

REPORT ON DEVELOPING ALTERNATIVE NARRATIVES FROM AN ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE THAT SUPPORT

Understanding, Tolerance, Respect and Gender
Equality to Counter Extremism and Radicalization



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study was commissioned by the African Council of Religious Leaders – Religions for Peace (ACRL-RfP) with the Communities Richer in Diversity (CRID) which is a European Union funded project implemented by a consortium of faith organisations with networks across Africa. The organisations implementing CRID are: the Council of Anglican Provinces of Africa (CAPA), the African Council of Religious Leaders – Religions for Peace (ACRLRfP), Faith to Action Network (F2A) and All African Conference of Churches (AACC). The project is implemented in six countries namely; Burundi, Egypt, Kenya, South Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda.

The study aimed at developing alternative positive narratives from an Islamic perspective that promote sound theological narratives (and counter-narratives) that support understanding, tolerance, respect and gender equality as the cornerstone for countering extremism and radicalization. The study was conducted in April 2019. The study adopted a purposive sampling in the selection of key terminologies and concepts used in the extremists' rhetoric. Interviews were conducted at various places within Nairobi County. The study benefited from Muslim religious leaders from umbrella bodies, NGOs, Imams and key informants who have special knowledge about the study area. In total, the researcher interviewed eleven respondents from various stakeholders. In addition to the interviews, the researcher also consulted with two experts on countering violent extremism and developing counter narratives.

The study classified extremists' narratives under thematic concepts with their definitions. Extremists' narratives were listed under each

theme giving an explanations of extremists' misinterpretation of the narratives. Alternative narratives were then provided backed by Islamic scriptural references quoted from the Holy Quran and Hadith to support the alternative narratives. Interviews were conducted within Nairobi County only. Among the challenges that faced the consultant was the limited time-frame for undertaking the study. The other challenge was the general suspicion by respondents and the fear that data collection was meant to be used for intelligence information gathering.

Among the key findings of the study was respondents' opinions that extremists control groups as well as their recruits had limited Islamic religious knowledge with minimal conventional school education and some of the recruited persons are school drop outs. Extremists recruit their supporters through the power of persuasion and financial temptation and promising them Jannah (paradise). The study also found that Muslim religious leaders and Imams fear to come out openly to talk on countering violent extremism because they are targeted by extremists as well as being profiled by security agencies. Respondents pointed out the existence of suspicion and mistrust between security agencies and the Muslim community. A key recommendation of the study is the need to unpack the history of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) so that the youth learn from his life on how he interacted with people from other faiths. Hence, the need to emulate him as their role model.

“Successful output of the assignment would be rolled out in other countries”

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.0 Background to the Study and Introduction

The purpose of this study is to develop alternative positive narratives from an Islamic perspective that support understanding, tolerance, respect and gender equality to counter extremism and radicalisation. Condemning extremists' theologies and their chosen strategies of violence is counterproductive. What is needed is to address the same issues extremists speak about and challenge those misleading theologies from a sound and sober interpretation of Islamic scriptural texts guided by the essence and spirit of Islam. This is the focus of this study.

The study identified the extremists' narratives that lead to the proliferation of theologies of exclusion and destruction propagated by radical Muslim clerics that have claimed lives of innocent people across the globe. Radicalization does not occur overnight, it entails a gradual process in which the targeted youth are indoctrinated with extremist's theologies with the end result that individuals are pushed toward committing violence over time.

The study identified narratives misused by extremists that facilitate radicalization. These include, inter alia, concepts of religious and collective identities, myths, symbols and images that provide distinctive characteristics of extremists' theologies seeking to identify themselves as the 'saviors of the unjust world' and exclude others who do not share their theologies. The assignment will look at extremists' narratives in advocating their destructive hatred messages and their ill-fated solutions that if left underdressed might contribute to the risk of radicalisation and recruitment in extremists groups.

