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NIGERIA STABILITY
AND RECONCILIATION
PROGRAMME

HOW-TO GUIDE
Mitigating Dangerous Speech

Monitoring and Countering Dangerous Speech to Reduce Violence

What Constitutes Dangerous Speech?

Dangerous speech is a catalyst to violence or the amplification thereof whereas hate speech is generally offensive communication that does not necessarily incite violence.

Amplifiers of dangerous speech:

- Powerful, charismatic or popular speakers with direct or indirect power, influence or authority over their audience.
- An audience vulnerable to incitement and with the means or capacity to commit violence against a targeted group.
- Speech containing hallmarks such as: describing another group as invaders; suggesting others will pollute the audience group; dehumanising target groups by comparing them to undesirable species such as insects; asserting a target group poses an existential threat to an audience group.
- Conducive social and historical contexts such as underlying conflicts, recent outbreaks of violence or other risk factors for mass violence.
- Influential means of dissemination such as music, social media or radio where the audience has no access to alternate sources of information.
- Frequent repetition of speech.

Where Can Dangerous Speech Occur?

Online spaces such as social media platforms, private and public messaging forums and blogs, as well as more established platforms such as print and broadcast media, provide platforms for dangerous speech to occur, be shared and amplified. This content can create a vicious cycle as audiences convene around it and by acting as an alternative source of information that neutralises positive information.

Historical Perspective

In Rwanda in 1994, broadcasts of genocidal instructions by Radio Télévision Libre des Mille Collines increased civilian violence by 65 percent and organised violence by 77 percent in communities with complete radio coverage. Nine percent of all deaths, of a total of 45,000 Tutsi people, are attributed to violent acts incited by the station.

Nigerian Context

Nigeria is a multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-cultural country that has experienced an escalation of tensions across all demographic divisions. This history of Nigeria and its political landscape makes the country prone to sharp divides that influence political and social affiliations. Most hate and dangerous speech is centred on ethno-religious identities. There have been few attempts to abate this tendency and tensions between groups have intensified.

Politicians often leverage identity-based support to mobilise voting and to incite violence. This promotes hate speech, targeted at specific communities, in the form of statements and comments made by public officials and politicians, in public spaces, in traditional media and in online forums. This tendency is particularly marked around elections as political competition becomes fierce. Elections have often triggered mass violence before, during and after election day, fuelled by: dangerous speech; perceptions as to electoral malpractice; and weak institutionalisation of democratic architecture including political parties, election management bodies, law enforcement agencies and the judiciary. Violence against women and girls is high and this is exacerbated by cultural and structural norms that normalise and create a culture of silence around gender-based violence, and establish barriers for effective prevention and responses. Women's meaningful involvement in strategies to counter hate speech and promote the peaceful resolution of conflict is rare.

Print and broadcast media have clear codes of conduct regarding content that incites violence, but these regulations do not specifically mention dangerous or hate speech. This void in regulation leads to dangerous speech being published in print and media, with fewer means of controlling such speech on social media. Inadequacy of regulation in the information era, overbearing political influence and inadequate sanctions have been adduced for these failures. Mobile technologies have also played a significant role in increasing hate and dangerous speech.

Statistical evidence:
- Over 70 percent of people involved in dangerous speech in social media spaces use their own identity thus they can be reached with counter messages and appeals.
- 76 percent of dangerous speech messages are transmitted through Facebook, either as a post on a private page or in a group, a post on a public page or group or as a response to a post or forum. The remainder of messages are transmitted through online articles or on Twitter.
- English is the major language used for dissemination with secondary visible content in Hausa.
- Men make up the overwhelming majority of those who take part in dangerous speech; over 65 percent of speakers have been identified as men whilst 10 percent have been identified as women and 30 percent are not identifiable by a gender.
- Seven percent of messages specifically call for discrimination against women and girls.
- The most prevalent messages call for discrimination (at 45 percent), call for war (at 38 percent) and advocate for the killing of others (at 10 percent).
- Hate and dangerous speech online tends to be actively recirculated by audiences with over 75 percent of messages receiving moderate to significant responses and observation.
- A significant percentage of posts use coded language that had been previously employed and has direct inferences such as violence.

