policies, programs and the curriculum should therefore embrace a conflict-sensitive approach so as to promote peace. Ministries of education are called upon to carry out comprehensive sector analyses which identify facets in the education system that can contribute or counteract peace-building. This can help to inform governments and peace building agencies on the adoption of targeted interventions.

The ADEA Triennale (2012) drawing its discussions from a wealth of pre-conference research and the Mombasa Communique of 2009 identified the skills of communication, critical analysis and decision-making, as essential for fostering a culture of peace. Other areas of expertise that encouraged peaceful coexistence included promotion of citizenship identity and personal development. These abilities were said to enable:

“The transformation of hearts and minds in order to enable human beings to live in harmony; bring learners to consider the racial, religious and cultural diversity of their societies as an important part of their national heritage; integrate this diversity into education, formal and non-formal programs for children, youth and adults as well as incorporate a dimension specifically aimed at eradicating violence and promoting peaceful co-existence among people”

(Mombasa Communique 2009).

The decision by African countries participating in the Mombasa meeting of 2009 was to create an Inter-Country Quality Node on Peace Education which provides a platform for sharing promising practices among countries facing challenges to their national security and socio-economic development.

Other specific education strategies adopted by the Inter-Country Quality Node on Peace Education include the following:

- Peace Education: This entails the promotion of knowledge, skills, values and attitudes for peaceful and harmonious coexistence. The Education Sector Policy on Peace Education developed in 2014; by Kenya’s Ministry of Education, Science and Technology expands the scope of peace education to include policy, programming and curriculum-based initiatives. Peace education can go a long way to enhance the critical and problem-solving skills

of the learners necessary to distance themselves from extremism and resist the “pull factors” that may make them vulnerable to radicalization and violent extremism. An experts meeting in Ghana at the West African Network for Peace-building (WANEP) in 2014 on incorporating strategies for Countering Violent Extremism into peace education curricula called for the inclusion of cultural values, trust building and games that emphasize unity in diversity rather than mere competitiveness.

- Global Citizenship Education (GCED): This encapsulates how education can develop the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes required to promote social transformation and facilitate international cooperation for a more just, peaceful, tolerant, inclusive, secure and sustainable world. Global Citizenship Education recognizes the relevance of education in understanding and resolving global issues in their social, political, cultural, economic and environmental dimensions (UNESCO 2014). Together with member states, including African countries, UNESCO and its partners are working to effectively integrate GCED into education and training systems. It is envisaged that GCED programs will contribute to peaceful societies by helping prevent violent extremism, genocide and atrocities. It also aims to counter all forms of discrimination, as well as the destructive manifestations of racism, xenophobia, religious intolerance and hatred. The GCED concept is reflected more visibly in terms of peace building, civic education, life skills and human rights education in both formal and non-formal systems.
- Education for Sustainable Development (ESD): This framework acknowledges that every human being has the right to acquire the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values necessary to shape a sustainable future. This means addressing key sustainable development issues such as climate change, disaster risk reduction, biodiversity, poverty reduction and sustainable consumption into teaching and learning. It also requires participatory teaching and learning methods that motivate and empower learners to change their behavior and take action for sustainable development. Embracing ESD necessitates acquiring competencies such as critical thinking and the ability to imagine future scenarios and make decisions in a collaborative manner.
- Children’s Government Model: This model of school governance presents an opportunity for young learners to be taught the importance of civic participation and encouraging peaceful coexistence, while still in primary school. This model of leadership and governance strategies aims at sustainable peace education by giving students a voice in their school’s governance. The prefecture system is replaced by a representative body composed of learners, elected by their peers, to organize social, curricular and co-curricular activities and to participate in governing their school. The Children’s Government model promotes open discourse which is essential to peaceful resolution of conflict. Learners pick this skill up through their education system