The study explored extremists' theologies geared towards creating divisions and distinctions between Muslims and people from other faiths and come up with alternative narratives based on Islamic scriptural texts that support religious tolerance and peaceful and build national identity.

1.1 Objectives of the Study

The purpose of this study is to research, document and develop from Muslim perspectives material that promote sound theological narratives (and counter-narratives) that support understanding, tolerance, respect and gender equality as the cornerstone for countering extremism and radicalization.

The main purpose of this study is to scale-up interfaith and intercultural dialogue interventions to enhance the understanding, tolerance and respect for cultural and religious diversity among young men and women at the risk of radicalization and joining violent extremists groups in the region. The assignment will be informed by experiences of similar initiatives working on countering extremism and radicalisation. Successful output of the assignment would be rolled out in other countries in the region that include Burundi, Egypt, South Sudan, Tanzania and Uganda.

The objectives of this study are:

- To identify the main narratives advanced by extremists' ideologies that would put the target youth at risk;

- To fully understand the foundations of extremists manipulated narratives and offer alternatives to better understand Islam with reference to scriptural texts;
- To identify and promote counter-narratives based on sound and sober interpretation of Islamic scriptural texts that will guide religious leaders in refuting extremists' rhetoric narratives and defeat their destructive theologies.
- To deconstruct the wideology and arguments of extremists and develop sound theological narratives that support understanding, tolerance, respect, gender equality as the cornerstone for countering extremism and radicalisation.
- Generate positive counter-narratives that promote pluralism, dialogue and understanding.
- Provide guidance and support in developing material and tools for dissemination of the content generated.

CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY

2.0 Study design

The study adopted a sample size selected narratives used by extremists' theologies in proliferating their destructive and hatred messages.

Purposive sampling was used in the selection of key terminologies and concepts used in the extremists' rhetoric. Interviews were conducted at various places within Nairobi County. The study benefited from Muslim religious leaders from umbrella bodies, NGOs, Imams and key informants who have special knowledge about the study area. In total, the researcher interviewed eleven respondents from various stakeholders.

In addition to the interviews, the researcher also consulted with two experts on countering violent extremism and developing counter narratives. A list of respondents interviewed and consulted is attached in Appendix 1. The study has also benefitted from a review of reports and studies on counter narratives in Kenya and beyond as provided in the references section in Appendix 3.

2.1 Methodology for data collection

The study was premised on the notion that religions ought to play their central role in providing solidarity and peace in communities rather than serving as sources of conflict in the world. The study developed a common material founded on the true spirit of Abrahamic faiths that seeks to promote sound theological narratives to promote pluralist discourses and construct religious tolerance and respect for cultural and religious diversity. These strong religious foundations would challenge extremists' destructive theologies and gradually undermine their claimed authority.

The study was based on a desk-review research. Data/information was collected from reports and resources developed by similar institutions working on countering extremism and radicalisation. The consultant carried out a sampled research on social media outlets with particular reference to interactive social media used by extremists groups in the region. Stakeholders were contacted and requested to plan for interviews. Respondents were furnished with the research

questionnaire. Semi-structured questionnaire-based interviews were conducted and opinions of respondents were collected through guided interviews, using the guided questionnaire. Guided research questionnaire (in English and Arabic) with open and closed questions was developed and distributed to respondents from Muslim religious umbrella bodies, Mosques, youth organizations, government institutions, NGOs in the field and media outlets (see Appendices 2 and 3).

