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# The Northern Nigerian Countering Violent Extremism Project: A measure of Participation vis-a-vis Outcomes

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THE NORTHERN NIGERIAN COUNTER VIOLENT EXTREMISM PROJECT-A MEASURE  
OF PARTICIPATION VIS-À-VIS OUTCOMES

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PIM 74

A capstone paper submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Master of Arts in  
Sustainable Development at SIT Graduate Institute in Brattleboro, Vermont, USA.

December 2016

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**Abstract**

This study evaluated the northern Nigerian Countering Violent Extremism project. Employing the theory of Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) as the overarching framework, it sought to inquire the extent of localism in the design of the project vis-à-vis project outcomes. The import of PLA theory stems from its emphasis on the use of bottom-up approach in project management, while de-emphasizing the top-down approach and hence its relevance in this study.

The frameworks of phenomenography and ethnomethodology were adopted to decide data collection methods and design of their contents. These methods included two in-depth interviews, two focus group discussions and observation of participants. The use of multiple sources of data collection or triangulation was to enhance validity and reliability by way of cross-referencing. Research participants included primary and secondary stakeholders in the project.

Findings showed, although the project recorded some positive outcomes, they were however mismatched with the actual needs of the youths, thus indicating a lack of participation in the design of the project.

### **Introduction**

The advent of terrorist groups such as Al-Qaeda, and the subsequent attack on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, occasioned a paradigm shift in global perception of terrorism, (Zedner, 2013). The United States government shifted from viewing terrorism as a regional problem of rogue states and the Muslim world to defining it as a global threat to peace and security and “acts of war” (Rasmussen, 2015, P. 78.). Consequently, this post 9/11 perception lead to a new global determination geared toward countering the nefarious and destructive activities of terrorists and insurgents. The United States and the United Nations Security Council have played leading roles in this effort, (De Jonge Oudraat, 2003).

Following this goal of countering global terrorism and extremism, there have been different approaches adopted in the last 16 years. At the country level, national security policies have been formulated and adopted by various governments and by the United Nations. For example, there are the United States' Patriot Act, the United Kingdom's CONTEST, and the United Nations' Security Council Resolution 1566, (Fenwick, 2008). There have been military interventions in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria. And, development programs or foreign assistance aimed at reaching out to foreign governments in the fight against radicalization and terrorism have been used, as an alternative to military engagements in terrorist spots of the world, (U.S. Department of State, n.d.).

In the face of these different approaches, however, terrorism and insurgency are ever still present, growing by leaps and bounds. Today, in Africa there are terrorist groups in Nigeria,

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Libya, and Mali. I believe the pertinent question, therefore, is, how effective and efficient have these approaches been in addressing the problems of terrorism and insurgency?

The project at the center of my research is a development assistance projects in northern Nigeria, sponsored by the U.S government. The one objective of the project was to identify at-risk youths in this region for training in leadership and community engagement. The overall goal was to counter the radicalization and recruitment of these youths by the Boko Haram (BH) terrorist group.

This study used qualitative inquiry to investigate the extent of participation vis-a-vis project outcomes in the northern Nigerian countering violent extremism project. It specifically evaluated the project design, activities or deliverables and the needs (socio-economic and career) of the youth.

### **Background**

This inquiry was incited by the expressed feeling of uncertainty, I observed with the project beneficiaries during our interactions.

I became a stakeholder in the project through World Learning (WL), after I was hired to coordinate the activities of the project as a consultant. In this position, I had the privilege to work and interact with both the direct and indirect beneficiaries of the project. In our interactions, I noticed there was one concern of the youth and this was constantly posed to me as a recurring question at every of our meeting and interaction opportunity. This question was “what is going to happen to us, sir...”. They simply wanted to know, what the plan for them was at the end of the project since they had no information regarding this. I could not get a satisfactory answer to this

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probing, even after I had asked the project officer a good number of times. After I had been asked this question for the umpteenth time, I decided to vet the project. I started rhetorically by asking, do we have the right project for this people? Are the activities relevant to their socio-economic needs? And, do we have the right group of beneficiaries? My thought was if these questions had been addressed in the design of the project they would not need more answers.

A secondary reason behind this study stems from the seriousness of radicalization and terrorism, and its associated socio-economic problems on the affected people. I wanted to examine the efficiency and effectiveness of the project activities relative to the needs of these beneficiaries.

### **Inquiry Question**

Primary Question: What is the extent of participation in the design of the project vis-à-vis outcomes?

#### Sub-questions

- a. How involved were the community members in the planning of the project?
- b. What are the outcomes of the project?
- c. What are the needs of these people?
- d. What are the perceptions of the people towards the outcomes?
- e. In what ways do the project outcomes meet the needs of the people?

### **Literature Review**

A constellation of literature covering varied subject areas in this study was consulted for relevant information about the frameworks used, data collection and analysis methods, and to explain claims and theories presented in the work. These different areas are sequentially and topically presented and reviewed as standalone subjects. The purpose for this was to enhance clarity and logical flow of information and thoughts in writing and presentation. However, these

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different sections did not particularly have the same leverage in terms of availability of published materials. Facts regarding literature are stated under each aspect presented, viz., theoretical framework, project context, and Islamic fundamentalism and terrorism in northern Nigeria.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study is premised on the principles of Participatory Learning and Action (PLA). The core of PLA theory de-emphasizes the use of a top-down approach in project management while advocating localism. Therefore, within the confines of this study, I have operationally conceptualized this framework as a community-driven approach to development, which may be preferred or adopted by external agents in the bid to reach out to a community in need.

