



Social Media Literacy Incubation Laboratory for Countering Violent Extremism, Political and Natural Resource Conflicts in Africa

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Introduction

There is enough evidence that the internet more so social media, is actively being used for polarization and advancing various forms of extremism from political to violent extremism. The latter often leads to radicalization and recruitment into violent extremism and terrorism and those more vulnerable are the youth (including women¹). The media has been used for ethnic polarization every electoral cycle in Kenya, for unreality, fake news and disinformation that has fuelled political conflict and natural resource conflicts. Those on the receiving end of the negative exploitation of social media are the youth. However, part of the reason why the youth are easily targeted is because they are most exposed to social media networks by virtue of the fact that social media spaces are the modern public spheres of youth expression as virtual reality increasingly determines sensory reality. The youth, unaware of the implications of the use of web 2.0 technologies, are readily influenced by what they see on social media. It is therefore necessary to come up with innovative social media literacy projects that will educate the youth on the

¹Ogenga, F. 2016. Beyond Material Interventions: Rethinking the Role of Gender, Media and the Politics of Female Violent Extremism in Kenya. *Policy Brief No 9*. Southern Voices Network for Peacebuilding. Wilson Center. Washington D.C; Ogenga, F. 2016. Philosophising Alternative Media and Society Approaches to Countering Female Violent Extremism in Kenya for Peace and Security. *Research Paper No. 5*. Southern Voices Network for Peacebuilding. Wilson Center, Washington D.C; Ogenga, F. 2016. Embodying Youth De-radicalization in Kenya: Rethinking State Relations, Foreign Policy, and Mediatized Peacebuilding in the Context of "War on Terror" as a Newfound Democratic Principle. *Conference Paper*, The Southern Voices Network for Peacebuilding, Wilson Center, Washington D. C.

implications and consequences of particular uses of technology both from a technical, cultural/moral and economic perspective.

This policy paper uses critical theory of technology² in the context of propaganda (unreality), agenda setting and theories of change as a theoretical approach. The paper argues for the establishment of a research laboratory project in institutions of higher learning (universities) premised on the contention that modern forms of hegemony are based on the technical nature of mediation, sometimes in themselves products of propaganda designed to change specific agendas³ on a variety of social activities and consequently, to achieve societies free of conflict requires radical, technical as well as political change that takes into consideration such transformative nuances. Mediation (media technologies) is at the heart of such critical transformations.

Technology or social media platforms are avenues where cybercitizens contest ideas regarding citizenship, natural resource sharing, radicalization, violent extremism and terrorism. This research laboratory incubation literacy project that this paper argues for, can examine polarizing discourses on social media related to radicalization and violent extremism, natural resource conflict and political/ethnic conflict to unravel the dangers of appreciating technology in its technical sense without considering its impacts in the society and cultural future. Social media has to be appraised critically though for providing a promising avenue for citizen engagement and its potential for preventing conflict and peacebuilding is still unexploited.

Social media literacy community programs, domiciled in a digital incubation laboratory pilot project, targeting state officials, clergy, civil society members and the youth (both from the university and its environs) who largely use social media platforms are direly needed for conflict prevention and peacebuilding. The project will use the *Build-Up Commons Approach* that emphasises on imparting practical knowledge and skills of users through guided conversations and automation unlike other interventions that mainly focus on sensitization and education at the theoretical level. This innovative laboratory to be jointly established by Center for Media, Democracy, Peace and Security, Rongo University, Build Up, Toda Peace Institute, Scofield Associates and the Royal Dutch Embassy in collaboration with various government security agencies will be a leader in social media literacy and best practices in preventing extremism and polarization in Africa and shall have the *Commons Approach* as its flagship *Methodology*.

²Freenberg, A.1991. *Critical Theory of Technology*. New York: Oxford University Press

³McCombs, M, L Shaw & D Weaver. 1997. *Communication and Democracy: Exploring the Intellectual Frontier in Agenda Setting Theory*. Mahwa, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates; Graber, D A. 2000. *Media Power in Politics*. Washington, DC: CQ Press.