The questionnaire focused on five main components. First is the targeted groups in which respondents were asked on the vulnerable targeted groups of the extremists' narratives and issues of concern to the vulnerable targeted groups. The second component was on narratives. Respondents were asked on the types of narratives misinterpreted/ misused by extremists in radicalizing the vulnerable targeted groups and how these narratives were disseminated by the extremists. The third component was on counter narratives. Respondents were asked on the types of counter narratives that can be used to deconstruct or delegitimize the extremists' narratives and

“The questionnaire focused on five main components.”





effective approaches to counter extremists' narratives. The fourth component looked at the role of religious leaders. Respondents were asked to offer alternative narratives that can be used by Muslim religious leaders and institutions to counter extremism. Religious leaders were also asked to propose the role of Muslim institutions in developing sound theological narratives that support understanding, tolerance and respect. The final component looked at the role of Islamic scriptural texts. Respondents were asked on types of Islamic scriptural citations, tools and resources that can be offered to provide alternative positive narratives to counter extremists' misconceptions. Respondents were also asked on the kinds of Islamic religious norms and practices that can be used to promote understanding, tolerance and respect for cultural and religious diversity.

Review of relevant documents was undertaken. Documents reviewed included (but not limited to) government and institutional reports and articles. Extremists' narratives were analysed and comparisons were done from other jurisdictions in which extremists propagate their ideologies. A literature review and internet search were conducted. A range of keywords

were used to search as broadly as possible. English and Arabic languages were used for searching and browsing relevant terminologies related to themes of the study.

The consultant adopted a sample size selected narratives used by extremists theologies in proliferating their destructive and hatred narratives. The following steps were adopted in undertaking the study: interviews. Respondents were furnished with the research questionnaire. Semi-structured questionnaire-based interviews were conducted and opinions of respondents were collected through guided interviews, using the guided questionnaire. Guided research questionnaire (in English and Arabic) with open and closed questions was developed and distributed to respondents from Muslim religious umbrella bodies, Mosques, youth organizations, government institutions, NGOs in the field and media outlets (see Appendices 2 and 3).

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in proliferating their destructive and hatred narratives. The following steps were adopted in undertaking the study:



Narratives propagated by extremists were reviewed. Literature review of current material written on extremists' narratives guided the study to identify Islamic concepts manipulated and misused by extremists that facilitate radicalization.



Extremists' narratives propagated by radical Muslim preachers in Kenya and beyond were consolidated and compared in order to come up with themes.



After consolidating and comparing the narratives, the study critically looked at extremists' narratives and thematicized them under main headings founded on religious identities, myths, symbols and images that provide distinctive characteristics of extremists' theologies seeking to identify themselves as the 'saviors of the unjust world' and exclude 'others' who do not share their theologies. Review of extremists' narratives focused on issues extremists speak about. These narratives were challenged from a sound and sober interpretation of Islamic scriptural texts guided by the essence and spirit of Islam. Thereafter, the material was developed to demonstrate the proper use of the narrative based on true Islamic teachings guided by objectives of Islamic law (Maqasid al Shariah). Each thematic head contained the concept and its definition, then followed by extremists' narratives under the theme. Extremists' misinterpretation of the narrative and the context manipulating of the narrative are then explained followed by proposing an alternative narrative. Finally, Islamic scriptural references are quoted from the Holy Quran and Hadith to support the alternative narrative.

The following themes and sub-themes were developed:

THEME ONE: Understanding Extremists' Ideologies

THEME TWO: Prophet Muhammad: An Exemplary Personality To Emulate

THEME THREE: Sovereignty

Sub Theme 1: Jihad (Holy War/Struggle)

Sub Theme 2: Suicide Bombing

Sub Theme 3: Hijrah (Migration)

Sub Theme 4: Rebelling Against the Head Of State

Sub Theme 5: Shahid (Martyr) or Istish-Had (Martyrdom)

THEME FOUR: Citizenship

Sub Theme 1: Ahl Al-Dhimma (Protected People)

Sub Theme 2: Jizyah (Tax)

Sub Theme 3: Ummah (Global Islamic Community)

THEME FIVE: Freedom of Belief

Sub Theme 1: No Compulsion in Religion

Sub Theme 2: Sacredness of a Human Being

Sub Theme 3: Takfir (Ex-Communication)

THEME SIX: Governance

Sub Theme 1: Al-Hakimiyyah (Ruling by the Sharia)

Sub Theme 2: Al-Walaa Wa Al-Baraa (Loyalty And Disassociation)

Sub Theme 3: Dar Al Islam (The Abode of Islam) and Dar Al-Harb (The Abode of War)

Sub Theme 4: Khilafah (Caliphate)

Sub Theme 5: Persecution and Oppression.





