Beyond Victims: Mainstreaming Youths in Countering Violent Extremism in Northeast Nigeria

Violent extremism is a major challenge confronting Nigeria in recent years. What has become worrisome however is the recruitment of youths by violent extremist groups in the country. Despite this, the youth peace-nexus has remained less explored in Nigeria as most counter terrorism efforts do not include the youths. As a result of this neglect, the potentials for young people to act as a vital resource in policy and planning on countering violent extremism (CVE) have remained largely untapped. This study is an attempt to highlight the importance of mainstreaming youths in CVE efforts. It recommends that an effective CVE initiative in the country should recognise and promote the significant and varying roles of young people at all levels.

Keywords: *extremism, Countering violent extremism, radicalization, youth, violent extremism,*

Introduction

Over the past decades, violent extremism has emerged as one of the biggest threats to global peace and security. The rise of violent extremism has become a global challenge as well as an area of interest to government and policy makers throughout the world and today countries, international development agencies and organisations are seeking the means of addressing it. While violent extremism has been on for decades, the proliferation of terrorist attacks since 11 September 2001 and the rise of the Islamic State (IS) are only the most visible manifestations of this threat in recent years (Kofi Anan Foundation, nd). Violent extremism is a global phenomenon and no country or region is immune from its impact (United Nations, 2015a) because with the world now a global village, every country is within the reach of extremists. Violent extremism has become an issue on the front burner of the discourse by security experts, development experts and counter terrorism experts worldwide. This is because the world has witnessed more extremist activities in recent years than in the previous ones. In addition, it is becoming recognized globally that the impact of violent extremism is global and extensive and far-reaching. From the developed to the developing world, extremist activities continue with its toll on the security of lives and property.

While violent extremism affects every country, Africa in particular has been susceptible to it as a result of weak institutions, porous borders, inadequately trained or ill-equipped security forces, historical grievances and a lack of economic opportunities and violent extremist groups, such as Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), Boko Haram and al-Shabaab, have seized on opportunities provided and subsequently contributed to insecurity across the Sahel, the Lake Chad basin and the Horn of Africa.(Sharland, Grice & Zeiger, 2017). Violent extremism has had a devastating impact on the continent as it

1   continues to witness an "arc of upheaval and distress" (UNDP Report, 2019).
2   An estimated 33,300 fatalities were caused by extremism between 2011 and
3   2016, with related displacement and economic devastation contributing to the
4   worst humanitarian crises ever seen on the continent as well as almost US$84
5   billion expended per year on securitization (UNDP Report, 2017; UNDP
6   Report, 2019). The fatality figures could be more as a January 2019 Defense
7   Post report estimated that since 2009, Boko Haram has claimed the lives of
8   about 30,000 people, and displaced over two million in Nigeria alone. Mali,
9   Nigeria and Somali are the epicentres of violent extremism in Africa while
10   spill-over countries include Cameroon, Chad, Kenya, Mauritania and Niger;
11   and 'at-risk' countries, the Central African Republic, Sudan, Tanzania and
12   Uganda (UNDP Report, 2019).

13   In Nigeria, the northeast has become the epicentre of violent extremism
14   with Borno, Yobe and Adamawa states in particular, recording incidences of
15   extremism regularly. Extremists have been responsible for various killings and
16   wanton destructions in the north and different parts of Nigeria. The north has
17   become a centre of attraction to violent extremists owing to the incidence of
18   poverty, unemployment, illiteracy and Islamic fundamentalism in the region.
19   The group that has emerged in recent years and at the centre of violent
20   extremism, Jama'at ahl al-sunna li-Da'wah wa-l-qital wal-Jihad translated to
21   mean "*People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet's Teachings and*
22   *Jihad*" and popularly known as Boko Haram has continued to unleash terror
23   and mayhem on the country. From their base in Maiduguri, Yobe and
24   Adamawa States, the sect who believes western education is forbidden was
25   founded in 2002 by Mohammed Yusuf and has youths as majority of its
26   members. In the early years of the sect's formation, young graduates who
27   bought into the ideas of western education as being evil and who were also
28   disenchanted and frustrated with the state of affairs in the country and
29   government's seeming inability to address these, tore their certificates and
30   declared allegiance to the sect. With time, the group's activities pitched it
31   against the Federal Government and this led to the killing of Yusuf and the
32   eventual emergence of Abubakar Shekau as the new leader.

33   In 2014, Boko Haram achieved notoriety for the abduction of 276
34   schoolgirls from Chibok village in Borno state and in 2018 and 2019 the killing
35   of international aid workers worsened the image of the sect. Some of the sect's
36   tactics include arson, mass killing by gunfire, suicide bombing, use of
37   improvised explosives, suicide bombing involving young girls, kidnapping,
38   media propaganda, jail break and forced enlistment of combatants usually
39   young boys and girls, beheadings among others (Ajodo-Adebanjoko, Ojua &
40   Okorie, 2017). In 2015, Shekau pledged allegiance to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi
41   and the Islamic State (IS) and thereafter the sect became known as Islamic
42   State West Africa Province. Currently under the leadership of Al Barnawi,
43   ISWAP's influence goes beyond Nigeria to neighbouring West African
44   countries such as Cameroon, Chad and Niger.