Conflict Trends in Kenya

Political Conflict

Kenya is a young democracy with a progressive constitution promulgated in 2010⁴ that was viewed as the best hope for citizens. However, Kenya is a multi-ethnic society and has a long tradition of identity politics where ethnicity has often taken centre stage. The fact that Kenya has gone through chaotic elections is written on the wall. The most controversial elections were in 2007/2008⁵ that led to one of the deadliest ethnic chaos. 10 years later, chaos were witnessed in the 2017 elections raising fears of a repeat of the 2007/08 violence with Migori, Nairobi, Kisumu, Uasin Gishu and other Counties trending as hotspots of violence in the country. While the 2007 elections prompted the formation of a coalition government mediated by the late Kofi Annan, the 2013 and 2017 elections were contested in the highest court in Kenya (the Supreme Court of Kenya). The disputed 2017 elections later gave birth to the Building Bridges Initiative or the famous handshake⁶ between incumbent President, Uhuru Kenyatta and his arch rival Raila Odinga, after the latter swore himself as “the People’s President”⁷ in a well-attended ceremony at Uhuru or Freedom Park. Among other things the handshake promised to address through an MOU is ethnicity, corruption and inclusivity for national unity. These were among the thorny issues Uhuru Kenyatta would like to achieve under his Big Four agenda as he serves his last term in State House. Kenya, therefore, has gone through a vicious cycle of violence every electioneering period, except for the minimal violence 2002 and 2013, where many innocent people have lost their lives through ethnic violence, on one hand, and state brutality on the other. This reality calls for the assessment of the country’s peace and security architecture to examine whether it is capable of mitigating repeated cycles of political violence and other predominant conflicts (natural resource conflict and violent extremism) discussed in subsequent sections.

Democratic institutions in Kenya that includes institutions such as the Judiciary, the police, Kenya Human Rights Commission, the Independent Electoral and Boundaries Commission, the Legislature and National Assembly, traditional mainstream media as

⁴Constitution of Kenya 2010 retrieved 07th February 2018 from http://www.icla.up.ac.za/images/constitutions/kenya_constitution.pdf

⁵Ogenga, F. 2008. The Role of the Kenyan Media in the 2007 Elections. *Journal of African Elections* Vol. 7 No 2.pp 124-135.

⁶Raila Odinga and Uhuru Kenyatta surprised the nation and the world by the famous handshake on the 9th of March 2018 after resolving to work together to solve ethnic antagonism, corruption, electoral conflict, marginalisation and inclusivity. On the 14th of December 2018, the two were awarded an honorary degree for their leadership that led to the peaceful action resolution of political conflict in Kenya by the Jaramogi Oginga Odinga University of Science and Technology, NCIC is the National Cohesion and Integration Commission, an independent commission created through the NCI Act 2001

⁷Nation Reporter 2018 US and EU Criticize Raila Oath, Call for Respect of law
DN Friday February 02 2018

6. Nyamori, M. 2019. Rutodismisses Push for Referendum. Standard Newspaper 23rd July 2019

well as the civil society have failed to live to the promise of a true democratic transition because they have been driven by the desire to preserve the economy (economic base) as the superstructure. This implies that any reforms that call for radical changes that would interfere with the economy are looked at with suspicion and cannot be tolerated by the ruling class. This systemic authoritarian tendency of traditional democratic system is what is currently under threat courtesy of new media technologies (social media). This is why it is refreshing to revisit the longstanding study of media effects on democracy and elections and the new wave of political and violent extremism therein with the emergence and rise of social media networks. It is no longer business as usual regarding the intersection between media, technology and democracy.

The 2013 elections in Kenya ushered in devolution as a new system of governance. Nonetheless, the level of understanding of devolution⁸ and preparedness by national and county governments to undertake functions remains tenuous. Competition for political power and resources at the county level has led political elites to adopt new strategies to win elections, such as elite pacts and ‘negotiated democracy’⁹. Political power sharing is frequently used to resolve violent conflict by diffusing contestation over access to power and resources between political groups. In addition, devolution has also created new cleavages along identity lines and notions of belonging and rights throughout the country. Members of the public are increasingly concerned about ethnic and clan identities, the degree of representation in the county government administration and access to county resources is an issue that brings about conflict.

As the country gears towards the 2022 elections, consensus is clearly emerging that the 2010 constitution failed to fully address the root causes of political extremism and attendant violence every election cycle. Calls are currently underway post-2017 controversial elections for a referendum, as part of the Building Bridges Initiative, to address ethnicity, corruption and inclusivity. However, opponents of constitutional changes opine that the country doesn’t need a referendum and see such calls as an attempt by election losers to share power and influence the outcome of the next elections. Out of mistrust of traditional mainstream media, many Kenyans opt to seek and share information about politics, particularly the elections through social media.