PLA approach has positive track records of effectiveness which have been reported from the different contexts of the world, where it has been adopted. Expressions such as allowing community members “ownership” and “handing over the pen” to community members have also been used to describe this theory.

In presenting the principles and advantages of PLA, Pretty, J. N., Guijt, I., Scoones., & Thompson, J., (1995) in their book “*A trainer’s Guide for Participatory Learning and Action,*” argue that there are positive pieces of evidence of long-term economic and environmental success when “people’s ideas and knowledge are valued and power is given to them to make decisions independent of external agents” (p.60). As an example of PLA’s leverage, they asserted that the idea of PLA promotes innovation (p.56). Similarly, in their work “Mutual Support: A model of participatory support by and for people with learning difficulties”, Keyes & Brandon (2012), submitted, PLA is about listening to individual narratives in a particularly

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problematic situation, and supporting them to develop a plan that encompasses these various narratives which can be synergized in the treatment of the situation. It is about understanding that people have different experiences, which invariably influence their analytical and decision-making processes, (PP. 222-228). According to Hess-Biber & Leavy (2011), this holds true even among people of the same ethnic group (P.19). However, it goes without saying, external knowledge or ideas are also pertinent in the whole process of PLA, but they are not just permitted to assume dominance over and above the ideas, knowledge, experiences and voices of the local people (Pretty, J. N., Guijt, I., Scoones., & Thompson, J. P.60).

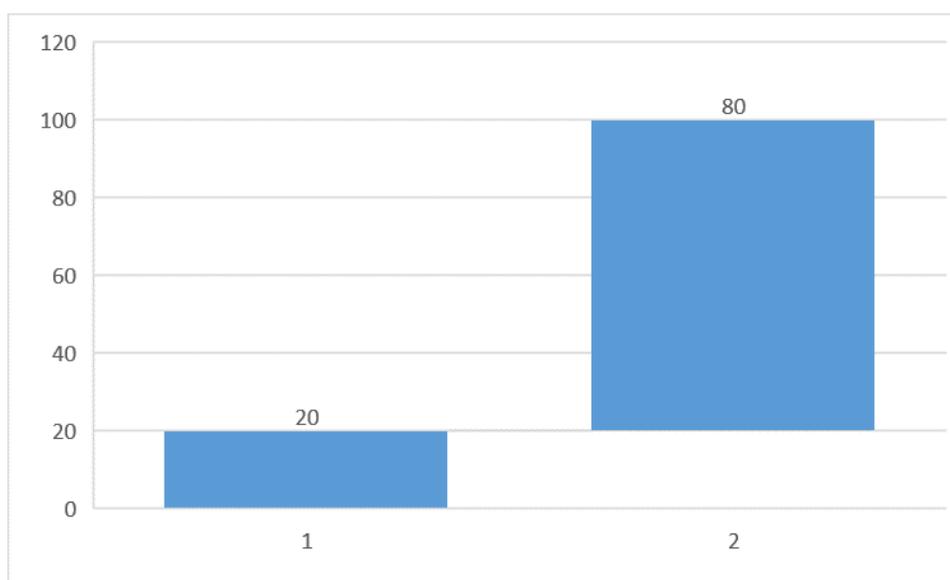
PLA as a people-centered approach theory can be analyzed in four steps. One, it affords the local people an opportunity to educate outsiders (experts) about their community. In this position, the outsider becomes a learner of the realities of that community, whether it be on socio-economic, local politics, cultural issues or what have you. Two, it empowers the people to analyze their conditions and proffer what they have designed to be suitable solutions or interventions to their problems. Three, it results in the creation of a model that represents the synergistic effort of both the outsiders and the local people. Fourthly, it develops and prepares the capacity of the local people to act in the future (Pretty, J. N., Guijt, I., Scoones., & Thompson, J., 1995, pp. 56-57).

In a report discussing their findings regarding failure rate in project outcomes, the Association of Project Managers (APM) asserted that “while the key to success is known, this practice is often not applied.” In this aptly titled study of *Conditions for Project Success: APM research report*, it was revealed that trillions of dollars are expended in projects and programs

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yearly, unfortunately, however, the outcomes from these financial inputs have not been found to be commensurate. In percentage, it was found to be at a mere 20% success rate, which by inference translates to 80% of project endeavors failing to “wholly” meet planned project objectives and goals (P. 2-3). As to the reason for this abysmal failure, the study postulated 8 conditions necessary for project success. One of these was the involvement of “end users and operators” in the design and implementation of projects. See chart 1.

Chart 1: Report of project’s success rate per year (APM report).



#### Methods in PLA

PLA uses various methods of information gathering in learning about community of interest.

Some of these are timelines, transect walks, community mappings, problem trees, visioning and what have you (Kenton, N., n.d.).

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*Timelines:* These are exercises conducted to outline historical activities that have taken place in the community over time. These include changes that have occurred in the community, household and life of community members.

*Transect walks:* These are walks conducted around the community for observations, questions and general information. This experience is then represented in transect diagrams as visual representations.

*Community mapping:* In this exercise, the community members share experiences of their community with the outsiders as they show the resources of the community and disclose what is important to them in their environment.

*Problem trees:* These are diagrams used to depict community problems, causes, effects and analysis of the problems.