2.2 Limitations of the research

The context of narratives is not localized. The assumption in carrying this study was premised on the fact that narratives are prevalent and not tied to a specific region. However, cultural biases sometimes influence narratives and this was beyond the scope of this study.

The initial plan was to conduct interviews at county levels with representatives of stakeholders from various categories. Given the available resources it was not possible to conduct interviews at county levels as anticipated. Hence, interviews were conducted with representatives of stakeholders from the various counties that represented different categories of stakeholders.

Collection of data was primarily based on desk review and

interviews. The researcher noted that the availability of too much material related to the study area that need to be considered. Challenges that faced the consultant in interviewing and collecting data were twofold. First, the time-frame allocated for carrying this study was short as expected due to the nature of the field of research. In some cases, the researcher experienced inadvertent delays and postponement of scheduled interviews with key stakeholders due to unexpected official commitments.

The other challenge was the general suspicion by respondents on the reason behind this study. Some respondents declined to be interviewed while those who interviewed were cautious on the information that they were giving with the fear that data

collected was intended to profile them. One plausible reason for respondents who have declined to be interviewed could their fear passing information to a person cooperating with security agencies.

The material developed from this study will be subjected to a peer review process. Thereafter, scholars and religious leaders will participate and contribute to the material generated. A validation workshop will be held to adopt the final material. Critiques and comments made from the validation workshop will be incorporated in the final material that will be submitted to ACRL-RfP for circulation to a wider stakeholder for a.

CHAPTER 3: FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 KEY FINDINGS

This section presents on knowledge and suggestions made by respondents interviewed during the period of the study. Findings and recommendations made in the study are based on information received from stakeholders and individuals interviewed. Respondents were asked questions based on the guided research questionnaire in English and Arabic as per the preferred language to the respondents. Below are the key findings of the study that are classified in accordance of the main components of the research questionnaire. The study established that extremists' perception that they are closer to Almighty Allah and consider all others either Kuffar (disbelievers) or (fujjar) disobedient. Hence, they perceive themselves as the true defenders of Islam and therefore have the mandate to force others to adopt and embrace their ideologies. It follows therefore that followers of other religions must either convert to Islam or otherwise they can be subjugated or be killed.

Component A: Targeted groups by the extremists,, narratives

(i) Category of targeted groups by the extremists,, narratives

Regarding the vulnerable targeted groups of the extremists' narratives, the study found that extremists' narratives mainly target women and youth between ages 16 and 28 years. Respondents pointed out that the age framework consists of unemployed youth who are in most cases drop outs of the conventional education system.

(ii) Issues of concern by the targeted groups subjected to extremists,, narratives

On issues of concern to vulnerable targeted groups, the study found that unemployment was the key factor that attracted youth to extremists' narratives. Closely related to youth unemployment, is poverty that is rampant in areas targeted by extremists. Marginalization was the other factor that is exploited by extremists in reaching out to youth by citing historical injustices.

The study also found pointed out that a significant number of the recruited youth are orphans, others are born out of wedlock and some have psychological challenges. Single motherhood was another factor that contributed towards paving the

way for extremists to exploit youth who have been raised up by their mothers only. Muslim youth from such broken families develop defiant and are more prone to extremists' narratives. The study found that majority of those who have joined extremists' groups have minimal schools education and some of the recruited youth did not finish elementary school education whereas others were school drop outs. Peer pressure and poor parenting were other aspects that contributed towards vulnerability of youth to extremists' narratives.