⁸Mkutu, K., Marani, M. and Ruteere, M. 2014. *Securing the Counties: Options for Kenya after Devolution*, Centre for Human Rights and Policy Studies, Nairobi.

⁹Elfverson & Sjogren: Do local Power-Sharing Deals Reduce Ethnopolitical Hostility? The Effects of ‘Negotiated Democracy’ in a devolved Kenya

7. Cheeseman et al. 2016. *Decentralization In Kenya: The Governance Of Governance.*, Cambridge University Press. p.2; Elfverson &. 2019. Do local Power-Sharing Deals Reduce Ethno-political Hostility? The Effects of ‘Negotiated Democracy’ in a devolved Kenya

Natural Resource Conflict

Devolution as ushered in by the 2012 constitution brought into being a system of government that represents the country's biggest political transformation since independence, perhaps even more significant than the repealed section 2A of the constitution that reintroduced multi-party democracy. An analysis of resource based conflict in the context of devolution and online discourses surrounding it can reveal how the historical lack of equitable resource access and distribution mechanisms offloaded to the county level can open room for value-laden sharing based on cronyism, nepotism, sycophancy, ethnic extremism and in the end incite conflict. The latter is true because devolution has provided a platform for the expression of county identities and in some cases contributed to ethnic regionalism and therein xenophobia.

The National Steering Committee on Peacebuilding and Conflict Management (NSC), the government's coordinating mechanism for peacebuilding in Kenya carried out a countrywide conflict analysis exercise in 2015 and identified cattle rustling, land, conflicts over oil, water, pasture, fisheries, and minerals as the main sources of conflict in Kenya. These conflicts are intra and inter-ethnic and cross-boundary, and sometimes interstate like the current dispute over territorial waters between Kenya and Somalia currently under arbitration in the International Court of Justice.

Oil and Land: Pokot-Turkana Inter-ethnic Conflict

The discovery of oil in Turkana has raised difficult questions about who should benefit from associated opportunities. This includes resentment against non-Turkana populations residing in the county and those employed by the oil companies. The bone of contention is on whether all the people in the county should benefit equally from oil or whether only the Turkana who have a historical claim of ownership of the oil fields should gain more. Oil has also aggravated long-standing tension between the Turkana and the neighbouring Pokot to the south. Over the years, some Turkana population have been pushed closer to the Pokot due to various factors including displacements due to national projects. In the absence of comprehensive news coverage and information on the oil and natural resource dynamics in the region, people have resorted to easily accessible channels of information found in Social media. In this context, social media is used to inform as well as to misinform and dis-inform through fake news and propaganda that risk escalating the conflict.

The Pokot for example, lay claim to large swathes of Turkana County land to the south as part of their traditional grazing lands and insist that the boundary should be modified in line with colonial maps which granted them these lands. In this context, Turkana allege that recent cattle raids by the Pokot are being used to foster insecurity along the border and evict the occupying Turkana and ultimately allow the Pokots become "locals" and benefit from oil in the area. The threat posed to security by the discovery of oil raises the

fear of an outbreak of “resource based conflict” in the county as locals have periodically threatened to oppose oil drilling if their share isn’t satisfactory.

There is also heavy presence of security personnel in Turkana County than in areas occupied by their rivals. This is associated with oil, and is often a source of envy as Turkana’s neighbours read favouritism in this. Neighbouring communities also fear that the Turkana – enriched by the oil wealth and resultant opportunities – will gain leverage over them by acquiring arms and bribing state officials and security agencies to be sympathetic to the Turkana. There is also fear that money being paid to local Turkana as compensation for their land and other resources on it by the oil companies and foreign investors is being used in acquisition of arms thereby shifting the conflict in the area to their advantage. This has precipitated an arms-race in the region as neighbouring communities fear that an enriched Turkana County poses more threat than before. Oil and devolution have united the Turkana as they unilaterally negotiate for oil and gas benefits from the state. This unity is seen as a threat in inter-communal conflict in the area

It is worth noting that some studies on the impacts of national resource conflict such as those of the Pokot and the Turkana for example, the one conducted by Security Research and Information Center (2016) titled “An Assessment of Social-Economic Impact of Conflict in Turkana and West Pokot Counties”¹⁰ failed to examine the salience of social media technologies in conflict prevention and escalation and in many similar studies, recommendation for the use of new media technologies are therefore missing in the policy options underscoring the importance of the approach proposed in this paper.