*Visioning:* Community members map their vision for the future.

Owing to its adaptability and applicability, PLA has adopted different names in different contexts reflecting the development work in these places, (Pretty, J. N., Guijt, I., Scoones., & Thompson, J., 1995). See table 1.

Table 1: Some descriptive terms for PLA

Agroecosystems Analysis (AEA)	Rapid Assessment Techniques (RAT)
Beneficiary Assessment	Rapid Ethnographic Assessment (REA)
Participatory Action Research (PAR)	Rapid Assessment Procedures (RAT)
Rural Appraisal (RP)	Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA)

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Planning for Real	Rapid Multi-Assessment Appraisal (RMA)
Participatory Research Methodology (PRM)	Samuhik Brahman (Joint trek)
Participatory Rural Appraisal and Planning (PRAP)	Process documentation
Diagnostico Rural Participativo (DRP)	Participatory Urban Appraisal (PUA)
Methodes Active de Recherche et de Planification Participative (MARPP)	Participatory Analysis and Learning Methods (PALM)
Rapid Catchment Analysis (RCA)	Training for Transformation
Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR)	

**Project Context**

Strictly, for reason of political and leadership failures, northern Nigeria has had its fair share of poverty, radicalization, and terrorism (Hoffman, S. K., 2014). There are several writings concerning this region and its perpetual socio-economic problems. However, this study concentrated on some of the needs, which have been identified and reported as the needs of at-risk youths, youths like the countering violent extremism project participants. Those life-affirming needs which are lacking in their experiences, thus making them vulnerable to radicalization and terrorism. In her article “Boko Haram's hometown: Living with the ugly Nigerian cult is not fun”, Murdock (2014) reported, before the advent of Boko Haram, this region had its own socio-economic setbacks and the attendant problems of joblessness and poverty. This hardship was however exacerbated; moving from a hitherto bad situation to a dire one, owing to the heinous activities of Boko Haram. She also revealed that Boko Haram has cleverly and successfully capitalized on this socio-economic plight of the youth as means of recruitment, as they “can be lured into insurgency for small sums” which the group is ever ready to provide. In a parallel report entitled, *Motivations and Empty Promises: Voices of Former*

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*Boko Haram Combatants and Nigerian Youth*, Mercy Corps (2016) investigated the motivation of those youths who were former members of Boko Haram. In the study, Mercy Corps wanted to know why these people were vulnerable to recruitments. Like Murdock's findings, Mercy Corps' study showed that Boko Haram exploited the prevailing economic gap in the region by attempting to satisfy the "common desires of youth in this region, to get ahead economically and distinguish themselves in their communities." The youths interviewed confessed to either accepting loans before joining the group or joined with a promise to get one. This admission indicated the extent of desperation among the youths, who saw an economic advantage or an avenue to prosperity by taking to terrorism.

In another study detailing yet another problem of the region, Ehwarieme & Umukoro (2015) in their work, "Civil Society and Terrorism in Nigeria: A case study of Boko Haram", asserted that the dropout rate in the region was induced by lack of security and protection for pupils and students in their schools. They opined, there have been instances where schools were savagely attacked with several children and teachers killed by Boko Haram, whose ideology was at odds with western education. These attacks and killings were therefore targeted plots, aimed at discouraging learners from going to school; an act which conflicts with the group's rejection of western education. As a result of these attacks, parents are faced with no option, but to withdraw their children and wards from schools completely (p.30).

This issue of school withdrawal was the specific, identifiable problem area the northern Nigerian project proposed to address, amongst other social and economic issues such as unemployment, prostitution, and internal displacements. This is in conformity with the

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Countering Violent Extremism policy objective of the United States Government, which gave rise to the project in Nigeria by way of development assistance. The policy says

the US government will collaborate with foreign stakeholders to reduce specific political or social and economic factors that contribute to community support for violent extremism in identifiable areas or put particular segments of a population at high risk of violent extremist radicalization and recruitment to violence. (Department of State, n.d.).

### **Islamic Fundamentalism and Terrorism in Northern Nigeria**

Although Boko Haram was only declared a terrorist group in 2013 by the United States government (Chothia, 2015), Islamic fundamentalism and terrorism are not new phenomena in northern Nigeria. Their origins date back to the 1980s with the emergence of a group that called itself “Maitasine.” This word means "one who damns" in Hausa language. The work of Isichei (1987), entitled “The Maitatsine Risings in Nigeria 1980-85: A revolt of the disinherited” gives insight into the group’s background, ideology, militancy, and its subsequent defeat in 1985 by the then military government of Nigeria. Following this defeat, there was a lull in Islamic militancy until 2009, with the accent of the group known today as Boko Haram (BH). Again, this is a word in Hausa language which means “western education is forbidden.” Hausa, is one of the major languages spoken in northern Nigeria.

According to Eden (2014), in his work on Boko Haram, “The geopolitics of Boko Haram and Nigeria's war on terror,” Boko Haram began their violence in 2009 after an encounter with the police. It was reported that some of the group’s members were stopped by the Nigerian police for failure to wear motorcycle helmets as required by law. This routine check was

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interpreted as an affront against the group and this was to be followed with reprisal attacks on police stations and several public places. Following these attacks, police arrested some of the group's members including the founder, Mohammed Yusuf, who later died in detention in the hands of the police. The death of their leader further complicated the hitherto complex situation and was followed by full blown acts of violence against the Nigerian state.

