Unmasking Radicalization in Learning Institutions in Kenya: Challenges and Prospects

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Abstract: *The Bill of Rights and the Constitution of Kenya(2010) both recognize safety and peace as an indispensable social human right that is crucial for the preservation of dignity and facilitation of the development agenda in Kenya. In recent times however, peace has been elusive in learning institutions in Kenya because they have been infiltrated by a more sophisticated and clandestine form of extremism and violence called radicalization. This near mysterious movement which has led to recruitment of members both young and old, all the way from primary schools to tertiary institutions has raised hue and cry among education stakeholders and the general public with calls to relevant authorities to urgently institute counter measures to stop the menace. This is because in the absence of peace and safety, people cannot engage in productive activities that are the bedrock of a country's development. It is on this premise that this paper sets out to survey the essence of radicalization in learning institutions in Kenya in a bid to unravel the challenges as well as prospects towards eradication of this retrogressive engagement. Eradication of radicalization would enable people in learning institutions to engage in various meaningful activities that would in turn accelerate national development.*

Key Words: *Radicalization, Challenges, Prospects, Learning Institutions, Clandestine, Kenya.*

1. INTRODUCTION:

Radicalization is one of the latest and most challenging developments in human history that world governments are yet to come to grips with. This human engendered process has arguably become the wellspring of sporadic violent extremism and terrorist attacks that have in recent times rocked Western democracies, emerging states in the Middle East and many countries of Africa. Besides print and electronic media reports about terrorist actions across the globe, scholarly works are equally replete with narratives of terror related atrocities that have been visited upon target spots culminating in massive deaths of civilians, trauma and devastation of property of magnitudes never witnessed before. Kegley (1990) observes that international terrorist incidents have been on the increase since 1960's to date. This alarming scenario presents the need for more protracted empirical studies on contemporary terrorism, perhaps in a bid to mitigate and possibly eradicate it from the face of the earth. Burgess (2005) proceeds to narrate incidences of relatively newer terrorist attacks such as the 9/11 attacks in New-York, United States of America (US or USA); attacks on the British Consulate in Istanbul in November 2003; murder of US Aid diplomat in Jordan in October 2002; kidnapping of US journalist in February 2002, kidnapping of 300 school girls from Chibok area,Nigeria in April 2014; massacre of more than 300 school children in north Ossetian town of Belsam, Russia in 2004 among many others. Acts of terror occur in many forms but the most rampant accounts by various authors include; bombings and shootings by Kegley (1990); barricades, hostage takings, armed assaults, and hijackings by Jenkins (1990); assassinations, kidnappings and abductions (Gopep et al, 2018; Onuoha, 2014; Burgess, 2005). Of these terrorist tactics, bombings account for about half of all international terrorist incidents (Jenkins, 1990).Given the frequency of occurrences of terrorist incidents all over the world as indicated above, it becomes obvious that terrorism is real and is a threat to world peace. Figure1 illustrates frequency of terrorist incidents in the world between 1960 and 1988.
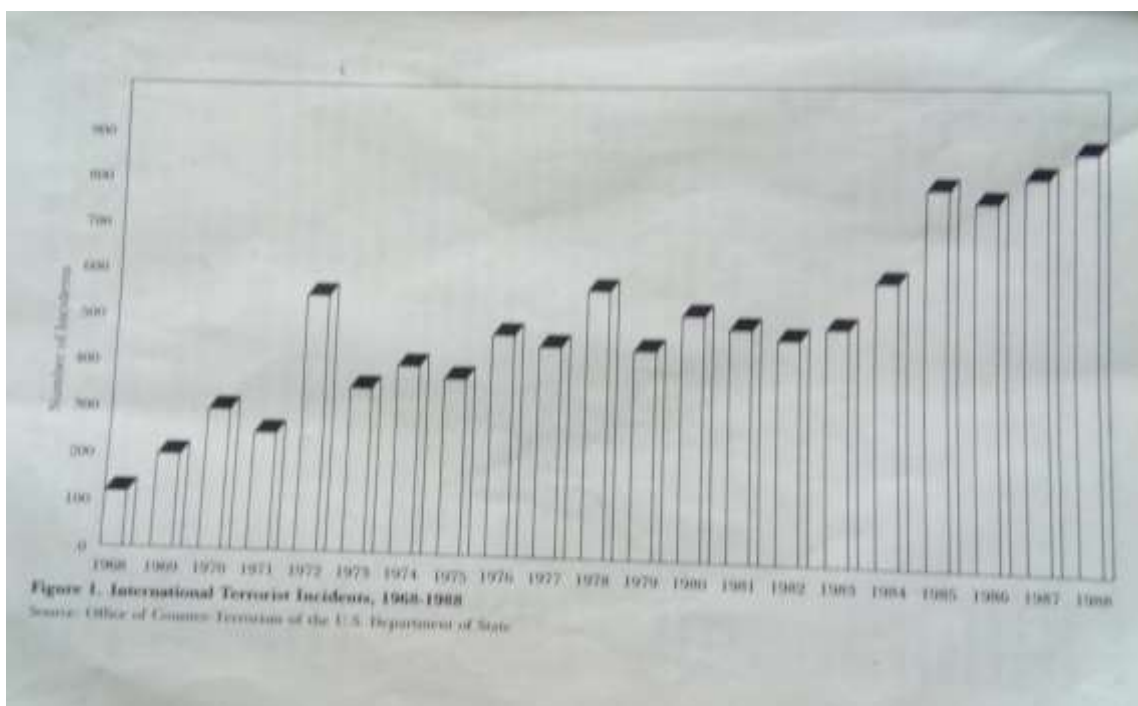
Figure 1.International Terrorist Incidents between 1968 and 1988
Source: Office of Counter Terrorism of the U. S. Department of State cited in Kegley (1990) p.15