Water and Fish: Migingo Kenya-Uganda Boundary-waters Conflict

Migingo, an island roughly the size of a football pitch on Lake Victoria, has been a site of contention between Kenya and Uganda, due to the large fish population found in the surrounding fresh waters. As populations increase, environmental degradation and pollution put pressure on the flora and fauna in the lake basin, creating a natural resource conflict time bomb. East African countries, especially Kenya and Uganda, are witnessing diminishing returns in fish and related products, leading to rising competition for the increasingly scarce natural resources¹¹.

Migingo has received negative headlines, often described as a “tiny piece of rock” by Daily Nation¹² and “Africa’s Smallest War” by Aljazeera¹³ The fact that it has led to a

¹⁰Security Research and Information Center (2016) titled “An Assessment of Social-Economic Impact of Conflict in Turkana and West Pokot Counties.” Retrieved 12 October 2019. From

<http://www.srickenya.org/publications/ReportonImpactofConflictinTurkanaWestPokot.pdf>

¹¹Waititu, E. 2009. Diminishing Water Resources Threaten Peace. Washington Times. Retrieved 4th October 2019 from <https://pulitzercenter.org/reporting/diminishing-water-resources-threaten-peace>

¹² See Business Daily editorial on <https://www.businessdailyafrica.com/analysis/editorials/Resolve-Migingo-dispute/4259378-4634596-w09ajx/index.html>

¹³Dijkstra, A. 2019. Migingo Island: Africa’s Smallest War. Retrieved 03rd October 2019 from

<https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/inpictures/migingo-island-africas-smallest-war-190217150742518.html>

protracted dispute between two neighboring East African nations – Kenya and Uganda – over its sovereign control, is something many are yet to understand. Both Kenya and Uganda claim the island is within their territorial waters and are even willing to use international jurisprudence, such as the International Criminal Court, to prove their point.

With the dispute of ownership raging on, Migingo Island provides a perfect laboratory for testing viable locally owned multilateral mechanisms for peacebuilding, especially as African stakeholders seek to explore “the next generation of peacebuilding.”¹⁴ Several efforts have been made by the two states to resolve the Migingo stalemate, which has the potential of escalating into a full-blown conflict between Kenya and Uganda. In 2009, for example, Kenya and Uganda launched a survey plan¹⁵ to determine the actual ownership of the island and to heal the festering diplomatic wounds.

According to Article 2(4) of the United Nations Charter,¹⁶ and reiterated in Article III paragraph 3 of the Charter of the Organization of African Unity (OAU)¹⁷ – the African Union’s predecessor – and in the AU’s idea of peacebuilding, Uganda’s activities may be interpreted as acts of aggression. Such acts may be then repulsed by Kenya through the use of force based on the principle of self-defense, per Article 51 of the UN Charter. Yet this would undermine the vision of the East African Community, where local ownership, multilateralism, de-securitization of borderlands, regional integration, and free trade remain core elements for creating chains of resilience in the event of conflicts. Interestingly, there is no proper news coverage and information regarding the Migingo conflict and most of what Kenyans know about the conflict is found on social media outlets. In the latter, discourses surrounding the conflict are always littered with political and ethnic extremism revealing the degree of polarization among Kenyans.

Violent Extremism

Online Recruitment, Gender and Preventive Approaches

It is critical to note that terrorism is on the rise in Kenya and has the potency of undermining democracy in the region. There have been attacks in Kenya since the 1970’s and in recent years with signature ones like Westgate Mall, America Embassy bombings, Garissa University, Norfolk Hotel, Dusit Mall, both foreign and locally organised,

¹⁴See Next Generation for Peacebuilding in Africa: New Voices, New New Networks and New Strategies Wednesday 10-Friday 12 April 2019 .Conference Report, Wilton Park , West Sussex, UK . Retrieved 06th October 2019 from <https://www.wiltonpark.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/WP1676-Report.pdf>

¹⁵Kisiangani, E. 2011. Dispute over Migingo Escalates. Institute of Peace and Security Studies. Retrieved 6th October 2019 from <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/dispute-over-migingo-escalates>; Ogenga, 2019. Lake Victoria’s Migingo Island; A Test for Peacebuilding in East Africa