45   Empirical evidence has shown that in recent years, youths constitute
46   majority of members of extremist groups. This fact is not divorced from the

1 fact that young people are most affected by issues such as poverty,
2 marginalisation and social exclusion and unemployment among others. They
3 also comprise the majority in countries marked by armed conflict or unrest,
4 Nigeria inclusive. It is estimated that more than 600 million youths live in
5 fragile and conflict-affected settings, and are not only victims but perpetrators
6 of such conflicts as well as violent extremism (Machina, 2018). While it is true
7 that youths are perpetrators of violent extremism, it is also being recognized
8 globally that they can become equal partners in countering the phenomenon.
9 The Security Council Resolution 2250 on *Youth, Peace and Security*
10 recognizes youth not just as perpetrators and victims of conflict, violence and
11 extremism but also as fundamental drivers and critical partners in global efforts
12 to prevent conflict and promote lasting peace and calls on Member-States for
13 the inclusion of young people in efforts to promote peace and security in their
14 communities (United Nations Experts' Draft Report, 2017). The United
15 Nations' Action Plan to Prevent Violent Extremism (2015), states that young
16 people are invaluable members of civil society who play a critical role in the
17 struggle against violent extremism and therefore call for their involvement in
18 P/CVE efforts. Despite this, Nigerian youths are not yet in the mainstream of
19 efforts to counter violent extremism as over time, the focus has been on the
20 adult generation to the exclusion of the younger generation who is the main
21 perpetrator and victim.

22 The expanding reach and destructive consequences of violent extremism
23 are among the major challenges to peace faced in today's world. Violent
24 extremism is setting in motion a dramatic reversal of development gains and
25 threatening to stunt prospects of development for decades to come. It is also
26 posing a direct and manifest challenge to the gains enjoyed by many countries
27 over recent years, and threatens to stunt development outcomes for generations
28 to come if left unchecked. The steep rise in violent extremist activity in Africa
29 in general and Nigeria in particular, represents a significant threat to global
30 security and development overall (UNDP Report, 2017). Initially focusing on
31 militarized and securitized approaches to addressing the challenge, countries
32 and their partners have come to realize that the solution to addressing violent
33 extremism lies in development approaches and this has led to the emergence of
34 programmes to prevent and counter the phenomenon. This study as part of the
35 effort to address the challenges posed by violent extremism in Nigeria stresses
36 the importance of mainstreaming youths in countering violent extremism
37 efforts.
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40 **Clarification of Terms**
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42 The terms to be clarified are youth, violent extremism and countering
43 violent extremism (CVE)
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Youth

The term youth may be defined based on age or social position. Defining it on the basis on age, youth refers to the time of life between childhood and adulthood when one is young and full of vigor. It also refers to the teenage years, young adulthood and/or adolescence. The definition of youth varies from country to country but for statistical purposes, the United Nations (nd) has defined *youth*s to include young people between the ages of 15 and 24. In Nigeria, youths include all citizens of the Federal Republic of Nigeria between the ages of 18 and 29 (National Youth Policy, 2019) while the African Youth Charter identifies youth as those between the ages of 18 and 35. For the purpose of this study, the definition of youth given by the National Youth Policy is adopted.

Beyond the age definition of youths, youth is also defined culturally in terms of social position where an older person still dependent on others is referred to as a youth (Furlong, 2011). The characteristics of youths include Youths are vibrant, energy inquisitiveness, the love for adventure, gregariousness, risk taking and identity seeking, all these features make them susceptible to recruitment by extremist groups. Youths constitute the majority of the world's population today making 1.2 billion (16 per cent) of the world's 1.8 billion population which makes it the largest ever known generation of young people and which is why the young populations have been described as a "demographic dividend" (United Nations, nd; Mlambo, 2020). The youth population is projected to grow by 7 per cent, to nearly 1.3 billion by 2030 ().

Violent extremism has become a generational struggle with young people constituting the bulk of its perpetrators. It is on record that young people join violent extremist groups far more frequently than other age groups (Kofi Anan Foundation, nd). Youths are their forcibly recruited or join extremist groups voluntarily owing to factors ranging from poverty, unemployment, marginalization, criminality, anti-social friends/peer pressure, drug use, low parental involvement, gang Involvement, prior delinquency, family member gang-involved, membership of a cult to the quest for adventure. Youths are every country's assets as the leaders of today as well as the future of the country but a growing 'youth bulge' of unemployable young people trying to survive – and subject to recruitment by armed extremist groups – is not an asset, but a threat to prosperity and peace (Mlambo, 2020). As such efforts should be made to mainstream them in preventing and countering violent extremism.

Violent Extremism

The term violent extremism is still evolving and has no universally accepted definition. However, scholars, agencies and institutions have attempted to define it from their individual perspectives. Violent extremism as a concept emerged in the mid -2000s following the need for a new anti-terror

1 approach. The Struggle Against Violent Extremism (SAVE) emerged as a
2 replacement to the Global War on Terror, or GWOT which had been the
3 approach for fighting terrorism (Nasser-Eddine, Garnham, Agostino & Caluya,
4 2011).