A study of Figure 1 shows that terrorist activities have steadily been on the increase globally between 1968 and 1988 with some marked upsurge in 1972, 1978, followed by steady rise from 1985 upto 1988. The steady increase in terrorist activities as shown in Figure 1 creates a worrying trend to national governments and entire international community. It is alarming how terrorist activities in the contemporary society have acquired a high level of sophistication in the organization and execution of atrocities across continents. It has been revealed that forces behind these executions are thousands of youthful populations who are first and foremost initiated gradually into terror groups through recruitment and radicalization (Hellsten, 2016; Omwega et al,2016;). In response to the seemingly ever growing tide of international terrorism, national governments in conjunction with private entities have allocated enormous resources to thwart terrorists and their hellish missions across the world. However, there seems to be an impediment in the way of eradicating terrorism. According to Omwega et al (2016) and Bizina and Gray (2014), these efforts have not yielded much because governments have not adequately conceptualized origins of extremism and terrorist actions. This therefore means that efforts put in place against terrorism while commendable, are in effect, superficial and may not effectively tackle the root causes of this vice. These sentiments perhaps point to the need for a paradigm shift that would inform the kind of policy decisions and strategies to be adopted by national governments and international community in a bid to restore peace and security among citizens of the world. To develop and enforce effective policies, there is need for a collaborative approach comprising various sectors of development in order to stem terrorism according to Wikipedia (2015); Bizina and Gray (2014). Education is one of the sectors whose role in the war against terrorism and radicalization cannot be underestimated. This is because besides the youth being the prime target for radicalization, education as an entity has the capacity to enlighten its huge population against engagement with forces of evil and destruction that have so far encroached schools and colleges disrupting safety and peace that these same institutions need to guarantee. Today, narratives abound to the fact that learning institutions of the world are no longer safe havens that they ought to be. As a matter of fact, there has been intense recruitment and radicalization of learners in schools and colleges and especially so in Kenya (Gopep et al,2018; Omwega et al, 2016; Mohammed,2015; Abdi,2015;Mukinda,2015; Mohammed,2015). On joining their newfound movement these young people –turned recruits become jihadists with declared commitment to advance selfish and hostile ideologies bent on unleashing terror upon their 'enemies'. Many boys and girls end up joining these outlawed militia and terrorist groups that operate in various parts of the world. Some of these groups include Boko Haram, al-Qaeda, al-shabaab, Al-Hijra, ISIS and Taliban to mention a few. While it may seem ridiculous that the primary goal of these groups is to establish Islamic states and ultimately a single Islamic Caliphate in the world, it is however this obsession that has become the epicenter of radicalization. It therefore means that until the ideologies underlying this obsession are properly conceived and adequately addressed at local and international levels, radicalization seems set to gain momentum as it continues to threaten world peace. This paper therefore sets out to unravel what entails radicalization with focus on its concept, drivers, challenges and prospects within the context of learning institutions in Kenya.

