



PLATFORM FOR DIALOGUE FOR CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN CABO DELGADO

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CONFLICT RESOLUTION SERIES (NUMBER 3)

Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism

The third brief in the Conflict Resolution Series explores preventing and countering violent extremism (PVE and CVE). This brief examines the concepts of PVE and CVE, in the context of Cabo Delgado, and how these approaches complement the ideas presented in previous

briefs, which addressed the key purpose of resolution dialogue (including dialogue with so-called 'faceless' perpetrators of violence), amnesty initiatives and alternative livelihoods for former combatants.

WHAT IS VIOLENT EXTREMISM?

Violent extremism can be defined by two distinct concepts: cognitive radicalisation and behavioural radicalisation.

Cognitive radicalisation: The acceptance of extremist beliefs as the first step to violent extremism. Extremist beliefs - be they religious, political, sociological or ethnic - are the cornerstone of violent extremism, as they inform violent extremists' aims.

Behavioural radicalisation: Embracing extremist behaviour as the consummation of violent extremism. A majority of people who hold extremist beliefs will not engage in extremist behaviour fearing legal and societal conse-

quences, or individual harm. However, individuals and groups that have been radicalised can quickly descend into violent extremism if the cost of engaging in extremist behaviour is low. In other words, ideology alone is not sufficient to push someone into violent extremism, they must also have little to lose.

The majority of violent extremists are therefore young men, with little or no educational and socio-economic opportunities. Violent extremism is not only a way to address grievances and satisfy greed, but also - at individual or group levels - an opportunity to gain prestige and social standing.

In the Cabo Delgado context, cognitive radicalisation is driven more by socio-economic factors than by political or religious beliefs. This is combined with extreme behavioural radicalisation from individuals that have little to lose. Their outlook is short-term, mostly based on personal gain, rather than any coherent political or religious objectives.

APPROACHES TO THE STUDY OF VIOLENT EXTREMISM

Violent extremism is a complex phenomenon that has only recently become the focus of academics. As a result, three different approaches have been devised to study violent extremism:

- The process of radicalisation and how an individual becomes a violent extremist.
- The cause of radicalisation and what

motivates people to embrace violent extremism.

- The psychology of violent extremism and the theoretical underpinnings of violence.

All these approaches are useful to understand and ultimately prevent and counter violent extremism.

PREVENTING VIOLENT EXTREMISM

Preventing violent extremism rests on two pillars: preventing extremist ideologies from spreading and preventing radicalised individuals from engaging in extremist behaviour.

To prevent extremist ideology from taking root, policymakers should focus on education (including wide-ranging religious and political instruction). Research indicates that educated people are significantly less likely to fall prey to extremist beliefs, as they are able to see through the logical fallacies of an ideology. This has been identified by several researchers, including studies conducted among Muslim youth. One such study used a wide array of participants, using a control group that received no religious education, which was compared to another group that was taught Islamic theology by reputable scholars. Those who received religious education were less likely to support extremist demands,

such as the imposition of strict shariah law and reported higher trust in institutions and politics in general. Furthermore, candidates who received theological education and were taught Islamic laws and scriptures were significantly less likely to engage in anti-social behaviour compared to those in the control group.

Policymakers can also prevent behavioural radicalisation by supporting measures which increase the cost opportunity of engaging in anti-social behaviour. In other words, by increasing socio-economic and educational opportunities for marginalised young men, policymakers can prevent violent extremism. If young men can devote themselves to a career, an education, or their community, they are significantly less likely to engage in violent extremism as the cost of embracing anti-social behaviour becomes prohibitive.

COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMISM

For young men who have already fallen prey to violent extremism - as in the Cabo Delgado context - policymakers need to offer a dignified way to leave the path of violence. This is done through cognitive deradicalization and reintegration.

Cognitive deradicalization is a complex process which necessitates an excellent capacity for strategic communications. To deradicalize individuals, policymakers need to counter extremist narrative and replace it with their own, which must appeal to the psyche of radicalised individuals. In the case of Islamic radicalism,

this is often done by religious education and a narrative of moderate, peaceful Islam. The grievances of radicalised individuals have to be tackled and they must be shown that progress will not come through violence but through peaceful activism. To ensure that this is a realistic possibility, avenues must exist for peaceful dialogue and even dissent.

Reintegration is also an excellent way of countering violent extremism because it raises the cost opportunity of engaging in anti-social behaviour. Radicalised individuals must be offered increased socio-economic

opportunities to lure them away from violent extremism and ensure they stay committed to non-violence. Amnesty programs coupled with educational opportunities, vocational training, counselling, and employment are all potential avenues to counter violent extremism and ensure a return to lasting peace. A

clear and transparent commitment to amnesty and reintegration is essential if radicalised individuals are to abandon violent extremism. Localised initiatives should be prioritised as a way to showcase the efficiency and success of these processes and encourage more extremists to reject violence.

APPROACHES TO COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMISM:

- Addressing locally specific drivers of extremism.
- Providing tangible, positive alternatives to what violent extremist groups and/or violent extremism may offer.
- Countering violent extremist narratives and messaging.
- Building capacity of governments and civil society to counter violent extremism, particularly at the local level.



EDITORIAL INFORMATION

Property: CDD – Centro para a Democracia e Desenvolvimento
Director: Prof. Adriano Nuvunga
Editor: Emídio Beula
Author: CDD
Team: Adriana Nhancale
Layout: CDD

Address:
 Rua Dar-Es-Salaam Nº 279, Bairro da Sommerschild, Cidade de Maputo.
 Telefone: +258 21 085 797

CDD_moz
E-mail: info@cddmoz.org
Website: http://www.cddmoz.org

PROGRAMMATIC PARTNER

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