(iii) Reasons which make the targeted groups remain susceptible to extremists narratives

On reasons that made the targeted groups remain susceptible to extremists' narratives, the study established that a substantial part of the Muslim youth joining extremists groups lost hope in their lives. The study further established found that dogma and indoctrination influenced susceptibility to extremists' narratives. The study found majority of extremists' control groups have limited and proper knowledge of Islam and have not been educated in reputed Islamic centres of Islamic learning. They are, rather, products of troubled

"The study found that majority of those who have joined extremists groups have minimal schools education"



environments and have subscribed to distorted and misguided interpretations of Islam that have no basis in traditional Islamic doctrine. Extremists exploit the recruited youth who have limited Islamic religious knowledge while others were revertees who do not have the basic knowledge of Islam. The study found that those who participated in extremists' groups have significantly lower levels Islamic religious teachings and some of them are unable to comprehend the Quran.

Component B: Extremists,, narratives

(i) Types of narratives misinterpreted/misused by extremists

Regarding the types of narratives misinterpreted/ misused by extremists, the study found that extremists advocate for the narrow meaning of concepts such as Jihad (holy war), Hijrah (migration), Istish-had (Martyrdom), Ummah (global Islamic community), Takfir (infidelity), al-wala wa al-bara (loyalty and disassociation), Dar al-Islam (abode of Islam), and the Khalifah (the Caliphate) to limit them to a strict interpretation that serve their ideological thinking. Extremists misrepresent and misinterpret these Islamic religious concepts by obscuring and subverting positive Islamic tenets, values and principles. Misinterpretation of these concepts are used to polarize the world between

Muslims and non-Muslims and used as a tool for creating divisions and categorizing people into friends and enemies. Extremists use these Islamic religious concepts as a tool for mobilizing youth to sacrifice their lives in the cause of fighting the enemies.

The study found that extremists adopt the Khawarij (dissenters) in their methodology of misinterpreting the Quran and Hadith out of context and imbue them with the worst of meanings, violence, and savagery. The study found that extremists propagate the apparent meaning of verses and Hadith without referring to proper and sound commentaries of the scriptural texts. The study also found that extremists possess the power of persuasion that put the targeted youth at the receiving end. Hence, receiving extremists' messages without analysing and challenging them. Extremists' power of persuasion is coupled by financial temptation that induces the targeted youth to join extremists groups.

(ii) Modes of dissemination of the extremists,, narratives

On modes of dissemination of the extremists' narratives, the study found that a key aspect of extremists' narratives is the simplicity of the disseminated messages which are easily understood and received by the targeted group. Extremists' narratives are based on presenting information that is

open to several interpretations. The study further found that extremists adopt secrecy in disseminating their ideologies. Recruited youth are isolated from the community and extremists' ideologies are indoctrinated unto them. Dissemination of extremists' narratives is done through various messaging that include, inter alia, audio and video tapes and other social media platform's such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Messenger etc.

(iii) Influence of the extremists,, narratives on the vulnerable targeted groups

On the influence of the extremists' narratives on the vulnerable targeted groups, study findings revealed that extremist preachers possess a personal appeal and charisma that they display through a striking and sophisticated rhetoric and eloquence. Narratives advocated by extremists comprise of compelling stories in a simplistic ideological structure that combines facts with half-truths and misinformation based on a range of real or imagined grievances. A key aspect of extremists' narratives is the simplicity of the disseminated messages which are easily understood and received by the targeted group. The study also found that extremist narratives carry ideological messages with a strong emotional and religious appeal which are carefully crafted to target the

youth. More significant, is the manner which extremists misuse scriptural texts in advocating their negative and destructive ideologies. Extremists look at the apparent meaning of the verses in the Quran and Hadith without referring to proper and sound commentaries and exegesis. The study further found that extremists' narratives target youth through the power of persuasion and financial temptation by providing to their recruits financial assistance and promising them gains in the hereafter such Jannah (paradise) as a reward for their fighting the infidels (kuffar). Due to limited Islamic knowledge, recruited youth receive such promises without challenging them or analyzing the consequences of the promises made to them.