2. CONCEPTUALIZATION OF RADICALIZATION:

Radicalization is one concept whose definition cannot be narrowed down to a single perspective. This is because the term is not only complex in nature but has inherent dynamism, is multifaceted and influenced by elements of context and timeframe (Center for Study of Democracy, 2016). These inbuilt characteristics pose a great challenge in finding a unifying definition of the term. However, there are various interpretations of radicalization that are considered in this paper while attending to the diverse overtones that each seems to advance resulting in finding their proper orientation. Wikipedia (2015) views radicalization a process in which an individual or even group acclaims extreme social, political or religious ideals and aspirations that undermine contemporary ideas or the status quo. Council of Europe (2015) stance is that the term refers to a quest for religious identity and willingness to perform certain collective causes on the behalf of a bigger group or community probably which may be encountering certain injustices abroad. This conception is more inclined to religion a view that may suggest that the radicalized may aim more at achieving religious cause over and above other underpinning factors that are psychological, socio- economic and political in orientation. The foregoing therefore presents a narrow conception of radicalization with religion as the prime mover hence the term religious radicalization is most appropriate. EIP Explainer (n.d.) submits that radicalization is a multi-stage process that capitalizes on the willingness of an individual or group to condone violence to achieve political goals. This definition tends to insinuate that the end justifies the means so that the mission of the radicalized is to disrupt and de-legitimize the status quo in the political arena by engaging in acts of violence. The Center for study of Democracy (2016) clarifies that when radicalization is premised on politically inclined grievances and disillusionment then it becomes right wing radicalization. Conversely, left wing radicalization is attributed to socio-economic grievances such as unemployment, unfair distribution of, and inaccessibility to resources. Onuoha (2014) submits that radicalization is a process through which an individual or group transits from passive reception and possession of revolutionary, extremist views, ideas and beliefs to active pursuit of these ideals by supporting, promoting or adopting violence to realize such intentions. A more encompassing conception is advanced by The Center for Study of Democracy (2016) which considers radicalization as a dynamic, multi-stage and multi-faceted human phenomenon that occurs when individual vulnerabilities interact or meet an encouraging environment. This definition seems to subsume earlier versions above as it is sensitive to all possibilities of contexts, levels, phases and transformations of radicalization, while remaining objective on the ultimate outcome of the process that is, whether it turns out as violet radicalization or otherwise. Drawing from the foregoing conceptions there seems to be a consensus that radicalization hinges on rejection of the status-quo and acceptable societal ideals; adoption and paying undue allegiance to extreme political, religious and/or social ideologies; and condoning violence as a means to realizing an ideological end.

It is also important to capture other facets of radicalization such as the violent and non violent shades. Violent radicalization emphasizes on active pursuit of violence by already recruited individuals or group as a means to achieve the stated goals (Center for Study of Democracy, 2015). Contrarily, non-violent radicalization thrives on the fact that recruited individuals or group vehemently hold radical views with regard to the status-quo but they do not directly condone violence or aid terrorist attacks to achieve their aims. Also it suffices to note that a radical person is such a one that harbors entrenched desire for fundamental socio-political changes in a manner that poses threat directly or indirectly to the existing order-that order can be exemplified by the local school authorities, local leaders, all the way to national and international legitimate structures. In sum the bottom-line is that radicalization thrives on the threshold of a radical ideology. This kind of ideology offers an extreme set of ideas that bombards an individual with a new look and inverted, misconceived and totally distorted explanation for events in the world in which they find themselves (Open Society, 2017). Other concepts which are captured in this paper and are closely related to radicalization hence ought to be appropriately conceived are terrorism and extremism.

According to Donnellan (2005) and Shultz (1990), terrorism is an act that is premeditated, with politically driven violence unleashed on non-combatant targets by sub-national groups or clandestine agents with an intention to sway or persuade an audience. The cornerstones of terrorism from this definition are outlined as follows; premeditated-this connotes prior planning of the act; political-the aim is to change the existing political arrangement; civilians are the target; sub-national groups not army of a country execute terror. The other terminology is extremism. Drawing from the understanding of Center for Study of Democracy (2016), extremism refers to active opposition towards fundamental universal values, democracy, rule of law, individual liberties, mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs. Extremism becomes violent the moment acts of violence are endorsed as means to achieve extreme ends. It is against the foregoing background that the causative factors of radicalization are examined.

