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Promoting arts and culture is a strong component of USAID's activities in Somalia that strive to enhance community cohesion and pride. Photo: USAID

COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMISM KENYA, SOMALIA AND EAST AFRICA

USAID recognizes the critical role of development in addressing social, economic, governance and other factors that can drive violent extremism or radicalize individuals and communities. Countering violent extremism (CVE) is central to achieving USAID's mission to end extreme poverty and promote resilient, democratic societies while advancing our shared security and prosperity. We coordinate closely with the State Department and other U.S. Government entities on this issue.

CVE activities focus on youth empowerment, social and economic inclusion, alternative messaging, local governance, enhancing knowledge and skills, connection and action within communities, trauma healing and social cohesion. Working with local communities, the programs address the “push” and “pull” factors that make individuals or communities vulnerable to extremist recruitment.

Push factors include social marginalization, poverty and inequality; high rates of unemployment; lack of formal services or social amenities; and ongoing human rights violations and lack of rule of law. Pull factors include the appeal of a particular leader or inspirational figure, or the material, emotional or spiritual benefits that affiliation with a violent extremist group may confer.

While CVE efforts focus on target populations, such as at-risk young men and communities, the unique role of women in promoting violent extremism (VE) and preventing/countering it, is being increasingly recognized.

WORKING IN SOMALIA

Increasing stability in Somalia requires a population productively engaged in governance, education, sports and cultural activities. The USAID Strengthening Somalia Governance (SSG) program supports the development of more effective and accountable Somali government institutions. SSG helps enhance government outreach, increases citizen participation, improves the functional capacity of key government institutions, and expands women’s empowerment and leadership. The Bringing Unity, Integrity, and Legitimacy to Democracy activity helps develop issue-based and viable political parties who promote inclusion and contribute to peaceful political processes.

Community-driven development is an important aspect of countering violent extremist narratives in Somalia. USAID’s Transition Initiatives for Stabilization (TIS+) activity increases Somalia’s stability through participatory processes that promote good governance and community cohesion. Tangible stabilization and development outcomes achieved through this approach improve government service delivery and demonstrate good governance processes, thereby improving citizen confidence in government and reducing the appeal of violent extremism.

In areas previously controlled by al-Shabaab where sports, arts, and cultural activities were strictly prohibited, TIS+ supports the restoration of Somali dialogue, arts, culture and sports to their original prominence in Somali society. These activities, which promote social cohesion and peace in communities, are particularly important for engaging vulnerable populations who have endured trauma and social and political exclusion. USAID funded the second annual Mogadishu Book Festival in August 2016, the most high-profile cultural event held in Somalia over the last twelve months, and assisted the Somali Olympic Committee and the National Basketball Federation in hosting the first women’s national basketball tournament in 26 years. In addition, TIS+ has constructed, rehabilitated and supported sports facilities and dozens of sports initiatives that serve more than 50,000 at-risk youth across Somalia.

Girls basketball is bouncing back in Somalia and uniting divided communities.



CVE ACTIVITY AREAS

- Strengthen the capacity of community-based organizations to organize and lead programs that address drivers of radicalization
- Strengthen the capacity and voices of influential leaders in non-violence, interfaith dialogue and moderation
- Expand CVE awareness and create networks to address radicalization in all spheres of society
- Provide youth with platforms to espouse and amplify the ethos of non-violence, tolerance and moderation
- Address the governance, economic and political dimensions that make individuals and communities vulnerable to recruitment by extremist groups

The USAID Office of Transition Initiatives' Somalia Stabilization Initiative (SSI) supports the government as it re-establishes itself in liberated areas. Activities include technical and material support to build the capacity of local administrations, promote government open houses, and sponsor community events that enhance service delivery and bring together citizens and government officials. In addition, SSI engages youth in dialogue forums, sports tournaments and youth events to empower them to resist the lure of extremism and act as agents of positive change. These activities offer opportunities for youth vulnerable to extremism to positively interact with communities and local government. SSI also supports reconciliation and peacebuilding efforts for communities, such as engaging influential community leaders and government officials in conflict prevention dialogue sessions and organizing socio-cultural events that bring clans together to discuss peace and stability.