¹⁶Chapter I: Article 2(1)-(5) – Charter of the United Nations ...legal.un.org/repertory/art2.shtml

¹⁷OAU CHARTER https://au.int/sites/default/files/.../7759-sl-oau_charter_1963_0.pdf

prompting Kenya to invade Somali to destabilise and neutralize al-Shabaab. Media organizations in Kenya have played a reactive rather than proactive role in counter-terrorism. For example, the media has oversimplified the role of women by presenting them as victims when they can also be perpetrators, dissuaders, and preventers of terrorism, violent extremism and radicalization as shown in a recent study on *Jihadi Bridism* or female violent extremism in Kenya.¹⁸ The media especially new media technologies (social media) have emerged as avenues for recruitment into violent extremism, radicalization and terrorism. A recent study titled “Digital Jihad” edited by Francesco Marone in 2019 points out how “Digital Communication Technologies can offer ample opportunities for violent extremism and at the same time they provide formidable instruments to confront the threat or even provide alternative vision”¹⁹

Quite often, we are witnessing a surge of terrorism globally due to the weaknesses inherent in conventional²⁰ preventive approaches that have been adopted across the board though elitist Washington-centric National Counterterrorism Strategies implemented by countries in the front-line of the global war on terror, done on a state to state level, remain at the ivory tower and do not consider grassroots nuances or local cultural contexts in order for them to attract ownership and commitment within the communities that they are being implemented. This therefore means that critical stakeholders are left out of these strategies. For example, the US Department Partnership for Regional East Africa Counterterrorism (PRACT) established in 2009 designed to build the capacity and cooperation of military, law enforcement, and civilian actors across East Africa is a good example of the failure of material preventive approaches.

The latter approaches are less productive and unsustainable going forward if not complemented with non-material strategic preventive approaches to terrorism to prevent and counter violent extremism (ideological and philosophical approaches through innovative technologies). This is why technology is a key pillar in Kenya’s Rapid County Action Plan on Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism. In the meantime, Kenya continues to experience a general surge in terrorism from 2010-2017 with terror mutating into female suicide bombings²¹ abductions and be-heading strategies believed to be

¹⁸ See Ogenga 2016 on Jihadi Bridism on <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/beyond-material-interventions-rethinking-the-role-gender-media-and-the-politics-female>

¹⁹ Marone, F. 2019. Digital Jihad- Online Communication and Violent Extremism. Milan: Ledizioni: Zed Publishing

²⁰ See Ogenga 2016 Beyond Material Interventions: Rethinking the Role of Gender, Media and the Politics of Female Violent Extremism. Policy Brief. Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Washington D.C See https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/ogenga_-_policy_brief.pdf

²¹ Ogenga, 2016. ‘Do Not Ignore Women in War on Terrorism’ see <https://www.nation.co.ke/oped/opinion/Do-not-ignore-women-in-war-on-terrorism/440808-3381230-fx9ilfz/index.html>

See also Solomon, S. 2016. “Attack Against Police in Kenya Highlights Rising Threat of Female Extremism” See. <https://www.voanews.com/africa/attack-against-police-kenya-highlights-rising-threat-female-extremism>

borrowed from ISIS. For such reasons, this paper argues that securitized preventive approaches should be on going, since terrorists are also actively working undercover to launch an attack, to complement preventive approaches even though, in the long term, use of law enforcement, military and development resources are not self-sufficient. As terrorism mutates, the focus of counterterrorism should shift from dealing with the immediate dangers posed by terrorists, which require military responses, to include strategic prevention (preventing and countering violent extremism), which attempts to deal with radicalization and recruitment of individuals into terrorist groups due to ideology to shrink the margin of those sneaking to the apex of the extremism pyramid.

There is an urgent need to go beyond material interventions and invest in institutionally sanctioned philosophical and ideological counter-measures using ICT. This implies that, first and foremost, we foreground the importance of ideology and technology in the whole complex of terrorism and counter-terrorism, violent extremism, radicalization and de-radicalization. This calls for the incorporation of research and practice when rationalizing the best forms of interventions that would go beyond the material preventive approaches to argue for the consideration of the extent to which education, mediation and therein the mass media and social media, as tools for mediation, play critical roles in defining, shaping and propagating ideas in the context of terrorism, counter-terrorism, radicalization, deradicalization, violent extremism, even political extremism and natural resource conflict. Terrorism being a form of political communication is given fuel or mileage by media sensationalism and propaganda born out of traditional western conventional conceptualization of news such as the aphorism “if it bleeds it leads” or “man bite dog mentality”²² on mainstream media and the power of users to generate content on social media networks.