In the last seven years, the region and its residents been under all manner of violent attacks including killings, bombings, kidnappings, and wanton destruction of property. Consequently, the people have been plunged into serious economic and social struggles such as internal displacement, joblessness, and poverty, (Eden, 2014, p.416). A timeline of Boko Haram's most violent activities across the region showed acts from the 2011 bombing of the United Nations' office building and the 2014 Kidnapping of a group of school girls to the destruction of a whole village. The kidnapping led to a worldwide uproar with the hashtag “#BringBackOurGirls,” thus directing the world’s focus on the situation in northern Nigeria.

## **Inquiry Methodology**

### **Approach and Rationale**

This research was conducted in Jos, one of the two sites where the project was implemented. The decision to concentrate on one half of the project was occasioned by the religious and social representations of the participants and the capacity of the local partner to have met project’s selection criteria. Also, the project officer thought the local administrators in Jos were easier to work with in terms of communication and organizational structure.

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For me, the diversity factor was critical in ensuring validity and reliability, especially for a project that emphasized inclusiveness in the selection of beneficiaries. This meant the voices and experiences of the various groups and subgroups in the region were to some extent represented in the data. In contrast, the other half of the project, Kano site had its participants from one monolithic socio-religious group, which amongst many other observed breaches negated the set objectives of the project. These observations combined with several futile attempts to correct them resulted in the negative perceptions the project officer had about the Kano site.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

Multiple approaches and methods were used in my data collection and analysis. In order for me to cross-verify information for increased credibility and validity, triangulation approach was used by way of two focus group discussions, two in-depth interviews, and a participant observation. A combination of the methods of phenomenography and ethnomethodology was used in deciding on these data gathering methods and in the design of their contents.

The principle of phenomenography helps in inquiry about the relationship between the subject and the object of a research. This provided the framework for me to determine the experiential relationship between the subject of this research, who are the youths of northern Nigeria and the object of the research, which refers in this case to the socio-economic climate in northern Nigeria, (Larsson & Holmstrom, 2007; Yates, Partidge & Bruce, 2012; Ornek, 2008). Applying this concept, I was able to determine the correlation between the socio-economic

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situation in northern Nigeria and the youths in northern Nigeria. This also helped my decision on the type of research methods to adopt and the questions to ask the participants, thus helping to direct the course of the research.

Ethnomethodology framework was also used in the design of my research methods, and in the collection and analysis of information from interviews and focus group discussions. Per Hesse-Biber & Leavey (2011, P.20), ethnomethodology as a research method is “particularly interested” in meanings gleaned through interactions with people and how it shapes their world view. This was applied in wanting to know what the teachers’ and the interviewees’ points of view were, from their standpoints of people who have lived this experience, and interacted with the youths regarding their needs, challenges, motivations and so on. This method was also adopted in my observation of the youths, as I interacted with them and observed them with their peers in and outside the club sessions. I gathered information from their expressed behaviors, mannerisms, feelings, and the subject matter they were engaged in. This experience was helpful in having some understanding about their interests and career goals.

#### **Ethical Considerations**

Every participant in the interviews, and focus group discussions was educated about her/his rights regarding participation and engagement in the study. These included the rights to participate or not to participate in the study, to withdraw at any stage they felt they could not continue, to know the purpose for which the research was going to be used, the right for them to see the transcripts from the interviews and focus groups, and the right to know the findings of the research. It was also explained to them that any information they volunteered was not going to be

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used against them, shared with anyone without their permission and that the transcripts was to be destroyed at the end of the research.

All these were written down, and explained to my participants to ensure they knew and understood what their involvement meant. Subsequently, an informed consent was duly signed by each participant. This was explained to them as a legal document indicating they agreed to participate in the study willingly without any coercion or expectation of payments, gifts or favors in any form. It was written in English to the understanding of each and every one of them.

#### **Notes on the Inquiry**

My intention in this study was not to critique the capability or work of the program officer involved in the Nigerian project or to cast aspersion on any organization for that matter, but to demonstrate the effectiveness of an alternative approach to program management that could have yielded more positive outcomes and better matched the needs of the targeted group.

A major limitation of this study is in the scope of the data collected, which was limited to one-half of the project size. The reason being that there were several observed breaches and manipulations by the administrators of the other half of the project which affected their credibility before the project officer. One, the makeup of the project beneficiaries they selected did not reflect the criteria stated in their terms-of- reference for the project. While the group was expected to reflect social and religious diversity, the participants they had was from one social and religious group. Given all the observed issues, I could not vouch that any data from them would be reliable and free of bias, since I needed to eliminate any sources of bias as much as possible for enhanced validity.

**Research methods**

**In-depth Interviews:** There were two unstructured interviews with two participants. These were conducted at different times and places to eliminate herd mentality in responses and increase reliability and validity. These participants were chosen based on their lived experiences in this region and their interactions with the youth. Each of them had lived and worked in this region for over thirty-three years as at the time of our interview and were in constant interaction with the youth. Their work experience included working in the social sector. I counted the experiences of these participants and the information they were privy to concerning the youths and the socio-economic environment critical in my data collection.

*First participant:* As at the time of this interview, he worked with Linking the Youths of Nigeria Through Exchange (LYNX) as project coordinator. This was the Community Based Organization that partnered with World Learning in the implementation of the project in Jos. He is a lawyer by profession, who has worked extensively as a divorce lawyer, community organizer and as a mentor to young entrepreneurs. Remarkably, one of his mentees was a beneficiary of the project, who has become an entrepreneur in his own right. He manufactures shoes and breeds rabbits for sale.