Component C: Counter narratives

(i) Effective approaches to counter extremists,, narratives

On the types of counter narratives can be used to deconstruct or delegitimize the extremists' narratives, the study established the need to come up with a positive and effective approach to respond to extremists' narratives. Instead of countering extremists' narratives, which in fact tacitly supports such narratives, the study proposes the adoption of developing alternative narratives based on sound interpretations and commentaries of renowned classical as well as

contemporary Muslim scholars. This approach is premised on the concept of unpacking Islamic concepts which are misrepresented and misquoted by extremists and putting them into their proper contexts as expounded by renowned Muslim scholars. The approach starts by unpacking the character of Prophet Muhammad (peace of Allah be upon him) as a role model to be emulated. The approach advocates for quoting verses of the Quran and sayings of Prophet Muhammad (peace of Allah be upon him) in their context of the revelation guided by the true spirit of Islam and Maqasid al-Sharia (objectives of Islamic law). The approach embraces the broader interpretations of concepts such as Jihad (holy war), Hijrah (migration), Istish-had (Martyrdom), Ummah (global Islamic community), and al-wala wa al-bara (loyalty and disassociation).

(ii) Effective approaches to counter extremists,, narratives and reach the vulnerable targeted groups

On effective approaches that could be used to counter extremists' narratives and reach the vulnerable targeted groups, the study found that in order to provide alternative narratives, it is first imperative to learn and understand extremists' narratives. Thereafter, alternative narratives need to be developed advocating positive messages on Islam

and peace and disseminate them through various fora such as social media. Other useful fora to educate and train Muslim youth include workshops and organizing youth groups, barazas (elders meeting place) to discuss issues related to radicalization and countering terrorism activities.

Component D: Role of religious leaders

(i) Positive alternative narratives offered by Muslim religious leaders and institutions to counter extremism

On positive alternative narratives that Muslim religious leaders and institutions can offer to counter extremism, the study found that Muslim religious leaders and Imams lack the necessary knowledge and information on positive alternative narratives to respond to extremists' narratives. The few Muslim religious leaders and Imams who possess the ability to provide positive alternative narratives will prefer keeping quiet and avoid to come out openly to talk on countering violent extremism due to fear of being targeted by both the extremists and security agents. The study found that there are no mechanisms to provide security and guarantee safety of such religious leaders and imams who talk against extremism and radicalization. The study further established that there is suspicion and mistrust between security

“The approach starts by unpacking the character of Prophet Muhammad (peace of Allah be upon him) as a role model to be emulated.”



agencies and the Muslim community. Respondents gave example of amnesty offered by the government and thereafter innocent persons persecuted for being suspects. Some of them were imprisoned and others disappeared.

(ii) Contribution of Muslim religious leaders and institutions in developing sound theological narratives to promote interfaith dialogue, tolerance and respect

On the contribution of Muslim religious leaders and institutions in developing sound theological narratives that support understanding, tolerance and respect, the study found that Muslim religious institutions and mosques need to be at the forefront of promoting peaceful coexistence, religious tolerance, and religious diversity. This can be done during the religious gatherings and congregations such as the Friday khutbahs (sermons). The study found that there is a need to have open discussions and debates between Imams, Muslim scholars and Muslim youth on issues related to countering violent extremism and radicalization.

The study established the need to have capacity building initiatives focusing on the Imams and Muslim youth to be trained to be on issues related to countering violent extremism and radicalization. Muslim religious organizations, mosques and Madrasas need

also to develop inter-faith and intra-faith initiatives such as poems, inter-schools debates, competitions and extra-curricular activities on issues related to countering violent extremism and radicalization.

