



**Location**

Mombasa  
Kenya

# Promoting Social Cohesion through Community Dialogue

in collaboration with

## Regional Peace Programme

# The need for inclusive community dialogue

While engaging young people and their communities together with government security agencies in dialogue on tolerance and respect for each other are imperative if we are to build more cohesive communities, limited common platforms and partnerships for action between different actors in the community has been a stumbling block in fostering social cohesion in the communities. It is against this understanding that Arigatou International - End Child Poverty in collaboration with the Uzalendo Afrika Initiative and Elim Fellowship Church, Nyalali - Mombasa organised a community dialogue between 28<sup>th</sup> - 29<sup>th</sup> November; bringing together over 50 diverse participants/stakeholders in the community. They included; youth, women, religious leaders and government officials.

Community dialogues is a critical lifeline to promoting peace as they provide the perfect avenues for partnerships between different actors within the community.

Acknowledging that peacebuilding outcomes do not follow a linear pathway of change, the community dialogue was positioned to provide an opportunity for to not only contextualize drivers of conflict but assess the levels of conflict, review and monitor some of the emerging new dynamics around Preventing, Countering Violent Extremism (PCVE), faith, and elections. Further, the dialogue offered an opportunity to reflect over emerging questions such as - Does the covid 19 and elections have a bearing on the PCVE, what does this mean to the traditional factors of recruitment and radicalization? The dialogue provides an opportunity to strengthen the working relations between state and non-state actors towards preventing VE. This also means the community has the autonomy to come up with locally driven and homegrown solutions to their challenges collectively.





*Community dialogue is an effective tool for finding solutions to community challenges as people with varying ideas and perspectives discuss and act together towards a common goal through dialogue. However, in dialogue, discussions alone are enough, we need to implement the resolutions to the challenges discussed.*

*Anne Rose*

*Executive Director,  
Uzalendo Afrika Initiative*

## **Role of stakeholders in promoting respect and tolerance in communities**

The 2-day community dialogue revealed the need for various stakeholders to unite community members through dialogue as well as actions. Participants and speakers at the dialogue underscored that despite some differences, people face similar challenges in the community and thus the need to peacefully co-exist. There is therefore need for all stakeholders to work together to achieve the common ground towards promoting tolerance for a holistic peaceful community.

Speaking at the dialogue session, Rev. Francis-Muteria, a religious leader from Mombasa, shared that religious differences should not be a barrier to community cohesion because human beings are the same and often face similar challenges in the community. He urged participants to cultivate a healthy relationship with God as that is the basis of community peace, cohesion and tolerance.

On the other hand, Jacklyn Chepkemwa, Assistant County Commissioner, Mombasa cautioned that one of the main challenges to social cohesion in the community was poor parenting and being self-centred. She expressed that consistent dialogue is essential in realizing community challenges, gaps and developing solutions. Further, she called upon parents and caregivers to improve in their roles of raising children with desirable values and spirituality. She emphasized that proper parenting was crucial to addressing and preventing challenges such as violent extremism especially within Mombasa.

***Young people are prone to radicalization, and we need to address the issue by empowering them emotionally, politically, religiously and financially***

*Charles Ayako*

*Regional Youth Director, Coast, Kenya.*



## Some reflections...

### What unites us in communities

- Intermarriages
- Community festivals
- Our Country's Constitution
- Social events
- Education institutions
- Collaboration among stakeholders

### What divides us in communities

- Discrimination
- Tribalism
- Corruption
- Racism
- Nepotism
- Harmful cultural practices

### Emerging trends in Violent Extremism (VE)

- Use of social media platforms including Facebook, TikTok, Telegram, and Instagram to recruit young people into (VE).
- Direct fundind of violent extremists.
- High rates of unemeployment thus youth are easily lured into VE with promises of plump jobs.
- False religious teachings triggered by misinterpretation of religious texts.