5   In defining violent extremism, it is imperative to explain the terms
6 contained in the concept such as 'violent' and 'extremism'. The term 'violent'
7 has to do with the use of force or energy or emotional intensity. In other words,
8 it deals with coercion while "extremism" on the other hand is any political
9 theory favouring immoderate uncompromising policies. Extremists often hold
10 extreme views or opinions that are far beyond the norm. From the foregoing,
11 violent extremism could be defined as the use of force or coercion to enforce a
12 political theory. GAO (2017) defines violent extremism as supporting or
13 committing violent acts to achieve political, ideological, religious, or social
14 goals while the Australian Government (2010) defines it as "a willingness to
15 use or support the use of violence to further particular beliefs, including those
16 of a political, social or ideological nature. The U.S. Federal Bureau of
17 Investigation (2016) further defines it as "encouraging, condoning, justifying,
18 or supporting the commission of a violent act to achieve political, ideological,
19 religious, social, or economic goals while the U.S. Agency for International
20 Development defines it as "advocating, engaging in, preparing, or otherwise
21 supporting ideologically motivated or justified violence to further social,
22 economic, or political objectives." Public Safety Canada (2016) on its part
23 defines violent extremism as "the process of taking radical views and putting
24 them into violent action.… [When persons] promote or engage in violence as a
25 means of furthering their radical political, ideological, or religious views."
26 These definitions have one thing in common and that is the fact that violent
27 extremist acts are perpetrated to further the goals of a social, economic,
28 political, religious and ideological nature. Although the term violent extremism
29 is considered a broader term than terrorism, the two are sometimes used
30 interchangeably (Glazzard & Zeuthen, nd).

31   In recent years, violent extremist groups have the world insecure
32 contributing significantly to the cycle of insecurity and armed conflict in
33 different parts of the world (United Nations, 2015b). The factors which
34 predispose people to violent extremism include; poverty, unemployment,
35 marginalisation, frustration, illiteracy, etc while some of the tools for
36 radicalization include; the Internet in general and social media in particular as
37 well as face-to-face communications, peer pressure and false information
38 (Alava, Frau-Meigs, Hassan, Hussein & Wei, 2017). Violent extremist groups
39 include the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), Islamic State in West African
40 Province (ISWAP) also known as Boko Haram, Al Qaeda in the Maghreb
41 among other groups.

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1 **Countering Violent Extremism (CVE)**
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3   There has been a lack of consensus among scholars on the definition of
4 countering violent extremism (CVE) and this is in part due to the lack of
5 consensus in defining violent extremism (Glazzard & Zeuthen, 2016). Despite
6 this, several definitions of the concept abound. Foreign Affairs (2018) for
7 instance defines it as 'the use of non-coercive means to dissuade individuals or
8 groups from mobilizing towards violence and to mitigate recruitment, support,
9 facilitation or engagement in ideologically motivated terrorism by non-state
10 actors in furtherance of political objectives'. It is initiative aimed at addressing
11 the causes and emergence of extremism through non-traditional means such as
12 persuasion and empowerment. CVE as an initiative seeks to address political
13 and socio-economic causes of extremism and it emerged as a result of the
14 failure of security-led approaches to address violent extremism (Zeiger & Aly,
15 2015). CVE as an approach focuses on the environments in which violent
16 extremism thrives, not on the individual (Buchanan-Clarke & Lekalake, 2016).
17 The idea underpinning CVE is that violent extremists should not be fought
18 exclusively with intelligence, police, and military means, but that the structural
19 causes of the phenomenon such as unemployment, poverty, marginalization
20 among other factors should also be addressed (Frazer & Nunlist, 2015). In
21 other words, it not enough to counter violent extremism but prevention which
22 aims to get at the root causes and factors that contribute to extremism and
23 terrorism, by engaging with individuals, communities and others, should
24 constitute a major aspect of CVE efforts (Idris & Abdelaziz, 2017).
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27 **Theoretical Framework**
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29   Relative deprivation theory and social movement theory or collective
30 action approach are chosen for the study.
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33 **Relative Deprivation Theory**
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35   This theory was propounded by Robert Merton in 1957. According to him,
36 psychological variables and deprivation is the basic product for conflict and
37 restiveness of any kind and the more widespread and intense deprivation is
38 among members of a population, the greater is the magnitude of violence in
39 one form or the other (Chukwuemeka & Aghara, 2010 cited in Ajodo-
40 Adebanjoko, 2020). Based on this theory, violent extremism in the northeast, is
41 believed to be the result of deprivation of basic needs such as employment,
42 education and infrastructure suffered by people within the region, particularly
43 young people. According to Nasser-Eddine, Garnham, Agostino and Caluya
44 (2011), individuals scoring poorly on socioeconomic variables are at risk of
45 radicalisation or violence. While this theory may to some extent explain the
46 reasons for radicalistion, it does not sufficiently address the reasons for the