Monitoring and Countering Dangerous Speech

Dangerous speech is usually based on differences along ethnic, political, regional and religious grounds. The actions of a broad coalition of partners are key to monitoring and countering dangerous speech online and limiting its impact on offline conflict dynamics. Given ethnic and religious diversity of a country such as Nigeria, dangerous speech has been a significant driver of violence in the past and is likely to continue to be in the future. It is important to find effective strategies for mitigating this both during volatile and stable times.

Clearly exhibit the consequences of engaging in dangerous speech:

Dangerous speech online is often the result of more casual hate speech escalating. In many cases people respond to hate speech with dangerous speech. If the ultimate response leads to violence, then both parties should feel accountable. Warn high-profile individuals and their advisors of the violent consequences of dangerous speech and ask the media to

> ### In Action:
> A pre-election report and advisory on violence in Nigeria's 2015 general elections was released stating that it would refer perpetrators of dangerous speech to the International Criminal Court. In February 2016, a special investigation panel was established to investigate all alleged cases of hate and dangerous speech and election-related violence in 2015 and make recommendations for holding the appropriate people responsible.

be both critical and watchful of such speech. Media should feel morally obliged not to print or broadcast speeches that are hateful or dangerous. Prosecute those found to have engaged in dangerous speech; act on investigative reporting to prosecute those who engaged in dangerous speech surrounding specific occurrences of violence in order to create meaningful deterrents for such future actions.

Monitor incidences and trends of dangerous speech:

The general public should be encouraged to report incidents of dangerous speech via email or other accessible channels such as Whatsapp Messenger. A framework should be established that allows one to easily identify whether a statement constitutes dangerous speech. One should continuously refine methodology, expand coverage and aim to automate the process.

Create an accessible platform to share analysis: Individuals and agencies must be able to share information at regular intervals and to discuss what actions are needed to counter and mitigate dangerous speech in the short, medium and long terms. Appointed monitors should engage in regular discussions to ensure that the framework remains current and effective. Significant topics of discussion include the appropriateness and adequacy of media regulations as well as means of ensuring media organisations that publish and allow dangerous speech are sanctioned adequately. Workshops, including civil society organisations, media regulators, security agencies, and governmental agencies, will augment these efforts. Efforts should be made to include women and other typically underrepresented groups in these workshops, particularly given the often disproportionate extent to which conflict, including hate speech-driven conflict, impacts on such groups.

Reach out to dangerous speakers:

There is low awareness and understanding of hate and dangerous speech amongst both media workers and members of the public. This has led to the unconscious publication of hate and dangerous speech. In these cases, it is relatively easy for monitors to reach out to speakers and persuade them to stop using dangerous speech on social media.

Influence those who engage in dangerous speech: Direct contact utilising a constructive and friendly tone has proved an effective means of influence. For example, outreach via Facebook or Twitter accounts explaining the danger of specific statements with requests to embrace more peaceful alternatives for expressing political opinions. Those engaging in the dangerous speech may initially express hostility, but usually eventually calm down and engage in meaningful discussion. Creating a network of online peace ambassadors, ideally those in leadership roles and with influence over a particular audience, is an effective approach to outreach. These ambassadors should give strong signals of disapproval of dangerous speech and violence. Strategies for influencing those who engage in hate speech should also recognise the importance and potential of informal communication networks, including within individual homes, families and communities. Within such networks, women have traditionally played a critical role as informal peacemakers and are often well-placed to identify early warning signs of increasing hate and dangerous speech.

"Address violence at the root of its development."

Counter high-profile dangerous speech through mass condemnation and media engagement:

Civil society organisations, media houses and influential leaders or companies have the capacity to pressure influential dangerous speakers to withdraw utterances. They should create meaningful awareness surrounding an issue through direct condemnation and calls for statement withdrawals. They can respond to dangerous speech made by high-profile public figures by organising press conferences, calling on partners and other civil society organisations to do the same, and asking media houses to form a critical mass around the issue to compel the individual concerned to denounce or reverse their comments before the public.