The Somalis Harmonizing Inter-and Intra-Communal Relationships (SHIIR) and Harnessing Opportunities for Peaceful Engagement (HOPE) are new activities. SHIIR works in Jubbaland on social reconciliation activities that will enable community cohesion and identify how to collectively advocate for inclusive state building processes. HOPE aims to increase community resilience to violence in Afgoye district through trauma healing, strengthening community relations and decision-making at the local level.

USAID's Somali Youth Learners Initiative education program supports the next generation of Somali leaders by expanding access to quality secondary education opportunities for more than 150,000 youth. About 2,250 teachers have graduated from pre and in-service training to enhance their classroom skills and more than 40,000 youth have led and participated in supported community action projects. By adding student-led civic engagement activities into an education program, youth can contribute to their communities. These opportunities help to increase confidence in their ability to achieve change through nonviolent means. Nearly 2,000 youth leaders have been trained in leadership, conflict resolution, advocacy and communication. USAID supports three major youth organizations in Somaliland (SONYO), Puntland (PYAN) and in south-central (SYLF). In 2017, we will support National Youth Day in Hargeysa and Garowe.

WORKING IN KENYA

USAID CVE programs address Kenya's increasing vulnerability to and penetration by extremist groups and ideologies, especially in the capital, Nairobi, and Coastal and Northeastern regions. USAID forges partnerships with faith-based groups including Coast Interfaith Council of Clerics, Supreme Council of Kenya Muslims and the National Council of Churches of Kenya, as well as other religious leaders, scholars and institutions who are enhancing community understanding of extremism and addressing misconceptions about Islam. Community-based activities include enhancing knowledge and skills on countering VE, and designing and implementing initiatives that address local drivers of VE. These target youth, women and community leaders working in concert with local government.



PEACE III capitalizes on the cadre of strong, proactive women and other actors to create networks to counter VE and build peace along East Africa's cross-border areas.

Strengthening Community Resilience against Extremism (SCORE) provides grants and training to civil society organizations (CSOs) in six counties on the Coast. With this support (about \$50,000 to each organization), 17 local CSOs have improved their operations and advocacy, making them better equipped to lead community-based efforts to address violent extremism. In 2016, these organizations contributed to the development of two county CVE strategies; improved relationships between communities and government agencies, particularly the police; and increased discussion of radicalization and VE in areas where it was previously considered taboo for fear of reprisal from extremist groups and security officials.

In 2016, USAID launched Kenya NiWajibu Wetu (NIWETU), Kiswahili for “Kenya, it’s our responsibility.” The four-year activity will work in Nairobi, as well as in Garissa, Isiolo and Wajir counties, to reduce VE among at-risk individuals and communities in hotspots. NIWETU will mobilize and equip communities to address VE and improve county and national government responsiveness.

By supporting county and national government in their efforts to respond to the needs of citizens, grievances that might otherwise be exploited by violent extremist organizations (VEOs) are minimized. The USAID Agile and Harmonized Assistance for Devolved Institutions (AHADI) project is helping 22 county governments in Kenya expand access to public services to youth and other vulnerable groups. The Kenya Youth Employment and Skills Program (K-YES) addresses the lack of economic opportunities for and disenfranchisement of young people. One major challenge to youth is the lack of national identification cards which serves as proof of citizenship. This card can protect youth from being rounded up by police as suspected migrants in the wake of terror attacks. K-YES partnered with the Government of Kenya to register approximately 16,200 youth in Garissa, Kwale and Nairobi counties who are at risk of VE. Registration efforts will continue through 2017.

REGIONAL AND CROSS-BORDER EFFORTS

USAID implements regional activities that address key drivers of violent extremism by improving relationships between communities and local governments within the same country, and between local governments and CVE actors across borders. The PEACE III program helps communities counter and respond to violent extremism in the Kenya-Somalia border region.

CVE ACHIEVEMENTS

- In Somalia, USAID created 13,000 employment opportunities and reached 50,000 youth through sports, arts and job skills activities
- In Somalia, USAID has constructed or rehabilitated 60 schools, reached 20,000 students, trained 600 people to deliver civic education and reached 40,000 youth in civic engagement projects
- In Kenya, USAID helped the Government of Kenya register 16,000 youth who are at risk of being wrongfully targeted in the wake of terrorist attacks
- In Kenya, USAID supported the development of two county CVE strategies

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