Kenya having borne the brunt of terrorist attacks over the last few decades, leading to loss of lives, destruction of property and disruption of economic activities such as tourism and trade came up with a response mechanism. The government’s National Strategy to Counter Violent extremism (NSCVE) that was launched by President Uhuru Kenyatta in 2016 and championed by the National Counterterrorism center is a rapid response towards the surging terror threat. It can be useful to assess to what extent this strategy enhances the national peace building architecture regarding violent extremism and terrorism and how institutions mandated to spearhead PCVE are performing. The NSCVE envisages and provides for collaborative approaches involving actors from civil society, international community, private sector, religious, scholarly and political actors to complement the state’s counter terrorism efforts.

²²See Ogenga, F. 2016. *If it Bleeds It Should Not Lead: Reporting in the Age of Terrorism* Africa Up Close, Wilson Center. Retrieved 14 October 2019 from <https://africaupclose.wilsoncenter.org/if-it-bleeds-it-shouldnt-lead-reporting-in-the-age-of-terrorism-in-africa/>

Critical Theory of Technology²³,

As an alternative approach to technological determinism which argues that technology determines our destiny, this theory is used in this policy paper to emphasize contextual aspects of technology ignored by the dominant view. Technology is not only the rational control of nature; both its development and impact are intrinsically social. Authoritarian social hierarchy of technology should not be viewed as a contingent dimension of technical progress but a technical necessity for the preservation of power modalities that ought to be resisted by all means. Terrorists use technology to propagate fear, hate and death in order to advance their power interests. Extremist political grouping use ethnic stereotype and propaganda for genocide as witnessed in Rwanda and Kenya during the 2007/2008 post elections violence and rebel armed groups invoke fear, misinformation and propaganda to incite conflict in order to maximise on the illegitimate exploitation of natural resources. It is therefore necessary that users are educated and are made aware of how technology works to support those interest and what they can do to avoid being vulnerable.

The warning is that technology should not make us little more than objects of self-created technically incorporated mechanism. As Marshall Mc Luhan observes, technology should not reduce us to sex organs of machines. Perhaps the only hope is spiritual renewal to inform a new technical practice captured in CMDPS peace journalism institutional-philosophical approach that emphasises *Utu (humanity)*, *Umoja (Unity)* and *Harambee (Collective responsibility)* as news values²⁴ in home-grown narratives to avoid polarization and extremism. Technology should not be assumed as something with a functional logic that can be explained without reference to society or humanity. To contend that technology is synonymous to progress it to assume that progress is an exogenous force rather than an expression of changes in culture and values²⁵. Social media should work in a manner that encourages users to stick to the basic principles of humanity (*Utu*).

Social meaning which is a product of contest and cultural horizon, should be analysed from the perspective of the social role of the technical object. What is the social role of WhatsApp or Facebook, for instance, and the life it makes possible? Facebook has allowed for interactivity and spontaneity of User Generated Content changing the scope, depth and scale of political discussions forever; terrorists use violence for political messaging. Web 2.0 or social media has altered the traditional authoritarian hierarchy of meaning circulation by allowing multiple voices or pluralism, including views of terrorist, in the contest for hegemony. It is at this point that dangerous technological/ social media political reforms, those driven through hate, radicalization, extremism, corruption, marginalization and ethnicity can be detrimental when they give room for radical

²³Freenberg, A. Democratic Rationalization: Technology, Power and Freedom. In Rober, C. and Dusek, V. (eds.) 2014. Philosophy of Technology –The Technological condition on Anthology 2nd Edition. Malden, Oxford: Wiley Blackwell.

²⁴Ogenga, F. (ed). 2019. East Africa Peace Journalism - A Manual for Media Practitioners. Routledge.

²⁵ Ibid

changes that destroy the economic structure of the state and society and therein threaten humanity.