Change the nature of political discussions:

A large number of dangerous speech messages are in reaction to criticisms of specific people. Whilst criticism itself does not necessarily constitute dangerous speech, the reaction to the criticism can fall under this category. This trend illustrates a fundamental intolerance to criticism. Therefore, tackling or combating dangerous speech online has to include a focus on shifting the nature of political debate so people are not provoked into making dangerous statements as response to criticism of their candidate or party.

Create responsible forums for public discussion: Feelings of disconnection from public debate can be a contributing factor to engagement in hate and dangerous speech messages. Many people vent their anger on social media as a response to their inability to reply or respond by other means. Print and broadcast media need to develop means of reflecting and engaging a broad and inclusive cross-section of society and their views in their coverage whilst guarding against the publishing or broadcasting dangerous speech.

Pressure politicians to disassociate from dangerous speakers: Politicians are not the major dangerous speakers, due in part in Nigeria to threats to refer politicians that incite violence to the International Criminal Court and the signing of the peace accord. However, even if politicians do not directly engage in dangerous speech, they often act through proxies; their supporters commit the dangerous speech and they do not disassociate themselves from their actions.

Pressure radio presenters to condemn dangerous speech: A number of media political programmes have fan pages created by listeners as opposed to the radio stations. These fan pages generate large volumes of dangerous speech. Presenters and radio stations of the programmes concerned often enable this behaviour.

"Do not allow dangerous speech to destigmatise heinous acts of violence."

Link online and offline interventions:

Interventions need to simultaneously focus on the online, the offline and links between the two. Although dangerous and hate speech is frequently disseminated on social media, online messages are often responses or comments to what is being said or published in print or broadcast media. As a result, even though very few influential figures engage directly in propagating hate or dangerous speech online, their comments offline serve to generate messages of dangerous and hate speech by members of the public on social media. Evaluate public arenas and geographical areas where dangerous speech is likely to be produced and disseminated and identify high-risk online dangerous speech. Integrate analyses of online trends to create early warning systems; ensure early responses by government and security agencies and civil society actors. Address these risks through offline responses such as increasing public sensitisation.

Train influential bloggers and users of social media: Facilitate workshops with the aim of increasing the knowledge of bloggers on ethical principles, conflict sensitive communication and hate and dangerous speech. This knowledge should guide their future reporting and commentary. A key target outcome should be a commitment by participants to join the campaign against hate and dangerous speeches by utilising unified marketing collateral, such as a campaign banner, on their blogs or other forums. They should also adopt conflict sensitivity principles that enable the minimisation of negative consequences and maximisation of positive impact.

Engage media regulatory agencies: Host well-structured meetings and workshops with press councils, broadcasting commissions, advertising practitioners and public relations practitioners. Regularly review and update media regulatory laws and processes and ensure effective compliance and enforcement. Strengthen and enforce regulations to prevent individuals and organisations, including political bodies, through communications guidelines and restrictions. Traditional media owners are motivated by profit by and a weak regulatory framework enables these owners to perpetuate hate and dangerous speech. In turn, this carries on to online spaces.

Promote specific peace efforts:

Peace efforts can influence the decline of dangerous speech. Existing peacebuilding networks should be used to counter hate speech and promote the peaceful resolution of personal and community-level grievances, as well as broader grievances from state to federal level. Recognising women's traditional role as informal conflict mediators, stakeholders working on the National Action Plan for the UN Security Council resolution 1325 could be engaged at the federal, state and local level to act as champions against hate speech, and encourage women and girls to do the same within their own communities.

> **In Action:**
> A significant decline in dangerous speech in Nigeria has followed the signing of a peace accord by presidential candidates and the development of peace campaigns by various actors.

Increase audience resistance to dangerous speech: Disseminate positive messages through campaigns against hate and dangerous speech. This may include peace platforms on Facebook and Twitter and the use of SMS bulk messaging. The use of social media hashtags, such as #nohatespeech, allow conversations to be tracked. Interactive radio programmes focusing on key peace-oriented messages can act as meaningful compliments.

"Beyond eliminating dangerous speech, one must promote peace and inclusion-oriented speech; let us realise the power of positive messaging."