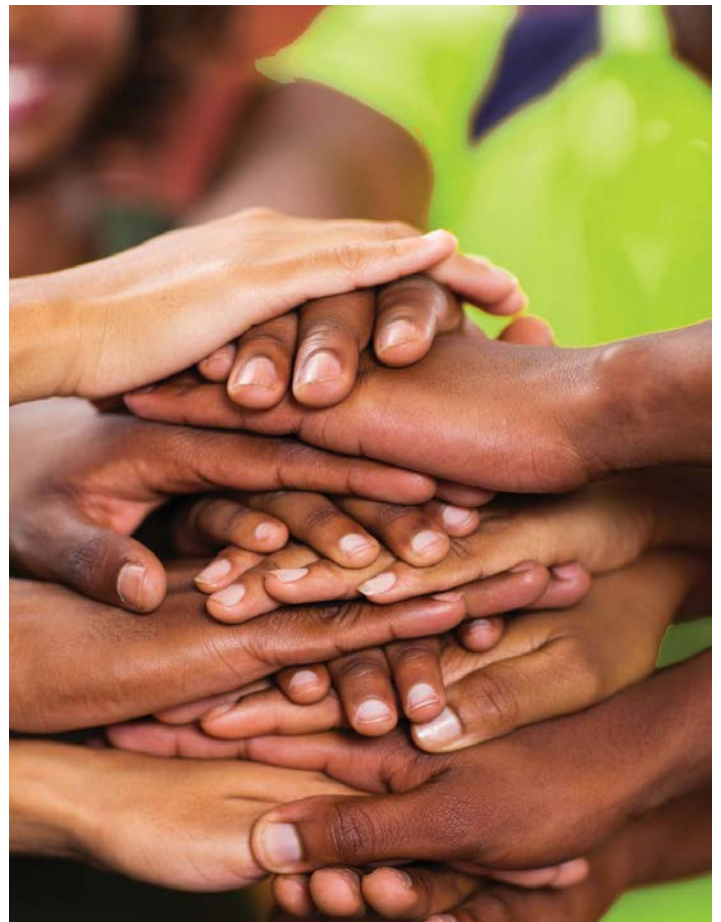


5. Schools and institutions managers need to be aware of early warning signs of radicalization among pupils such as high student/pupil turnovers
6. Encourage universities to conduct regular research on the ever changing trends in radicalization and violent extremism to inform government and development practitioners on innovative strategies for countering violent extremism.
7. Strengthen technical and vocational training to equip young people with skills that enhance their employability and thus reduce the risk of being radicalised into violent extremism.
8. Integrate strategies and approaches for countering violent extremism into the formal and informal curricula so that teachers can help learners to develop critical thinking, empathy, patriotism and the ability to make well-grounded decisions.

Recommendations

Interventions towards the promotion of peaceful coexistence in schools and the community through education are long term and require consistent investment and regular monitoring for such interventions to register successes. The following recommendations can assist Ministries of Education and other partners in addressing the drivers of radicalization and violent extremism through education strategies such as:

1. Develop the instruction methodology/pedagogy in a manner that provides a forum for inter-religious and inter-ethnic dialogue where many different ideologies, opinions and viewpoints are shared and debated. Curricula and school programs that promote this type of healthy exchange of ideas could encourage students to broaden their horizons, think critically and become more self-aware. This will facilitate the development of balanced views to life and hence counter radicalization to violent extremism.
2. Facilitate close working relationships among education institutions and communities, religious organizations and civil societies to promote dialogue and strengthen the relationship between institutions and communities.
3. Undertake a sector review of the education system using various methodologies for example ADEA's Education Management Information System Norms and Standards monitoring frameworks to assess whether policies and financing mitigate or exacerbate vulnerability of disadvantaged groups and other drivers of conflict.
4. Conduct training and sensitization sessions on Countering Violent Extremism for education officials, school administrators, school management committees, teachers parents and students. This will help in preventing radicalization among young people, facilitate the identification of those at risk and put in place appropriate measures to reduce the occurrence of radicalism. The Children's Government model further inculcates values of good and honest civic participation in the absence of violence.



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