1   origin of violent extremism in the northeast which has been identified as a
2   reaction to the use of force by security agents.
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5   **Social Movement Theory or Collective Action Approach**
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7   Social movement theory or collective action believes that frustration is the
8   underlying trigger of radicalization which ultimately leads to violent extremism
9   and when humans are frustrated they use aggressive means to negotiate the
10 frustration (Rinehart, 2009). Social movements often begin as peaceful,
11 grassroots movements which eventually metamorphose into violence or other
12 radical forms of collective action such as guerrilla warfare, insurgencies, and
13 dissident movements. Violence may also be an inevitable product of the strain
14 members of the society feel when the society fails to provide them with the
15 legal means of attaining culturally valued goals and when rules no longer
16 control behavior, the result is deviance (Okoro & Akunesiobike, 2018). This is
17 true of violent extremism in the northeast. The Boko Haram sect emerged
18 initially as a peaceful movement which eventually became violent because of
19 the frustration of its members which resulted from the use of force by security
20 personnel and indiscriminate killing of the leader as well as members of the
21 group.
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24 **The Rise of Violent Extremist Groups in Northeast Nigeria**
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26   For the past two decades, the threat posed by violent extremist groups that
27 espouse fundamentalist religious narratives has grown substantially across
28 Africa in recent (Hallowanger, 2014). Violent extremist views have their roots
29 in the colonial era and the undemocratic rule that characterized many post-
30 independence governments and led to the growth of anti-Western and jihadist
31 movements across the Middle East and the wider Islamic world (Moore, 2016).
32 These movements had one thing in common and this is the fact that they
33 advocated conservative religious rule as a cure for modern societal societal ills
34 such as corruption and immorality among others (Buchanan-Clarke &
35 Lekaleke, 2016). By the 1990s, these ideologies spread to Africa and aided by
36 porous borders, poor security apparatuses, weak governance, corruption, ethnic
37 divisions, and high youth unemployment, they created conditions under which
38 violent extremist groups thrived (Institute for Economics & Peace, 2014).
39   In Nigeria, violent extremism has been on for decades with violent
40 extremist organisations such as Wahhabi inspired Izala, the Islamic Movement
41 and the Maitasine movement beginning as ethnically homogenous movements
42 with purely domestic concerns (Buchanan-Clarke & Lekaleke, 2016). Groups
43 like the Wahhabi inspired Izala, a Muslim fundamental group founded by
44 Sheikh Mahmud Abubakar Gumi, the Islamic Movement of Ibrahim El-
45 Zakzaky leading to the Maitasine movement and other ideologically inspired
46 domestic violent extremists have been active in the northern part of country for

1   decades. The Maitasine conflicts in the north in the 1980s for instance were the
2   result of violent extremist views perpetrated by the group. In the northeast,
3   Boko Haram a Salafist, ISIS-affiliated sect founded in Maiduguri in 2002 by
4   Mohammed Yusuf a native of Gashua in Yobe State is at the root of violent
5   extremism in Nigeria in recent times. Most accounts trace the origin of the sect
6   to the Alhaji Muhammadu Ndimi Mosque in Maiduguri where a faction that
7   became disenchanted with the Nigerian religious establishment broke away in
8   2002 and migrated to Kanamma, a village in Yobe state, where they formed an
9   isolationist community and became known as Boko Haram because of their
10   ''ascetic life away from modern immorality' (Suranjan, 2015). The sect which
11   started as an innocent proselyting group of moderate Muslim clerics has in
12   recent years blossomed into a radical group with extremist views. For instance,
13   the group forbids western education which it claims is corrupting although
14   ironically some of its members are beneficiaries of western education. It is also
15   an irony that a group that claims to be religious and 'righteous' engages in acts
16   such as stealing from banks, raping innocent girls and marrying off such
17   without the girls' consent. The Boko Haram group which is based in northeast
18   Nigeria, specifically Adamawa, Borno and Yobe States but with operational
19   bases in Cameroon, Chad, and Niger, seeks to establish a caliphate, or Islamic
20   state, in Nigeria (Botha & Abdile, nd). The sect has attacked several
21   organisations such as the Police Headquarters and United Nations office in
22   Abuja and churches as well as individuals and has been responsible for several
23   brutal killings and heinous crimes resulting in the death of thousands.
24   Most of the sect's funding comes from proceeds of crime as kidnapping
25   for ransom, bank robbery, and the payment of 'protection fees' by individuals
26   and state governments. For instance, a French family had to pay a ransom of
27   US$3 million for the release of a family member **year** (Attah, 2019). Bank
28   robberies are believed to have yielded an estimated US$6 million to the group
29   (McCoy 2014 cited in Attah, 2019) while some state governments in the
30   northern part of Nigeria have allegedly paid regular 'protection fees' to the
31   group; for instance, Isa Yuguda as Governor of Bauchi and Ibrahim Shekarau
32   as Governor of Kano State allegedly paid regular 'protection money' to Boko
33   Haram so that the organisation would not launch attacks in their states (Weber
34   2014 cited in Attah, 2019). From late July of 2014, the Boko group captured
35   large swaths of land across northeastern Nigeria and proclaimed an ''Islamic
36   Caliphate,'' while they continue to cultivate deepening ties with regional
37   jihadists such as al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) who is one of the
38   sources of the sects funding (Suranjan, 2015; Attah, 2019).
39   The factors at the root of the Boko Haram's metamorphosis from a
40   moderate to an extremist group are myriad. The sect became violent beginning
41   from 2009 when the government clamped down on it and eventually killed its
42   leader (Ajodo-Adebanjoko, Ojua & Okorie, 2018). Abubakar Shekau emerged
43   as the group's new leader in July 2010, and became known for ordering attacks
44   on mosques and using children as suicide bombers (Al Jazeera, 2010; Conor,
45   2016). The death of the leader among others led to the onset of killings by the
46   group, its first attack being that of attack of January 2010 in Borno which led to

the death of four people. It can thus be said that grievance was one of the factors that led to the violent extremist views of the group. According to Anan (nd) violent extremist organisations thrive on and exploit grievances and instability to advance their aims. The groups grievance manifested against America's foreign policy in the Middle East particularly its seeming support for Israel against the Palestinians, US invasion and occupation of Afghanistan and the declaration of a 'global war on terror' (Ajodo-Adebanjoko, 2019).