3. YOUTH RADICALIZATION IN LEARNING INSTITUTIONS:

The youth component of the population in Kenya is under threat ranging from conflicts, crises and lately radicalization and recruitment into terror and militant movements. Prevalence of insecurity in many learning institutions has prompted enforcement of strict measures ranging from deployment of security personnel to man entry points, frequent spot-checks by school administration and installation of security devices to monitor events during school hours (Mukinda, 2015). As if in defiance of many security measures already in place in schools, a more threatening movement

in the name of radicalization seems to be fast infiltrating these institutions. Muliru (2014) submits that radicalization among school going children is not only a fact, but accounts for the disappearances, increased indiscipline and cases of arrests currently witnessed in many learning institutions in the republic. The point of departure however is that the unpleasant episodes in the foregoing may not be absolutely attributed to radicalization. Perhaps some of these misdeeds could be due to other external influencers or even innate character traits in learners. None the less, the task at hand is to unveil the causes of radicalization among youth because there is no single root cause but a combination of various factors, events and experiences so intertwined so that for ease of comprehension they are considered in clusters together with their ensuing exemplifications.

Factors that cause radicalization operate at three levels namely; micro, meso, and macro levels with key actors as an individual person, group and national/international community respectively. Factors that thrive at the personal level and group level have direct relevance to the topic and the scope of this paper compared to those that operate at the macro level. The micro level casts an individual with entrenched dispositions of anger, despair, feelings of injustice, humiliation, stigmatization, identity crisis, frustration etc emanating from experiences of rejection, unemployment, oppression or even failure. These feelings could emanate from self, family or from learner's immediate social environment (friends, school). Such individuals harbour deep-seated feelings of revenge apathy and defiance towards the established order, in this case school authorities. While desperate for a way to vent this anger, such youth become vulnerable to an alternative voice. On a wider or meso level, individual feelings and despair are expressed through a wider milieu with interests considered from perspective of group and not individual. Here, individuals identify with the group, sympathize, and become committed to aggressively defend its (group) cause. At this point the individual is not only willing but ready to bear the emblem of the group. Root causes of radicalization the at macro level are a bit complex and may involve government or mega organizations' operations concerning distribution of national resources, development projects or even certain policy decisions which may not be pleasant to a section of the population hence may deem them as 'discriminative' or ' biased'. In the ultimate, mobilization and radicalization of the discontented group may ensue, culminating in formation of terrorist organizations (Center for Study of Democracy, 2016). At this macro level, recruiters capitalize on any government weakness such as corruption or even ineptitude to 'explain' their (aggrieved group) need for revenge. The cluster of factors described in the foregoing are called endogenous or 'push' factors. The factors are lodged within environments inhabited by potential recruits and sometimes recruiters as well. Gradually feelings of hate, need for revenge and distaste towards the status quo gain ground when the 'desire' of the 'offended' group is not fulfilled. Consequently, they form terrorist groups to push their agenda. The second batch of factors is called exogenous or 'pull' factors. These factors are largely illusory and are used to trap many a youth. The factors reside in the outside world away from the potential recruit. They comprise terrorist ideas and narratives that legitimize violent extremism and terrorism which are packaged as rewards including hope for better life, employment, friendships and relations. Many youth have become prey to seduction, enticement, allurements, persuasion or even coercion and ended up recruited into terror groups. In many cases the 'pull' factors are not executed by strangers but by those who are in close proximity to the learners. They include teachers, family members, religious preachers, counselors and sponsors among others. In support of the foregoing, Gorsa (2018), submits that most of the radical sheikhs visit schools and mosques during weekends and lecture learners on radical ideologies under the pretext of teaching these unsuspecting youths solemn Islamic principles. While the common element among recruiters is that they are members or supporters of terror groups, it is unfortunate that they enjoy unrestricted access to learners (Omwega et al, 2016; Gorsa, 2018). The vulnerability of youth to religious radicalization is further reiterated by Onuoha (2014: 5) thus '…young people are very vulnerable to recruitment and radicalization by independent and roaming preachers, extremist groups and religious ideologues, who often distort religious injunctions'. Distortion of religious content to confound the potential recruit is due to their ignorance, illiteracy and naivety (Onuoha, 2014). Kigotho (2017) also emphasizes that low levels of education among the youth are used to advance militant and distorted interpretations of religion.