(iii) Specific concerns of the vulnerable targeted groups by extremists, not well answered by Muslim religious leaders and institutions

On the specific concerns of the vulnerable targeted groups by extremists' not well answered by Muslim religious leaders and institutions, the study found that there is a failure on the part of Muslim religious leaders to engage Muslim youth and provide guidance on issues related to countering violent extremism and radicalization. The study found that there is a generational gap between Muslim religious leadership and the youth. Hence, there is a need for Muslim religious leaders and particularly the Imams to be close to the youth. The study also found that there is a lack of direction from Muslim religious leaders to Muslim youth that creates a vacuum leading Muslim youth to search for other alternatives. The study further found that Muslim religious leaders do not have programmes targeting youth particularly on career development and resource mobilization.

Component E: Role of Islamic scriptural texts

(i) Types of scriptural citations to provide alternative narratives to counter extremists, misinterpretations

On the types of Islamic scriptural citations that can provide alternative narratives to counter extremists' misinterpretations, the study established the need to refrain from adopting literal interpretation of Islamic scriptural texts and instead embrace a broader approach of interpretation guided by the true spirit of Islam. The study established the need to educate and train Muslim youth on the proper understanding of the context of revelation of verses of the Quran and sayings of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) related to jihad (holy war), fighting the enemies etc. The study further established the need to adopt interpretations and commentaries of Islamic scriptural texts by renowned Muslim scholars of various schools of Islamic thought.

(ii) Islamic religious norms and practices to promote pluralism, dialogue and understanding

On Islamic religious norms and practices can be used to promote the understanding, tolerance and respect for cultural and religious diversity, the study found that Islamic scriptural texts are rich with norms and concepts that need to be utilised to develop alternative positive narratives.

This applies also to the rich Islamic heritage starting from Prophet Muhammad (peace of Allah be upon him) to our contemporary era. Alternative positive narratives derived from the Islamic heritage can be used to encourage and support peace and interfaith narratives that advocate for non-violence as well as tolerance between religions. The study also underpinned the need to educate the youth and popularize Islamic texts that promote tolerance and respect of the other such the last sermon of Prophet Muhammad (peace of Allah be upon him) delivered during his last pilgrimage (Hijjat al wad'aa).

3.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

This section presents recommendations proposed by the study based on the various discussions and interviews conducted with the respondents. Developing alternative narratives is a long term strategy. Hence there is the need to develop policies and strategies on achieving the desired results over time. The study recommends developing a framework of alternative narratives that will positively respond to extremists' narratives. Priority and focus should be on shifting the nexus from reactive to proactive approach that will not only respond to extremists' narratives but lay a firm foundation for Muslim youth to understand and appreciate their

rich Islamic heritage to respond to issues related to radicalization and terrorism.

The following are the recommendations to improve the development of alternative narratives that will promote understanding, tolerance, respect and gender equality as the cornerstone for countering extremism and radicalization:

3.2.1 Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) as a role model

The study recommends the unpacking of the history of Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) so that Muslim youth can learn from his life and emulate his exemplary character as a role model. Muslim youth need to learn from Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) on how to cope with various challenges, how he interacted and related with people from other faiths.

3.2.2 Trust building between security agencies and the Muslim community

The study further recommends the need to address sources of mistrust between security agencies and the Muslim community and re-build trust with the Muslim community. This will build trust and confidence with the Muslim religious leaders and Imams that will help in combating radicalization and terrorism. Government security agencies need to adopt a 'soft touch' approach as opposed to a 'hard hammer' style that is

common perceived by citizens. Respondents pointed out cases in which security agents arrested innocent persons under the pretext of fighting terrorism.