Youths as Victims and Perpetrators of Violent Extremism in the Northeast

Youths in Nigeria have achieved notoriety in recent years for their involvement in several criminal acts such as robbery, kidnapping, internet fraud, rape, drug abuse, banditry and violent extremism. Prior to this time, the youths were known to be the driving force of politics in the country. It was the youth that spearheaded Nigeria's quest and eventual independence from colonial rule. In the post-independent era, youths were also involved in various forms of activism which shaped government's decisions. However, this golden age of youths in Nigeria has been replaced with recourse to terrorism and violent extremist acts among others.

Violent extremist groups within the country recruit adolescent youths within the society who are dissatisfied and disenchanted and willing to do anything. Potential terrorist recruits lie among 15-25 year olds. Botha and Abdile, (nd) put membership of the Boko Haram at approximately 5,000 to 10,000 members which includes women leaders, explosive experts, intelligence and recruiters with majority of these being youths. Between 2014 and 2016, the Boko Haram group reportedly abducted 10,000 boys and trained them as foot soldiers (Hinshaw & Parkinson, 2016) and since then there has been a steady flow of young people comprising both genders, into the group either voluntarily or by duress. Thus, youths are both victims and perpetrators of violent extremisms.

As victims of violent extremism, many young people have been held captive against their will. Some are conscripted by duress by other family members who are already members of an extremist group. The female captives in particular are worse-hit as they are held in captivity as sex slaves, molested and in some instances married off without their consent or their parents' consent. Those who are lucky to escape or to be rescued return with pregnancies or children born to sect members, and have to bear the stigma that goes with this. As victims as well as perpetrators of violent extremism, these young people are also trained as suicide bombers and deployed to commit act of murder-suicide

Apart from those young people who are forcibly conscripted, there are however other youngsters who voluntary join the extremist organization. Among these are victims of social isolation or exclusion from family, friends or the society. This group is often referred to as those who are 'lonely'. For these, a terrorist cell may be the only 'family' they have. Such people have

been denied the needed love and in most cases viewed as out-casts and good-for-nothing. The life of rejection often drives them to an extremist group where they are accepted and are willing to do anything. This factor could be understood from the backdrop that humans have an innate desire for acceptance but when the immediate environment does not provide this and an individual finds a group readily available and willing to accept them, they will be more than willing to be part of such a group. This is often true of young people who are marginalized and those who bear a number of inferiority complexes, a lack of a developed personality and impressionable idealists. Some studies have suggested that terrorists have abnormal personalities with clear identifiable character traits such as inferiority complex, a lack of independence, assertiveness, low self-esteem and feelings of humiliation, lack of empowerment, absence of empathy and/or harbouring feelings of guilt and loneliness, narcissism, paranoid tendencies, and a pre-occupation with power, mental illness and psychopathy or sociopathy. As individuals enter a path of radicalization, they feel being empowered after a life of powerlessness, significance for the insignificant and the importance of peer culture. Adolescents may be more susceptible to recruitment by extremist groups or to engage in violence for a number of psychological reasons such as the need for adventure among others.

There are other youths who join the sect as a result of the need for adventure. Some young people are attracted to violent *jihadi* movements because of the excitement and glamour it supposedly offers. Many believe that membership of a terrorist organisation offers the chance to become a hero who wins respect and admiration amongst peers, especially when such an individual has known rejection all his life. The feeling of being powerful and belonging to a close network of friends which they cannot achieve through other avenues accounts for their membership of these organizations. This may be explained from the angle that adolescence and youth is a period of experimentation, of identity formation, of a struggle for autonomy, and a time of dealing with issues of intimacy. In addition, insecurity about belief and cultural rootlessness breeds fanaticism and extreme fundamentalism.

Suffering from extra judicial killings and injustice and the need for revenge is another reason youths join extremist groups. In a study conducted by Botha and Abdile, (nd) and based on the interviews of a total of 119 former Boko Haram members between December 2015 and January 2016, the respondents identified revenge (57%) as having a strong or being the only influence for joining the sect and tagged the military as brutal, merciless, and pitiless. Revenge which is also grievance directed at the state, and particularly the security forces had a strong influence in the sect's recourse to violence and members' willingness to join the group because of the brutality they or members of their families suffered at the hands of security forces. Contrary to popular opinion, religion rated 9.24%, had little or no influence on the decision to join the group while poverty (15.13%) and unemployment (5.88%) did not also play a significant role in the decision to become a member because before