Besides friendlier ways of recruitment, there are cases where youth are coerced to join terror groups as submitted by Khalif (2018) that al-Shabaab indoctrinates children and forces them into terrorism. Another way of recruitment and radicalization that seems to be gaining ground in current times is social media (Pkalya, 2018). According to Ngunjiri (2018) Omwega et al (2016) and Wikipedia (2015), the internet has become the fastest channel in the world today to propagate terrorist ideologies with many options for individuals to be recruited and radicalized. Reports that more than 20 extremism sympathizer pages and groups are on facebook with combined following of more than 28,000 individuals are not only shocking but also worrying as this attests to the scope and depth of radicalization across the globe (Ngunjiri, 2018). Perhaps, it is opportune that scholars examine more deeply the role of social media in radicalization of youth. A study by Omwega(2016) in Uasin Gishu county titled 'Preventing Youth from Radicalization and Recruitment' reveals that radicalization is real in many learning institutions in areas such as Coast, Western and North-Eastern parts of the Kenya. Figure 2 seems to corroborate the foregoing as it shows clearly zones in the periphery (Coastal strip, North-Eastern and spots in Western part) of Kenya as prone to terrorist attacks hinged on religious ideologies or otherwise.
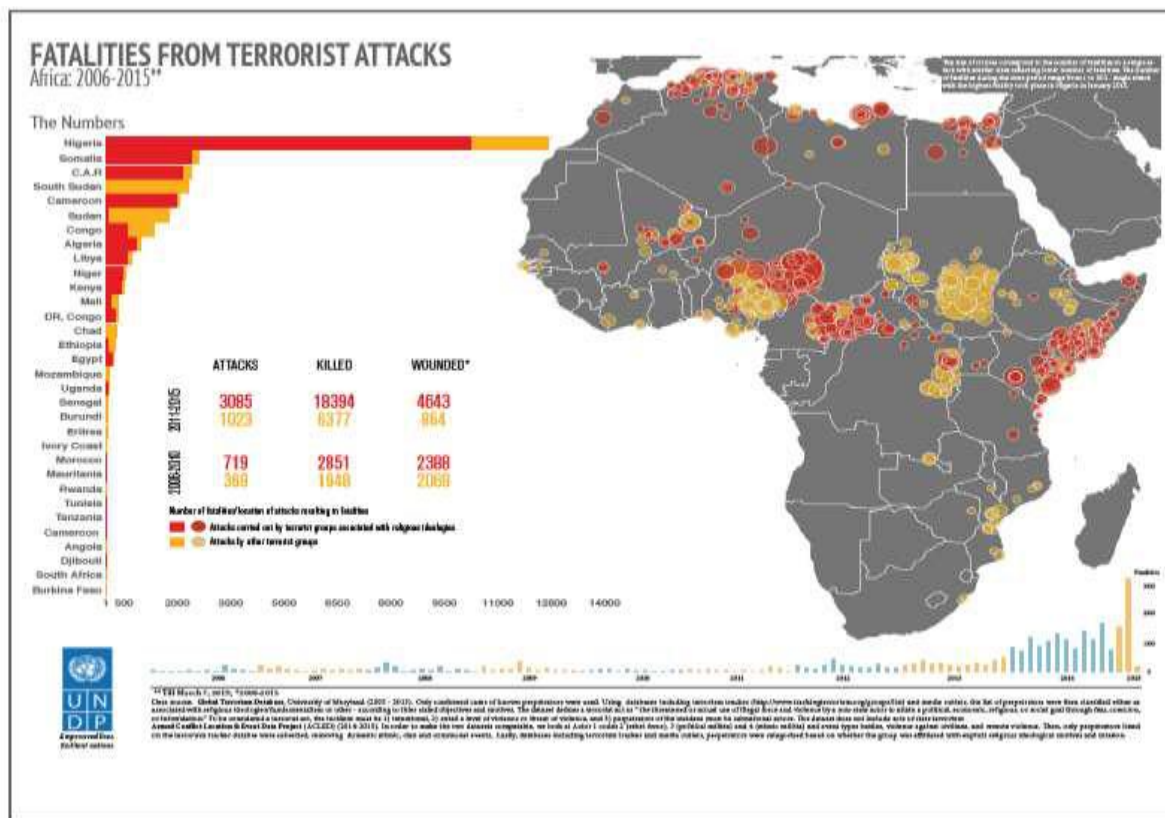
Figure 2: Fatalities From Terrorist Attacks, Africa 2006-2015
Source: UNDP-RBA. Available at *https://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/DemocraticGovernance/Local*