Institutional Methodological Approach: The Commons Approach

The commons approach, which was first piloted in the USA in 2017 by Build Up.org sort to identify polarising political extremist discourses online in relation to the elections based on the understanding that majority of Americans do not drive polarization and therefore they can be actively engaged online to find a common ground about discussions that matter to them. *The Commons* tries to fill the gap of “finding people who don’t seem to realise polarization is happening to them” and engage them in constructive conversations through automation²⁶

The Center for Media, Democracy, Peace and Security, Buid Up, Toda Peace Institute, Scofield Associates and the Royal Dutch Embassy seeks to extend this approach to Sub-Saharan Africa in order to address all forms of extremism, from political to violent extremism²⁷. This is to be achieved through seeking ways of understanding and flagging extremism content on social media and to innovatively conceptualize technical ways of using social media through facilitated conversations guided by automation to prevent conflict for peacebuilding. By engaging the youth using online and offline volunteers through innovative best practices (users of social media technology) that creatively exploit and guide polarizing discourses, it is contended that a *common ground* can be realised for peacebuilding. “Through the last decade, researchers working to understand the impacts of emerging ICTs posit that political groupings have become siloed, increasing the polarization of public discourse²⁸.” Moving people from passively accepting a context that escalates conflict to constructively engaging in mediating dialogue in their society is an enormous challenge²⁹but one which we must be prepared to face.

Policy Recommendations

For the Kenyan Government

1. The Kenyan government should review punitive measures on social media, especially those that would interfere with the right to freedom of expression.

²⁶ The Commons see

<https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/#search/helena%40howtobuildup.org/KtbxLwgdjRjxBmPKhLNSLmbGrqCGNphLV?projector=1&messagePartId=0.1>

²⁷ The Royal Dutch Embassy is particularly interested in violent extremism

²⁸ Ibid

²⁹ The Commons see

<https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/#search/helena%40howtobuildup.org/KtbxLwgdjRjxBmPKhLNSLmbGrqCGNphLV?projector=1&messagePartId=0.1>

2. The government should invest in continuous training of law enforcers to investigate and prosecute where necessary, and collaborate with civil society, youth groups and technology companies to prevent misinformation. They should avoid being the source of misinformation.
3. The government should maximize its own use of social media to improve the state-society relationship, so the government can hear and respond to the concerns of citizens by listening to them on social media platforms devoted to addressing citizen concerns for example on how to benefit from natural resources such as oil, water and fish.
4. The government should ease buy-in bureaucracy to accelerate collaboration with civil society and international community members represented locally through embassies to invest in innovative ICT incubation laboratories to nurture innovation on ICT, peace and security to counter extremism (political and violent extremism) and natural resource conflict.

For Technology Companies

1. Technology companies should partner with government and educational institutions to conduct research on the role of social media in polarization, extremism (both political extremism and violent extremism) and sharing of natural resources to better understand how to avoid the negative exploitation of social media platforms that often leads to conflict.
2. Technology companies should be more proactive in policing content, especially fake or false news and politicians should avoid being the main source of propaganda on social media platforms.
3. Technology companies should partner with civil society and educational institutions to work with volunteers to guide extremist and polarizing conversations on social media for realizing *common grounds*.

For the International Community Civil Society and Public Higher Educational Institutions

1. The civil society should work with government, technology companies and internet providers to invest in social media literacy incubation laboratories in institutions of higher education (universities) for education and sensitization.
2. Public higher education institutions and research centers such as the *Center for Media, Democracy, Peace and Security, Rongo University*, should conduct research on the use of social media in Kenya and use the findings to develop a training manual, conduct training workshops, and hold seminars with various stakeholders such as government

officials and citizen bloggers. From these, policy briefs and journal publications on the role of social media in extremism (political and violent) and conflict resolution could be published. In particular, these programmes should aim to engage the youth (cybercitizens) both online and offline.

3. Educational institutions should partner with technology companies to facilitate social data research on the trends, and the technical, socio-economic, political and cultural implications of their applications and their future cultural roles for modifications.

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Center for Media, Democracy, Peace & Security

Is a policy think tank in Rongo University, Kenya designed to conduct high quality research in media, democracy, peace and security and generate knowledge consistent with Rongo University vision of nurturing research, innovation and outreach initiatives for the betterment of communities both locally, nationally and internationally. The university supports the center in playing a significant role of research, innovation and community outreach. The Center (CMDPS) calls for a uniquely African methodologies and philosophies of representation and mediation inspired by Africanism fused with international elements to sync with Western and other modes of expectations. It is envisioned that research projects from the Center will help influence policy issues on media, democracy, peace and security in Kenya, East Africa, Africa and beyond.

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