1   joining the organisation it was found that the majority (51%) of the respondents
2   were employed.
3   Sexual, physical and verbal abuse, rape stigmatization and ostracism, low
4   level of parental involvement in a child's life, the social environment, a relative
5   lack of exposure to people of other ethnicities and neglect both by the state and
6   its educational facilities play a critical role in the voluntary membership of
7   terrorist groups by an individual as revealed in a study by UNDP (2017). In the
8   north where extremism thrives, there are families where a man may have
9   children that he may not know and may be unable to cater for. Recently in the
10   country, a lawmaker Kano disclosed that he has 27 children from four wives
11   and hopes to have more (Lawal, 2020). This is despite the fact that polygamy
12   has been described as the major cause of poverty and hardship in northern
13   Nigeria, a view shared by former Emir of Kano, Mohanmmed Sanusi. Children
14   from polygamous homes and who are not catered for often constitute *Almajiris*
15   who are susceptible to recruitment by extremist groups. In the past, many of
16   these children have been conscripted during religious conflicts in the north.
17   The social media also plays a large role in the radicalization of young
18   people who are the majority of its users globally. As of 2017, there was an
19   estimated 3.9 billion internet users across the globe, accounting for more than
20   half of the global population and as of June 2019 Nigeria, acclaimed one of the
21   countries with the biggest number of internet users had 123.49 million internet
22   users (Clement, 2019; Clement, 2020). In recent years, extremists have used
23   the internet as a tool to recruit radicalised individuals and it is believed that it
24   will continue to play a crucial role in the recruitment, indoctrination and
25   training of future terrorists. The social media are used as a strategic tool to try
26   to incite violent behavior (Alava, Frau-Meigs, Hassan, Hussein & Wei, 2017)
27   and young people are targeted every day by violent extremists, directly and
28   through mainstream media. A study sponsored by UNESCO between 2012 and
29   2016 found that the Internet at large is an active vector for violent
30   radicalization that facilitates the proliferation of violent extremist ideologies
31   with protagonists of violent extremism heavily spread throughout the Internet
32   (Awan, 2012). Violent extremists' ability to communicate effectively,
33   especially through social media has become clear.
34   Since the invasion of Iraq in 2003, there are an estimated 5000 terrorist-
35   related websites now available and with the fast paced evolvement and
36   accessibility of technology the fear is that future terrorist attacks may be more
37   lethal (Moghadam, 2006). ISIS used encrypted messaging services to
38   perpetrate the Paris attacks and 90,000-200,000 pro-ISIS messages were posted
39   daily in 2015 (Anan, 2016). Among extremist groups in sub-Saharan Africa,
40   ISWAP is said to be the most sophisticated and effective in terms of
41   employment of technology in its operations as well as the effective use of
42   media (Ajodo-Adebanjoko, 2020). Extremist groups are heavily spread
43   throughout the Internet and use this cyberspace in different ways, from online
44   recruitment to the broadcasting of violent content. The media of radicalization
45   is usually chatroom, Facebook, twitter and YouTube. Chatrooms provide the
46   space where at risk youth without previous exposure are likely to come across

1 radicalizing religious narratives, Facebooks are often used as a decentralized
2 center for the distribution of information and videos or a way to find like-
3 minded supporters and show support, twitter increases the communication
4 potential for recruiters since it is difficult to trace the identity and the source of
5 the tweets while YouTube is the main video-sharing platform of choice
6 because of the difficulty in tracing the identity of people posting content and
7 offers the possibility for users to generate comments and share contents.
8 (Crettiez, 2011; Menkhaus, 2014). The social media have thus become the
9 means by which contemporary conflicts are literally being played out.
10
11

The Role of Youths in Countering Violent Extremism in Nigeria

14 The involvement of young people as perpetrators of violence has led
15 several segments of society to stereotype them as the problem overlooking the
16 fact that the solution to violent extremism and other threats to safety and
17 stability can be found in working with young people, and tapping into their
18 talents and potentials to reform and rebuild society (Ekpon, 2017). The
19 importance of youth as equal partners in development has been recognized
20 worldwide and this has begun to take centre stage in many countries since the
21 turn of the 21st century.
22 Beginning in 1965, the United Nation General Assembly adopted the
23 Declaration on the Promotion among Youth of the Ideals of Peace, Mutual
24 Respects and Understanding between the Peoples, thus, stressing the
25 importance of the role of youth, especially their potential contribution to
26 security and development. Following this was another UN General Assembly
27 Declaration in 1979 proclaiming 1985 as 'International Youth Year,
28 Participation, Development, Peace' to increase awareness of the situation,
29 needs and aspiration of youth, with a view to engaging them in the
30 development process (Dokuboh, 2018). The adoption again by the General
31 Assembly of the World Programme of Action for Youth to the year 2000 and
32 beyond further shows the importance of the universal concern about the issues
33 of youth. Outside this, there have also been series of declarations and focus on
34 the issues of youths and development such as the Amman Youth Declaration
35 of August 2015, the United Nations Security Council Resolution 2250 on
36 Youth, Peace and Security of December 2015, and United Nations Security
37 Council Resolution 2282 on the Review of the United Nations Peacebuilding
38 Architecture, all underscore the important role youth play in preventing
39 conflict and maintaining peace and security while in the area of violent
40 extremism, the 2015 UN Plan of Action Against Violent Extremism recognizes
41 the positive role young people can play in countering violent extremism ((UN,
42 2015b; Obi, 2017). At the regional level, regional organizations like the
43 African Union (AU), and the Economic Community of West African States
44 (ECOWAS) have long-standing Youth Charters and policies, and some
45 national governments have similar frameworks but they are yet to fully
46 mainstream youth in peace processes.