A study of Figure 2 reveals that areas along the coastal strip of Kenya and entire Horn of Africa are home to intense terrorist activities which through academic guess are likely to be inherent hence home-grown in nature. That is, these terrorist activities can be explained on the basis of the presence of a conducive environment ranging from prevalent insecurity due to community/clan clashes, fragile socio-economic base, to general inaccessibility to basic social amenities etc. Youth from such backgrounds may more often than not feel condemned unlike their counterparts elsewhere as to why they have to endure suffering and turmoil. Lacking in capacity to objectively address these seemingly desperate situations, many a youth may not wait to seize an attractive option guised as a pathway to a better life as is observed by Odenyo (2017), while Bizina and Gray (2014:74) assert that such dejected youth only need '… presence of charismatic person who can deliver persuasive speeches not only in mosques but also in schools and prisons'. Kigotho (2017) further submits that the journey towards extremism in sub-Saharan Africa starts from experiences related to living in highly peripheral and marginalized areas that mirror one's social exclusion and vulnerability in early in life. It apparent that when difficult social environments become unbearable, young people especially are left with no choice but to engage in illegitimate activities to make their dreams and aspirations a reality. Paradoxically, there is another set of youth whose vulnerability to radicalization is surprising as it is difficult to comprehend. This group as described by Mohammed (2017), Hellsten (2016), Omwega et al (2016) and Craig (2016,) belongs in the crème de la crème of society. They are affluent, privileged, multi-lingual and 'cool'. They attend university and pursue promising careers probably in engineering, aeronautics and technical sciences. Such students are prime targets and once in a terror group, they have potential to become bomb experts, advisers or even strategists if they are male while their female counterparts are deployed as couriers and suicide bombers but basically their key role is to bear children for the martyrs (Abdi, 2015). As a matter of fact, revelations are rife that Al-Sha-baab and ISIS have put university students on their payroll (Mohammed, 2015). This is kind of development not only points to the possibility of existence of peer radicalization among students, but that the presence of deep funding only helps to buttress recruitment further in learning institutions. While there seems to be a dichotomy between the two groups (poor and affluent) of recruits as described in the foregoing there is probably need for a discourse on the role of poverty or affluence in radicalization. None the less , the bottom-line is that learning institutions in Kenya have become hotbeds of radicalization churning out deadly terrorist leaders who eventually navigate their way to Somalia, Syria, Yemen, Iraq etc to join terrorist movements (Craig,2016; Mohammed,2015; Abdi,2015) that eventually unleash mayhem upon citizens of the world. When education is disrupted by forces such as radicalization as submitted above, not only are promising careers diminished or massive wastage of resources realized, but such a malady portends disaster for Kenya's education system and destruction of humanity. The next section considers challenges and prospects of radicalization.

4. CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS:

This paper focuses on challenges for countering radicalization within the purview of learning institutions. The challenges are basically embedded in the scope and nature of radicalization. It has been intimated in this paper that radicalization is a global phenomenon with networks stretching from Europe in the West to Pakistan in the East, and down south to sub-Saharan Africa. A study of Figure 2 reveals that terrorist attacks are widespread within marginalized locations of countries in Africa. In Figure 2, it can be observed that Kenya stands out as one such country whose coastal belt, North-Eastern mainland and certain spots in the western part do encounter terrorist activities. On the whole, Kegley (1990) argues that it is this international orientation of radicalization that impedes efforts to extirpate it from the surface of the earth. At the international level, there have been efforts to eradicate illiteracy, ignorance and poverty among others, but again contextualizing them to address local needs is another task for individual countries. In recent times, other global developments have emerged which may be lauded but in essence provide favorable conditions for terrorist recruitment and activity (Laquer, 1990). These developments include liberalization of education, adoption of e-learning, Open and Distance learning,(ODEL) child rights, internationalization of education, social media etc. Indeed, to administer surveillance on these developments would be an exercise in futility whether such efforts are tried at school level or otherwise.