### Emerging narratives post Covid-19 and elections in relation to PCVE

- The increased cost of living and unemployment during the Covid period led to increased recruitment of young people into violent groups.
- Confinement during lockdown led to an increase in domestic violence cases in the community.
- Strict health measures and enforcements during the covid period affected the police-civilian relationship hence few reports on suspicions of violent extremism.
- Increased mental health cases due to a lot of uncertainties during the covid and post-covid period

# Religion as a symbol of peace in communities

FoRB entails respecting and allowing everyone to worship and practice their teachings and beliefs without intimidating other people's religions or beliefs. Gerald Acho, the Regional Peace Programme (RPP) lead at Arigatou International underscored this assertion by explaining that even though religion promotes identity, it is also a major cause of conflict since believers assume that they are superior or more righteous than people who do not share their religious beliefs.

He expressed the importance of religious education, including learning the beliefs of a religious group that one does not believe in to understand diversity and avoid misunderstanding religious teachings. He also called on the need to involve children in social cohesion actions and dialogues.

This discussion led to the realization that our humanity is the basis of our religion, hence a symbol of peace thus the need for stakeholders to support and encourage interfaith dialogues aimed at creating awareness on FoRB.

## A nugget of wisdom on the 3H Dialogue

- *Dialogue of the **Head** - based on people's understanding or knowledge of a specific content.*
- *Dialogue of the **Heart** - based on acts of compassion.*
- *Dialogue of the **Hands** - based on activities people can do with their hands.*



*We need to look at FoRB within the context of communities and religious leaders need to help communities in understanding and proper interpretation of religious texts. Further, we need to constantly talk with each other, identify challenges in our communities and come up with solutions.*

Gerald Acho

Programme Lead, RPP  
Arigatou International -  
End Child Poverty

## Governance and security in communities

Deliberations at the forum revealed that there was need for community members to adhere to set rules, regulations and constitutional provisions set out regarding operations of public institutions including security agencies.

Government officials at the dialogue explained that government agencies had been gradually reforming and even rebranding in order to bolster cohesive relations with community members and citizens at large. Albert Chebi, the Officer Commanding Station (OCS) for Nyali Mombasa gave examples of change of name for the police from the Kenya Police Force to the Kenya Police Service. Mr. Chebi demonstrated an example of improved interfaith relations in the police station saying that the police station had recently built a Mosque and Church at the station premises. These worship places had enhanced FoRB and strengthened interfaith relations among police officers and the community at large.

There was however concern that structural and historical injustices had been a major challenge in promoting security in the community. Some of these were identified as; land grabbing, lack of proper reintegration methods of returnees/prisoners, political marginalisation, profiling of people based on their religion.

“Information is power. Such dialogue sessions rid us of ignorance, including leaders. It is only through such dialogues that the views of many can be heard. We need stakeholders in the community to create more safe spaces especially for young people to dialogue on issues of peace and security.

*Arnold Baya - Youth, Mombasa.*

**“I was a robber and transformed into a religious leader...”**

***The testimony of Bishop Mwaura Paul***

*I was a robber for a very long time and went to prison severally until I got used to it. Prison, to me, was not a place to correct but punish me for my wrongdoing. The rehabilitation services at the prison did not help me because I kept stealing even after leaving prison. However, my life changed due to religious leaders who used to visit us at the prison. One day I accepted the call to get reoligious, and the leaders prayed for me. I felt like a heavy burden had been lifted off my shoulders, and I became a pastor and later a Bishop traversing the world to preach the gospel of God.*



## What can the youth do to help enhance social cohesion in communities...?

- Use social media platforms as an empowerment tool for the online community on cohesion.
- Positive peer-to-peer engagements.
- Taking leadership positions.
- Mentorships and being role models.
- Participation in decision-making processes.
- Upholding and promoting proper religious practices.
- Use of arts and sports to create awareness on the importance of cohesion.



Religion is a way of life and aspects of dialogue and peaceful co-existence are well grounded in religion. Parents need to collaborate with religious leaders, community leaders and teachers in instilling desirable values in their children.

Sh. Mwanguzo  
Religious leader, Mombasa.



# Building stronger and cohesive communities

Social cohesion allows community members to embrace living and working together despite our differences. Social cohesion also brings people on the front lines of creating change in communities. Community members were called upon to play their roles in advocating and engaging community members in dialogues aimed at enhancing community cohesion. Participants identified marginalisation, historical injustices and ethnic/religious/gender profiling as some of the major challenges towards fostering social cohesion in communities.