1   Apart from the UN, various youth-led and youth organized civil society
2 organizations are also involved in mobilizing and training youth to play
3 positive roles in conflict prevention, countering violent extremism, and
4 peacebuilding and some of these include; Extremely Together, an advocacy
5 group managed by the Kofi Annan Foundation with the support of the
6 European Commission, One Young World, and the Amersi Foundation bring
7 together exceptional young leaders to prevent violent extremism. Through this
8 forum, ten young activists from across the world, each with a track record of
9 working with grassroots communities and effectively challenging intolerance
10 and extremist voices, have come together to encourage, mobilise and inspire
11 other young people to follow their lead. Other initiatives that have youths as
12 the centre of addressing violent extremism include the Elman Peace Centre's
13 Drop the Gun, Pick Up the Pen (EPHRC) is another Non-Governmental
14 Organisation (NGO) established by a youth and for young people to address
15 violent extremism. It has successfully disarmed, rehabilitated and reintegrated
16 thousands of young women and men co-opted into clan militias by warlords.
17 Further, Pakistan Youth Alliance, a youth-led NGO that works on counter
18 violent extremism, peace-building, conflict resolution, and the social welfare of
19 the under-privileged, YTFPDI – Tolerance Academy, a mobile peace-building
20 academy that gives young people tools and skills to propagate messages of
21 peace, Youth Justice Board for England and Wales, a group that Collates
22 information on interventions to prevent religious radicalisation and violent
23 extremism, Uganda Muslim Youth Development Forum, a nonpartisan, youth-
24 led and faith-based development organisation that promotes dialogue and
25 development, #NotAnotherBrother, a crowd-funded counter-narrative
26 campaign to prevent youth from joining ISIS and International Youth Action
27 Against Terrorism, a youth-firm that counters violent extremism in East Africa,
28   Despite all the efforts being made globally to address violent extremism
29 through youth engagement, in Nigeria youths remain marginalized in this area.
30 This may not be far-fetched. In the first place, Nigeria's approach to insecurity
31 issues has always been the deployment of Police and Military operations to the
32 troubled areas, furthermore, initiatives such as Nigeria's Soft Approach to
33 Countering Terrorism (NACTEST) do not include the youth the reason being
34 that CVE efforts have long been considered the exclusive preserve of men
35 (adults). This is based on the assumption that extremism, like war, is primarily
36 an issue for men to address. As a result, youth efforts at tackling violent
37 extremism in the Northeast are mainly spearheaded by individuals, Civil
38 Society Organinsations, Non-Governmental Organsiations. Some of the efforts
39 aimed addressing violent extremism in the northeast include the Youth
40 vigilante initiatives in Madagali, Gombi, Mubi South and North Local
41 Governments of Adamawa State and in Biu Local Government of Bornu State.
42 These initiatives spearheaded by vigilante groups mount check points and
43 move from house to house to apprehend suspected Boko Haram members and
44 hand them over to the military. The Initiatives have been successful in the area
45 of expelling the Boko Haram sect from communities where they operate and
46 community members now have more faith in them than the Nigerian

1　government or military. With the help of the Kinjir Foundation and the Centre
2　for Sustainable Development and Education in Africa, the Madagali Youth
3　Vigilante Initiative is presently being transformed into a sustainable grassroots
4　peacebuilding organization that is equipped with peacebuilding skills to impact
5　their communities positively (Ekpong, 2017). While the initiatives are
6　commendable, the challenges with vigilante-led groups is the fact that they can
7　become lawless, carry out extra-judicial killings engage in armed robbery,
8　extortion money from vulnerable groups and other forms of human rights
9　abuses. Apart from these youth initiatives, CVE efforts are mainly carried out
10　by the state. This is not encouraging considering that across the globe young
11　people's inclusion in addressing extremism has increased its effectiveness and
12　this has shown that young people's participation in CVE can bring better
13　results. Every young person can find some way to make a contribution and any
14　improvement youths can make in their local community, no matter how small
15　it may seem, is valuable (Anan, 2016). Nigerian youths can participate in CVE
16　efforts using the various strategies discussed below.
17　　　Youth associations can play critical roles in countering violent
18　extremism. Nigerian youths can form or belong to associations and Non-
19　Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and through these fora counter violent
20　extremism by mobilizing young people who refuse to join violent extremist
21　organisations. By doing this, youths can counter extremist groups who seek to
22　recruit members of civil society organisations because of the dynamism the
23　former bring to their activities. Globally, to extend their influence, acquire
24　moral credibility, and gain supporters, extremist groups create and support
25　voluntary associations, and often give them money. By joining or forming
26　associations and NGOs young people stand to enjoy one another's support and
27　add strength to their efforts to prevent radicalisation, resist the spread of false
28　and intolerant ideas, and help young people who have been radicalised to
29　reintegrate successfully and peacefully in their societies.
30　　　Adopting targeted interventions is also a strategy that young people can
31　adopt in their efforts to counter violent extremism. Youths can intervene to
32　help people who are on a path towards radicalisation but are not yet involved in
33　violent attacks and such interventions can prevent individuals from joining
34　dangerous groups and doing harm to themselves or others. Targeted
35　interventions are important dimension of CVE and are most likely to succeed
36　when they occur early and involve friends, parents or relatives who are close to
37　the person at risk. As part of the targeted intervention, youths can inspire
38　young people like themselves to make a positive difference, work together to
39　help them in their struggles to resist extremism, promote peace and security
40　locally and regionally, and make their voices heard in mainstream and social
41　media.
42　　　Organization of conferences, symposia and seminars is also another
43　strategy that can help youths in countering violent extremism. Young people in
44　Nigeria can organize conferences, symposia and seminars with the role of
45　youths in national security, peacebuilding, P/CVE as its focus. They can obtain
46　funds for these through writing proposals to organisations that are ready to