*Second participant:* He was the local coordinator of the project in Jos, employed by world Learning to oversee the project activities in Jos. His main responsibility was monitoring and evaluation of club activities. He has worked extensively in this region in the areas of program development, training, and in conflict transformation mostly concerning the promotion of dialogue and tolerance between Christian and Muslim adherents in the diverse communities of

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Jos, Adamawa, and Kano. He has also worked as a consultant to World bank and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). See appendix 1 for interview questions.

**Focus group discussions:** There were two focus group discussions conducted at two different times with two different groups of participants.

*First group:* There were seven participants who represented the direct beneficiaries of the project. The group comprised of four female and three male members. Their average age as of June 2016, when this discussion was held was twenty years. The discussion was held in English language which they all understood, spoke, and wrote at advanced level fluency. So, no interpretation was needed, as I was confident in their proficiency to the extent of their ability to understand and respond to questions and engage in discussions. Regarding what they did outside of club activities, three of them were engaged in water, breeding (rabbits), and transportation businesses, while the other four had no jobs. The purpose of this focus group was to understand the lived experience of this people, and how it has shaped their life choices, needs, and career goals.

*The second group:* These were the facilitators of the community English clubs and were also referred to as teachers. They were mostly responsible for the identification and selection of project beneficiaries. The group comprised of three female and three male teachers. I thought by virtue of their responsibilities, which placed them in constant interaction with the youths, they would be good sources of information regarding them and program activities. On the question of language of communication during the focus group session, they were English language teachers

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themselves. This was one of the qualifications they needed to have to be considered for their roles as club facilitators of the community English clubs. The community English clubs were the spaces where the youths met for project activities, and there were six of them in Jos.

These teachers were contracted by LYNX as local consultants on behalf of World Learning. In regards to what they did as full-time jobs, they all had their full-time teaching jobs with the public and private school systems. Four out of the six participants had their master's degrees, and the other two had their bachelor degrees. Their courses were taken in English since Nigeria uses English as the language of instruction in its schools. Thus, there was no need for any interpreter since both the researcher and the participants could communicate in English.

The importance of this focus group was to get information about the needs of the youths, and the socio-economic environment they lived, which they might have gleaned from their interfaces with the youth and, from their experiences living and working in the region.

*Participant Observation:* This was conducted before, during and after club sessions. I interacted with most of them at these times by chatting with them and watching them interact with their peers and teachers. The themes of some of the things we talked about were education, English language proficiency, interests, motivations, family backgrounds and post-project activities. Information from these encounters were mostly written down.

#### **Analysis**

To understand the prevailing socioeconomic problems that drive radicalization and terrorism in northern Nigeria and to present a thoroughly investigated report, I conducted two

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interviews, a focus group discussion and consulted published materials including Nigerian daily newspapers. The focus was not to unveil or name every social or economic problem prevalent in this environment, which are, of course many, but those that had direct influence on the youths and make them vulnerable to radicalization and violent extremism. My questions were mostly in open-ended format, however, in some instances where clarifications were deemed necessary, closed-ended questions were asked. For example, one of my questions was “what are the social and economic needs of this region that make the youths vulnerable to radicalization and violent extremism? In this instance, I followed up with a closed-ended question as “did you say security was also a need in this region?” This came up when one of my informants listed what in his opinion are the problems in the area.

My informants were considered reliable sources of information for two reasons. First and foremost, they had experiential knowledge of the context, because they all had lived and worked in this region. Secondly, they all had specific roles as beneficiaries and primary stakeholders in the project (see research method).

#### **Socio-economic Environment**

In the views of my informants, the fundamental problems in this region were food, shelter, security, and means of livelihood. They, of course, named a host of other problems such as high rate of school withdrawal, prostitution, early marriage, and thuggery. From their responses, it was clear the region and its people were faced with problems of fundamental human rights as defined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, articles 22, 23, 25, and 26 (UN,1948). Assessing these problems in other of severity, my informants all agreed that the

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topmost problem they faced was poverty, which in the words of one of them “is a topmost factor in pushing people towards violent extremism and being recruited by these agents of violence.” This position finds corroboration in the report of Mercy Corps (2016), which was conducted to investigate "the motives" of former Boko Haram members. Key findings from this report showed two classes of former members. Those who had collected loans before joining the group and those who joined with a promise of loan. According to this report, these loans were used for "mostly small and informal businesses."

These results are proofs that the prevailing socio-economic hardship in northern Nigeria, was a causative factor in the desperate disposition of the youth in the region, as they are faced with daily struggle against poverty.

### **Youth's Needs**

Four salient points came to bear from my informants and participant observation about these youths. One, they needed economic empowerment and sustainable long term plan to sustain it. Two, they all had goals and aspirations they wanted to achieve. Three, they were a determined group of individuals willing to work hard to achieve their career goals. And, fourthly, they all wanted to be responsible and productive citizens.

