

STRENGTHENING JUSTICE SYSTEMS FOR CHILDREN

Youth in Conflict with the Law (YiCwL) & Preventing/Countering Violent Extremism (P/CVE)

A PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE

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A Youth Empowerment & Engagement Outfit working in all the Five East African Countries with an aim of Creatively, Innovatively and sustainably partner with Young People and Their grassroots communities to address social-economic-political challenges from an integrated human factors inspired approach. This includes working on the following Four Impact areas that target the Individual within the group;

1. Personal Growth and Social-Life Skills Development,
2. Skills and Knowledge Acquisition,
3. Economic-Live hood Empowerment,
4. Influencing Capacity

The Key to YADEN work has been on UNDERSTANDING the YOUNG PERSON and using this Understanding to Formulate RESONATING ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES, that build credibility, personal relations and equips the young person to take charge. Using mostly art based approaches the Sustainability of the process is guaranteed.

Besides having an expansive Issue base, YADEN has been working on Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (P/CVE) since 2011, even when it was not common. YADEN engages a unique approach that uses creative and innovative art based method mainly to build resilience among grassroots communities, engage youth creative talents to develop and disseminate P/CVE narratives/messages, tap into grassroots P/CVE information and Knowledge and engage it to inform higher levels of intervention (Local-National-regional-international) besides ensuring that Young people (inclusive of children) the most targeted for VE recruitment and affected key population group if central to the P/CVE agenda, as contributors to solutions and not only as subjects of discussion.

Defining Youth in Conflict with the Law.....

#ithechange; VOICE Project, a YiCwL led Learning Initiative revealed that 7 out of 10 Young People (Youth & Children) are in Conflict with law. Categorising them in Four Different Levels;

- ▶ **Environmental Situations & Circumstance;** Those living in crime prone localities where four out of five choices they make or are exposed to are criminal in nature. Most deprived neighbourhoods / slums / ghettos fall here.
- ▶ **Young People in Anti Social Behaviour;** They mostly don't commit punishable offences under penal code but their attitudes, and behaviours cause social challenges.
- ▶ **Incidental crime;** Those involved in minor offences that are not pre meditated.
- ▶ **Capital Offences;** Those that are involved in pre-meditated capital offences, including engaging in Violent Extremism.

The Survey revealed that Legal Justice for young people majorly incorporate Social –economic – political factors and is a progressive process that often communities are ignorant about until the young people reach level three or four, which is sometimes too late. Criminal enterprises are ahead in terms of this understanding and exploit it in their recruitment for children.

Link Between Violent Extremism & Youth in Conflict with the Law.....

2017 YADEN study under Youth Platform of Opportunity (YPO) and #insolidarity P/CVE Projects (in Partnership with Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs and American State Department) Revealed that The age of Recruitment to Violent Extremism (VE) has significantly gone down, evidence showed targeting of children as young as Nine years. Some of the Factors contributing to this;

1. With Security Forces more alert and aware/vigilant, Children mostly are undetected and thus an easy camouflage.
2. Young People and Children are easy to confuse -radicalise, they follow orders and question less and are easy to threaten and sustain the fear instilled.
3. They are low maintenance. They mostly do not have family responsibilities or even feed less.
4. Those in conflict with the law this becomes a kind of graduation to a higher level, gaining bragging rights among their peers. They are already inducted into crime.
5. In VE actors have 'adopted' children especially in conflict zones i.e Somali, Syria after they become abandoned in war, orphaned etc with no state or non state mechanism to take care of them.
6. VE spaces, such as sleeper cells, terrorist camps, Criminal gangs linked to VE groups become an escape / protection for Youth-children in conflict with law, given society-state stigma on offender or ex offenders.
7. VE actors understand children and have come up with attractive ways to reach them and entice them with their narratives.

Lets ACT using the Conference Goals to make

recommendations .

▶ **The global trend towards children's involvement in violent extremism and possible responses,**

1. Isolate the role of Children in VE and give it focused attention, otherwise it will be lost within the larger effort.
2. Identify and address unique social-economic-political driven circumstances that make children particularly vulnerable to VE recruitment.
3. Come up with children/young people friendly strategies that can resonate with them, which are attractive and accessible to them.

▶ **The need for more effective ways to reduce juvenile offending and recidivism,**

1. Understand and Incorporate Children and young people dynamics and characteristics while warning, punishing and rehabilitating child offenders.
2. Establish social factors..... Allowing ourselves to imagine the child/young person might be a victim first before being an offender.

▶ **How to improve protection mechanisms for vulnerable children, including early prevention.**

1. Using the #ithechange Youth in Conflict with the Law (YiCwL) levels and associated engagement stages to address the building blocks that lead to children and young people offending. This includes looking at external factors such as the environment children grow, the people they are exposed.
2. Establish reliable indicators which can assist in early detection and thus early prevention.