3.2.3 Positive and effective messaging

Extremists' narratives keep on changing with time. The study recommends developing alternative narratives to counter the changing dynamics of extremists' narratives. Extremists use religion in their narratives, and to respond to such misinterpretation, the messaging must be based on religion as well. The study further recommends developing common messaging through Khutbah (sermons) particularly during the Friday prayers in mosques on narratives and alternative narratives and promoting tolerance and peaceful co-existence in the society. There is a need to empower constructive Muslim voices and religious leaders and especially those willing to come out openly to talk on countering violent extremism and radicalization. The study also recommends educating Muslim youth to understand extremists' narratives with a view of positively responding to extremists' narratives founded on sound and proper Islamic teachings. The study further recommends developing literature targeting Muslim youth with information on human values and sanctity of

“This will build trust and confidence with the Muslim religious leaders and Imams ...”



life that will promote recognizing and respect followers of other religions.

Messages need to be disseminated through various advertising campaigns, hash tags, short animation videos, madrasa competitions and poems to encourage Muslim youth to speak up against violent extremism and radicalization. Faith based FM radio channels are useful to disseminate messages that aim to positively influence listeners' attitudes, increase community awareness and understanding and promote tolerance and peaceful; co-existence between various religious groups.

3.2.4 Empower Muslim religious leaders and Imams

The study recommends the need to engage Muslim religious leaders and Imams in the processes of developing positive alternative narratives to respond to issues related to violent extremism and radicalization. This will not only equip Muslim religious leadership with the necessary knowledge to respond to extremists' narratives but also ensure ownership of the process. There is a need to train and empower Imams and Madrasa teachers on the danger of extremist ideologies.

The study also recommends engaging Muslim leadership to talk on countering violent extremism and radicalization. Muslim scholars, particularly the Imams, need to be

encouraged to come out loudly and issue fatwas on countering violent extremism and radicalization. Imams need to be vocal and actively involved at the grassroots and speak out openly on issues related to radicalization and terrorism. There is a need for coordination between Muslim national religious bodies to give joint statements, press releases and issue fatwas on countering extremism and radicalization. The study further recommends training Muslim religious leaders and Imams on Islamic religious values to mitigate risks of violent extremism and radicalization and other necessary skills such as peace building, counselling, managing trauma, and stigma. There is a need to bridge the gap between the Muslim leadership and youth in order to provide guidance on narratives and counter-narratives.

3.2.5 Educating Muslim Youth and building their capacity

The study recommends that Muslim religious leaders need to accommodate Muslim youth and educate them Islamic religious values that empower the Muslim youth to critically analyse extremists' narratives and challenging them with proper and sound Islamic religious knowledge.

There is a need for Muslim religious leaders to develop capacity building initiatives that focus on building institutional capacities and leadership skills and target Muslim

youth particularly on career development, and resource mobilization.

In order to engage Muslim youth and ensure their inclusivity, the study recommends the establishment of Muslim youth structures from the county level to the grassroots targeting Muslim youth groups on counter extremism and radicalization. The study further recommends strategizing on youth activities such as youth camps, and development targeting the youth on human values, sanctity of life, and respect and recognition of followers of other religions. Poverty and marginalization were cited to be among the major concerns of Muslim youth leading to radicalization. The study recommends the development of activities and the creation opportunities to engage the Muslim youth.

3.2.5 Inter-faith initiatives
The study recommends the development of joint inter-faith workshops, seminars and conferences on peaceful co-existence and respect for others. There is a need to develop constructive inter-faith and intra-faith dialogues on narratives and alternative narratives and provide spaces for diverse views and opinions that aim to promote peaceful coexistence, tolerance between various religious groups.

3.2.6 Promoting national values and citizenship
The study recommends advocating the concept of common citizenship (muwatana).

This will develop a national identity that cuts across all faiths and ethnicities. The study also recommends the need for Muslim youth to appreciate the significance and existence of the state and its apparatus irrespective of religious affiliation. Educational programmes need to be developed to enlighten Muslim youth the necessity of having a functioning state for the safety and security of the entire members of the society. Muslim youth need to acknowledge rights and responsibilities of each citizen vis-à-vis the other. The study further recommends the need to create and entrench the culture of respecting the state and its structures and avoid anti-establishment ideologies.



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