In my focus group discussion with the beneficiaries, when I asked what their career goals were, their responses ranged from “I want to be an astronaut” and “I want to be an architect” to “I want to be a nurse” and “I want to be a petrochemical engineer”. On the question of what their plan was toward achieving these goals, they all thought there was nothing they could do without financial support and mentorship. One of them said, referring to WL “I would suggest that you

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pay for my school, while I put the hard work to go there.” On why they thought they needed a mentor, as part of their plan towards their career goal, all seven discussants began their response with the same words. They all expressed to me, they would not want to fail in achieving their goals as a preventive measure, they would rather take a more proactive approach by having someone who had expertise in their chosen areas, share with them tips that would guide them through their pursuit.

Confirming these two needs amongst the youths in northeastern Nigeria, in the studies conducted by Mercy Corps (April, 2016), it was discovered that those who resisted joining Boko Haram had the "social, familial and community support" that negated whatever the group had to offer. On the aspect of poverty and lack in the region, yet another study by Mercy Corps conducted to showcase how inequality drives recruitment and how Boko Haram used financial support to lure its supporters into its fold, reported, by providing steady and accessible source of financial support to community members, the terrorist group has been able to progressively maintain its recruitment, “achieve tactical aims through local business connections, and broaden popular support” (September 2016).

### **Project Design**

The northern Nigerian CVE project was a development assistance-type project, sponsored by the United States government as aid to the government of Nigeria in the fight against radicalization and terrorism. The project objective was to identify at-risk youths in northern Nigeria for training in leadership and community engagement. The curriculum covered topics in collaboration, tolerance, democracy, conflict management, and peace. The project was

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mostly designed by World Learning with limited contribution from LYNX (a community-based partner employed by WL as a subcontractor). The youths that were identified for the project as beneficiaries were a mix of youths who had dropped out and those who had graduated from high school, but were all not meaningfully engaged.

Considering the project design, participants were clear on the one aspect of economic empowerment as a project component they would have opted for, if they were given the choice. They felt this would have benefitted them the most given that poverty was the most pressing need they were faced with. In view of this, my query was, in what ways would they say the project activities addressed or did not address their social and economic needs or what would they have preferred as a project to address their needs? The five discussants in my first focus group, who responded to this inquiry began their responses, stating the same position but in different verbiages. Three of them responded with the same expression, “I would ask for financial assistance” and the other two responded with “I will go for the finance.” To eliminate the possibility of herd mentality and to ensure this viewpoint represented their individual opinion, I followed each of them with a question that asked, if they had alternatives to financial assistance. They all said they had no alternatives to this need for financial assistance. When asked what, they would do with financial assistance, if they had some, the theme from their responses was “business”. They all said they wanted to have steady source of income by setting up a business. Their reason being, they would be able to meet their needs and pursue their careers without having to bother anyone for financial support. They also thought financial promises could not be guaranteed due to eventualities.

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Regarding other participants in the second focus group and in the interviews, while they think the project succeeded in achieving its objectives of educating the youth about leadership, tolerance, and civic engagement, they expressed concern for the lack of sustainability plan to ensure that these outcomes were maintained. They thought this was a major setback in the design of the project. In their view, there was no way the youths were going to be able to succeed all by themselves without a plan of support for them. To them, this omission was an indication that these gains were going to be lost in a matter of time. On what they thought might have been a suitable sustainability plan for the youth, their responses also indicated provision of means of livelihood for them such as work or soft loans.

This finding corroborates the work of Mercy Corps (2016) about youth in northeastern Nigeria. The study gave an insight into why the youths in this area were vulnerable and how they can be supported to curb their radicalization. Part of their recommendations was for the various actors concerned, in addressing the needs in this area to increase financial services to youth with small businesses (p.20). This they submitted would be a critical part of a holistic approach to solving their problem, otherwise, any provision aside of this specific need area would be a mismatch and a futile effort.

### **Project Impact**

This theme revealed the outcomes of the project. I made a rather interesting discovery from the submissions of the participants concerning the impact of the project. In trying to determine the counterfactual of the intervention, that is to ascertain the outcomes looking at

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before and after data about the youths, I wanted a baseline information concerning the direct beneficiaries, since I had secured the after-project information from my interviews and focus groups. My intention was to understand what their needs and goals were prior to being beneficiaries of the project. Interestingly, I discovered that opinions were markedly different between what the direct beneficiaries expressed to me about themselves, and what other research participants thought of them. While the direct beneficiaries expressed what their career goals were prior to being beneficiaries of the project, other research participants thought they did not have any of such goals. In fact, one respondent described them as being ignorant of their surroundings. Their reason was that they had conducted a baseline study at the inception of the program.

My question to the beneficiaries was “what were your career goals before joining the project?” All seven participants answered by stating their specific career goals and aspirations they had before their experience in the project. They all wanted to be professionals in the fields of medicine, engineering, catering, broadcasting, aerospace and sports. However, the views of other research participants (teachers and administrators) about the youths were quite different. On what the direct beneficiaries had expressed to them as their goals during the baseline study, their responses indicated that the beneficiaries did not have any goals. Some examples of the responses I got in their words were “they were not aware of their environment” and “they had no high aspirations.”

On project outcomes, there was a convergence of opinions. All the participants agreed that there were noticeable positive changes in the general attitude of the youth. In responding to

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my inquiries on what they learned from the club activities and how these experiences had impacted their career goals, their responses reflected learnings in the areas of respect for others, cooperation, tolerance, teamwork, problem-solving, and community building through service and outreach. In the words of one of the respondents, "I learned to take and check the problem around me and know how to solve it and to become a community builder that others can achieve." Concerning their career aspirations, all but one respondent told me they had changed their career goals because of their experience in the community clubs. Talking about her learning and career change, one of the respondents said, "before I wanted to be a nurse now, I guess I have changed my plan, the club helped me to change my career." They all thought this change was possible because of the style of the curriculum, which they thought was student-centered, inclusive, promoted creativity, teachers-student interaction and discouraged negative criticisms and punishments. According to them, this was an inverse experience to their teaching and learning backgrounds.