1 sponsor such activities. In the same vein, young people can partner with other
2 youth organisations within or outside the country to organize such events.
3 Proper training may be required for effective organization of such events and in
4 this regard, they need to partner with NGOs and CSOs and advocacy groups
5 who offer such trainings.

6   Apart from youths who have not joined extremist groups, youth ex-
7 extremists can also be agents of positive social change by assisting households
8 and communities to respond resiliently after violence. They can play a vital and
9 irreplaceable role in efforts to build social resilience, bring societies together,
10 generate prosperity and employment, and resolve personal, community and
11 larger-scale conflicts and grievances, many of which drive radicalization (Kofi
12 Anan Foundation, nd). Young people can also be important shapers of religious
13 narratives that oppose violence. They can be part of efforts to promote
14 peacebuilding and religious tolerance.

15   Despite its negative uses, the social media remain a major tool in the hands
16 of the youth in their fight against violent extremist groups. The Internet creates
17 opportunities for everyone, particularly young people who are majority of its
18 users to counter violent extremism. Though social media has also been used by
19 violent extremists to spread their propaganda, young CVE activists in Nigeria
20 can use technology innovatively to prevent radicalisation and recruitment.
21 They can form and maintain an online platform or presence for this purpose. A
22 good example of this is the #NotAnotherBrother, an Online and offline
23 communications solutions and a crowd-funded counter-narrative campaign to
24 prevent youth from joining ISIS, launched by the Quilliam Foundation in 2015.
25 It is important however that young people who work to counter violent
26 extremism innovate imaginatively and make full use of their ability to employ
27 social media creatively. The reason being that the challenge is not just to
28 oppose violent extremism but to develop better alternatives for people who are
29 drawn to radical propaganda.

30   Young people can also be part of localized efforts to tackle violent
31 extremism. As a core part of families and communities, young people have
32 vital contributions to make to a more expansive understanding of the local
33 context for CVE, including violent extremism in all its forms and
34 manifestations, and its underlying factors. They can help formulate and deliver
35 tailored CVE responses that are more localized, inclusive, credible, resonant,
36 and therefore sustainable and effective. This is helpful as youth-mainstreamed
37 CVE needs to more appropriately address localized youth-based recruiting,
38 organizational youth dynamics, local youth dynamics, and to other localized
39 needs in order to be most effective.
40

41 **Conclusion**
42

43   Half of the world's populations today comprise youths under 30 years and
44 this group constitute the most affected by violent extremist activities. But on
45 the contrary, this generation is not given the best of considerations to play
46 critical role with regards to national security particularly in the area of

countering violent extremism as they are often perceived as the main perpetrators of violent extremism. Youth is an opportunity, not a threat and as such, young people should be perceived as important citizens and as potential ambassadors for peace and leaders in countering violent extremism. There is the need for a 'whole of society' response to a growing threat to peace and security, sustainable development, human rights and the rule of law, and humanitarian action (Sharland, Grice & Zeiger, 2017). To mainstream young people in CVE efforts the following strategies are suggested:

- Education is critical to any role young people might play in violent extremism. Making young people more aware of its evils through education and critical thinking is the first line of defence against violent extremism. Formal education plays a significant role in this regard. Education should equip young people to identify and ultimately reject online and offline extremist propaganda. It is therefore necessary for the government to revise the current school curriculums and incorporate CVE as part of the courses. This should be at every stage of a child's educational development.

- It is imperative for the Nigerian government, local authorities in the northeast, international agencies, private sector and civil society organizations, including faith based organizations and religious leaders, to expand the role of youth in CVE efforts in the northeast by recognizing and supporting what young people are already doing in preventing violence and violent extremism and building upon existing capacities, networks and resources of young people in the zone.

- There is also the need for the country to promote social inclusion or social equity by ensuring that policies to counter violent extremism (CVE) involve a wide variety of people (including young people) in CVE work.

- An effective CVE approach should recognise and promote the significant and varying roles of young people at all levels, including in families, communities, civil society, educational institutions, the private sector, and in government.

- Young people should be mainstreamed in decision-making at all levels. States should partner with relevant actors to ensure that young people can participate in peacebuilding activities, and involve local communities in efforts to counter violent extremism.

- Government at all levels should support youth initiatives financially and ensure that corruption practices which hamper the successful and smooth delivery of support packages to youth groups and organizations in the northeast is addressed.

- The private sector also need to support youth P/CVE initiatives through funding, job creation and provision of material support to youth- led organizations and networks, formal and informal youth groups, and individual youth initiatives.

- Lastly, there is the n

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