Learning institutions in Kenya are infiltrated by radicalized people bent on fulfilling the mission of recruiting young people more so, those that are least suspected such as teachers, preachers, family members (Kigotho, 2017; Omwega et al, 2016; Abdi, 2015) While some of these personnel could be most suitable to reach out to youth with anti-radicalization message, sadly enough they have become its perpetrators. Indeed teachers are basically trained to execute their professional services in their areas of specialization. Little wonder therefore that, The Conversation (n.d.) contends that teachers are not best suited to engage in fighting radicalization because they do not have the capacity to recognize extremism. Perhaps teachers can play a role in creating awareness among youth of concepts such as tolerance, peace, pluralism, co-existence etc. Another impediment raised by The Conversation (n.d.) is likelihood of risk of over-reporting on radicalization whether it is done by law enforcers or any other assigned personnel. The argument is that there is a high possibility of young people to interact with some symbols of extremist organizations or exhibit certain overt behavior without fully comprehending implications of these actions which may actually be in tandem with certain radical ideologies. Such young people may therefore be wrongfully victimized by their teachers, peers or even family members. Figure 3 displays the more common traits exhibited by those undergoing radicalization process. A study of the figure reveals that some of the overt behavior presupposing radicalization under 'Personal Issues' such as 'is socially withdrawn', for example may be misconstrued to mean such a one is radicalized while they may not be. In a nutshell, the traits contained in the Figure 3 may be not conventional and are therefore likely to be misinterpreted. Other challenges border on the enormous resources (financial, personnel, physical, technical etc) that are required to stem radicalization. Indeed huge percentage of national budget is dedicated annually to matters security for the sake of peace and safety of citizens at the expense of other areas of national development projects. There are seemingly many challenges that stand in the way of attempts to eradicate radicalization in learning institutions in Kenya. However, with proper comprehension of the task at hand, concerted mobilization of appropriate resources and calculated execution of drawn plans, it would be fair to intimate that the war against radicalization is far from over- a thought echoed by Gutteridge (1990:245) thus 'Neither terrorism (read radicalization) nor the grievances in which it is rooted can be entirely eradicated'.

Figure 3: Radicalization into violent extremism-Indicators
Source: Tactical Reference. Available at
https//www.wired.com/images-blogs/…12012/10/Radicalization-Final 090911.pdf

5. CONCLUSION:

Radicalization is a universal pandemic that is poised to render entire youth population hopeless and helpless in the ultimate. There are myriad attestations to the effect that this phenomenon is increasing its scope and depth by the day. Laquer (1990) observes that the world has nourished highly favorable conditions for recruitment and radicalization of young people. A majority of these young people are in learning institutions. Regardless of their social, economic and family backgrounds, youth are potential candidates of radicalization. Recruitment drives mounted by friends, religious preachers, family members or even strangers are meant to prey on these young souls whose future careers and dreams are often shattered whenever they become victims of their masters. The entire education sector faces disruption and imminent collapse in the face of radicalization. It is for this reason that challenges raised in this paper that characterize efforts to extirpate this malaise need urgent redress. Some of the steps that may be executed mainly at multi-sectoral level to rescue youth are considered below.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS:

Radicalization is a reality in learning institutions in learning institutions in Kenya and probably the following recommendations can help bring in check. The recommendations require concerted effort involving all education stakeholders each participating and contributing where appropriate.
They include:

- Use of education to raise awareness and equip young people with critical thinking skills and sound religious and moral knowledge to enable them is less vulnerable to extreme views concerning religion, drugs or gangs. Also, appropriate education would help the youth develop virtues such as resilience and endurance in the face of hardships and human suffering. In support, Gutteridge (1990:252) avers that governments '…have deliberately to educate populations on the danger of terrorism (read radicalization)'.
- Utilization of both print and electronic media to campaign against youth radicalization.
- Forge strong, healthy relationships with local communities in a bid to increase their resilience towards extremist propaganda.
- Government in partnership with other relevant agencies to address grievances (especially socio-economic) that render communities vulnerable to radicalization.
- Teachers ought to be empowered through training to be able to challenge extremist ideas and develop capacity to identify ideologues in learning institutions.
- Peace education and strong family values be integrated in the school curriculum.
- Empirical research on radicalization of youth should be done to bring forth authoritative findings that would hopefully go a long way to address the menace.

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