The views of other participants also reflected positive results from the project. When they were asked to appraise the project in terms of its impacts on the youth, their responses stated there were observed positive behavioral and ideological changes in the youth. Examples of some of these responses were "they view life differently", "they are now motivated to pursue their goals", and "they have developed self-esteem." When I inquired about the ways the youth had demonstrated a change in their world views as observed, I had a plethora of examples, one of which was about one of the female club members. As recounted by one of my discussants, this said club member had made up her mind to be married to a man that had other wives. Every plan

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concerning rites and ceremonies had been concluded for the wedding occasion, but she was to change her mind after spending time in the club. She opened up to one of the club facilitators about everything. When she was asked why she had changed her mind, her response was, she wanted to go back to school, so she could be like the facilitator, who was also a Muslim woman. She eventually canceled the marriage after she had convinced her family members she wanted to go back to school.

### **Discussion**

To reiterate, my motivation for this research question came up during my various interactions with the youth as a coordinator of the project and participant observer. During these interactions, they wanted to know what the post-project plan was for them. I was asked this question multiple times, and each time, I had no positive response to give. For me, this only spoke volumes of how much they did not know about the project that was supposed to be their project. Consequently, I began my questioning.

The findings in this study were relevant in answering my research questions. The main one was to determine the extent of inclusiveness in the design of the project vis-à-vis project outcomes. This was done employing the framework of Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) in my analysis, which has been defined under my literature review.

A confluence of published work including contextual ones dealing specifically with the Nigerian situation were consulted for relationship between project outcomes and community participation in the design of project activities and implementation. One of such was the work of Nwagu (2009). In a hypothetical, but similar study to the northern Nigerian project, he

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demonstrated how the information needs of youth within the same socio-cultural identity varied from one age group to another, (p.138). In the study, he discovered that for youth who were 12 years and under, their information preference or need was in education, health(HIV/AIDS) and income. In the case of those who were 13 years and older, they were more interested in information concerning income/employment. And, for those who were between 20 and 30 years old, they were more interested in information about computer technology. He, therefore, concluded that collaboration was imperative between the outsiders (civil societies, governments, project managers and what have you) and the local people when designing community project. As part of his recommendation, he thought it was necessary for the Nigerian government, policy makers, and project planners to provide appropriate fora to engage with the youth on matters concerning their needs, before embarking on any development project intended to empower them. He warned, failure to do this might mean the design and implementation of projects that are mismatched with the true needs of the youths, thus failing to bring about the needed development and change (P.138).

Applying this principle, the apparent mismatch between the outcomes and the needs of the youth as revealed in the findings of this study, might have been avoided, if Nwagu's recommendation of engaging youth, prior to designing a project with the aim of empowering them, had been adopted in lieu of the top-down approach used in the design of the Nigerian Project. That is, where project activities were designed and implemented without the participation of the beneficiaries. Confirming Nwagu's position, in the focus group discussions and interview sessions, participants submitted that economic empowerment was the major

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setback among youths in northern Nigeria. They expressed that it was important for any development assistance aimed at empowering them be designed to address this economic issue. Given this understanding, the Nigerian project needed to have been designed in collaboration with the youth. By so doing, their needs would have been known and analyzed with them, and appropriate activities could have been formulated to address them. It is hard to think that these approaches would have yielded anything but positive and more impactful outcomes.

Nwagu is not alone in this advocacy for the bottom-up approach in project management, it has also been demonstrated in other parts of the world to be a success tool in project management and community development as afore-mentioned.

#### **What was the extent of participation in the design of the project vis-à-vis its outcomes?**

My findings showed a negative correlation between the actual need of the youths and project outcomes. Actual here, means what the youth expressed as their most pressing need as paired against other needs they had. While the youths wanted financial assistance, the project provided trainings leadership and community engagement. The failure of project officers to liaise with the youths in the design of the project cannot be separated from the cause of this mismatch.

#### **Conclusion**

The importance of localism in project development and management cannot be overemphasized (Ojo, 2014). The result of this study is yet another proof of its effectiveness. As the findings revealed, there was a gap between the actual needs of the youth and project deliverables. while the youths are pressed with economic issues of jobs and financial

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empowerment, the project's activities concentrated on issues of leadership and civic responsibilities, which were secondary needs as they were. Granted, these project objectives generated positive outcomes for the beneficiaries, however in the face of their economic hardship, in their own words, they would have preferred "financial assistance."

These people are faced with dire situations of joblessness and abject poverty, which have made them vulnerable to the problems of recruitment, radicalization, and terrorism. Keeping with the goal of the project, this need was the very issue the intervention was supposed to address, which did not get addressed. Consequently, not only did the project not meet the need of the youths, it also failed to accomplish one of the set objectives of a Countering Violent Extremism Program (CVE) as stated on the website of DOS under its programs and initiatives. It reads, "to address the spread of violent extremism and the conditions that make communities susceptible to violent extremism."