In order to build social cohesion, some tenets towards sustainable social cohesion were identified as collaboration with different stakeholders, empowering others to give feedback on work done on social cohesion and inclusion of leaders at different levels. While meaningful and consistent dialogue sessions were lauded as effective ways to building stronger and cohesive communities, youth and women were called upon to take up available opportunities and initiatives in communities and within government to empower themselves and help build more cohesive communities. It was however noted that there was need for more more engagement on FoRB towards enhancement of community cohesion while aslo analyzing current situations and emerging trends when coming up with solutions to VE and other drivers of conflict through dialogue.



*We need to engage more on FoRB through more trainings, awareness and implementation of actions.*

*Charles Masheti  
Consultant, Arigatou  
International - Nairobi*



*We have been having a good number of such dialogue sessions but often times we fail in implementation of the action points that we agree on in such forums. I would like to challenge each of us to lead in implementation of whatever we have been discussing. We need implementation and consistency.*

*Bishop. Tee Malo - Mombasa.*



## Some recommendations...

- *Need for more sustained and meaningful dialogues right from families levels, communities to national levels; geared towards advancing social cohesion. Direct fundind of violent extremists.*
- *Need for youth to be proactive and use available opportunities/spaces, like social media as well as resources provided by government agencies to empower themselves and contibute to promot-ing peace in communities.*
- *Religious leaders to put more effort in helping communities understand and interpret religious texts; as a way of promoting FoRB.*
- *More inclusion of women and youth in such dialogue forums and leadership roles in communities, governance and religion.*
- *Timely prevent and respond to incidents of discrimination or conflicts between groups.*
- *Create a sense of belonging promote trust and offer members of the community the opportunity of upward mobility by addressing issues of marginalisation and exclusion.*
- *Build the capacity of the community, and participate in planning and implementing activities.*
- *Need for continues dialogue between community memebtrs and security agencies as there has existed friction between the two groups.*
- *The need for communities to start looking inward and discover resources and power they have towards tackling challenges in the communities.*



# How about a conversation with women in the community?

This conversation was centred around the GCERF project ran by Arigatou International - Nairobi, which equipped the women with business skills and help them set up businesses in groups of 20 women each thus promoting cohesion and tolerance. The one-day conversational event gathered 32 women from Mombasa who gave out their testimonials of their day-day lives pre and post GCERF project. Notably, the COVID-19 pandemic derailed the business but the women have pushed through and had tremendous testimonials on how the project benefitted their lives. The GCERF project aimed to address the root causes of challenges on social cohesion in the community by empowering women to have access and control of resources especially financial.

Ms. Kahindi, a beneficiary of the project explained that the project helped her household in particular in saving the life of her son. Ms. Kahindi told the audience that prior to the program, her son was deeply engaged in drugs she felt like she couldn't communicate with him. However, after her training, Ms. Kahindi was able to open up a business to cook chapati and save this money and do small projects around the house. This greatly motivated his son to do the same. Today her son has opened a charcoal selling business and now has a family and has since then stopped abusing drugs.

The women revealed that the impact of the project helped hundreds of people around Mombasa so much so that the outside world outside Mombasa noticed the changes in the women's lives giving an example of "the Chama Show" aired on KTN TV (a national TV in Kenya) showcasing the successes of their groups.

The women noted that the project had helped open up dialogues with their children in identifying early warning signs of PCVE. Other ways through which children were included in the project included training on the CRAVE manual on the importance of PCVE, forms of GBV and proper channels of reporting abuse cases.

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Through intergenerational dialogues we have been able to get our children off the streets and avoiding recruitment into violent extremist groups.

Elizabeth Mlongwe - Beneficiary.



*Poverty has been a major push factor to violent extremism and other conflicts in the community. Projects like GCERF have been instrumental in alleviating poverty levels in the community.*

Maria Menego - Faith Leader, Mombasa.





# Promoting social cohesion and FoRB in Eastern Africa.

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