This mismatch and failure did not have to occur had the project been more participatory and inclusive of the youths. This approach could have made it possible to hear the narratives and experiences of the people affected (the youth). The scenario would have been that the needs are known, analyzed and an appropriate intervention could have been designed to counter these problems, thus preventing misalignment of project activities and failure.

In recounting his experience and disappointment over past project failures, one of my respondents said, "a lot of programs have been formulated over the years" in trying to address the challenges these youth face but to no avail. He feels the wrong programs and target groups have

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always been the issues responsible for the record of failure. Considering the results of this study, he is not incorrect in his assumption that these failures have been due to using the wrong project activities in the wrong context, which goes back to lack of using a people-centered approach in program management. Also, given this repeated failures, some of my informants were of the opinion that the overtime effect of these repeated disappointments will be distrust for subsequent project officers by community members.

It is as a matter of pertinence for program officers and policy makers to engage their target audience in the planning and implementation of programs as various studies and reports have shown. If the paradigm of top-down approach does not shift to a bottom-up approach, the status quo of program mismatch and failure will persist.

#### **Recommendation for further study**

Since there was doubt expressed by some research participants concerning the longevity of recorded outcomes, my recommendation for further study will be a longitudinal study of the long-term impact of this project. The purpose of such a study will be to track the developments of these youths relative to their behavior and worldview over time. As the study showed, the project achieved the outcomes it was set out to achieve, even though they were not primary. These outcomes were observed positive changes in the behavior and worldview of the youths. Some suggestions on the aspects to direct the study would be occupations of the youth, their community involvement, experiences and learning, worldview and behavioral evolvement/the lack thereof.

### **Practical Applicability**

The result of this work underscores the importance of bottom-up approach in community development. The work will act as guide to prospective project officers, civil societies, and policy makers, who care to know the prevailing needs in northern Nigeria as they pattern to recruitment, radicalization, and terrorism. It will educate them yet again on the approach of bottom-up in project development. To the organizations and project officers involved in the design and implementation of this project, it reiterates to them the need for localism in designing and implementing capacity development project. It is not always what they think their target community needs, but it is all about finding out what the people living the experience needs.

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### **Timelines**

July 15th: I conducted my first focus group discussions with club members.

July 16th: I conducted two semi-structured interviews with local administrators of the project. One from a partner organization, LYNX and the second was with the coordinator of the project in Jos hired by World Learning.

July 17th: I conducted the second focus group with the teachers.

July 18th-August 2th: I worked on transcribing of focus group and interviews and identified emerging themes.

August 3rd-30th: I began the process of data analysis and writing of this part of the capstone. The reason was for me to have fresh memory of every detail. Also, at this stage, I reviewed my references for any additional or not so relevant materials.

September 1st-Oct 28th: I started and completed my first draft and made some adjustments and corrections from cohort

October 29th: Submitted draft to advisor for feedback.

### **Informed Consent**

The Northern Nigerian Countering Violent Extremism Project- A measure of Participation vis-à-vis Outcomes

Onomen Odafen

School for International Training: Capstone.

Instructions: Please read the statements below carefully as signing indicates your agreement with them, and your voluntary participation in the study. Please, put a check on the methodology you are participating in (shown at the bottom of the page). Signing below while omitting to check a methodology will be interpreted in the affirmative. Please, address any questions with the researcher.

I am aware that this study is being conducted with the goal of analyzing responses on the measure of beneficiary's participation in the northern Nigeria CVE project.

I am aware that the information I provide in this interview is for research purposes only. I understand that my responses will be audio recorded, will be kept confidential, and that my name will not be associated with any results of this study.

I am aware that I have the right to full anonymity, that the researchers will omit all identifying information from both notes and drafts, and that they will destroy recordings and other identifying information when the study is complete.

I am aware that I have the right to refuse to answer any question and to terminate my participation at any time, and that the researcher will answer any questions I have about the study.

I am aware of and take full responsibility for any risk, physical, psychological, legal, or social, associated with participating in this study.

I am aware that I will not receive monetary compensation for participating in this study, but a copy of the finished work will be made available to me upon request.

With the above understanding I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

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Interview:

Focus Group:

Survey:

Date:

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Participant's Signature:

---

Participant's Printed Name:

---

Researcher's Signature:

---

Thank you for participating!

Questions, comments, complaints, and requests for the final written study can be directed to:

Onomen.odafen@mail.sit.edu

## Appendices

### Appendix 1-in-depth Interview (project administrators)

1. What would you say are the socioeconomic needs in this region?
2. What are the causative factors of these problems?
3. In your opinion, how have these affected the youths of this region?
4. How do they keep themselves engaged and focused in the face of the prevailing problems?
5. In what ways, would you say the club is responding to these needs?
6. Otherwise, what would you suggest as an appropriate project?

### Appendix 2- Focus group (club members)

1. What are your career goals?
2. What have you learnt so far in the club?
3. What would you say you are not learning in the club?
4. How is your learning meeting or not your career goals?
5. Otherwise, what would you prefer in place of a club?

### Appendix 3-Focus groups (Teachers)

1. What are your club experiences so far?
2. What aspects of the program, would you say are the greatest motivations for the club members?
3. In what ways, have they demonstrated enthusiasm for club activities?
4. What are some of the career goals club members have shared with you?
5. What are the challenges you face trying to mentor them?
6. What do you say is/are the relationship between the aspirations of the club members and club activities?

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7. What would you say is the best capacity building project for club members if not the club?